

INTIMATE TERROR: GENDER, DOMESTICITY, AND VIOLENCE IN IRISH AND  
INDIAN NOVELS OF PARTITION

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## **ABSTRACT**

AMY MCGUFF SKINNER: *Intimate Terror: Gender, Domesticity, and Violence in Irish and Indian Novels of Partition*  
(Under the direction of Dr. Pamela Cooper)

My dissertation argues that contemporary novelists writing about partition and the post-partition state in India, Pakistan, and Northern Ireland create alternative social histories that reframe our understanding of these newly created spaces and the ways in which the intrusion of public violence into private homes and neighborhoods was constitutive of the partitioned borders. Rather than presenting partition as a bureaucratic solution to ethnic or religious conflict, the novelists I study use the framework of childhood and family to situate their novels—and these questions of national space—firmly in the world of the private home. This shift in focus from the national to the private writes against the belief that, through the act of partition, discord and trauma are pushed to the borders and large-scale civil war is avoided. In four chapters considering nine novels, I examine the ways in which the reconstruction of national borders—and national identities—takes place through violence that is frequently gendered, targeting women's bodies as sites of reproduction in order to validate sectarian identities. In these texts, the border cannot be understood as a distant location where the lines of a battlefield—and the nation itself—can be easily delineated, but instead must be envisioned as the construction of countless smaller boundaries, each of which might contain part of the battlefield's violence.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter	
I.     REPRODUCTION, SILENCE, AND PARTITION VIOLENCE IN BAPSI SIDHWA’S <i>CRACKING INDIA</i> AND SHAUNA SINGH BALDWIN’S <i>WHAT THE BODY REMEMBERS</i> .....	19
Gender and the Partition of India.....	22
Bapsi Sidhwa’s <i>Cracking India</i> .....	27
Shauna Singh Baldwin’s <i>What the Body Remembers</i> .....	54
II.     “FROM AYAH TO WIDOW”: GENDER AND THE DOMESTICATION OF HISTORY IN SALMAN RUSHDIE’S <i>MIDNIGHT’S CHILDREN</i> AND <i>SHAME</i> .....	77
Salman Rushdie’s <i>Midnight’s Children</i> .....	83
Salman Rushdie’s <i>Shame</i> .....	112
III.    “BROKEN INFLECTION OF MOTHER”: HAUNTED SPACES, HAUNTED SELVES IN SEAMUS DEANE’S <i>READING IN THE DARK</i> AND DEIRDRE MADDEN’S <i>ONE BY ONE IN THE DARKNESS</i> .....	141
Seamus Deane’s <i>Reading in the Dark</i> .....	147
Deirdre Madden’s <i>One by One in the Darkness</i> .....	177
IV.    MOTHERING THE BORDER: REPRODUCTION AND THE URBAN BACHELOR IN <i>FAT LAD</i> , <i>RIPLEY BOGLE</i> , AND <i>EUREKA STREET</i> .....	204
Sexual Politics in Northern Ireland.....	206

Robert McLiam Wilson's <i>Ripley Bogle</i> and <i>Eureka Street</i> .....	211
Glen Patterson's <i>Fat Lad</i> .....	242
EPILOGUE .....	249
WORKS CONSULTED .....	262

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

1. They May Look Harmless .....	189
2. Bombay Street, Belfast .....	191



## Introduction

I had to remind myself that they were not to be blamed for believing that there was something admirable in moving violence to the borders and dealing with it through silence and factories, for that was the pattern of the world. They had drawn their borders, believing in that pattern, in the enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that once they had etched their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like the shifting tectonic plates of prehistoric Gondwanaland (*The Shadow Lines* 228).

In October 2006, Mike McGavick, a Republican candidate for the United States Senate, ran a series of ads asserting that it was time to leave Iraq: “Partition the country if we have to,” he said, “and get our troops home in victory.” The tone of this statement is strikingly similar to the logic governing the 1921 partition of Ireland and the 1947 partition of India. Partition is viewed as way to avoid civil war, an attempt to order the country before withdrawing from its spaces, and a pathway to what McGavick terms “victory” for the nation charged with drawing the new lines. In “Intimate Terror,” I argue that contemporary novelists writing about partition and the post-partition state in India, Pakistan, and Northern Ireland create alternative social histories that reframe our understanding of these newly created spaces and the ways in which the intrusion of public violence into private homes and neighborhoods was constitutive of the partitioned borders. Rather than presenting partition as a bureaucratic solution to ethnic or religious conflict, the novelists I study use the framework of childhood and family to situate their novels—and these questions of national space—firmly in the world of the private home. This shift in focus from the national to the private writes against the belief that, through the act of partition, discord and trauma are pushed to the borders and large-scale civil war is avoided. In these texts, the border cannot be

understood as a distant location where the lines of a battlefield—and the nation itself—can be easily delineated, but instead must be envisioned as the construction of countless smaller boundaries, each of which might contain part of the battlefield’s violence.

Ireland and India are linked by a shared history of colonization ending with independence and partition, events that in both locations took place following a major world war. Both the partition of Ireland and the creation of the Irish Free State were confirmed in 1922 with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, though the material border between Ireland and Northern Ireland would still be violently disputed over seventy years later. India was also partitioned at the exact moment of Independence; the separate states of Pakistan and India came into being at midnight on August 15, 1947. Partition in India was followed by the migration of over twelve million people and massive communal violence; the exact number of deaths is unclear; estimates range from 200,000 to 1,000,000 (Mishra 1). The impetus for both partitions came from minority cultures that feared being subsumed within a nation that would ignore their rights and values. Joe Cleary explains in *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State* that, in both India and Ireland, “Mass support for the majority nationalist movements...came preponderantly, though not exclusively... from one ethnic and religious community within the colonial state” (32). The minority communities in the newly independent states, then, would “...have to forego their own *collective* cultural and national identities, and essentially be assimilated into the national culture of the dominant group within the new state” (32).

So why, if the call for a new national border came from these minority communities, is partition often imagined as what Pankaj Mishra terms the “exit wound” left by departing colonizers? Mishra, in a August 2007 article for *The New Yorker* published the day before the

sixtieth anniversary of Indian Independence, describes partition as an action that also served the needs of British colonizers, who in India “saw partition along religious lines as the quickest way to exit” an increasingly chaotic and dangerous situation (1). Similarly, in Ireland partition was part of a peace process intended to end a war in which British forces were increasingly frustrated by guerrilla tactics. The new borders were thus not designed to “produce either equitable or imaginative resolution to the problems raised by the clash of conflicting claims to self-determination...complex problems that demanded complex institutional solutions were eventually ‘settled’ by crude military-territorial dictate” (Cleary 39). The border between India and Pakistan was drawn by Cyril Radcliffe, a British lawyer who “was flown to Dehli and given forty days to define precisely the strange political geography of an India flanked by an eastern and a western wing called Pakistan” (Mishra 5). This division was thus marked by both haste and ignorance, and the border Radcliffe drew across the Punjab region was particularly problematic, causing the greatest amount of conflict and violence. W. H. Auden’s poem about Radcliffe, “Partition,” ends with the following stanza imagining the lawyer the day after setting the border: “The next day he sailed for England, where he could quickly forget/The case, as a good lawyer must. Return he would not/Afraid, as he told his Club, that he might get shot.” The border between Northern Ireland and Ireland was created in 1920 with similar haste and lack of attention to city populations, and the line itself was originally designed to create two self-governing territories as part of a plan for Home Rule. A Boundary Commission charged with redefining the new border by 1925 chose not to change the original line, disappointing populations living in Catholic-majority cities like Derry who were sure their area would be shifted to the South.

Though these partitions are connected by these shared experience of colonization and national division, Cleary writes in *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State*--the first critical work in literary studies to consider partition literature of more than one country--that “partitions...tend to be studied in isolation” (3). Recent works like Jill Didur’s 2006 *Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory* reconsider partition literature of India and Pakistan but, with the exception of Cleary’s own study, partition is rarely considered as a transnational phenomenon. Though Cleary excludes India from his work on partition literature, in part because India was a “colony of exploitation rather than a colony of settlement” (5), striking similarities emerge in contemporary novels exploring the partitions of both countries. The texts themselves thus create an impetus for this pairing through the shared imagery of the militarized home, the use of a child’s perspective, and the focus on the importance of mothering and reproduction to emerging national identities. These narrative similarities suggest the rich possibilities that emerge through a study that considers literature of Indian partition alongside texts exploring the Northern Irish Troubles.

As my title suggests, the primary connection between Irish and Indian novels of partition is their exploration of the intimate types of violence that occurred in the wake of the creation of the new border. Barbara Harlow states, “Britain’s withdrawal from these three...territories [India, Palestine, and Ireland] incised a deep and violently protracted scar against the political, geographical, and cultural terrains of these arenas” (84). Harlow’s language emphasizes the multiplicity of scars left following partitions, scars writ not only on the shape of the nation but also on the private home and individual body. These scars emerge because partition is not a simple solution where the problems of religious conflict are solved by a new line on a map, but instead “entails a reorganization of political space that inevitably

triggers complex reconstructions of national identity” (Cleary 20). As Gyanendra Parry suggests, in the partitioned nation “...violence and community constitute one another” (3), violence becoming the means through which these “reconstructions” of community identity take place.

Joe Cleary writes that “...violence does not end with the act of partition: violence is not incidental but constitutive of the new state arrangements thus produced” (11), and though I group these narratives as “novels of partition,” many of the texts I study do not take place at the historical moment of partition, instead exploring partition as a lingering force in the lives and homes of their characters. The novels thus narrate continuing political instability and patterns of violent conflict through the frame of the private home. Yet the political tensions following the Indian and Irish partitions are quite different, in part because the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland is imagined as mutable. In India and Pakistan, the partition is conceived as complete at the moment of national division. The possibility of reunification is never discussed, though strained relations between the two countries over disputed territories continue to this day. The novels of Indian partition are thus most concerned with the events at the actual moment of partition and the emerging national identities of India and Pakistan. In Northern Ireland, the creation of the border resulted in several years of violence followed by over twenty years of relative peace, a time period author Deirdre Madden describes in the title of her first novel as being diseased but with “hidden symptoms.” A Catholic civil rights movement began to address issues of discrimination in 1968, and this struggle quickly became violent, sparking an almost forty-year period of sectarian conflict. The Northern Irish novels I study are primarily concerned with periods of violence beginning when their characters are children in the 1960s and 70s

and eventually extending to their adult lives in the 1990s. Though this violence is distant both temporally and geographically from the creation of the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, it nevertheless stems from the act of partition, indicating the continuing need to violently enforce sectarian identities even seventy years after the creation of the new border.

The violence that emerges along the countless intimate borders of these novels often intersects with women's bodies, and the texts reveal the ways in which partition violence and reproductive power coalesce in the new national spaces, gendered violence becoming one way in which the borders of the community are created. In her work "Stories of Women and Mothers: Gender and Nationalism in the Early Fiction of Flora Nwapa," Elleke Boehmer argues that:

...nationalism relies heavily on gendered languages to imagine itself. Gender informs nationalism and nationalism in its turn consolidates and legitimates itself through a variety of gendered structures and shapes which, either as ideologies or as political movements, are clearly tagged: the idea of nationhood bears a masculine identity though national ideals may wear a feminine face (6).

Following partition, the link between gender and nationality moves beyond the imaginings that Boehmer describes, and violence against women is used to confirm the masculine identity of the state. In Northern Ireland, for example, the limits of community are enforced not only through violence against a perceived enemy but also through the public torture of young women who engage in sexual relationships with men outside their cultural group. Partition violence in India takes noticeably different forms but is characterized by a similar obsession with women's bodies as spaces on which to write the desires of the nationalist community. During India's partition, women were subjected to forms of sexualized violence including rape, genital mutilation, and disfigurement of breasts—acts that targeted women's

bodies as sites of reproductive power. Forms of violence also arose within the family itself: women were killed by family members or encouraged to kill themselves to avoid being violated by an outsider.

In her article “Cartographies of Nations and Identities: A Post Partition Predicament,” Ritu Menon describes the partition of India as an event that resists historical narrativization precisely because of the intimate nature of the violence that emerged in its wake. She points to work by Dipesh Chakrabarty, an Indian historian, who, in an essay titled “Remembered Villages: Representations of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of Partition” describes Partition as a “fundamentally inexplicable event” (320). In his article, Chakrabarty goes on to describe the strange intimacy of partition violence, in which “neighbors turned against neighbors after years of living together in bonds of intimacy and affection” (320). What emerges out of these encounters is not a historical narrative explaining, “why it happened and why it happened at the time it did” but instead a series of unanswerable questions, beginning with the most obvious: “How did this come to pass?” (320).

Chakrabarty’s work, though focused only on the partition of India, suggests that the violent division of a nation, wrapped up not in the borderland but rather in the home itself, frustrates attempts at explanation and thus “belongs to the marginalia of history” (320). His work can also be applied to the intimate nature of Troubles violence in Northern Ireland. A book by John Conroy on Northern Irish violence is titled “Belfast Diary: War as a Way of Life,” and the subtitle illustrates the ways in which terror intrudes into ordinary lives during this period of undeclared war. The title of this project, “Intimate Terror,” comes from a *New York Times* review of Robert McLiam Wilson’s *Ripley Bogle* and indicates a similar intersection of the violence of the Northern Irish conflict and the intimate interactions of

everyday life. In the article, Liam Callahan refers to the “intimate terror” of Belfast violence as a force that shapes the title character’s young life. The terror is personal both because it intrudes on the daily events of the child’s life—his friends and neighbors are murdered and British soldiers search his home on Internment Night—and because it becomes part of his own psychology.

Such personal experiences are rarely included in historical narratives of national division. Veena Das confirms in her 2007 work *Life and Work: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* that partition is an event largely ignored in the public histories of India and Pakistan:

... there has been no attempt to memorialize the Partition in the form of national monuments or museums. No attempt was made, for that matter, to use the legal instruments of trials and public hearings to allow stories of mass rape and murder to be made public or to offer a promise of justice to the violated persons. There was no dramatic enactment of ‘putting history on trial’ (19).

Das writes that, in the wake of this lack of historical representation, a violent cultural event like partition “attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary” (1). Her work on the connections between nationalist violence and the “ordinary” thus aligns with the domestic focus of the authors I study. As history retreats, imaginative fiction becomes one way to move these narratives of violence beyond the realm of gossip, pushing past the frames put on such personal stories by the media or formal historical accounts.

The novelists I study are often quite straightforward about their attempts at historical intervention, discussing their narrative purpose in personal essays or embedding contrasts between the events of their novels and incomplete historical representations into their fictional works. Salman Rushdie writes of the subversive possibilities of fiction in *Step*



*Across This Line: Collected Nonfiction 1992-2002*: “History has become debatable ...literature steps into the ring. In this ambiguous atmosphere, upon this trampled earth, in these muddy waters, there is work for [the fiction writer] to do” (61). In a 1996 interview with the *Guardian*, Seamus Deane expresses a similar desire to reveal the way in which the public intrudes on private lives. He states, “What we misleadingly call ordinary life is destroyed by politics in our part of the world, generation after generation. I had to show how that happens” (Fraser 9). Deane’s words indicate a need to intervene through a text focused on the destruction of “ordinary life,” something that he implies is missing from historical narratives of partition violence. In Deirdre Madden’s *One by One in the Darkness*, a novel that explores the impact of the death of one Northern Irish man on the everyday lives of his wife and daughters, a character comments that the media is “...a blunt weapon itself...it isn’t fitted to dealing with complexity, it isn’t comfortable with paradox or contradiction” (51). Imaginative fiction set in the world of the private home focuses its gaze on the intimate lives of its characters; these personal narratives of “ordinary life” become one way to combat the perceived violence of inadequate historical representation.

My initial interest in this set of texts began with a simple question: Why do authors writing about the violent division of a nation use a child’s perspective to tell these stories, necessarily limiting the scope of their narrative to the home and neighborhood that surround the young narrators? A variety of answers emerged, each indicating the ways in which the use of this perspective was central to the authors’ attempts at historical intervention. A simple glance at the ages of the authors reveals the most obvious answer: personal writings indicate that most of the novels in this study—Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Seamus Deane’s *Reading in the Dark*, Glenn Patterson’s *Fat*

*Lad*, and Robert McLiam Wilson's *Ripley Bogle*—are semi-autobiographical texts in which the authors rework events they witnessed as children. The term “semi-autobiographical” presents its own series of questions for inquisitive interviewers and critics: What happened and what did not? What is “true” in the texts? What is fiction? While most authors are quite forthcoming about the autobiographical nature of their work, they are often understandably unwilling to delineate the borders between fiction and autobiography. When Seamus Deane was asked how much of his novel came from his own family history, he replied, “A good deal. I have been insistent in saying that it's fiction...but there is a good deal of autobiographical material in it.” (“Secrets and Lies” par 4). Gerry Smyth grouped *Reading in the Dark* with a “number of high-profile autobiographical or semi-autobiographical Irish texts” appearing in the 1990s, arguing that the intimate nature of these works allowed them to present “...a range of previously unspoken (or only whispered) stories from the margins...of official island culture” (134). Smyth's argument aligns with the work of Veena Das, who describes the ways in which the violent history of Indian partition was pushed from the realm of public history and transformed into “gossip.” The novelists' use of the frame of childhood thus forcibly relocates the realm of the historical, setting these narratives of national transformation in the private world of the home and thus creating an intimate intervention into “official” historical narratives.

The use of a child's perspective also serves a variety of narrative purposes. Most notably, the child becomes a disorienting lens that allows the authors to present scenes of horrific violence that seem almost impossible to narrate from an adult's perspective. In Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, for example, Sidhwa depicts the murder of a Hindu man using the young Lenny's bewildered perspective. During a violent protest, a man's legs are each tied

to separate jeeps, engines start, and the vehicles speed off in different directions. Lenny is pushed to the ground and avoids seeing the murder directly but witnesses the act through the strange enjoyment she sees on the face of a family friend. Similarly, in McLiam Wilson's *Ripley Bogle*, the narrator recounts the events of Internment Night, in which soldiers barged into his bedroom and a neighborhood friend's genitals were mutilated when she was shot at while playing atop the fence between their two houses. In both texts, the child's perspective is defamiliarizing; they narrate events they do not quite understand, and the authors use this point of view to reimagine partition violence and destabilize traditional representations of the events in these novels. In exploring the ways in which the intimate and the national coalesce, I utilize Homi Bhabha's definition of the "unhomely" from *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha describes the ways in the nation's intrusion on private lives in the postcolonial state:

The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing on us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting (9).

The defamiliarizing frame of childhood thus becomes a way for the author to represent in narrative a "divided," "disorienting," vision of the partitioned state.

The frame of childhood and family allows the writer to relocate the realm of the historical and narrate horrific violence that might resist representation, but this focus also allows the authors to explore the ways in which motherhood and reproduction intersect with national identities. Thus, the narrative focus on childhood—indicated most notably in Rushdie's title *Midnight's Children*—ultimately facilitates an exploration of the role of motherhood and reproduction in the context of national division. Christopher Hitchens writes briefly of Rushdie's reproductive focus in a 2003 article for *The Atlantic* titled "The

Perils of Partition”: “Rushdie's conceit--of a nation as a child simultaneously born, disputed, and sundered--has Solomonic roots. Parturition and partition become almost synonymous” (par 10). Though I initially began my study as a project focused on domestic space and childhood, I ultimately found that authors use these frames to create texts that are filled with references to pregnancy, motherhood, and reproductive power. Robert McLiam Wilson’s *Ripley Bogle*, Shauna Singh Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers*, and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* all begin with an image of birth, and each of the other novels I study is framed by a focus on motherhood and pregnancy. These births are often immediately tied to the nation, and the authors work to reveal the ways in which the “birth” of new community identities relies on both the language of reproduction and gendered violence to legitimize new national borders.

My first chapter considers the tropes of reproduction and violence in Shauna Singh Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers* and Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*. Both texts provide historical interventions into readers’ understanding of the gendered violence that followed partition, though the larger focus of the novels differs greatly. Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*, originally published as *Ice Candy Man* in 1988, prefigured the early-nineties revision of partition events by feminist historians like Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, and Kamla Bhasin. In the semi-autobiographical novel, Sidhwa uses the perspective of Lenny—almost a toddler when the book begins—to narrate the events leading up to and following Partition in the urban area of Lahore, a city redefined as Pakistani in 1947. Lenny’s perspective is limited because of her age, affluent class, and status as a member of a small minority religion. However, I argue that Sidhwa uses this naïve perspective to center her narrative gaze on the home and maternal bodies that surround Lenny. This focus highlights the

collapse between private and public that occurs in the wake of the new national divide and the intimate violence this collapse engenders. Following partition, Sidhwa depicts women's bodies as spaces on which the intimate desires of nationality can be enacted. The still-fluctuating border of Pakistan is validated imaginatively through narratives of national birth and materially by violence marking female bodies through public rape and genital mutilation.

The acknowledgments included in Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*, published in 1999, indicate a shift in the larger historical understanding of partition violence. While Sidhwa wrote at a time when silence still surrounded the gendered forms of violence following partition, Baldwin cites Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* as "invaluable" to her work. Though this citation reveals that women's suffering during Partition has become more visible, Baldwin's text nevertheless marks an intimate intervention into our understanding of how these forms of violence arose. The larger plot of *What the Body Remembers* follows the relationship between a wealthy Sikh man Sardarji, his first wife Satya, and his second wife Roop, who is brought into the family when Satya is unable to become pregnant. This domestic relationship allows Baldwin to explore the community values that surrounded reproduction, female sexuality, and honor in the Punjab region. Her flashbacks to Roop's childhood—which depict the young child transforming from a willful girl to a submissive woman scared of her own female form—also contribute to a larger understanding of the ways in which gendered expectations are created and enforced. Thus in both *Cracking India* and *What the Body Remembers*, an early focus on domesticity and gendered familial relationships aligns with later explorations of violence targeting female bodies as a way to confirm new national identities.

Unlike Baldwin and Sidhwa, Salman Rushdie is not concerned with providing a detailed narrative of partition violence. In both of his early novels that include the time of Indian Partition, *Shame* and *Midnight's Children*, he alludes to the communal violence that occurs following the creation of the separate states of India and Pakistan but does not make this violence central to his narratives. Nevertheless, Rushdie writes partition as a loss at the heart of both Pakistani and Indian culture and, in the wake of this historical loss, imagines domestic arts closely tied to women's bodies as a creative force that can be used to subvert dominant modes of representation. The narrator of *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai, uses canning and preserving—a process learned from his ayah Mary—as his model for storytelling. In my second chapter, I argue that what Rushdie terms Saleem's "chutnification" of history indicates an attempt to create individual historical meaning as the narrator struggles against the "cracks" that, dividing the nation, have been "reborn" in masculine identities. Saleem's link to Indian history is performed through the birthing body of his mother, bringing him into the world at the exact moment of Indian Independence and Partition, and he is both repulsed by and drawn to moments of feminine creativity that serve as his narrative models.

While Saleem must appropriate forms of feminine expression in order to create political intervention, in *Shame* Rushdie expands his exploration of gender in the emerging nation of Pakistan, eventually imagining women themselves as agents of change. The novel is ostensibly focused on characters intended to represent two 1970s Pakistani prime ministers, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq. But Rushdie, who states that the entire text was inspired by a 1980s honor killing that took place in London, quickly turns his narrative eye towards the women that surround these two men, ultimately aligning sexual and

political repressions in Pakistan to create a larger vision of the post-partition state. Within these repressive structures, Rushdie imagines female forms of resistance—including a series of subversive tapestries—in which women attempt to regain control over both their own bodies and the larger historical narratives of the nation. Rushdie's exploration of these alternative narrative modes, inspired by female characters who challenge dominant modes of representation through the domestic arts, suggests a need to reinsert the intimate into the discourse of national history.

My third chapter examines the use of haunting as a framework for understanding the presence of trauma within domestic space in post-partition Northern Ireland. In Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* and Deirdre Madden's *One by One in the Darkness*, both published in 1996, the language and tropes of haunting—invaded spaces, cursed families, and ghostly presences—align with the invasion of the public onto private lives in the partitioned, postcolonial state. Using work by Jacques Derrida and trauma theorist Cathy Caruth, I interrogate the links between domesticity, haunting, and the historical, ultimately arguing that the ghostly—which in these novels is mediated most often through the mother figure—indicates not only the repetition of individual trauma, but also the nightmare of untold histories in the postcolonial state. In *Reading in the Dark*, a shadow on the stairs is alternately a disappeared uncle, a traumatized mother, and the narrator himself. Deane infuses the domestic with the phantasmal, using the tropes of haunting to indicate the presence of a secret family trauma at the heart of the home. The young, nameless narrator's attempts to locate the full history of this trauma ultimately cause him to become increasingly distant from his mother and family.

Unlike Deane, Deirdre Madden is interested in the ghostly as a psychological rather than phantasmal phenomenon in both 1960s and 1990s Northern Ireland. The form of her book, focused on the reactions of three sisters and their mother to the violent death of their father, includes chapters narrating the girls' childhood awareness of the growing violence around them and chapters that flash forward to their present situation. Though the text focuses on sisterly connections, their mother is also central to Madden's exploration of the traumatic repercussions of a murder, and the entire narrative is framed by one sister's return home from London to announce an unplanned pregnancy. Madden uses her eye for the domestic to set up a detailed vision of the sisters' sense of home, only to reconfigure their vision of the domestic when their father is shot in the kitchen of their Uncle's beloved house. The imagery of haunted objects enables Madden to represent not only traumatic memories associated with the home, but also the ghostly threat held by ordinary objects—like a young girl's forgotten backpack—in a city plagued by terrorist violence.

Glenn Patterson's *Fat Lad* and Robert McLiam Wilson's *Ripely Bogle* and *Eureka Street* provide a very different vision of Troubles violence than the works of Seamus Deane and Deirdre Madden. Their work, focused on young, single men in the urban setting of Belfast, takes the reader outside the spaces of the family and into the streets of Belfast. Patterson and McLiam Wilson, friends who have been interviewed together in the past, reimagine Troubles violence through narratives framed by stories of romantic pursuit. In my third chapter, I argue that both authors use their bachelor protagonists and narratives of romance as backdrops to a larger exploration of reproduction and motherhood in the militarized city of Belfast. In Robert McLiam Wilson's *Ripley Bogle*, the narrator tells stories of his Belfast childhood while wandering the London streets as a homeless man. These



stories, told by the increasingly unreliable Bogle, describe the intersections between his childhood, touched by poverty and a stepfather who “once tried to disembowel [him] with a broken Bass bottle,” and the sectarian violence that surrounded him in a 1970s working class Catholic neighborhood. Though the larger narrative is focused on Bogle’s own process of storytelling and the violence he witnesses, McLiam Wilson also uses these stories to present the ways in which this violence intersects with issues of gender and reproduction. Most notably, he includes a scene in which a pregnant woman is tortured for her relationship with a Protestant man and lengthy passages describing Bogle’s involvement in the abortion of his girlfriend, Deirdre. Both of these incidents connect political desires to concerns about women’s reproductive power in the Northern Irish city. McLiam Wilson’s *Eureka Street* is ostensibly a much lighter novel than *Ripley Bogle*; he incorporates two narrative voices, a Catholic young man who has left behind the poverty of his youth to live in a more affluent neighborhood and a Protestant from a working-class neighborhood who creates outrageous schemes to earn money. Yet though the focus is on the “misadventures” of these two single friends, the narrative also includes both an abortion and an attempt by a woman to force a miscarriage, again exploring issues of reproduction and the ways in which sexuality and violence coalesce in a militarized culture.

Glen Patterson’s *Fat Lad* also embeds an exploration of violence and sexuality into what at first appears to be a lighter narrative. The novel initially focuses on Drew Linden’s return to Belfast to manage a book chain and his attempts to navigate complicated romantic relationships with a girlfriend he left behind and new women he encounters in his hometown. As the text progresses, however, Patterson extends his vision both temporally and narratively, drifting back in time to Drew’s childhood in an increasingly violent Belfast and

also incorporating the experiences of Drew's family members, including his grandmother's perspective immediately following the partition and the Anglo-Irish War. Through his use of multiple narrators and the form of the flashback, Patterson provides a historical narrative that examines the intersections between gender, reproduction, and sectarian violence.

Partitions begin with the hope of peace, the belief in what Amitav Ghosh terms "the enchantment of lines," the power of the new border to lessen nationalist or sectarian conflict. The novelists I study reveal the ways in which the dream of partition turns to a nightmare characterized by violently enforced communities in which trauma intrudes on the world of the private home. This violence also extends beyond the home to female bodies and reproductive power, women's bodies becoming the place on which community desires are marked. While I hope this study can provide a more general understanding of partition literature and the connections among Indian, Pakistani, and Northern Irish authors who create social histories of this intimate violence, I also feel that partition, the moment when community spaces are broken and restructured, can serve as a starting point for larger understanding of the intersections between political communities and conceptions of motherhood.

## Chapter One

### Reproduction, Silence, and Partition Violence in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* and Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*

I grew up overhearing fragments of whispered conversations about the sadism and bestiality women were subjected to during the Partition: what happened to so and so—someone's sister, daughter, sister-in-law—the women Mrs. Khan categorized as *the spoils of war*. The fruits of victory in the unremitting chain of wars that is man's relentless history. The vulnerability of mothers, daughters, granddaughters, and their metamorphosis into possessions; living objects on whose soft bodies victors and losers alike vent their wrath, enact fantastic vendettas, celebrate victories. All history, all these fears, all probabilities and injustices coalesce in *Ammijee's* terrible face... (*Defend Yourself Against Me* 326)

Bapsi Sidhwa's short story "Defend Yourself Against Me," published in the 1995 anthology of Partition writing, *Orphans of the Storm: Stories on the Partition of India*, first appears to be a narrative of experiences that inspired her 1988 novel *Cracking India*. Much like the author herself, who at the time was teaching at the University of Houston, the narrator of the story lives in the "greenly-shaven suburbs of an American city in the heart of Texas" (308), but when interacting with Pakistani friends the writer is taken back to the time of Partition. At a party in suburban Houston the narrator encounters a man she recognizes as an old childhood friend from Lahore, but with one noticeable absence—as a young man, this friend had a "raw pit gouged out of his head that couldn't have grown hair in a hundred years!" (309). After confirming that the man is indeed her friend, fitted as an adult with a well-placed hair piece, the narrator spins into a "fierce bout of nostalgia and [a] host of ghost-memories," all the more powerful because these memories "...clamour to be recorded in a novel [she has] just begun about the Partition of India" (310).

The narrator of “Defend Yourself Against Me,” much like Lenny in *Cracking India*, plays her childhood games within reach of the lamentations coming from a “...nursery school hastily converted into a Recovered Women’s Camp” (312). The setting’s description immediately conveys the strange link between domestic and national violence during the Partition of India. The narrator explains that “tens of thousands of women” were kidnapped, resulting in the creation of many such camps to “recover” these women; her memories of the “unearthly shrieks” that filled her childhood street indicate that the camp is no escape from the torments they have experienced (312). Though the narrative diverges into the author’s childhood memories of riots, communal violence, and crowds of refugees, the story begins to focus, through the character of *Ammijee*, on the violation of women’s bodies during Partition. *Ammijee* is a mysterious figure in the text; she is not given a name, but instead is known only by this word meaning “mother,” further emphasized by Sidhwa through the italicization of the name throughout the short story.

At the beginning of the narrative, the iconic scar on the back of Sikander’s head, forming “the shape of a four-day-old crescent moon,” seems to represent the trauma and communal violence experienced during the 1947 Partition following the independence of India. Yet both the title of story, “Defend Yourself Against Me,” and the emergence of *Ammijee* at the center of the narrative, gesture towards the history of violence against women’s bodies as the untold scar of the new national border. Situating a narrative of intimate violence within the setting of the American suburban home, Sidhwa reveals *Ammijee*’s past suffering through a long conversation that takes place at a second party. Mrs. Khan, prompted by the narrator’s ignorance and a crowd of encouraging women to reveal *Ammijee*’s story, describes the village’s plan to avoid the violence: “Rather than fall into the

hands of the Sikhs, the poor women planned to burn themselves. They had stored kerosene...but when the attack came they had no time” (318). The women, without the means to kill themselves as their culture and community dictated, were subjected to horrific acts of violence targeting their bodies and reproductive power: “Pregnant women were paraded naked, their stomachs slashed...” (318). Though this violence is at the hands of the Sikhs, often portrayed as the lustful murderous mob in Sidhwa’s narratives<sup>1</sup>, Mrs. Khan explains that these acts of violence were performed across ethnic and religious communities, extending the vision of communal violence to all Indian and Pakistani women: “everyone carried women off. Sikhs and Hindus, Muslim women. Muslims, Sikh and Hindu women (318).

As Sidhwa voices the story of *Ammijee*’s experience, she emphasizes the woman’s own inability to recount the events she suffered, and both the narrative that Sidhwa writes and the process of sharing the story with a community of women at a party emerge as ways to voice the memory of these horrific acts. When the narrator’s ignorance about *Ammijee*’s experience is revealed, “The entire ensemble combines to enlighten [her] in five languages: English, Punjabi, and Urdu...Kannada and Marathi” (317). This eagerness to fill the silence surrounding *Ammijee* coincides with the true meaning of the title, “Defend Yourself Against Me,” revealed when the author ends the narrative by quoting the Pedro Shimose poem, a lament against gendered violence. The narrative voice of the poem commands the presumably female audience to, “defend [herself].../against my father and the father of my father/still living in me” (29). Sidhwa, in “Defend Yourself Against Me,” presents a fictional

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<sup>1</sup> Sidhwa’s portrayal of Sikhs is problematic in both “Defend Yourself Against Me” and *Cracking India*. Though all ethnic groups participate in the violence following partition, her descriptions of Sikh men often portray them as animalistic and savage. Gyanendra Pandey discusses the role of Sikhs in partition in *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India*, focusing on the splitting of the Punjab, where a majority of Sikhs resided, leaving the Sikhs “like orphans” (16).

narrative of a writer called to create an alternative history of Partition, one that acknowledges violence against men, but focuses on recovering the hidden histories of women such as *Ammijee*, who were subjected to forms of intimate terror in the days, weeks, and months following the Partition of India and Pakistan.

In both Bapsi Sidhwa's 1988 novel *Cracking India* and Shauna Singh Baldwin's 1999 *What the Body Remembers*, the authors center their narrative gazes not only on the "cracking" of India and the new border that Partition creates, but also on the collapse between private and public that occurs in the wake of the new national divide and the intimate violence this collapse engenders. In both novels, the domestication of national identity reaches beyond the material spaces of home to include women's bodies and reproductive power. An early focus on the domestic lives of young girls and women enriches the larger exploration of the violence and terror that explode in the Punjab both before and after the moment of Partition. The resulting narratives provide a revisionist social history of Partition violence and the ways in which new nations, in the wake of this division, are constructed imaginatively through intimate terrors targeting women's bodies.

### **Gender and the Partition of India**

Gyanendra Pandey's central argument in his 2001 book *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India* is that "...In India and Pakistan, as elsewhere—violence and community constitute one another..." (3). Pandey thus links the experience of violence with that of community-building in a post-partition space, and in novels of Indian Partition this violence is markedly intimate. This desire for an intimate destruction of the "other"—especially those who were so recently part of one's own community—is explained

in part by Homi Bhabha in *Nation and Narration*. When discussing the “narratives and discourses that signify ‘nationness,’ Bhabha writes first of “...the *Heimlich* pleasures of the hearth, the *unheimlich* terror of the space or race of the Other” (2). This passage, part of Bhabha’s introduction, immediately links the domestic to the national, implying an intimate comfort in one’s own nationality, and a terror at the domesticity of the “other.” He further develops this idea of intimate nationalities, stating, “The ‘other’ is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we *think* we speak most intimately and indigenously ‘between ourselves’” (4).

Testifying to the simultaneously public and private traumas encountered in *Cracking India* and *What the Body Remembers*, a political cartoon included in Sukeishi Kamra’s *Bearing Witness: Partition, Independence, and the End of the Raj* depicts a woman playing the part of a magician’s assistant, lying in a box labeled “Pakistan” and “Hindustan.” The woman, whose face contorts in anxiety, is being sawed into two pieces by Jawaharlal Nehru and Muhammad Jinnah.<sup>2</sup> John Bull, a cartoon figure used by illustrators to represent Great Britain, nervously oversees the magician’s act, and comments from the background “I only ‘ope Nothing Goes Wrong Madam” (77). This cartoon foregrounds the importance of women’s bodies to the imaginative construction of the nation while also revealing the very material ways in which violence against women’s bodies emerges as part of the process of nation-building. Susheila Nasta argues in her introduction to the critical anthology *Motherlands: Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia* that “...in the iconographies of nationalism, images of mothers have conventionally invited symbols suggestive of primal origins—birth, hearth, home, roots, the umbilical cords of being—as

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<sup>2</sup> Nehru became prime minister of India and Jinnah governor general of Pakistan at the moment of Indian independence: August 15, 1947.

encapsulated by terms such as ‘mothertongue’ and mother country’” (xx). Women’s bodies thus become sites of multiple symbols: they reach back to the primal but also embody the nation’s future through the reproductive possibilities located in their feminine forms; they also represent the most intimate of desires and spaces. Thus, women’s bodies become a space on which the intimate desires of nationality can be enacted: the creation of the new national space can be validated imaginatively and materially through women’s bodies. In the context of Nasta’s statements, the political cartoon becomes all the more powerful. Constructing the nation as a woman’s body, the cartoonist portrays the division of India as physical violence against an individual female form, and he also focuses the reader’s eye on the flippant response of the men who surround her, implicating Nehru, Jinnah, and the entire British state through the figure of John Bull.

In contrast to the possibilities of intimate pain implied by the cartoon, the history of Partition often refers to “communal violence”—a term, that, in a way, further displaces the acts of violence from the bodies and homes of individuals to the larger community. Perhaps this term, and what Ahmad Salim describes as the need to reduce Partition “to a mere footnote” while dwelling “...on the triumph of independence,” allowed the specifically gendered nature of this violence to be ignored for almost fifty years (2). In his *Remembering Partition*, Pandey describes the fairly recent historical revision of the act of Partition as “[marking] an important advance in the process of rethinking the history of partition, of nationhood, and of national politics in the subcontinent” (5). Listing a series of texts that reconfigure the violence of Partition, often within new gendered frameworks, Pandey’s extensive bibliography begins with “Recovery, Rupture, Resistance: Indian State and Abduction of Women During Partition” by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin and “Community,



State, and Gender: on Women's Agency During Partition" by Urvashi Butalia, both published in the April 1993 issue of *Economic and Political Weekly*<sup>3</sup>. According to the timeline pulled from Pandey's bibliography, this 1993 publication initiates a critical trend of reimagining the history of Partition. Menon and Bhasin state in *Borders and Boundaries* that, "The abundance of political histories on Partition is almost equaled by the paucity of social histories on it," further emphasizing that literature is the cultural force that has "stepped in...to record the full horror of Partition"(6).

Though Menon and Bhasin speak primarily about writings at the time immediately following Partition, I contend that contemporary literature that attempts to revisit the act of Partition can also serve as social history, if not of the moment of Partition then of the lasting cultural memory and psychological impact of India's division. Sidhwa's novel prefigures by only five years the historical revision of Partition found in the essays in Pandey's bibliography, and I was often struck by the similarities between the descriptions of violence included in cultural histories from the 1990s and the types of violence Sidhwa writes into her 1988 novel. Baldwin's work also intertwines with this historical revision of Partition: she cites Butalia's 1998 *The Other Side of Silence* as "invaluable" to her work on *What the Body Remembers*, and her text provides a narrative of honor and shame within a pre-Partition Sikh family that provides context to the later emergence of gendered violence.

In his 2002 book *Literature, Partition and the Nation State*, Joe Cleary discusses the cultural logic of Partition, which imagines the act as "...the only humane means of intervention available since its aim is to separate the conflicting groups into ethnically homogenous states that would...be created in any event through bloody war" (21). Partition,

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<sup>3</sup> Both the Urvashi Butalia and the writing team of Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin published significant texts on partition in 1998, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* and *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*. These works contain revised versions of the essays cited by Pandey.

then, is envisioned as something to be celebrated, an alternative to the equally frightful possibilities of being a minority in a hostile country or a “bloody war” in which the lines of the nation would be reworked on distant border battlefields. In this construction, partition is described as the alternative to war and is viewed as a process of peaceful negotiations undertaken with “superpower supervision” through which new, homogenous national spaces can be created (21). In her article “Drawing the Line: Cultural Politics and the Legacy of Partition,” Barbara Harlow provides an alternative reading of the link between partition, decolonization, and the role of “superpower supervision.” Harlow asserts that partition was “peculiar to Britain’s participation in the process of decolonization,” further arguing that “Britain’s withdrawal from these three of its colonially occupied and administered territories [Ireland, India, and Palestine] incised a deep and violently protracted scar across the political, geographical, and cultural terrains of those arenas...” (84-5). Here the partition of colonized countries is imagined not as celebratory moment, Britain’s last valiant attempt to order the colonized state, but instead as a final act of violence against the partitioned land, aligning with Fanon’s understanding of colonial power in *The Wretched of the Earth*, which even at its most peaceful is “carried out by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons” (36).

Using the lens of domesticity and childhood, Sidhwa and Baldwin introduce the language of trauma into their texts—both to portray the political act of partition itself, and to create a better understanding of the connections between this new border and the countless violent acts that followed its creation. Though both Joseph Cleary and Barbara Harlow present different accounts of Partition—of the cultural logic that creates the desire for national division and an understanding of partition as part of the process of colonization—both critics, and indeed most who revisit Partition, attempt to understand it as a largely

political process, the reconstructing of national boundaries by colonizing committee. These bureaucratic negotiations ostensibly transpire far from the spaces of intimacy; however, in *Cracking India* and *What the Body Remembers* the language of the family and home enters discussions of this process at almost every level.

### **Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India***

*Cracking India*, originally published as *Ice-Candy Man*, is a semi-autobiographical text in which Bapsi Sidhwa recounts the events surrounding Partition through the lens of her childhood memories. As Richard Ryan writes in a 1991 review of the novel, Sidhwa's "gaze" falls "upon the domestic comedy of a Pakistani family in the 1940s," yet also "somehow [manages] to evoke the great political upheavals of the age" (par 1). Though critics like Jagdev Singh in "Ice-Candy-Man: A Parsi Perception on the Partition of India," have focused on Lenny's (and Sidhwa's) Parsi status and her "tone of neutrality" in their readings of *Cracking India*, Sidhwa's continued writings and rewritings of these events indicate a need to expand the critical gaze beyond the figure of the child and her religious background to a larger understanding of the moment of Indian Partition (3). She does not write a semi-autobiographical account to rework a narrow vision of Partition from a limited, childhood perspective; she instead continually revises the presentation of this experience, ultimately using the figure of the child to create an alternative history—that of Partition's intimate nature.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The use of the term "Partition of India" instead of "Pakistani Independence" in this chapter in some ways privileges Indian constructions of the event. Here, I follow the lead of Gyanendra Pandey, who notes in his recent work on partition that the debate over these names itself testifies to the "diverse claims regarding nationalism and the nation-state," and chooses to use the phrase "partition of India, or of British India" because it aligns with most recent historical work (13).

Ambreen Hai writes in her 2000 article “Border Work, Border Trouble: Postcolonial Feminism and the Ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*” that through her novel, Sidhwa can “...intervene in male nationalist discourse and historiography via the belated remembering and retelling of this collective trauma” by voicing the “untold” traumas of women abducted and raped during Partition (383). Strange, then, that Sidhwa’s text starts not with a more expansive vision of Partition, but instead by setting up the confines of the narrative. Sidhwa emphasizes Lenny’s limited experience from the first page of *Cracking India*, beginning the text with the line “my world is compressed” (11). She continues to describe Lenny’s small world: “Warris Road, lined with rain gutters, lies between Queens Road and Jail Road: both wide, clean, orderly streets at the affluent fringes of Lahore” (11). Defining the scope of the novel as limited by the neighborhood, minority religion, disability and affluent class of the young child narrator, this opening presents the reader with a rewriting of Partition that will provide a narrow glimpse of Lahore in 1947. Yet the child’s perspective, confined as it is to domestic space and even her caretakers’ laps, focuses the attention of the narrative on maternal bodies and intimate spaces. Creating a context for her later explorations of gendered violence, these early moments in the text provide a glimpse into Lenny’s private world and the mother-figures she interacts with daily, narrative spaces that Sidhwa then reconfigures in post-Partition Lahore.

Even though Lenny is quite young at the beginning of the novel—no more than five years old—her intimacy with several mother figures including Godmother, Ayah, and her own biological mother is explored through long passages describing her familiarity with their bodies. Ayah, described in a *New York Times* review of *Cracking India* as both “suggestively zaftig” and the “locus of the book,” is the most intimately connected to Lenny (Tharor par 7).

The young narrator, who is with her caretaker for large amounts of time, recognizes Ayah's voluptuous figure as both maternal and highly sexualized. The same roundness that draws Lenny to Ayah's lap also draws "covetous gazes" that "educate" Lenny about sexuality and desire. Sidhwa describes the masculine response to Ayah: "Up and down, they look at her. Stub-handed twisted beggars and dusty old beggars on crutches drop their poses and stare at her with hard, alert eyes. Holy men, masked in piety, shove aside their pretenses to ogle her with lust" (12). It is not just crowds of possible suitors that are drawn to Ayah's round figure, but also, perhaps most disturbing, "holy men," who, unencumbered by their religious "pretenses," lust after the young woman as well. Her description of their gaze indicates not just lust, but an intense and powerful desire for ownership; their eyes move "up and down" with "hard, alert" stares that tinge these scenes with the threat of violence. No one physically assaults Ayah in these early parts of the text; in fact, she is often viewed as exerting some control over the men who frequently surround her. Yet these moments also depict a dangerous desire. Shortly after this passage, Lenny describes the shape of the body that draws such attention, asserting that "Everything about her is eighteen years old and round and plump" (12). Lenny continues to describe her in terms of roundness: "full blown cheeks, pouting mouth... a rolling bouncy walk that agitates the globules of her buttocks" (13). Ayah's body is attractive because it is round and maternal, indicating the possibility of fertility. Her power over the gawking men appears located in their sexual desire for her voluptuous body, but it also is generated by the potential reproductive power that she possesses.

Lenny also describes the body of her Godmother, another woman who will emerge later in the text as a strong female figure. The relationship between Godmother and Lenny is

maternal, and though Godmother has no biological children, Lenny asserts that, “The bond that ties her strength to my weakness, my fierce demands to her nurturing, my trust to her capacity to contain that trust—and my loneliness to her compassion—is stronger than the bond of motherhood. More satisfying than the ties between men and women” (13).

Godmother inhabits much less of the narrative than Ayah, yet Sidhwa suggests that Lenny’s relationship with her transcends both biological and sexual boundaries. This focus on a mother figure who is maternal only in her authority is again developed by Lenny’s account of Godmother’s body. She describes her need to touch and even sleep beside Godmother, and explains that “She wears only white khaddar saris and white khaddar blouses beneath which is her coarse bandage-tight bodice. In all the years I never saw the natural shape of her breasts” (13). In contrast to Ayah, Godmother attempts to bind her femininity, even confining her breasts beneath a bodice as tight as bandages.

The strange recognition of maternal bodies continues throughout the text, including a moment when Lenny is in bed with her biological mother. The intimacy between mother and child is clear, but the child is both drawn to and uncomfortable with “The motherliness of mother” (51):

Her motherliness. How can I describe it? While it is there it is all-encompassing, voluptuous...But it switches off, this motherliness. I open my heart to it. I welcome it. Again. And again. I begin to understand its pattern. It is treacherous.

Mother’s motherliness has a universal reach. Like her involuntary female magnetism it cannot be harnessed (51).

Once again, Sidhwa reconfigures these intimate moments to represent the “treacherous” powers of the maternal, the “involuntary female magnetism” that hints at the possibility of danger. In this passage, the young Lenny recognizes the maternal body as something that has power outside the domestic sphere. The danger of motherliness, what Lenny describes as a

treacherous pattern, lies in its inability to be “harnessed,” or confined by the intimate spaces of the home. This passage, read with her earlier description of Ayah’s attractiveness, endows the maternal body with certain dangerous qualities, most noticeably its “universal reach,” implying that it is the possibilities of the female body as public form that create this danger.

In these descriptions, the relationships between mother, or mother-figure, and child, are private, though Sidhwa gestures at larger public possibilities for the maternal body through both Lenny’s discomfort with her own mother’s “motherliness” and her recognition of the dangerous looks that Ayah’s voluptuous body draws. Public and private converge in pre-Partition Lahore primarily in the body of Queen Victoria, a “treacherous” mother whose statue is found at the center of the park where Ayah meets her many admirers. Sidhwa’s fascination with the statue and its power to represent political power fits with her later exploration of women’s bodies as sites of public violence. As Lenny and Ayah visit the park, Sidhwa writes the statue as though the absent Queen enforces a kind of surveillance over the activities in the park:

... when Ayah takes me up Queens Road, past the YWCA, past the Freemasons’ Lodge, which she calls “The Ghost Club,” and across the Mall to the Queen’s statue in the park opposite the Assembly Chambers, I’m still pushed in a pram. I love it. Queen Victoria, cast in gunmetal, is majestic, massive, overpowering, ugly. Her statue imposes the English Raj in the park. I lie sprawled on the grass, my head in Ayah’s lap (28).

Lenny’s description of this walk describes the very material way in which British colonial power pervaded the culture of pre-Partition Lahore; as Ayah implies with her joking comment about the Freemasons, the British haunt the communities of the city. Even in the presence of British officials and the buildings that house the offices of their elite clubs, however, the statue of the Queen dominates the landscape. Its metal form indicates a monstrous maternity that both impresses and repels the young girl. Sidhwa immediately

questions the idea of Queen Victoria as benevolent mother through Lenny's mixed response to the statue's presence. She registers that the statue is impressive, yet finds it ugly, emphasizing the militarized nature of this mother figure by drawing attention to the gunmetal material of the statue: Queen Victoria may be a matriarch, but her statue is cast from the same metal as military weapons.

Though the form of the statue consists primarily of the Queen's wide, billowing skirts, clearly underscoring her femininity, the contrast between Queen Victoria, the militarized mother, and Ayah, the soft, maternal body, unveils the violence lurking beneath the surface in the pre-Partition state. Sidhwa pairs Ayah and Queen Victoria several times throughout the novel, including a moment in which Ayah bites a coin inscribed with the Queen's profile. The two women are presented quite differently in the text, the Queen as a majestic yet repulsive statue and Ayah as the loving and desirable nanny, but both possess the signs of reproductive power that will be deployed throughout the text to create and consolidate political power. In this moment at the park, the violent nature of Queen Victoria's presence is revealed; her "motherliness" is also threatening. Though this section of the novel portrays the community in the park as a family-like group of mixed religious and ethnic backgrounds—with Queen Victoria and her British Empire as, perhaps, the force that creates this atmosphere—Lenny's interpretation forces the reader to encounter the threat of violence that holds the colonized community together.

Sidhwa's choice of Lenny's naïve persona as the text's narrative voice seems all the more meaningful in light of her many writings and rewritings of the events that make up *Cracking India*. In a personal essay "New Neighbors" published in *Time Magazine*, Sidhwa



explains the power of this statue from her adult perspective, again focusing on its mix of femininity and authority:

For me, the British Raj was imposed by the massive statue of Victoria that overlooked Queen's Park. Resplendent in gun-metal, she held a large iron ball in one hand and an iron club in the other, her billowing raiment filling the delicate marble canopy that framed her statue.... (par 9).

Sidhwa's use of the words "resplendent," "billowing," and "delicate" emphasize the fragile femininity of this representation of Queen Victoria. But Sidhwa's memory continues to fixate on the strange nature of the statue's power: the Queen is splendid but she is also splendidly monstrous. Though this description, written in the author's own voice in a nonfiction piece, does not contain the visceral response that a word like "ugly" conveys in Lenny's reaction, the author again emphasizes that, for her, British colonial power was "imposed" by this statue, testifying to the violent power held by these cultural monuments. In a recent newspaper article titled "Now You See Them, Now You Don't," Mariam Qureshi, a Lahore journalist, discusses the presence of statues in colonized Lahore and their disappearance following decolonization. Described by one Lahore citizen as "emblems of British authority," these statues—representations of a variety of powerful British figures—were the subject of much controversy as the desire for an independent India began to be voiced in the early twentieth century (par 3). One particularly controversial statue, a depiction of Lord John Lawrence, included a plaque that read "By which shall ye be governed: by the pen or the sword?" (par 6). This threatening phrase reveals that these statues, seen on one level as grandiose representations of the leaders of the colonial state, actually codify the threat of violence that is always associated with imperial power. Read this way, the walkway of statues becomes sinister. Implicit violence looms above, or beside, the citizens of Lahore as they meet in Queen's Park, and Lenny's recoiling reaction appears

entirely natural. The statues thus become the embodiment of what Fanon describes as “violence in its natural state”: colonial power (61).

Queen Victoria’s body, with its wide, billowing skirts and majestic air, becomes the perfect representation of this violent power, so much so that the dominant images of colonized Lahore in *Cracking India*, written in the 1980s about a time period almost fifty years after her death, are this statue, Queen’s Park, and Queen’s Road. This ubiquitous imperial body, presented cast in gunmetal as a mother figure to the empire, aligns with Queen Victoria’s own vision for colonial relations. In a letter to Lord Salisbury, she writes:

...if we are to go on peacefully and happily in India, and to be liked and beloved by high and low—as well as respected as we ought to be—and not trying to trample on the people and continually reminding them and making them feel they are a conquered people. They must of course *feel* that we are masters, but it should be done kindly and not offensively (qtd in Spurr 12).

These statements reveal the colonial desires that shaped the state we see in Sidhwa’s Lahore. The colonizing forces *must* be “liked and beloved by high and low,” while at the same time the colonized must “*of course feel* that we are masters.” This mix of authority and comfort, of the need for the colonized to *like* their oppressors, seems to indicate exactly why the maternal body of Queen Victoria was such a powerful symbol of colonial authority. Queen Victoria’s delicate frame is maternal, but cast in gunmetal she is a militarized mother, threatening violence but avoiding the controversial statement found on Lord John Lawrence’s statue. Queen Victoria’s statue does not state her power so frankly, but nevertheless conveys a similar sense of threat and authority, perhaps cloaked beneath the folds of her iconic skirts.

Spurr writes that “the ultimate aim of colonial discourse is not to establish a radical opposition between colonizer and colonized. It seeks to dominate by inclusion and

domestication rather than by a confrontation which recognizes the independent identity of the Other” (32). Spurr’s use of the word “domestication” is telling: the language of the family, and more specifically parental authority, becomes the way in which colonial power can create a comfortable dominance. Though colonizing officials were men, this domestication does not only occur through the image of a benevolent colonial father, but is also performed through the female body. Queen Victoria, possessing a body that has given birth to nine children, becomes a vehicle that is sent forth, cast in gunmetal, to confirm colonial power. Margaret Homans argues in her book, *Royal Representations: Queen Victoria and British Culture, 1837-1876*, that images of Queen Victoria helped to sustain her political power throughout her reign. Even when the Queen was young, the “early domestic images...answered the paradoxical demand for a monarch who was not too strong but strong enough” (Homans 229). Much as the pictures of a young, newly married Queen could present an image of female power that comforted the British nation, the representations of a middle-aged Queen fulfilled similar “paradoxical” expectations in service of the empire. The image of the Queen, “...served to justify the extension and maintenance of Britain’s—or rather ‘Her’—empire, and indeed her image traveled the globe in the service of this project” (Homans 230).

Early in the text, Sidhwa focuses her narrative gaze on women’s bodies in relation to community. In pre-Partition Lahore, Ayah is a “magnet” who attracts a crowd of diverse men in the park, while Queen Victoria, also imagined as a more violent kind of metal, has a body that can “impose” British power. At the moment of Partition, which occurs halfway through the text, Sidhwa again invokes women’s bodies, including Queen Victoria’s powerful skirts:

Playing British gods under the ceiling fans of the Faletti's Hotel—behind Queen Victoria's garden skirt—the Radcliffe Commission deals out Indian cites like a pack of cards. Lahore is dealt to Pakistan. Amritsar to India. Sialkot to Pakistan. Pathankot to India.

I am Pakistani. In a snap. Just like that (150).

In this moment, Queen Victoria is used both as a representation of colonial power that permits this division of India's provinces, and as a contrast between the image of "superpower supervision" that Joe Cleary references in his portrayal of cultural imaginings of Partition and its reality. After setting up the image of Queen Victoria as militarized mother, a representation of colonial power that is at once menacing and delicate, Sidhwa infantilizes the actual "power players" at the moment of Partition by contrasting them to the statue's imposing force. She emphasizes the idea of play twice, stating that they are "playing British gods" beneath the ceiling fans and also comparing their handling of the provinces to a card game. Though the outward structure of Sidhwa's text is one of order leading to disorder—the community is relatively happy and functional prior to independence and Partition, and after Partition both the community and the material structure of the city fall apart—Sidhwa disrupts this narrative, offering a vision not of rupture following the end of colonization, but instead of continuation from one type of violently enforced community to another. These brief moments when she mentions the actual process of Partition align with Barbara Harlow's understanding of this act as the final scar of colonization. The trivial game in which provinces are handed out beneath the gaze of the monstrous mother Queen demonstrates that the horrifying violence which ensues must be understood as part of the process of colonization, not merely the result of the colonizers leaving the state to disorder.

Though Pakistan has been officially created at this point in the text, Sidhwa's repeated descriptions of the process of Partition continue, in part because the actual act of

delineating the new border took place over an extended period of time.<sup>5</sup> These passages continue to emphasize the corrupt and fallible nature of the “icy card sharks,”<sup>6</sup> who, charged with the project of creating borders for the new nations, deal “...out the land village by village, city by city, wheeling and dealing and doling out favors” (169). She also describes the colonial powers as playing favorites, creating borders in a careless manner that ignores the ethnic populations of certain provinces: “Nehru is Kashmiri; they grant him Kashmir. Spurning logic, defying rationale, ignoring the consequences of bequeathing a Muslim state to the Hindus, while Jinnah futilely protests: ‘Statesman cannot eat their words!’ Statesman do” (169). Such conceptions of the moments of actual Partition indicate both the changing nature of the borders—at the moment of Partition Pakistan’s borders have not even been fully delineated—and the impotence of masculine leaders in their attempts to unite the country. In contrast to Queen Victoria, whose image of domestic and reproductive bliss proved useful in representations of her power over the empire, Jinnah is continually described by Sidhwa in terms of his domestic and political failings which seem, throughout the text, to intersect. While Nehru’s power to control the borders of India and Pakistan is attributed to his sexual relationship with Lady Mountbatten—Ice Candy Man exclaims “He’s got Mountbatten eating out of his one hand and the English’s wife out of his other what-not”—Jinnah’s wife, a Parsee idolized by many in Lenny’s community, “died of a broken heart” (171). At this moment, the narration switches back to the present, and the fully-grown Lenny ponders that Jinnah is today “...caricatured, and portrayed as a monster” (171).

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<sup>5</sup> Sidhwa’s depiction of this process aligns with recent critical assessments of partition, including Ahmad Sinai, who in his book *Lahore 1947* argues that “The continuing effects of partition at political, cultural, and psychological levels extend far beyond the focus on Kashmir...They point to the fact that partition should be regarded as a process rather than a single historical event confined to August 1947” (1).

<sup>6</sup> Sidhwa’s use of the word “ice” is significant, as she often uses descriptions of “ice” or “iciness” to indicate something sinister that is hidden from view.

When masculine constructions of Pakistani power fail, the maternal body is again invoked as the citizens of Lahore attempt to reconcile the arbitrary nature of the new border with their desire to legitimize those newly created spaces. Sidhwa quickly contrasts Lenny's vision of "British gods" at play with Slavesister's perception of the moment of Partition as a national birth. Lenny, who is also celebrating her own eighth birthday, comments, "A new nation is born. India has been divided after all. Did they dig the long canal Ayah mentioned?" (150). Sidhwa again uses Lenny's naïve narrative persona and her insistent desire to imagine the materiality of Pakistan's borders to foreground the arbitrary nature of these boundaries. Though Lenny seems to recognize this moment as a kind of birth, she uses this language metaphorically, referring to a new beginning for the nation. It is the oft-mocked Slavesister, not Lenny, who pushes the metaphor into the biological:

"...don't forget, we have to celebrate the new arrival yet!"

Godmother and I look at her blankly. "Somebody have a baby I don't know of?" asks Godmother suspiciously.

"Have you forgotten already?" says Slavesister with reproof. "We've all produced a baby... We've given birth to a new nation. Pakistan!"

"You *are* silly," says Godmother crossly. But without the devastating artillery fire such an absurd way of putting things might be expected to provoke (151).

Though Lenny and Godmother both mark this statement as silly, the girl's observation that the reaction did not match the strange nature of the statement implies that even the stoic Godmother can appreciate the need to celebrate the creation of Pakistan as a birth. The birthing body thus becomes an accepted vehicle for envisioning the partition of the nation: Pakistan, in Sidhwa's text, is constructed through a casual game of cards played by British officials, but it is only through the imaginative process of *birthing* the nation, an image that clearly invokes the female body, that national space is consolidated and Pakistan is truly created. Deployed to reconfigure a unified national identity, the maternal figure sanctifies

national spaces whose recently created, still-fluctuating borders resist such naturalizing narratives.

In this moment of national birth, space, history, and the female body intertwine as Pakistan comes into being through these intimate imaginings. Such gestures toward the primal reproductive power of maternal bodies avoid the questions asked by the naïve Lenny about the material construction of borders. After the death of a British official, whose “...English toes and kidneys float before [Lenny’s] disembodied eyeballs,” she continues to imagine mutilation, but her mind becomes focused not on mutilated bodies, but instead on violence against the land. As she tries to eat her curry, another moment when Sidhwa juxtaposes the domestic and the national, she is haunted by, “...the vision of a torn Punjab. Will the earth bleed? And what about the sundered rivers? Won’t their water drain into the jagged cracks? Not satisfied with breaking India, they now want to tear the Punjab” (124). Lenny’s frightening apparition foregrounds the material nature of borders and rewrites the act of partition as a kind of mutilation. Though the two visions Sidhwa presents of Partition—birth and mutilation—seem remarkably distant, in the context of the novel their juxtaposition, an image of a violent, mutilating birth, foreshadows the specific kinds of violence that occur in the wake of Partition.

Sidhwa’s description of Partition as a monstrous birth is further developed by two acts of horrific violence that precede the moment of Partition; both acts witnessed by Lenny are displaced by the child onto intimate spaces and bodies. Shortly before her birthday—and the day of Partition—Lenny awakes to “the chanting of slogans” and is taken by Ayah and Ice Candy Man to spaces near the Queen’s Garden where crowds have gathered. In the city, the traditional Holi festival in which Hindus and Sikhs “[splatter] everybody with colored

water and colored powders and laughs and romps...” has taken a sinister turn.<sup>7</sup> Instead of water Lenny sees “people splattering each other with blood,” and a crowd of Sikh men running through the street. The child’s gaze falls on “A naked child, twitching on a spear stuck between her shoulders...waved like a flag: her screamless mouth agape...staring straight at [Lenny]” (144). The female child’s naked body takes the place of a flag, a common symbol of nationalist desire, and Sidhwa’s language in this passage marks a turn in the text, emphasizing both the muteness of this feminine body, and the power of the female child’s violated shape as a form of communication. Sidhwa will use this image of a “screamless mouth” again, yet at this moment in the novel the child’s mute body seems to connect her to Lenny, indicating both the silence surrounding violence and the powerlessness of Lenny to react to the horrific act.

Confirming the power of the female body as a vehicle of representation, even acts of violence against men are reconfigured, by Sidhwa, through the feminine. Though Lenny’s gaze falls on a series of disturbing images—including a crowd that “leaves at its center the pulpy red flotsam of a mangled body” every few moments—it is an act of violence that she witnesses only through sound and the reactions of others which leaves the most lasting impression. A mob of Muslim men gather around two jeeps and an “emaciated Banya wearing a white Gandhi cap,” feminized through his association with the strangely maternal Gandhi, has his “thin, brown legs tied to a jeep” (145). Though Ayah covers Lenny’s eyes and pushes her to the ground, she still experiences the moment through the sounds of the engines and the many men yelling “Allah-o-Akbar!” (145). Perhaps most disturbing in this scene, however, is not the sound of the revving jeeps or chants, but instead the terrifying face

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<sup>7</sup> One of Sidhwa’s narrative strategies is to write an everyday event—like Hari’s dhoti-chasing--and reconfigure it as horrific violence later in the text.



of the Ice Candy Man, on whom Lenny's gaze falls as she is pushed to the ground. Ice Candy Man's face is "...tight with a strange exhilaration I never again want to see" (145). Lenny recognizes, and is repelled by, Ice Candy Man's almost sexual response to this act of horrific violence.

Though the victim is a man, both Ice Candy Man's sexual enjoyment of his murder and Lenny's attempt to understand the violence by displacing it onto the figures of her "long abandoned" female dolls link this moment to later categories of intimate violence against women. Lenny's use of the dolls begins as play, but as she pulls and splits the dolls at their seams, this game takes on the sexual overtones of the violence against the "emaciated Banya." Lenny first turns a large doll "...upside down and pull its legs apart. The elastic that holds them together stretches easily. I let one leg go and it snaps back, attaching itself to the brittle torso" (148). The image of Lenny stretching the dolls' legs focuses her attention on the seams at its center, indicating the intimate nature of this play. Discovering the sturdiness of its seams, Lenny rejects this doll and begins the process of selecting the other possible victims from a lineup on her bed. After casting aside her Indian dolls for seeming "unreal" and "too fragile," the girl selects "...a large lifelike doll with a china face and blinking blue eyes and coarse black curls," a fitting victim because of its "sturdy, well-stuffed cloth body and substantial feel" (148). In this moment, Lenny's selection clearly reveals her desire to displace the masculine act of violence she witnessed onto a decidedly feminine body, perhaps suggesting that this act of displacement is a response to both acts of violence she witnessed at the riots.

Carefully selected for being particularly round and well-stuffed, the body of the chosen doll does not mirror that of the split man, but, indicating the complex forces at work

behind the violent scenes witnessed by the child, instead seems quite feminine and possibly British, characterized by its blue eyes, curly hair, and “pink legs.” Lenny is unable to tear the doll on her own, and enlists the help of her young brother, demanding that he engage in a violent tug of war until the doll is split:

The cloth skin is ripped right up to its armpits spilling chunks of grayish cotton and coiled brown coir and the innards that make its eyes blink and make it squawk “ma-ma.” I examine the doll’s spilled insides and, holding them in my hands, collapse on the bed sobbing. (148)

Lenny’s attempt to recreate the violent act can be understood on the simple level of reenactment—the child desires to perform the violent act that she witnessed only indirectly, to solve the mystery of what exactly happens to a split body, and perhaps also the mystery of Ice Candy Man’s enjoyment—but her displacement also shifts the scene to both a feminine form and a domestic relationship. As the insides of the doll spill out, an image of a birth is reconfigured into one of violence. The violence against the doll is also associated with the maternal, and Lenny’s pain at witnessing the remains of the doll is exacerbated by the dismembered part that squawks “ma-ma.”

These acts of violence occur in the text directly before Lenny becomes Pakistani, and both gesture towards a larger pattern of violence against feminine bodies that will occur in the post-Partition state. Early in the text, the discourses of femininity, particularly the terms of reproductive power, are deployed to consolidate community. At the moment of Partition, however, these intimate imaginings become markedly violent: community is not created through the female body in the form of a statue or a desirable, round nanny, but instead is confirmed through the rape and destruction of women’s bodies. Thus, as the birthing body becomes a powerful icon for the nation, suggesting, as Nasta writes, “primal” origins, the destruction of the reproductive powers of the “other” collapses the distinction between

private and public and becomes a vehicle for nationalist desires. The violence directed at women's bodies following partition is often the most personal violence imaginable, yet reaches back, in a clearly *public* way, to the private and primal origins of this "other." Thus the border being mapped by colonizing officials cannot be understood as the primary marker delineating the limits of the state; this line instead becomes violently enacted on the feminine form. As soon as news of the upcoming partition begins to spread, Lenny remarks, "People shrink, dwindling into symbols. Ayah is no longer just my all-encompassing Ayah—she is also a token. A Hindu" (101). The female body, too, shrinks in *Cracking India*, transformed from an object of desire and maternal power, to a symbol on which violent nationalist desires can be enacted.

In a 1991 *New York Times* article Bapsi Sidhwa comments on the use of the feminine form in political struggles, asserting that "Victory is celebrated on a woman's body, and vengeance is taken on a woman's body" (Graeber 11). The mutilated female body becomes both a reenactment of the mutilated border itself and "...a sign through which men communicated with each other," a location on which narratives of nationalism can be created or redeemed (Das 56). The first act of post-Partition violence that occurs in this novel, shortly after Slavesister's declaration of Pakistan's "birthday," reveals the shockingly violent ways in which the feminine form was reconceived as canvas for nationalist messages in 1947 Lahore. Ice Candy Man interrupts a quiet domestic evening at Lenny's home with the news that a train has arrived from Gurdaspur. Instead of the expected relatives, he explains, "Everyone is dead. Butchered. They are all Muslim. There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women's breasts!" (159). Again, reproductive power is violently reconceived through the image of the spilling gunny-sack, here filled with women's

breasts, a symbol of maternal and sexual power. The amputation of female breasts was one of the most iconic images of the communal violence following the division of India and Pakistan, “at once [desexualizing] a woman and [negating] her as a wife and mother; no longer a nurturer (if she survives, that is) she remains a permanently inauspicious figure...” (Menon and Bhasin 42, 44). These acts of violence coincide with Bhabha’s descriptions of nationalist thinking, as intimate and public desires coalesce in the violation of the female body. Just as Queen Victoria became, through her well-known reproductive power, a meaningful symbol of imperial desires, so too these destructions of specific reproductive organs become a way to consolidate the new national space while excising the “others” within its borders. In addition to the mutilation of breasts, other common violations of the female form included “marking the breasts and genitalia” with nationalist symbols, tattooing, and mutilating pregnant bodies (Menon 43). Menon and Bhasin argue that these forms of mutilation became an inscription in which the country’s history could be confirmed through these “...secretly carried [memories] of terror upon the ‘secret’ organs of women” (185).

Showing the violation of women’s bodies as a form of communication between men or as a metaphor for the destruction of the nation dangerously disconnects the act of violence from the actual women experiencing the trauma. Sidhwa’s use of the young narrator, however, works against any attempt to understand these acts of communal violence as merely historical and political events, revealing not just the image of severed breasts, but of the intimate body in pain. It is important that these acts not be displaced from the body of the woman; though they may function, culturally, as an attack on the masculine, it is also an individual body that suffers so horrifically. Through Lenny’s visceral reaction to this news, Sidhwa brings the narrative back to the domestic spaces and bodies that surround the eight-

year-old girl. Lenny describes this news of this brutal discovery on the train as “...unbearable. I don’t want to believe it. For a grisly instant I see Mother’s detached breasts: soft, pendulous, their beige nipples spreading” (159). In this moment, the act recaptures its intimate nature. We, as readers, never encounter the women to whom these breasts belong; all that remains of them is the horrible image of the gunny-sack. The young narrator reconfigures the specific shape of a pair of breasts through the figure of her Mother, emphasizing the corporeal, private pain of the nameless women whose breasts had been so horrifically mutilated. Sidhwa thus writes the trauma as both public and private. The bag of severed breasts is transformed into a public form of communication, a verification of nationalist power, and, as Menon and Bhasin have written, a way of inscribing the new national space onto the histories of women’s bodies.

In Sidhwa’s “Defend Yourself Against Me,” the violated mother figure “*Ammijee*” emerges as the center of the narrative, though the story at first appears to be about the writer herself and the pain of her childhood friend--whose experiences are strikingly similar to Ranna’s in this novel. In *Cracking India*, we see a similar pattern; readers at first encounter a semi-autobiographical narrative describing a personal account of Partition. As the novel progresses, however, narratives of intimate violence against women’s bodies emerge as the center of the text. Though our first image of violated female forms—the young girl waved as a flag and the gunny-sacks full of breasts—are not violations against characters in the text, after the moment of Partition such violations occur closer and closer to Lenny. Ranna’s story, which Sidhwa sets up in her acknowledgment to Rana Kahn as a true history, disrupts this personal narrative because it is the only part of the book that is not told through Lenny’s perspective. Sidhwa even marks the change visually in the novel by including, in bold-faced

type, the heading “Ranna’s Story,” before his portion of the book begins. Though the author clearly desired to incorporate the harrowing story of her friend’s Partition experience, voicing Ranna’s story also provides insight into specific kinds of violence against women that Sidhwa herself did not encounter in the urban area of Lahore.

Ranna’s narrative shifts the scene of the novel from the urban Lahore to a rural location that Lenny visits several times throughout the novel. Strangely, the language of the family is also incorporated in these earlier parts of the novel to portray the relationships between the Muslim community to which Ranna’s family belongs and their Sikh neighbors. When discussing the possibility of Partition, the *chaundhry*, a leader of the community, remarks that he is “...prepared to take an oath on the Holy Koran...that every man in this village will guard his Sikh brothers with no regard for his own life” (65). Following Partition, however, these family relationships shift to ones of violence and control, and Ranna’s community is attacked by their Sikh neighbors. Preparing for this attack, the Sikhs are described by his community as “...swarms of locusts, moving in marauding bands of thirty or forty thousand...Setting fires, looting, parading Muslim women naked through the streets—raping and mutilating them in the center of the villages and in mosques” (209). Such intimate violations are made more horrific by their transformation into a performance of public control. In an almost list-like manner, Sidhwa recounts the horrors that Ranna witnesses once he escapes his own destroyed home: men sexually assaulting children and women, babies being thrown against walls, and an unclothed woman hanging upside down as her hair is set on fire. Each description confirms the strange public nature of these types of intimate violence and coincides with the accounts written by cultural historians in the 1990s, several years after this novel was published. Harveen Mann finds in her article “South Asian

Partition Literature and the Gendered Rape and Silence of the National Body” a wide range of intimate assaults against women, who are: “...paraded naked through the street of their abductors; mutilated, with their breasts cut off and their bodies tattooed with the marks of the "other" religion; impregnated by men of the other religion to sully the 'purity' of the woman's race; and forcibly separated from the children they subsequently bore." (5.) Such acts of violence are an incredibly intimate destruction of the feminine, but also can be read as an attempt to annihilate male honor. The description of these events from Ranna’s perspective, while brief, highlights the public nature of the trauma: the acts often took place in front of a crowd of men and, perhaps more appallingly, before members of the victims’ families or communities.

Though a majority of the violence occurring in this text is directed towards an “other,” a member of an ethnic community different from those who perform the violence, this disruption in the narrative also allows Sidhwa to represent the act of women being killed, or encouraged to kill themselves, by their own family members in order to “save” them from the types of intimate destruction described in other parts of the text. Many cultural narratives describing the deaths of these women seem invested in protecting the purity of both the domestic and the national through feminine “honor.” Ranna’s community has a clear plan to safeguard the women from being used in such a way, and Sidhwa emphasizes the care with which this plan is constructed. She writes:

Rather than face the brutality of the mob they will pour kerosene around the house and burn themselves. The canisters of kerosene are already stored in the barn at the rear of the *chaundry*’s mud house. The young men will engage the Sikhs at the mosque, and at other strategic locations, for as long as they can and give the women a chance to start the fire (210).

Interesting that, in this moment, the idea of protection shifts from keeping the women alive as long as possible to allowing the women enough time to quickly kill themselves. Such a plan reveals the importance of women's purity to male constructions of community; this plan is Sidhwa's *only* mention of preparation for the upcoming encounters with their former neighbors. Thus, the entire purpose of this encounter is to safeguard women's bodies from the public, shaming types of violence that they would experience if captured by the invading party. Menon and Bhasin title their chapter on such particularized types of violence "Honourably Dead: Permissible Violence Against Women," emphasizing the ways in which these violent narratives are reconfigured as heroic choice (55). Their extensive cultural work on Partition, including many first-person narratives, reveals that, though they differed on this definition of the "heroic," both men and women agreed that honor was "located in the body of the woman" (58).

The significance of honor, shame, and purity emerges powerfully in the stories of Ayah and Hamida, both caretakers for Lenny who are subjected to sexual violence that leaves them as outsiders to the domestic sphere. Women who are violated, raped, and mutilated cannot be incorporated back into the spaces of the home or, it seems, the nation. Thus, a woman threatened by these kinds of terrors faced two possible futures: one in which she was dead, but honorably so, and incorporated in narratives of national sacrifice, another in which she had been violated by an "outsider" to the community, and therefore shunned by her family. Sidhwa uses the figures most intimately connected to Lenny, her female caretakers, to explore the fates of women who survived these acts of violence. Masculine desire for Ayah has continually intruded on the text, and Lenny senses the gazes of men falling on her nanny from a very early age. After Partition, however, Ayah's body is



transformed from an object of sexual desire to a possible symbol of nationalist pride, a place on which to demonstrate the desires of a political community. Much as Ammijee emerges as the central character of “Defend Yourself Against Me,” so too does Ayah become the center of the second half of Sidhwa’s narrative. Both character names place an emphasis on their reproductive power, and, in post-Partition Lahore, Ayah becomes a symbol of Hindu femininity: the voluptuous body Sidhwa describes with such care earlier in the text becomes all the more desirable for these nationalist purposes.

After Partition, then, many Hindus have left Lahore, leaving behind empty houses that are filled with Muslim families fleeing the new borders of India. Lenny is struck with guilt when a crowd of men arrive at her house asking after Hindus at their residence and she reveals to Ice Candy Man, who she trusts, that Ayah is hidden away upstairs. Though the men at first appear to be after any Hindus at the residence, once Imam Din vouches for Hari’s circumcision, their attention focuses on “...the Hindu woman...The ayah!” (193). As she describes the moments when Ayah is taken away, Sidhwa links her experience of violation to that of the first female seen violated in the text—the young girl impaled during the pre-Partition riots:

They drag Ayah out. They drag her by her arms stretched taut, and her bare feet—that want to move backwards—are forced forward instead. Her lips are drawn away from her teeth, and the resisting curve of her throat opens her mouth like the dead child’s screamless mouth. Her violet sari slips off her shoulder, and her breasts strain at her sari-blouse stretching the cloth so that the white stitching at the seams shows (194).

The image of Ayah and that of the young girl coalesce in the vision of their mute, “screamless” mouths. Revealing the ways in which sexual violation and voicelessness can intertwine, Harveen Mann titles her article on multiple short stories about Indian Partition, including “Defend Yourself Against Me,” “South Asian Partition Literature and the

Gendered Rape and Silence of the National Body.” Her title emphasizes not only the inability of the women to speak out against her violation at the moment it occurs but also the silence surrounding these narratives of gendered violence in the wake of Partition, until feminist cultural historians revisited these acts in the mid-1990s. In this moment in *Cracking India*, the silence is found both in the family who is powerless to protect her as the men “swarm into [the] bedrooms, search [the] servants’ quarters, climb to the roofs, break locks and enter [the] godowns and small storerooms near the bathrooms,” and in Ayah’s own voicelessness in the wake of her violation (194). Their hasty invasion of the home coincides with Sidhwa’s description of their rough handling of Ayah. They “...drag her in grotesque strides to the cart and their harsh hands, supporting her with careless intimacy, lift her into it. Four men stand pressed against her, propping her body upright, their lips stretched in triumphant grimaces...” (195). Sidhwa is careful to emphasize the “careless intimacy” of such an encounter, and the image of so many men satisfied and triumphant as they carry her away, is horrifying for Lenny.

Sidhwa further stresses the strange nature of such violations, in which new homes and families could be created and quickly dismembered in service of nationalist desires, in her choice of violators. Though Ice Candy Man is clearly outside the ethnic community of both Lenny and Ayah, he is not a distant stranger from outside the city. He is, instead, a suitor and friend of Ayah’s who, though viewed as diabolical—an image emphasized by Sidhwa’s use of “ice” to describe any sinister person or organization—is familiar enough to Lenny that his face, “transformed into a savior’s,” coerces the girl into revealing Ayah’s whereabouts (193). When Ayah is found later in the text, after an extended absence from Lenny’s home during which readers are unsure what exactly has happened to her, she is Ice Candy Man’s

wife. Ice Candy Man continually uses domestic language to describe their relationship, reconfiguring his role as “husband.” He asserts, “I have been a good husband...Ask her. I’ve covered her with gold and silks. I’d do anything to undo the wrong done her. If it were to help to cut my head off, I’d cut my head and lay it at her feet! No one has touched her since our *nikah*” (262). Nationalism and intimacy coalesce in Ice Candy Man’s description of their relationship: her original abduction was focused on her status as the *Hindu* nanny, and the violence against her is clearly nationalist. Yet, Ice Candy Man claims her as his wife, and she has been incorporated into the domestic space of his home. Though some critics describe these later moments in the text as redemptive for the character of Ice Candy Man, and Lenny herself seems to sympathize with his feelings towards Ayah, the woman herself is clearly haunted by the domestic role she occupies, and the path that led her to this home.

When Godmother explains that Ayah does not want to face the family, including Lenny, the narrator understands that Ayah has been transformed, and is “...deeply, irrevocably ashamed: They have shamed her. Not those men in the carts—they were strangers—but Sharbat Khan and Ice-Candy-man and Imam Din and Cousin’s cook and the butcher and the other men she counted among her friends and admirers” (266). Part of this shame is Ayah’s exile from the domestic sphere; she asserts she cannot remain married to Ice Candy Man because of her memories of the beginnings of their marriage, yet she feels that she would be rejected by her family members if she were to go to India. Hamida, Lenny’s new caretaker, has experienced a similar shaming violation. Godmother, frank with Lenny about Hamida’s past, explains that she “... was kidnapped by Sikhs...taken to Armistar. Once that happens, sometimes, the husband—or his family—won’t take her back” (227).

This narrative, a minor part of *Cracking India*, further confirms the outsider status of women after being violated in these intimate ways.

Though public and private have intertwined in these narratives of violence against women, the acts have been, for the most part, unofficial. The burgeoning official governments of Pakistan and India were also confirmed through feminine identity, however, and their policies attempting to recover women and dismantle “faked families” like Ayah and Ice Candy Man’s emerged as part of the confirmation of their legitimacy as a national government (124). Thus, it was not just the borders of India and Pakistan that had to be so scrupulously delineated, the borders of the family emerged as another front on which the wars of Partition were fought and national power confirmed. In Urvashi Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence*, a text whose title again emphasizes the “screamless mouths” of violated women, she writes of the “official” discourses surrounding women’s bodies in post-Partition India and Pakistan:

The women had to be brought back, they had to be 'purified'...only then would moral order be restored and the nation made whole again, and only then...would the emasculated, weakened *manhood* of the Hindu male be vindicated. If Partition was a loss of itself to the 'other,' a metaphorical violation and rape of the body of the motherland, the recovery of women was its opposite, the regaining of the 'pure'...body of the woman, essential, indeed crucial for the State's—and the community's—self legitimation (150).

Most significant in Butalia’s description of these gendered constructions of nationality is the quick and easy connections made between the moral purity of the women, located in their gendered bodies, manhood, and nationality. Sanctifying the borders of the family, recovering “lost” women and children, and developing an official language that created policies regarding the abduction of women, all served to consolidate national power and confirm the identity of the new governments. Though this passage is about Hindu male identity and the

national legitimacy of India, the Inter-Dominion treaties and the 1949 revision, re-titled the “Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act,” negotiated the return of women from both countries, implying that the return of abducted women will lead to the restoration of national legitimacy for the newly independent India *and* the recently created Pakistan.

In Bapsi Sidhwa’s “Defend Yourself Against Me,” she writes from the perspective of an author beginning work on a novel of partition, a book that will clearly become *Cracking India*. The author is drawn back into her childlike memories of Lahore in 1947, writing that, “Since childhood memories can only be accurately exhumed by the child, I will inhabit my childhood. As a writer, I am already practiced in inhabiting different bodies: dwelling in rooms, gardens, bungalows and spaces from the past; zapping time” (310). Though the narrator seems unclear about the shape of her Partition novel, I would argue that “Defend Yourself Against Me” is the story of Sidhwa finding both her narrative voice and her narrative purpose for *Cracking India*. This drifting back into the spaces of her childhood allows the author to inhabit memories of maternal bodies that intersect with her developing interest in the violence against women during Partition. As the author drives home, her “thoughts tumble through a chaos of words and images” ultimately revealing the poem by Pedro Shimose.

Though throughout both stories the narrative focus is on the horrific physical assaults against women, Shimose’s poem also cries out against representational violence. The narrator of the poem at first seems to be asking a female audience to defend herself against the physical harm that might be perpetuated by the narrator or his male relatives, but the perspective shifts, and he then demands that she defend herself “...against my force and shouting in schools and cathedrals/against my camera, against my pencil/against my TV-

spots” (329). Shimose and Sidhwa imply that masculine violence cannot be represented only by physical scars, but instead must be understood as a larger process of educational, historical, and literary violence, committed when stories such as that of *Ammijee* and Ayah are silenced, when their “screamless mouths” are unable to describe the acts of violence they have witnessed and history is subsumed instead by the “shouts” of celebratory narratives of Partition. This interpretation of the history of Partition coincides with the cultural histories of gendered violence that emerge following the publication of Sidhwa’s novel. *Cracking India*, perhaps part of the “chaos of words and images” in the narrator’s head alongside Shimose’s poem and her thoughts on the violence against Ammijee at the end of her short story “Defend Yourself Against Me,” can be seen as an answer to the poem, a defense not against the weapons of intimate violence, but instead against the “shouting in schools,” against the “pencil” of Partition historians.

### **Shauna Singh Baldwin’s *What the Body Remembers***

Shauna Singh Baldwin’s 1996 short story “Family Ties” takes place in the 1970s, twenty years after Partition, but the year 1947 still lingers in the domestic life of the young narrator. The story, told from the perspective of a female child, depicts the girl’s realization that her father disowned his sister, a woman who was captured and converted during the time of Partition. Baldwin uses this narrative from the past to reveal the ways in which violent familial conceptions of feminine purity and honor still remain—even in the more contemporary 1970s home. Not knowing that she has an aunt, the nameless narrator discovers a picture of a young woman who her father identifies as his sister “Chandini Kaur” who was “eighteen in 1947.” Immediately after naming the woman in the picture, the father

takes a gun from the attaché case, instructing the narrator's young brother that he should be prepared to defend his sister. Though the narrator first assumes that her brother would use the gun to shoot *at* potential attackers, her father's definition of protection is revealed when he states, "If the Muslims come and your sister is in danger, you must shoot her rather than let her fall into their hands" (26). The narrator is shocked by this realization and becomes haunted by her lost aunt whom she refers to as the "Moonlight Princess," stating that her aunt "...comes to me in my dreams that night telling me I can trust no one. Especially if he says he loves me" (26). The pronouns in this sentence make clear the emphasis on violent gender relations *within* the family structure; the narrator is told she should not trust men who claim to love her. This story thus becomes a unique Partition narrative: it focuses not on communal violence against an "other," but instead on the brutality visited on women's bodies by family members who insist the violence is done out of protection and love.

Though her lost aunt contacts the family after being kidnapped, they dismiss her as a madwoman, because "no woman of your father's family would have allowed herself to become a Musalmaan," even rejecting her after she kills the child she bore with her Muslim husband, a murderous attempt at penance for her "crimes" (30). After hearing the rest of this family story, the narrator refers to her father and aunt as "...a brother and his mad sister, partitioned by family ties" (31). This phrase "partitioned by family ties" is important to the narrative because though it refers to the division of the country, it does not lay blame with larger political structures or even the Muslims who kidnapped the Moonlight Princess. Instead, Baldwin directly links the division of the brother and sister to the patriarchal family structure itself. The family is not divided by Partition; in Baldwin's construction the family is partitioned by its own conceptions of honor, shame, and femininity.

This brief story demonstrates the ways in which family structure, domesticity, and national identity coalesce in Baldwin's work on the Partition of India. In *What the Body Remembers*, published three years after "Family Ties," a similar focus on domesticity allows Baldwin to develop a vision of gendered cultural expectations in the pre-Partition Punjab region that complicates her narratives of post-Partition violence. The 1999 novel, written 10 years after *Cracking India* was published, foregrounds the significance of geographic boundaries to the narrative with the inclusion of a map of "Undivided India" before the title page. Though the first 400 pages of the novel focus largely on the personal lives of Roop and Satya, this map draws attention to the ways in which the intimate and political collide during the ten-year period preceding Indian Independence and Partition. Like *Cracking India*, *What the Body Remembers* depicts the moment of Partition through the lens of the domestic spaces and personal lives of the female characters in her text. This narrative vision of Partition links the personal relationships that take place within the patriarchal family home to the later violence that emerges between both relatives and strangers, a move that aligns with Ritu Menon's description of the sexual violence following Partition. She writes:

... the dramatic episodes of violence against women during communal riots bring to the surface, savagely and explicitly, familiar forms of sexual violence--now charged with a symbolic meaning that serves as an indicator of the place that women's sexuality occupies in an all-male, patriarchal arrangement of gender relations, between and within religious or ethnic communities (43).

Though Baldwin does not include acts of sexual violence in the sections of *What the Body Remembers* that occur prior to Partition, she does focus on the threat of violence that enforces cultural norms regarding women's sexuality, ultimately linking the reproductive role of women in the patriarchal family to later horrific acts of violence "...charged with symbolic meaning."



Ron Carlson writes in his *New York Times* review of *What the Body Remembers* that the text explores three major themes: “the division of India, the sorrows of patriarchy and a woman's role in the emerging nation-state” (par 2). These themes emerge through a plot that explores the complex domestic relationships that occur when Sardarji, a wealthy engineer, takes a second wife, Roop, after his forty-two year old wife, Satya, is unable to become pregnant. This arrangement—and Roop and Satya’s various attempts to live within or resist it—foreground a textual exploration of female entrapment within patriarchal family structures that deepens Baldwin’s later depictions of brutality against women’s bodies following Partition. Thus these themes—national identity, borders, fertility, and domesticity—do not function separately in the text and instead must be read together in order to understand the ways in which mothering is inextricably linked to nationalist imaginings.

Though most of the novel’s action takes place in the twenty years prior to Partition, the phrase “Undivided India, 1895” is repeated in the heading of the Prologue. The Prologue is a brief passage describing Satya’s birth from her perspective, and the first sentence of Baldwin’s work imagines birth as a kind of violence. A voice not yet known to the reader states “*I have grey eyes in this lifetime and they are wide open as I am severed from my mother’s womb.*” The trauma of this severing is exacerbated by the voice’s recognition that she has, once again, been born female:

The midwife knows as I do already, testing the kick in my legs, that I am not a boy. Against all odds, against every pandit’s promise, despite a whole life of worship and expiation, I have slid down the snake’s tail and for all the money and temple offerings I lavished on pandits the last time round, here I am again...born a woman (1).

This opening passage—depicting both birth and being gendered female as loss—sets the tone for a text in which the domestic lives of two women becomes a frame through which to understand the horrific communal violence that occurred in the wake of Partition.

The importance of fertility to the marriage arrangement at the center of the novel creates a textual obsession with reproduction and birthing. In addition to the birth scene that opens the novel, two more births are described in the first forty pages of *What the Body Remembers*. Together, these three violent births serve to illustrate the ways in which the patriarchal culture that surrounds Roop and Satya defines and controls female reproductive power. When Satya is suffering over her husband's marriage to Roop, an arrangement entirely dependent on Roop's apparent fertility, she sends for "...the only woman who owed her anything, her cousin-sister Mumta" (11). Mumta is in debt to Satya for helping her when she became pregnant out of wedlock:

Mumta would come. In memory of three salwars soaked in a baby's blood, in memory of marigolds unable to perfume a furtive death, Mumta would come. In memory of that baby that was Mumta's first, her dropped one, that baby that could not be born before marriage, in memory of that birth that became non-birth and that small atma denied its given body on this rotation of the wheel (11).

Here Mumta's birthing of a child is transformed into "non-birth" by a society that dictates when and how women should reproduce. The decision is painful but simple for the women: the baby "could not be born before marriage," and therefore must be "dropped." Though included only as a brief aside in the larger story of Roop and Satya's first meeting, Mumta's story aligns with the larger textual focus on patriarchal control of female fertility.

Soon after Baldwin flashes back, in Part Two of the novel, to 1928 and Roop's childhood, Roop witnesses her own mother's traumatic labor. Like Sidhwa's use of Lenny, Baldwin utilizes Roop's childhood perspective in the early parts of the novel as a disorienting

force. Roop suffers as she watches her mother in pain, and she reads the birth, which ultimately causes her mother's death, as a punishment for femininity. Baldwin writes, "Since early dawn, each scream from her mama has brought Roop new tears. What did Mama do to deserve this torment that tears at her insides, spewing blood, leaving her eyes glazed?" (32). After learning that the baby is breech, Roop's nervousness is exacerbated when her grandmother hits her on the head and demands that she "learn what we women are for!" (32). The birth act thus becomes a scene of education for Roop and, after the birth, she recognizes how others read the work done by her mother's body as "unclean" and insignificant (33). She describes how "Nani and Gujri have forgotten Mama now that she has done what women are for" (33). The phrase "what women are for" is repeated throughout the novel, referring to women's ability to become pregnant and give birth. Baldwin thus uses this phrase to delineate a woman's role in the Sikh culture she describes: their entire identity is defined by their ability to reproduce.

Roop's mother's death aligns these passages with the earlier descriptions of birth as a kind of violence, but this incident also functions as one of many encounters that force Roop to develop an awareness of her role as a woman in her cultural surroundings. The brief first section of the novel, describing Satya and Roop's first meeting, introduces readers to a sixteen-year-old Roop who is submissive, demure, and innocent (3). Yet when we encounter Roop as a child in the second section of the novel, she is bold, adventurous, and inquisitive. Part Two of *What the Body Remembers* can thus be read as a narrative of Roop's transformation into a submissive wife. This "education" begins the moment we first witness Roop's childhood: in the first passage describing Roop as a girl, she asks for the eggs and chicken that her brother is having, complaining of her hunger. She is quickly rebuked,

however, by the servant Gujri, who instructs Jeevan not to “waste” the “eggs and meat” on his sister (20). The domestic and the political align in this scene as well: Jeevan, Roop’s brother, indicates that he needs the eggs because he plans to join the army. The spaces of home, her interactions with her brother, and even the foods she is allowed to eat become part of Roop’s gradual realization of her place as a woman in the larger patriarchal culture.

Roop’s education in femininity focuses on silence and shame, two forces that are crucial to an understanding of the gendered violence following Partition. In this way, Baldwin’s decision to devote over a hundred pages to Roop’s childhood deepens rather than distracts from her social history of Partition violence. The passages describing Roop as a child first focus on her increasing awareness that women are viewed as possessions and guests in the homes of men. Roop understands that Gujri “...was a gift to the bride’s family, like Mama’s dowry pots and pans,” aligning a woman who does domestic work with the material objects she works with (21). Gujri is a servant in part because her husband, whom she had never met, died when she was seven years old. She was marked by her community as “unlucky and, because she could not be given to another man as a bride, was given to Roop’s grandmother as a cook and housekeeper (21). Undermining readings of domestic space as a place of feminine empowerment, Roop too identifies her status in the house as that of a “guest.” Like her sister, she is “Papaji and Jeevan’s guest for a while, just till her marriage,” when she will become a guest in the home of another man (23). Such constructions of domestic relationships paint women as suffering alienation within the family home; there is little joy for female characters in this text, and Baldwin continually presents moments when women envision their femininity as a kind of punishment. After getting a tattoo she knows her family would disapprove of, Roop worries that she will “...be a dog in

her next life,” before thinking of a more horrifying possibility: “*Or I might have to come back as a girl again*” (53). This brief comment works as a repetition of Satya’s birth thought that being born a woman is a punishment for actions in a past life.

Voicelessness is also part of Roop’s education in femininity, and this emphasis on womanly silence aligns with the later textual exploration of the silence surrounding the gendered communal violence following Partition. Lajo Bhua, a “cousin-sister” of Roop’s father, instructs Roop and her sister, Madani, by presenting them with a series of rules that they must follow. Each rule places a limitation on the girls’ communication. Rule number one is that the girls “...must be more graceful, more pleasing to their elders” (76). This desire for “gracefulness” demands that the girls say only “yes-ji” and never “no-ji,” limiting their ability to form and voice their own opinions. Rule number two demands that they “speak softly,” further creating a culture of silence for the young girls by teaching them that their voices should not be heard. Rule number three is perhaps the most important to Lajo Bhua, whose husband “unloads his bitter tongue” at her nightly, blaming his disappointments on her inability to produce a son. She instructs the girls that they should: “Never feel angry, never, never. No matter what happens, or what your husband says, never feel angry. You might be hurt, but never ever feel angry” (77). Once again, Roop is taught that even the emotions she feels must be quiet and understated: she is allowed to be sad, but must not feel rage. Lajo Bhua, Papaji, and ultimately Roop herself view this education as far more important to a woman’s development than scholarly knowledge. Roop later describes her method of passing tests at school “...filling her waking memory rapidly, emptying it to the page, then forgetting—why remember things she will never need to do what a woman is for”

(101). Roop dismisses education as unimportant to her growth and even indicates that too much education might make it difficult for her to marry.

As the text progresses, Baldwin describes the transformation that occurs in Roop, indicating that she "...has forgotten the taste of eggs and chicken" (101). This lost memory aligns with changes in her behavior: she is submissive and "...no longer quarrelsome; she knows when to be quiet. She expects only the things she truly needs" (101). Roop's commitment to obedience is caused in part by the fear she has developed of her own body:

She is no longer adventurous, having learned the fear of unrelated men ...Roop has learned shame. Roop has come to dread what-people-will-say. It is a dread Roop shares with other girls in Pari Darvaza—Sikh, Hindu, or Muslim—fear of her own body, that lurer of lust from the eyes of unrelated men. But in Roop that dread runs much deeper than in many other girls, runs deep into bone, for Bachan Singh's love is a love stronger than any father's in the village. So his fear of other men looms larger (103).

Here, Baldwin ties Roop's loss of spirit to her burgeoning awareness of her body as a sexual form. "Unrelated men" present a threat, not just to Roop but to girls of all religions in Pari Darvaza, but it is also her father's "love" that makes this fear run "much deeper" than that of other girls. Baldwin thus presents Roop's development of shame as something that originates both outside and within the family structure. The changes in her body do not empower Roop, instead entrapping her through her increasing awareness of the power of shame. Though Baldwin does not include acts of sexual assault in her pre-Partition narrative, these descriptions of Roop's growing dread of her dangerous female body indicate "...the place that women's sexuality occupies in an all-male, patriarchal arrangement of gender relations" (Menon 43).

Roop's awareness of cultural expectations—her fear of "what-people-will-say"—also influences her desire to marry Sandarji. Learning "what women are for," at a young age,

Roop does not hesitate to enter into a marriage in which her primary function is bearing children for an older man who already has one wife. She wonders: “*Is that so bad...Papaji’s father had four wives,*” and is comforted by the fact that Sardarji and Satya have no children. The marriage offer also comes at a time in Roop’s life when, at sixteen, she is worried about becoming a “defeated girl,” a “girl who can’t be married” (105). The prospect of having “...a family before she turns seventeen and people in the village start their chattering” is thrilling, potentially freeing her from a life of defeat within her father’s house (110). Roop is desirable to Sandarji both because of her apparent fertility and the purity seemingly guaranteed by her young age. Manifesting masculine investment in feminine sexual purity, Gujri warns Roop after the marriage is announced, instructing her that, “...there *must* be blood on the sheets or you’ll see: everyone will say let-her-be-alone” (125). Here, Roop’s virginity is seen not as a personal characteristic but instead is viewed as a possession of the larger culture. Not only her husband but also the unseen force of “everyone” would say “let-her-be-alone” if she cannot be physically proven to be a virgin, again revealing the ways in which the community polices female sexuality.

When Roop and Sardarji have sex for the first time, the description is not one of a joyous union between man and wife, but instead emphasizes Roop’s pain through language that aligns sex with the act of giving birth. Baldwin writes:

His weight is upon her.  
 A shard of pain divides her; she clenches her teeth not to scream.  
*Women’s pain turns into sons. Vaheguru, let there be blood on the sheets!*  
 His weight crushes air from her lungs.  
 Her black hair and his flow loose and combine.  
*Vaheguru, let there be blood on the sheets!*  
 He thrusts within her to a place her body does not remember owning. Hidden place,  
 locked away place, sealed place, imprisoned place, place that waited so long for one  
 man given the key....  
 He occupies her (149).

Sardarji's body becomes a violent force in this description, crushing Roop with its weight and dividing her with "...a shard of pain" (149). Baldwin develops the link between fertility and sexuality by having Roop hope that this pain "...turns into sons," and this phrasing creates an image of the female body as simply a vehicle through which men can reproduce themselves. The passage also uses the language of ownership to describe the interaction between the two bodies, imagining Roop's form as "occupied" by the masculine. Baldwin writes that Sardarji enters "...a place her body does not remember owning," defining Roop's sexuality as her husband's possession. Both this language of ownership and the "division" that occurs in Roop's body during sex prefigure post-Partition violence against women, acts that will reconfigure sexual violence as a way to confirm nationalist power.

This language of imprisonment and colonization applies both to Roop's sexual life and her domestic entrapment within Sardarji's home. On her wedding night, she is locked in a "small storeroom at the ground level of Sardar Kushal Singh's three-story haveli, still dressed in her red-gold wedding lengha. All the doors are locked, not just the door to the courtyard" (135). Roop remains in the room while Sardarji fights with Satya in a nearby courtyard, covering her ears to avoid hearing Satya's screams, a noise that surprises her because she "...has never heard a woman raise her voice to her husband before another man or stand before a man with her head uncovered" (137). Though this wedding night entrapment is never explained—Roop later convinces herself that she "...*must have imagined the door was locked*" (139)—it prefigures her later domestic entrapment within the spaces of Sardarji's home.

After the birth of her first child, a daughter described as an "...unwanted gift" and treated by her husband as a miscarriage, Roop retreats further and further into a life of wifely



obedience (179). Baldwin describes the material limitations Roop puts on herself to make herself pleasing and accessible to her husband:

There are a few small rooms close to the cookhouse where her voice, saying the Sukhmani as she goes, becomes softer, softer. When she stands in the smallest, a room so small she can only stand within it and watch the world beyond its threshold, she is Sita in her man-inscribed circle.  
Her voice, now just a whisper.  
Idol in her niche (191).

Roop's spirit was transformed by her earlier education in femininity, but marriage has placed even more limitations on her identity. Baldwin presents her standing in the smallest space she can find in the house, voiceless, transformed from a woman to an "idol" in a small "niche." These phrases emphasize both Roop's invisibility and her importance as a symbol, an "idol" that represents Sardarji's power. Roop's identity is entirely dependent on Sardarji's desires; she explains that she places herself in this "man-inscribed circle" so that "...she can give no trouble," and that if Sardarji needs her "...he can call. She will come" (191).

This image of domestic entrapment—and Roop's resigned submissiveness within her "niche"—mirrors Sardarji's control over her reproductive life. He chooses when and how she has children through his control over their sexual life, and the patriarchal community dictates the circumstances of birth and recovery for the young mother, marking her as "unclean" for eight days following the birth. Later in the novel, when Roop is wondering if her children will become aware of her "lower born" status and reject her, she reflects on the relative insignificance of her part in their creation:

She is Sandarji's wife; it makes her special too, though somehow less special than the children. She is the means by which his seed produced them—without her, they could not be. But then, she thinks, it was not she herself, Roop, who was required. Any other woman's womb would have been just as useful (374).

Roop describes her individuality, her identity as Roop, as insignificant to the reproductive process. She is merely a “womb,” a “vessel” through which Sardarji can reproduce. This construction defines female fertility as owned and controlled by men; the woman’s body and ability to reproduce become indications of masculine power rather than possessions of the pregnant woman.

Satya is the only voice of resistance to this patriarchal construction of domestic relationships. Aligning her husband’s inability to resist British ideas with their own lack of resistance in the home, Satya explains to Roop that she told her husband “...his mind is their colony also,” implying that the British have not merely colonized Indian land but also transformed their minds<sup>8</sup> (240). She describes telling Sardarji, “I too am a colony—your colony,” and informs Roop that both women are “birds in the same cage” (240). Satya’s voice reveals the instability and violence at the heart of the family structure, aligning Sardarji’s patriarchal power with that of the colonizers. Later in the text, Baldwin imagines this corrupt domesticity as a rotting force in the home. When her sari becomes caught on a floorboard, Roop “...pulls at it to extricate herself and abruptly, the floorboard cracks, comes away in her hand. White ants. Slowly, patiently, doggedly, eating away the foundation of this house” (346). This image of domestic disintegration mirrors the disintegration Satya envisions at the center of the family. Thus, when Partition violence begins to emerge in the text, it does so within the context of *both* colonial power—and incompetence in creating

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<sup>8</sup> Satya’s observation is surprisingly accurate. Sardarji is constantly troubled by an “ever-present” imaginary British voice, an “English-gentleman-inside” (141, 131). The voice, named Cunningham by Sardarji, comments on all of his actions from the perspective of the colonizer.

thoughtful borders<sup>9</sup>--and the patriarchal control over female bodies that “rots” the familial relationships in the novel.

Part Eight of the novel is the only section that takes place entirely in one year—1947—and the narrative details the communal violence that surrounds Roop and her family both before and after the August Partition. In the second chapter of this section, Roop has a dream of division and violence that prefigures the trauma that will follow. In the dream, she is attacked by a woman she first believes is Satya, a woman standing “...in [her] path with a long sharp jade-hilted sword” (366). After remembering “Satya’s forgiveness” at the moment of her death, she identifies the woman as the British nanny, Miss Barlow, who cares for the family’s children. The nanny “...advances towards [her], raises the sword high above her head. The sickle moon, the woman’s sword, shine as one. The sword falls. Crystal shatters to fragments...There is red, everywhere crimson red (367). Domesticity and violence coalesce in this image of the crusading nanny, a vision that imagines the violence of the Partition of India as an act visited on the body of one woman. It is also significant that it is the British Miss Barlow—a woman who intrudes on Roop’s maternal power by renaming her children with British names—who indiscriminately attacks Roop. The described action of lifting a sword high above her head also aligns the attack with the violent division of the Punjab.

Only two pages after this traumatic dream, the violence of Partition begins to intrude into the lives of Roop’s family. Unlike Sidhwa’s startling firsthand depictions of violence, Baldwin creates distance from the original act of violence by focusing on the ways in which narratives were circulated following Partition. Roop sees women who have suffered or are

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<sup>9</sup> Part of Sardarji’s administrative position is to advise British powers on where the Pakistani border should be drawn. After careful consideration of his Sikh community, he makes detailed suggestions to the committee that are largely ignored when the date of Partition is pushed forward by British officials.

about to suffer violence, but the actual narratives of rape and mutilation are told to her through the filter of a male storyteller. Thus, both the gendered nature of this violence and the feminine silence surrounding the trauma align with Baldwin's earlier explorations of patriarchal constructions of female reproductive power. Men control both violence and narrative. As in *Cracking India*, the violence first enters the text from a distance; stories detail horrendous acts of brutality that are initially hard to believe. Sardarji is the first to hear these stories:

...Muslims singed the beards of easily identifiable Sikh men, tore off the turbans of young and old alike and, Manager Abdul Aziz told him, horror breaking his voice, pulled babies from mothers' arms, threw them to the ground and raped their mothers and sisters before all (369).

Here, violence targeting religious and ethnic identity attacks both symbols of Sikh identity and women's reproductive power; both are viewed as attacks on the "other" community. The public nature of this violence is also emphasized, and Manager Abdul Aziz, who details the narrative, focuses on the male perspective, characterizing the women as "mothers and sisters" to the targeted men (369).

Narratives also begin to emerge in which women "sacrifice themselves" rather than be subjected to the threat of sexual torture. These acts of violence can be read as a continuation of the patriarchal family structures described in the early parts of the novel and are always narrated in the text from the male perspective Baldwin emphasizes the rumor-like nature of these reports. Aziz tells Sardarji:

There are reports from the village of Thoa Khalsa not far from 'Pindi that eighty-four—no, ninety—Sikh women jumped in a well, eldest last, rather than fall into the hands of the Muslims. No, not official reports, gossip, rumours...(369).

The description of these acts of sacrifice is particularly compelling within the context of Baldwin's slow narrative of Roop's childhood development. Here, the same forces that

compelled Roop to learn shame, fearing her body and understanding that her perceived virginity was the property of the larger community, compel women to kill themselves rather than bring dishonor to their family. Though their desire to die rather than be sexually assaulted can be read as a personal decision to protect themselves from pain, in the context of Baldwin's "Family Ties" this act also seems to stem from a fear of rejection by their families. Menon writes that the "...belief that safeguarding a woman's honour is essential to upholding male and community honor" works to create this new "order of violence" in the post-Partition nation (187). Later in the text, Baldwin describes the outsider status of the women who have been sexually assaulted: "The silent women are the ones who were raped; even widows pity *their* kismat; families with any sense of izzat are not likely to take them back" (440). Thus, the language that paints this "sacrifice" as an attempt by women to preserve their own honor belies the fact that both male and community honor is located in the perceived purity of the female body. "Families with any sense of izzat," or pride, would thus not allow violated women back into their homes. Baldwin also emphasizes their silence; they are not even able to voice their narratives of loss because the act of rape shames them, casting them out of their community.

Violence against female bodies continues to intrude on the text in short passages amidst the narrative of Roop and Saradji's struggle to survive in the chaos that follows Partition. Like female suffering in the earlier parts of this novel, women's pain is largely ignored, relegated to the background of the disorder found in Lahore. As Roop and her children attempt to flee the now-Pakistani city following Partition, she sees an injured woman in the crowd:

A woman with a bandage where her breasts should be staggers against the white-striped barrier arm.

She falls.

The crowd surges forward, around the fallen woman. Impatient, pressed from the rear. Bicycles and bullocks, tongas and pushcarts laden with the accumulation of each man's past and his woman's ambitions for his future move slowly over the tracks.

The woman is left behind, where she lies.

*Alone* (390-91).

Here, Baldwin utilizes one of the more iconic forms of sexualized violence following Partition—the removal of a woman's breasts—to portray the ways in which female pain was silenced and ignored by the fast-moving crowd. The mass of people, focused on their “accumulation” of possessions, ignores the woman, impatiently “[surging] forward” while the woman falls to the side. The crowd does not want to acknowledge the woman's pain or even look at her violated form, and Baldwin thus marks the mutilated woman as the ultimate outsider to the “mass of humanity walking from Lahore,” again emphasizing female isolation through the italicization of the word “alone” (391).

Eight pages later, Roop witnesses men from her own community threatening two Muslim women. She sees “...an army lorry of young Sikh soldiers [veer] around a corner” and stop “...beside two burqa-clad woman. A woman's ghostly hand lifted the edge of one burqa—could it have been the hand that held her own when she was so small?” (398). Here, Roop personalizes the act of violence by wondering if the young Muslim woman is her childhood friend Huma, even imagining that the woman calls to her using a childhood nickname: “‘Roop-bi! Bachao!’” (398). This woman is also encountered as Roop is traveling from Lahore, relegating her to the background of Roop's journey, and her “ghostly” hand characterizes her as invisible and easily ignored. Because these acts of violence occur on the side of the road while Roop moves forward, Roop watches them as though in a silent film, unable to hear or fully understand the interactions she sees. She witnesses a “turbaned

soldier” lean “...from the lorry and [pull] Huma up like a black cloth sack,” but uses her distance and inability to hear as an excuse not to intervene on behalf of the woman. She insists she does not know if “...*those soldiers destroy her honour or protect it*”(3). Though she feels a desire to help the woman, her husband’s command not to “...stop for anyone,” and her thought that “*Compassion is weakness, disloyalty to the Sikhs*” keep her from acting (399).

Four days following Partition, while still waiting to hear news about her family, Roop is overwhelmed by the mass of violent narratives: “...versions upon versions of the same stories from before the border was declared, from after the border came down... ‘I made martyrs of seventeen women and children in my family before their izzat could be taken’ .... ‘I made martyrs of fifty’ (435). These narratives, told through the male perspective, emphasize the number of martyred family members as a source of pride for the male storyteller. Thus the violence men do to women *outside* their community and the violent acts of “sacrifice” within the family both serve the same purpose: to sustain male community pride. Baldwin links these post-Partition narratives to her pre-Partition exploration of Roop’s development of shame. After hearing “tales fly” of women being forced to dance naked in temples and mosques, Roop observes, “Perhaps Huma was among them, who knows? Everywhere on the platform, women pull the remnants of rags about their breasts—Satya would say they have learned shame, shame of their own bodies...” (435-36). Again, Roop personalizes the violence against women from Muslim communities by imagining that Huma was among those forced to dance naked in a religious space.

The last act of Partition violence described in the text brings communal violence against community outsiders and patriarchal violence within the family together in the body

of one woman, the wife of Roop's brother Jeevan. After being reunited with her family, Roop inquires after Kusum, who is not with her husband. Jeevan "...would only shake his turbaned head" until a later moment when he chooses to reveal Kusum's story to Roop. "In that time when everything was being divided," Jeevan explains, he returns home to find a "simple white-clad mound laid at his feet in the centre of the room" (446). At first he thinks this body might be that of his dead mother, returned to the room in which she died many years ago, but he uncovers the form to find his wife. Baldwin describes the horrifically arranged scene:

'A woman's body lay beneath, each limb severed at the joint. This body was sliced into six parts, then arranged to look as if she were whole again...Her hand was like this—unclenched. Her feet were like this—not poised to run. Her legs cut neatly at the thigh, why they must surely have used a sword or more than one! Why were her legs not bloody? To cut a woman apart without first raping—a waste, surely. Rape is one man's message to another: 'I took your pawn. Move on'... He received the message. Kusum's womb, the same from which his three sons came, had been delivered. Ripped out (447).

Jeevan is clearly horrified at his wife's death, but also immediately reads her body as a political message to him. Confused that she has not been raped, Jeevan describes that the same message is nevertheless sent through the mutilation of Roop's womb, aligning rape and mutilation as acts that say, "We will stamp your kind, your very species from existence...We take the womb so there can be no Sikhs from it, we take the womb, leave you its shell" (447).

Jeevan is puzzled by the expression on his dead wife's face, and her peaceful form presents a mystery: what happened in that room before her death? Several pages later, Papaji reveals to Roop that he killed Kusum, an act he refers to as "his duty" because his daughter-in-law was his "responsibility" (455). Her body was later mutilated by Muslims ransacking the family home. His sense of duty does not stem from a desire to protect Kusum from pain,



but instead from rumors he has heard "...that the seeds of that foreign religion were being planted in Sikh women's wombs" (455). Also, he asserts that he "said to [himself]: Kusum was entrusted to me by Jeevan, she is young, still of childbearing age," and this possibility of reproduction is the reason why he could not "endure" the chance that a "Muslim might put his hands on her" (455). Like the narrator in Baldwin's "Family Ties," Roop is hurt by this story: "An old wave of pain begins low in Roop's tummy, a fear-ache that burns from above her womb to her heart" (455). She is not, however, surprised by her father's revelation, instead expressing that, "She knows it before Papaji speaks...knows because Papaji's story cannot be so very different from other men who see their women from the corners of their eyes, who know their women only as the bearers of blood, to do what women are for. She knows this story" (455). Roop's thoughts reveal that this murder is a continuation of the patriarchal family structure that she encountered early in the novel, and she is thus not surprised by her father's violent definition of protection because she is familiar with the centrality of women as reproducers of the community. Even though she "knows" the story, she feels the need to have her father voice it, to "say what he did" (455).

Papaji then reveals the circumstances of Kusum's death, the details of which allude to gendered interactions throughout the novel. Papaji emphasizes Kusum's acceptance of his plan. He says, "She understood. Always she made no trouble," linking her attitude to her obedience within the family home throughout her marriage (456). Papaji takes Kusum to Roop's mother's room, aligning this act of "sacrifice" with the mother's death in childbirth. Kusum bares her neck for Papaji, and he raises "[his] kirpan high above her head," bringing it down to kill her in a motion reminiscent of Roop's earlier dream of violence at the hands of Miss Barlow. Roop imagines this story being told to Jeevan's sons, a narrative that will

surely emphasize her willingness to die “...for the izzat of her quom,” linking her death to the honor of the greater community (456). Roop is horrified by the possibility of this narrative, and she asks that Kusum be sent back to tell her own story:

*Let her tell her story herself, remember this death herself, for I am not worthy to tell it! How will I tell This-one and That-one, but with Papaji's words? How will I ask her sons to know her pain when they learn to see as men see, like horses, blind to what lies directly before their eyes? (457).*

Like in *Cracking India*, Baldwin presents Kusum's lack of control over this narrative as yet another kind of gendered violence; Kusum's silence is a violent extension of the lessons Roop received as a young girl. J. Edward Mallot considers the ways in which trauma is held by the body in his 2006 article, “Body Politics and the Body Politic: Memory as Human Inscription in *What the Body Remembers*”—the only current critical article that considers this novel. He suggests that, “...in the aftermath of Partition, women's bodies become the text onto which the trauma of communal violence was inscribed, its marking and meanings clear for both men and women” (170). Yet Baldwin's text leaves room for multiple readings of the same traumatic act, suggesting that the “marking and meanings” of this violence were perhaps far from clear. “Papaji's” words subsume Kusum's story, and the patriarchal version of her death is so powerful that Roop questions her own ability to escape the masculine narrative when she imagines describing the death to Kusum's sons. Roop also links Kusum's death to an inability to voice dissent. She remembers Kusum as “...daughter-in-law who always followed rule number one, never saying ‘nahinji’ or ‘no-ji,’” asking if this wifely silence was to blame for her inability to “find the words *nahinji* and *no-ji* when the kirpan lifted above her bare neck?” (457).

Baldwin uses the violation of Kusum's body by both family and strangers to demonstrate the ways in which rape and “honor-killing” served similar purposes, defining

community honor in a time of national chaos. Like the lengthy narrative describing Roop's development of shame, this double-violence against Kusum creates a vision of the communal violence following Partition as something that stems from a larger patriarchal culture in which a woman's sexuality was viewed as the possession of both her husband and her larger community. Baldwin strives to write this violence not as an isolated incident, occurring in 1947 and disappearing before the year ended, instead providing a narrative of gendered violence that extends both before and after the year of Partition. The last page of the novel matches the first: it depicts the moment of Satya's rebirth in 1965 "Divided India." Satya expresses surprise that she has again been born a "foolish girl-child" and describes her realization that a nearby man is "...disappointed [she is] not a boy" (470). The last words of the novel imply not hopefulness but a surprising lack of change in the twenty years following her last death: "...men have not changed" (471).

Like Sidhwa, Baldwin writes women as suffering not only physical but also narrative violence following the Partition of India. Upon the death of her sister-in-law, Roop mourns her violent death, but she also is pained over the loss of Kusum's story and the ways in which the narrative of her suffering will forever be subsumed beneath masculine tales of honor and sacrifice. Women's stories are erased in both public and private narratives in Baldwin's fiction. In her short story "Family Ties," the narrative of the "Moonlight Princess"—a lost aunt and sister—reveals the ways in which relatives silenced traumatic stories that could potentially be read as shameful, even erasing a loved one from their lives in order to protect community honor. In the quote that begins this chapter, the narrator of Bapsi Sidhwa's short story "Defend Yourself Against Me" describes hearing "whispers" and "fragments" about the "sadism and bestiality women were subjected to during the Partition," and these words

emphasize the partial nature of narratives of these atrocities. The description of these barely voiced stories, present but fragmentary, indicates the place occupied by gendered violence in traditional narratives of Partition. Sidhwa and Baldin use the spaces of their novels to create alternative narratives of this violence through a domestic focus that locates their histories firmly in the spaces of the private home. This relocation of the national narrative allows the authors to examine the ways in which nationalism, violence, and domesticity coalesce during Partition. Both writers emphasize silence and voicelessness as cultural forces surrounding the intimate types of violence that occurred during Partition and use their texts as weapons against the fragmentary nature of these “whispers,” ultimately providing revisionist social histories of Partition violence through their focus on maternal bodies and reproductive power.

## Chapter Two

### **“From Ayah to Widow”: Gender and the Domestication of History in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and *Shame***

The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting (Bhabha 9)

My special blends: I’ve been saving them up. Symbolic value of the pickling process: all the six hundred million eggs which gave birth to the population of India could fit inside a single, standard-sized pickle jar; six hundred million spermatozoa could be lifted on a single spoon...Tonight, by screwing the lid on to a jar bearing the legend *Special Formula No. 30: “Abracadabra,”* I reach the end of my long-winded autobiography; in words and pickles, I have immortalized my memories, although distortions are inevitable in both methods. We must live, I’m afraid, with the shadows of imperfection (*Midnight* 529).

Near the end of Salman Rushdie’s 1980 novel *Midnight’s Children*, the narrator describes his writing process in terms of pickling, tying narrativization to reproduction by imagining the quantities of sperm and eggs that could fit within the containers that hold his story. The easy contrast between the disappearing bodily fluids of this “drained above and below” narrator and the “special blends” of his story coalesce in the image of these pickle jars, holding both narrative and sperm and testifying to the ability of the nation to control both historical meaning and reproductive power. Throughout *Midnight’s Children*, the public process of history-making is consistently tied to gendered bodies and reproduction, so that the impotence of the narrator—caused by his forced sterilization—is linked to his historic confusion as well. Rushdie’s *Shame* also explores the themes of motherhood and reproduction in the context of the nation, linking sexual and political repression and locating

possibilities for subversion in both female domestic work and shame-fueled violence. Anne McClintock describes gender, violence, and national identity in *Imperial Leather*, suggesting that “Nationalism becomes... radically constitutive of people’s identities through social contests that are frequently violent and always gendered,” further stating that explorations of this gendering have been “conspicuously paltry” (353). This collision of private and public forces aligns with Bhabha’s description of “history’s most intricate invasions” into private lives and homes. Bhabha argues that, when the forces of the nation intrude on the private lives of its citizens, disorientation and division result, ultimately causing what he terms an “unhomely” state of being. In Rushdie’s texts, novels centered on the moment of Indian Independence and Partition, this disorientation arises as the fragmentation of individual identity. Out of this bewildering mix of public and private arises a need for alternative historical forms, endowed with and bearing witness to private forms of suffering that arise out of the public transformations of the nation. Rushdie’s exploration of alternative narratives suggests a need to reinsert the intimate into the discourse of national history; the nation intrudes on and shapes intimate lives, and in Rushdie’s novels these lives push back, domesticating the narrative and the process of history-making itself.

In a 1990 interview with *Newsweek*, Salman Rushdie described a “sacred object” that he made sure to bring when fleeing his home following the 1989 fatwa:

...a little inch-high block of silver, Indian silver, engraved with the map of the unpartitioned continent of India and Pakistan, which was given to me as a present by a friend of my father's when I was one day old. It is my oldest possession, so it goes everywhere with me...So I had a few of my little totems with me (Crichton par. 8).

Rushdie further describes the object as having both personal and professional meaning, grouping it with objects that writers “keep around to help them work.” The decidedly secular Rushdie locates the “sacred” in this image of national unity and, within the context of his

writings on India and Pakistan, his careful description of the “little inch-high block of silver” suggests an image of wholeness that serves as a sharp contrast to the fragmentation, division, and, yes, partitions, that fill the lives within his fiction. For an author who describes his writing as a kind of “literary land reclamation” (*Step* 180), this choice of a talisman further suggests the link between the narratives he creates and the nation that he loves. In his essay “A Dream of a Glorious Return,” written about a visit to India after a twelve year absence, he describes “...what it means to love a country: that its shape is also yours, the shape of the way you think and feel and dream. That you can never really leave” (*Step* 180).

If the shape of the nation is also the shape of Rushdie’s individual identity, both his later writings and this inch-high block of silver—given to him at birth, only eight weeks before the division of India—suggest that this form was strongly influenced by Partition. In an essay on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Indian independence, he referred to the Partition of India as both the “dark side” of the celebration and an “avoidable mistake”:

The decision to carve a Muslim homeland, Pakistan, out of the body of subcontinental India led to bloody massacres in which over a million Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims lost their lives. Partition has poisoned the subsequent history of relations between the two newborn states ever since. Why on earth would anyone want to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of one of the century’s great tragedies? (*Step Across This Line* 161).

Rushdie uses the language of the body to describe the division of India as mutilation, linking the carving of the land linguistically to the countless mutilations occurring during the “bloody massacres” that followed. The image of a body in pain is again invoked with his use of the phrase “poisoned...relations between the two newborn states,” choosing words that invoke both a sudden cut—the division itself—and a more lasting dis-ease between the two newly divided nations.

Though both of his novels written in the early eighties describe events surrounding Partition, Rushdie is rarely discussed as a novelist *of* Partition; critics instead focus on his exile status, the fatwa against him beginning in the 80's, or his writings on either India or Pakistan separately, perhaps because Rushdie himself shrouds his discussions of Partition with assertions like "I shall not describe the mass blood-letting in progress on the frontiers of the divided Punjab (where the divided nations are washing themselves in one another's blood...." (*Midnight's Children* 125). Yet the influence of Partition emerges powerfully in interviews and essays, in which he writes that his family "...was cut in half by partition...our lives were defined and shaped by the frontier separating us," suggesting that the division of India was also the outline of his life (*Step Across this Line* 161). Bhabha writes in *The Location of Culture* that domestic spaces "become sites for history's most intricate invasions," arguing that in colonized nations the border between private and public is lost, intimate lives inextricably intertwined with national, political concerns. Though Bhabha's argument is centered on a vision of the postcolonial world as a whole—he draws his examples from South Africa, the United States, and India—the moment of Partition, a time when the recently independent nation is reshaped both materially and imaginatively, is one at which the public intrudes even more powerfully on the private.

Careful to distinguish between Saleem's desires to intervene in the discourse of the nation and his own desires as a writer, Rushdie nevertheless clearly believes that his fiction can make interventions into historical meaning in the wake of the loss that surrounds the "disorienting" divide of the nation. In his non-fiction essays he explains the importance of novels as alternatives to the "fictions" spouted by politicians; as both groups try "to make the world in their own image," his texts become "one way of denying the official, politicians'



version of the truth” (*Imaginary* 14). Yet Rushdie also claims that the facts of the stories don’t matter, purposely leaving in factual discrepancies, insisting on memory’s truth rather than the details of the history books and writing that such discrepancies can remain in a novel that is more about “imaginative truth” than historical truth (*Imaginary* 10). The history ultimately arrived at by Salman Rushdie in both *Shame* and *Midnight’s Children* is imbued with personal meaning, the intimate details of everyday life coalescing with larger national narratives, and domestic tasks providing the shape for the unwieldy and challenging story of the nation.<sup>10</sup>

Rushdie implies in a 2005 interview with Michael Enight that this type of story is necessary in a time when the public decisions of the nation collide with private lives. After Enight confuses Saleem and Rushdie, asking if Rushdie himself feels “handcuffed to history,” the author replies:

The joke of *Midnight's Children* is that Saleem thinks that history is his fault. But I do think, and I suppose I have been obliged to think from when I was very young, that in these days you can't escape the impact of public events on your private life. And that has a consequence for the novel (558).

This response also indicates why Rushdie sometimes rejects the “magical realism” label: though Saleem’s idea that history is somehow linked to the personal events of his life is a “joke,” the feeling behind it, that the public events of the nation are somehow inescapable, is quite real. Rushdie writes in *Imaginary Homelands* that, “Fantasy, or the mingling of fantasy and naturalism... offers a way of echoing in the form of our work the issues faced by all of us,” implying that the inclusion of fantasy in his novels is an effort to contribute to, not

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<sup>10</sup> One of the first examples of the intersection between private and public in *Midnight’s Children* is Saleem’s assertion that “On the day the World War ended, Naseem developed the longed-for headache. Such historical coincidences have littered, and perhaps befouled, my family’s existence in the world” (23). These coincidences—moments when important family events coincide with important “textbook” dates—fill the novel.

evade, realistic depictions of national crises (19). In a revealing essay about his attempts to create a film version of *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie asserts that while Western readers most often focus on the fantastic elements of the story, "Indian reviewers treated it like a history book...however highly fabulated parts of the novel were, the whole was deeply rooted in the real lives of the characters and the nation" (*Step Across this Line* 72). Saleem's belief that he has the power to shape public events is thus both a fantasy of identification sparked by his birth at the moment of Indian independence and a strikingly authentic depiction of the intrusion of public events onto the family life of a child born at the moment of Partition.

Elsewhere in the interview with Enight, Rushdie further explains the impact of Partition on the intimate lives that surrounded him:

If you are of my generation, the partition is a gigantic fact. I am eight weeks older than the partition. From the time of my birth, not only was the country divided, but my family was divided, more or less half and half between India and Pakistan. So that borderline actually ran through not just nations but through our family (557).

Family structure and individual identities thus bend and divide as the boundaries of the nation are negotiated, the new national border becoming both a material location and an "intricate invasion" into private homes. In this chapter I will bring these border concerns to the forefront, focusing on Partition and partitioned psychologies in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, ultimately arguing that Rushdie's narrators challenge these intimate invasions by creating alternative social histories of partition and its aftermath, imbuing "historical facts" with personal meaning to subvert what Rushdie refers to as the "politician's truth." In *Midnight's Children* the narratives of national history become family stories, intertwined with domestic space and non-combatant bodies, and Rushdie's narrator tells these family stories by appropriating what he considers feminine, domestic forms of story-telling, drawing

on techniques learned from monstrous women who cook their emotions into food or sew garments filled with bitterness. In *Shame*, Rushdie aligns political and sexual repressions, presenting a series of mothers trapped in their female bodies and exploring the ways in which repression is hidden from view by the larger culture of shame. In a time of loss caused by both Partition and political tyranny, Rushdie ultimately locates possibilities for subversion in Sufiya Zinobia's violence and Rani Harappa's unflinching shawls, both of which materialize shame, transferring it from the female body to the public historical record.

### **Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children***

Ambreen Hai writes extensively about Rushdie's use of "female artistry" in her 1999 essay "'Marching in from the Peripheries': Rushdie's Feminized Artistry and Ambivalent Feminism," claiming that Rushdie uses the figure of the female artist to "represent his own postcolonial artistic and political work" (18). I argue that, in *Midnight's Children*, Saleem's use of canning and preserving as his model for storytelling is an attempt to create individual historical meaning as he struggles against the "cracks" that, dividing the nation, have been "reborn" in masculine identities. For his narrator Saleem, who peppers the text with domestic objects that serve as significant historical markers, the mode of storytelling ultimately arrived at mimics the process of canning and preserving; each chapter has a corresponding jar in this "chutnification" of history (548). Yet these modes of storytelling, ways of fighting against the "amnesiac nation," are not just material reminders of domestic space and private lives; instead, they are tied to maternal bodies and female sexuality, so that Saleem's arrival at the canning factory is also his arrival at a matriarchal center. Surrounded by "women and

women and women,” relying on pepper pots, holey sheets, and dirty laundry as the framework of his history, Saleem, though impotent, is finally able to birth both son and story.

Rushdie’s central conceit in the novel, that Saleem’s individual life intertwines with and influences national history, is first performed through an image of the Amina Sinai in labor at that exact moment that Nehru delivers his speech ushering India into a “new age” (129). In fact, Rushdie writes that the hospital where Amina is giving birth “...is running on a skeleton staff...many employees who have preferred to celebrate the imminent birth of the nation, and will not assist tonight at the births of children,” immediately drawing attention to the language of “birthing” used at both events (128). A newspaper contest has arranged to give a prize of 100 rupees to the woman who gives birth closest to the moment of national independence, and though both the paltry prize and the motivation of the contest—to add a “human interest angle” to the coverage of Independence celebrations—appear trivial, the juxtaposition of nationalist symbols, cries of labor, and Nehru’s speeches suggests a deeper intersection between maternal bodies and nationalist desires. Nalini Natarajan describes this contrast in her article “Women, Nation and Narration in *Midnight’s Children*,” ultimately arguing that mother’s bodies surpass the iconic flag as symbols of this moment of national creation: “We may note significant juxtapositions and identities: woman’s pain with communal joy, human with national birth, woman’s body *as* the national tricolor flag” (398). Natarajan further describes the importance of motherhood as a signifier of national identity, suggesting that “Woman...is the dream of unified India, and her unborn child its hypothetical citizen” (403). Though Rushdie’s focus on the children themselves and not these *Midnight Mothers* draws reader attention away from the birthing bodies, from the first lines of the

book—where Saleem hesitatingly reveals the exact moment of his arrival—both narrative and nation are tied to this moment of female labor.

Though a mother's pregnant body can, as Natarajan argues, signify a "dream" of Indian independence, the celebratory narrative of birth is disrupted in *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie does interpose his description of Saleem's birth with some of the most triumphant quotes from Nehru's speech at the moment of Independence. The act of Partition, however, looms over the birth of the nation, casting both moments of birth as monstrous. Rushdie's paragraphs go back and forth between sentences describing Amina's labor "coming harder and faster by the minute," and sentences chronicling the stirring "monster in the streets," here imagined as a nationalist creature whose blood is replaced with "corpuscles of saffron and green" (128). The contrasting images in this midnight scene continually subvert the exultant narrative of national independence by inserting images of partition violence immediately before or after Nehru's optimistic remarks. The sentence directly before Nehru stands up to give his speech "anointed with holy water from the Tanjore river" describes the burning of Lahore, and the jubilation of Nehru's language of awakening and freedom, much like Amina's labor, is tempered by these intrusions of horrific partition imagery.

The monstrous nature of Saleem's birth continues through Mary Pereira's "private revolutionary act"—switching Shiva and Saleem to give the poor child "a life of privilege" (130). Rushdie thus reveals that Saleem has at least three fathers: Wee Willie Winkie, Ahmed Sinai, and his biological father, the British owner of Saleem's childhood home, William Methwold. At this point in the novel, Padma furiously attacks Saleem for telling her a family history—of Aadam and Naseem Aziz and the meeting of his "parents"—that is "not his own" (131). Rushdie again invokes the language of the monstrous, as Padma asks "You

are a monster or what?” (131). Here, Rushdie’s use of the word “monstrous” coincides with Bhabha’s description of the unhomely: the uncanny displacement of the borders between public and private and the disorientation that results from this collapse. Rushdie describes the *Midnight Children* as parented only “partially” by their father and mother:

... all over the new India, the dream we all shared, children were being born who were only partially the offspring of their parents—the children of midnight were also the children *of the time*: fathered, you understand, by history. It can happen. Especially in a country which is itself a sort of dream (132).

These “midnight” children, parented by father, mother, and the public forces of history, become the embodiment of Bhabha’s description of the unhomely. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha’s the unhomely takes place primarily through private houses that have been invaded by public meaning—Sethe’s house in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, for example. Rushdie pushes the notion of this disorientation further, moving beyond the architecture of the home to the disorientation of individual identity through these partially parented children. The midnight children, pushed and pulled between private and public “parents,” are themselves unhomed.

Saleem’s birth at the exact moment of independence and Partition sets up the frame of the story—a tale told by an unhomed man who believes he is chained to the history of his country—and provides the narrator with an abundance of fathers. From the second page of the novel, after Saleem has described his moment of birth, the narrative focus is on these patriarchal stories. Saleem fights the “crumbling” forces that attack him on the first page by slipping into a traditional narrative mode: “One Kashmiri morning,” he writes, “...my grandfather Aadam Aziz hit his nose against a frost-hardened tussock of earth while attempting to pray” (4). Though his decision to begin this story in an ordered, conventional fashion is a comforting contrast to the “crumbling” described in the preceding paragraph,

even in this early moment in the text patriarchal authority is envisioned as threatened. As the narrative continues masculine authority is constantly under assault by the intrusion of national concerns, often linked to Partition, on the domestic interactions of the home: when the nation is divided masculinity “cracks” as well. While Saleem clearly states his choice not to portray the “massive blood-letting” that followed the division of India and Pakistan, this proclamation belies his focus on the more intimate assaults and traumas taking place surrounding Partition, lasting even to the mid-1970s when the novel ends. In contrast to Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*, a text that focuses on the massive communal violence that surrounded the moment of Partition, the impact of this division on Saleem’s family emerges slowly, intruding on smaller moments in the text throughout Saleem’s life. This depiction of post-partition effects on individual identity aligns with current criticism: Ritu Menon writes in “Cartographies of Nations and Identities: A Post-Partition Predicament,” that “ At independence, two sovereign nations, divided along religious lines, came into being, but freedom was accompanied by dislocation and violence of such magnitude that its reverberations were felt for many years to come,” suggesting that the “post-partition predicament continues even today (157). Rushdie’s central metaphor for these reverberations is “cracking”—a phrase used to describe both what happens to the land and to male bodies. Saleem describes “..cracks in the earth which will-be-have-been reborn in my skin,” so that the deterioration of his body is linked to the division of India itself, a fitting connection given Saleem’s facial resemblance to the map of partitioned India<sup>11</sup> (119).

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<sup>11</sup> Saleem’s sinister teacher describes the boy’s strange appearance in terms of the partition: “In the face of thees ugly ape you don’t see the whole map of *India*? ... These stains...are Pakistan! Thees birthmarks on the right ear is the East Wing; and thees horrible stained left cheek, the West! Remember, stupid boys: Pakistan ees a stain on the face of India!” (265).

Partition is closely linked to the emotional and physical “cracking” of Ahmed Sinai, Saleem’s father, beginning with the freezing of his assets, an attempt to make him “...run to Pakistan, leaving all his wealth behind him” (153). This intrusion into the financial life of his family becomes one invasion into Saleem’s domestic world, extending beyond the “bank account; savings bonds; the rents from the Karla properties” to Ahmed’s body and his sexual relationship with Amina:

Such things happen; after the State froze my father’s assets, my mother began to feel them growing colder and colder. On the first day, the Brass Monkey was conceived—just in time, because after that, although Amina lay every night with her husband to warm him, although she snuggled up tightly when she felt him shiver as the icy fingers of rage and powerlessness spread upwards from his loins, she could no longer bear to stretch out her hand and touch because his little cubes of ice had become too frigid to hold (154).

Here, the desire to confirm the new borders of India invades Amina and Ahmed Sinai’s bedroom; the freezing of Ahmed’s assets clearly influences the daily life of his family, but Rushdie extends its power to Ahmed’s body as well. His emotions of “rage and powerlessness” manifest themselves in his inability to connect to his wife emotionally or perform sexually. “The freeze” is thus another link between nation, narrative, and fertility, as the Brass Monkey’s conception would not have been possible following this national intervention into domestic life. Rushdie’s choice of the “two little cubes of ice” as the symbol of Ahmed’s transformation also suggests that these intrusions into private lives were emasculating, threats to both the economics of family life and to the body itself. Ahmed Sinai deteriorates completely, entering “an almost permanent state of intoxication” for most of Saleem’s childhood (233).

“The freeze” is only exacerbated by the divisions within the extended family about the decision to leave for Pakistan or remain in India. Reverend Mother is particularly vocal



about her desires for the family to leave and verbally attacks her son-in-law, “hand slicing air,” commanding “Go, leave it all, go to Pakistan. See how well that Zulfikar is doing—he will give you a start. Be a man, my son—get up and start again!” (157). Border concerns are once again linked to masculinity, and when Amina urges her parents to allow Ahmed to rest, the father asserts that her husband is “a jelly,” invoking a feminized contrast to traditional conceptions of masculine hardness and decisiveness. Testifying to the continued intrusion of partitioned boundaries into the home, Ahmed and Amina have a similar argument much later in the novel; this time, when Ahmed declares India “is finished,” they leave for Pakistan (349). This move across the border creates many changes in the Sinai family, most notably the transformation of the Brass Monkey into a Pakistani pop star Jamila Singer, but Rushdie also includes smaller moments that depict the influence of national disputes on private lives. Aadam Aziz dies at a moment of tension between India and Pakistan and, Saleem narrates: “Indo-Pakistani relations deteriorated; the borders were closed, so that we could not go to Agra to mourn my grandfather” (363). Though this small revelation is buried in Saleem’s depiction of the changes in his nasal powers following his move across the border, it nevertheless resonates as an example of the emotional, familial losses caused by national disputes. Though Rushdie purposefully avoids depicting the horrific acts of violence and mutilation that surrounded the partition of India and Pakistan, he embeds throughout the text moments of familial disintegration most often envisioned through the masculine body.

Aadam Aziz’s eventual death is caused by a disease the narrator refers to as a “crack death,” and the beginnings of this “cracking” are located in an imagined hole at the center of his body that mirrors the hole in the “perforated sheet” that begins the novel. When Brass Monkey asks Saleem if their grandfather is dying, he replies:

I saw the cracks in his eyes—a delicate tracery of colorless lines against the blue; I saw a network of fissures spreading beneath his leathery skin; and I answered the Monkey’s question: ‘I think he is’...But a crack-death can be slow; and it was a long time before we knew about the other cracks (315).

Division, cracking, and fragmentation are all central to the imagery of the novel, envisioned both as the destructive forces of Partition itself and the effects of Partition on individual identity. Aadam Aziz’s story is thus central to creating a genealogy for these crack deaths. Rushdie sets up Aziz’s “vulnerability to women and history” as a personal quirk, beginning when he bows to pray and hits his nose on the ground, from that moment on refusing to take part in any religious activity. Yet, this weakness when confronted with history or women—a strange pairing—extends beyond Aziz’s male heirs to other men within the text who cannot claim him as an ancestor, creating an image of masculine vulnerability that cannot be located in one small collision of a nose and a “frost-hardened tussock” (4).

Aadam Aziz thus provides a link between the colonial past and the “cracking” caused by Partition politics. Emphasizing the colonial roots of masculine disintegration, Aziz is first traumatized when he attempts to provide medical services to protestors for Indian Independence. The British disrupt the peaceful protest with gunfire, firing “...a total of one thousand six hundred and fifty rounds into the unarmed crowd. Of these, one thousand five hundred and sixteen have found their mark, killing or wounding some person” (35). At this point in the narrative, when Aadam returns home to his wife and shakes in her arms, unable to describe what he has witnessed, the cracks occurring in Aadam extend to both Saleem’s narrative and his body. Though Saleem at times distances himself from the narrative when describing traumatic events and only occasionally seems emotionally invested in the sadder parts of his story, the narrative pushes back as Aadam crumbles to the floor, revealing a link between this emotional “crack” in Aadam and the physical “cracking” of the narrator. Saleem

draws our attention to the physicality of writing by revealing that his hand “has begun to wobble,” and he locates this tremble partially in the theme of this chapter and partially in the “thin crack” that has appeared on his wrist.

This moment of narrative “cracking” ends with Saleem’s decision to include a brief story of Partition violence that ended in the death of the boatman Tai—“a quirky, enduring familiar spirit of the valley” and a man whose storytelling encompassed so many years that he claims to have watched the creation of mountains that surround the valley (11). Saleem’s introduction of Tai at this moment in the text—when Saleem and his grandfather are linked through their emotional and physical “cracking”—ties the moment of Partition to both emotional and historical disintegration. Because of his importance as a cultural figure in the Kashmiri valley, Tai’s death is significant both as a moment of historical erasure and as a depiction of Partition as a final act of colonizing violence. Coinciding with Barbara Harlow’s description of partitions as creating “... a deep and violently protracted scar across the political, geographical, and cultural terrains of those arenas” (85), Rushdie’s early descriptions of the Kashmir valley emphasize what has been lost in the battles over “500 square miles of Pakistani soil”:

In those days there was no army camp at the lakeside, no endless snakes of camouflaged trucks and jeeps clogged the narrow mountain roads, no soldiers hid behind the crests of the mountains past Baramulla and Gulmarg. In those days, travelers were not shot as spies if they took photographs of bridges, and apart from the Englishmen’s houseboats on the lake, the valley had hardly changed since the Mughal Empire, for all its springtime renewals (5).

The militarization of the valley is seen as a result of Partition, but is also linked to the violent British presence in India. Patrick Colm Hogan notes in “Midnight’s Children: Kashmir and the Politics of Identity,” that the narrative returns to Kashmir at the moment of Aadam’s death, describing another act of violence blamed on both Pakistani and Indian forces. Both

Aadam and “modern Kashmir,” Hogan writes, are “...crushed by the enmities of national and communal imagination and by the brute force such categorical imagination can create and sustain” (539).

In addition to this description of the transformations of the valley, Tai’s death resonates as one of the only examples of Partition violence depicted in the text, and his importance to the narrative extends the meaning of the act beyond the tragedy of an individual loss. The seemingly immortal Tai dies during 1947, when “...infuriated by India and Pakistan’s struggle over his valley, [he] walked to Chhamb with the express purpose of standing between the opposing forces and giving them a piece of his mind” (35). Saleem explains that he was shot, but he uses the vague pronoun “they” to place the blame with both Indian and Pakistani forces and links this act of Partition violence to two European characters in the text, Oskar Lubin who “would have approved of the rhetorical gesture” and R.E. Dyer who “might have commented on his murderer’s rifle skills” (35). These references to European men again imagine Partition as the ultimate legacy of colonial violence, a final, visible scar on the nation itself. Rushdie furthers this notion by emphasizing the narrative significance of Tai who, while not directly linked to Saleem’s “family” history—though perhaps no less so than the other fathers our narrator collects—is nevertheless an important figure as a male storyteller and a link to the nation before colonization. Inextricably tied to the Kashmir valley where the narrative originates, Tai, with his “...claim to an antiquity so immense it defied numbering” is in many ways representative of a history that transcends colonization (9). Ananya Jahanara Kabir asserts that the association of Tai with Kashmir and the author’s later use of the “Valley of K” in *Haroun and the Sea Stories* indicate that “Kashmir functions as Rushdie’s personal myth of the source of all story-telling. Tai,

metonymic of Kashmir, thus reflects the Valley's unchanging power as a cornucopia of narrative inspiration" (254). Tai's storytelling abilities are also clearly linked to nation, and he rejects forms of knowledge that come from European sources, renouncing Aadam for rejecting his talented nose in favor of "...a big bag of foreign machines."<sup>12</sup> Tai thus extends the vision of masculine cracking beyond the individual himself to larger narrative forces within the text: men are disintegrating emotionally and sexually as individuals, but the forces of Partition also threaten larger cultural notions of history and narrative.

Given the disintegration of his patriarchal ancestors, it is no surprise that our narrator is himself cracking; he says he is "falling apart," and carefully emphasizes that he is not speaking in metaphors:

... I have begun to crack all over like an old jug... my poor body, singular, unlovely, buffeted by too much history, subjected to drainage above and drainage below, mutilated by doors, brained by spittoons, has started coming apart at the seams. In short, I am literally disintegrating, slowly for the moment, although there are signs of acceleration...I shall eventually crumble into (approximately) six hundred and thirty million particles of anonymous, and necessarily oblivious, dust. This is why I have resolved to confide in paper, before I forget. (We are a nation of forgetters) (37).

On the first page of the novel, he explains that he has been "mysteriously handcuffed to history," emphasizing a violent connection between his body and the life of his country. Here, he has been "buffeted by too much history," torn apart by both the everyday forces of his life—spittoons and doors—and the larger forces of the nation. This grotesque fragmentation is less terrifying to Saleem, however, than the "moments of terror" that arise

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<sup>12</sup> When Saleem describes fishermen at the beginning of the chapter titled "Methwold," after his father and the British landowner, they too are linked to history before colonization: "The fishermen were here first. Before Mountbatten's tick-tock, before monsters and public announcements; when underworld marriages were still unimagined and spittoons were unknown; earlier than Mercurochrome; longer ago than lady wrestlers who held up perforated sheets...before the East India company...in this primeval world before clocktowers, the fishermen..sailed in Arab dhows, spreading red sails against the setting sun. They caught pomfret and crabs, and made fish-lovers of us all" (101).

from his fear of oblivion, of being forgotten in what he calls “a nation of forgetters” (36). Strangely, Saleem’s struggle against this disintegration *caused* by history is to create an alternative history himself—faced with death and the terrifying disintegration of his physical form, he spends his time “at the great work of preserving” his narrative (37). Michael Reder describes this process, explaining that Saleem “must write his own history, relating it to the history that has been imposed upon him by the fate of his birth. Through Saleem’s struggle the reader witnesses the struggle for individual narration” (227). Though many have identified the significance of Saleem’s individual history to the text, none have commented on Saleem’s necessary abandonment of patriarchal stories; to create his narrative Saleem must exchange a “grandfather” for an ayah, traditional narrative forms for a process of seasoning and canning pickles.

While the public cracking of the nation causes masculinity to crumble and disintegrate, women in the text are startlingly resilient and become seeping, pregnant contrasts to masculine “crack-deaths.” Though Saleem claims to anchor this story around his male ancestors—beginning with his “grandfather” Aadam Aziz—both his reference to Scheherazade, a female storyteller whose narratives are linked to her sexual relationship, and Padma’s consistent intrusions into the text, link the story early on to the narrator’s relationship with the “women and women and women” that surround him. Within this framework, Saleem also privileges feminine modes of storytelling, elevating the role of the domestic “ayah” over that of the historian when, as he is watching Mary cooks, he states: “Look into the eyes of a cooking ayah...and you will see more than textbooks ever know” (235). Saleem imagines domestic work performed by women as artistic communication, and here implies that a domestic worker has more historical meaning to offer than a textbook—

one form of writing that is often envisioned as entirely “factual.” Yet it seems significant that the ayah has no narrative power in this vision; she is not an active storyteller and you only have to “look into the eyes” to understand her meaning. This quote is representative of Saleem’s depictions of female artistic power. He possesses both admiration and dread for feminine forms of storytelling and often describes subversive female artistry as unnatural and monstrous. The narrator must appropriate their forms of storytelling—used by the women in the novel to convey private pain—for his own, more public purposes. When he discusses his relationship with the “sheet”—an object directly tied to his grandparents’ sexual relationship and his grandmother’s fragmented body—he describes it as something that he must “master”:

‘Condemned by a perforated sheet to a life of fragments,’ I wrote and read aloud, ‘I have nevertheless done better than my grandfather; because while Aadam Aziz remained the sheet’s victim, I have become its master...’ (137).

Rushdie describes the sheet, a metonym for both vulnerability to women and the act of writing, using the language of partition and fragmentation. Surrounded by women and narratives, he struggles to become the “master” of both, ultimately mimicking the chutney-making process of his ayah Mary in order to gain control of an unwieldy story and a cracked body.

In contrast to the deteriorating, impotent men that fill the text, Reverend Mother, Saleem’s grandmother and one of the first women introduced in the novel, possesses a monstrous, almost mythic, power over her cracking husband. Though he once described his grandmother as a sensitive woman who wept upon Aadam’s return from the peaceful-protest-turned-massacre, Saleem now narrates her monstrous transformation, stating that she:

...now appeared to thrive on his weakness, as though their marriage had been one of those mythical unions in which succubi appear to men as innocent damsels, and, after luring them into the matrimonial bed, regain their true, awful aspect and begin to swallow their souls (314).

Significantly, Rushdie locates the moment of transformation from beautiful princess to monster as the “matrimonial bed,” endowing female sexuality with a sinister transformative power. Reverend Mother’s girth and moustache, described by Saleem as he explains her soul-swallowing abilities, create an image of the woman’s masculinity as monstrous. Near the end of the novel, Rushdie describes another woman, a washerwoman named Durga who nurses his son, as a “succubus... a blood sucker in human form” (513). His depiction of this female character is not central to the narrative but is a striking image of Saleem’s fear of maternal monstrosity nonetheless. Saleem locates her monstrosity in the terrifying mix of her excessive femininity with the few masculine traits she possesses: Durga has bulging biceps, “preternatural breasts,” and *two* wombs (513). Linking her feminine monstrosity to a loss of narrative, Saleem further describes her as “a monster who forgot each day the moment it ended” and a woman who “flattened” Picture Singh through their sexual relationship. These images, included as an aside near the end of the novel, link her horrific body to something else Saleem is terrified of: forgetting. Here, the double-wombed woman threatens both Picture Singh’s masculinity and the notion of narrative itself. Saleem’s brief discussion of Durga downplays his fear of her narrative destruction, and he links his interest in her to memories of his grandparents, explaining that their connection was “...the only thing that interested me in the personality of the hoydenish washerwoman” (513).

Though Reverend Mother’s power is clearly unsettling to Saleem, Rushdie’s depiction of her domestic authority prefigures Saleem’s own reliance on domestic objects as the markers of his story. Even as a child, Saleem is entranced by what he views as the private realm of domestic space, particularly the “enigmatic world” of Reverend Mother’s pantry, filled with “locked chests with neat square labels...nuts and turnips, and sacks of



grain...goose-eggs and wooden brooms” (40). This description draws attention to the order found in Reverend Mother’s pantry, and the “locked chests” and their labels foreshadow the closed chutney jars that later represent the chapters of Saleem’s own teeming narrative. His description also militarizes these corners of Reverend Mother’s home—he senses her desire to defend her “inalienable territory” against “invasion,” and also imagines these private spaces as a kind of haven against the outer world (40). Though Reverend Mother’s domestic retreat does become a refuge from the intrusions that her husband invites into their home, her withdrawal into these spaces is also characterized by her inability to speak, creating a more sinister vision of her kitchen confinement.

When Aadam invites Nadir Khan, an anti-partition Muslim activist, into their home after Mian Abdullah is murdered, Reverend Mother objects because of the presence of their young, unmarried daughters. Ordered by her husband to be silent she refuses to speak at all. She is “...locked up in the pantry and kitchen, sealed behind her lips...incapable—because of her vow—of expressing distrust of the young merchant in recine and leathercloth who came to visit her daughters” (57). Linking narrative to reproduction, Reverend Mother’s inability to speak becomes a kind of uncomfortable pregnancy. “Month by month” she swelled with “unspoken words,” and Saleem’s mother worries that “her mother’s skin was becoming dangerously stretched “ (62). She has knowledge that is not accepted in public arenas, and her invasions of her daughters’ dreams—though a mirror of Saleem’s eventual mind-invading powers—would not “stand up in court.” When she eventually discovers that Nadir Khan is, like many men in the novel, sexually impotent, and her daughter who has married him still a virgin, she releases the words in a torrent of rants but, “her body, stretched by the exigencies of storing them, [does] not diminish” (64).

Reverend Mother is not a storyteller—even before her vow of silence she adopts the confused phrase “*whatsitsname*” as both her “leitmotif [and]...unconscious cry for help” (41)—but she nevertheless sets the stage of the domestic as a space for subversion. Though she “rules” over the pantry and the kitchen, the dinner table is the only setting where she is able to exert control over her husband:

No food was set upon the table, no plates were laid. Curry and crockery were marshaled upon a low side-table by her right hand and Aziz and the children ate what she dished out. It is a sign of the power of this custom that, even when her husband was afflicted by constipation, she never once permitted him to choose his food, and listened to no requests or words of advice. A fortress may not move. Not even when its dependents’ movements become irregular (41).

Again, Saleem militarizes domestic space both with his use of “marshaled” and by imagining Reverend Mother’s control over the food as a fortress. Though the tone in these moments is jovial, Rushdie implies that this dinner-table authority gave Reverend Mother power—at least over the bodies of her family. Aadam might make most family decisions, but Reverend Mother could easily create comfort or extreme discomfort with her culinary choices. Saleem’s conception of the militarized kitchen is further emphasized by his description of the “war of starvation” that took place between Reverend Mother and Aadam following a dispute over the religious education of their daughters, when she takes an oath that “...no food will come from my kitchen to [his] lips” (42). Unable to exert control over the lives of her children and the boundaries of her home and furious at her husband’s lack of religious devotion, these domestic battles become a way for Reverend Mother to communicate her displeasure. Rushdie often draws connections between the bodies of his characters and the boundaries of the nation, and Aadam’s body is described as a “...battlefield...each day a piece of it was blasted away” (43). Though he is repulsed by her unwomanly appearance, Saleem seems to admire these moments of domestic subversion, and

the active nature of Reverend Mother's rebellion provides a sharp contrast to masculine disintegration and disillusionment in the face of public crises.

As the novel continues Saleem reveals more women who express their frustrations through cooking or sewing, transforming domestic tasks into a kind of art. Saleem's aunt Alia, whose fate as an "old maid" was sealed when Saleem's father betrayed her and married Mumatz, is described as particularly spiteful, and this bitterness is woven into all acts of domestic work that she performs. Brass Monkey and Saleem represent the children that she might have had with Ahmed, and she sends them endless piles of "bitter garments" into which she has sewed her lost hopes (176). Rushdie's tone towards Alia is starkly unsympathetic, emphasizing her bitterness rather than the sadness he later reveals in Mary Pereira's cooking. He writes that Alia sent him and Brass Monkey "...an unending stream of children's clothes, into whose seams she had sewn her old maid's bile...I grew up in white shorts starched with the starch of jealousy, while the monkey wore the pretty flowered frocks of Alia's undimmed envy" (176). Though it is important that Alia is able to communicate her emotions—and revenge—via "baby-things of bitterness," Rushdie's use of the phrase "old-maid's bile" does not associate the act with artistry, instead linking their confinement in her "web" of revenge to the secretions of a monstrous body. Rushdie continually links these "artistic" creations to women's bodies, either by locating the emotions found in the food or clothes in their frustrated sexuality or by referring directly to the bodies as the source of their communication.

Rushdie describes the effects of these domestic forms of communication on Saleem's mother, emphasizing the ways in which food can transmit emotion:

Amina began to feel the emotions of over people's food seeping into her—because Reverend Mother doled out the curries and meatballs of intransigence, dishes imbued

with the personality of their creator. Amina ate the fish salans of stubbornness and the biranis of determination. And, although Mary's pickles had a partially counteractive effect—since she had stirred into them the guilt of her heart, and the fear of discovery, so that, good as they tasted, they had the power of making those who ate them subject to nameless uncertainties and dreams of accusing fingers... (158).

This depiction pushes our understanding of the power of domestic work further. Alia sews her bile into clothes but, though this exertion was a release for her, the children remained blissfully unaware of the emotions found in their garments. Reverend Mother causes bodily discomfort through her culinary choices, but her power is located in the food itself, not in the emotions she stirs into her concoctions. In this more artistic vision of the cooking process, the food, “imbued” with the emotions of the cook, has powerful capabilities to influence the mental state of those who eat it. Here we see the beginnings of Saleem's understanding of feminine artistry and his particular fondness for Mary, whose pickles, seasoned with “the guilt of her heart,” tasted good but also had “power” to influence the dreams of those who ate them (518).

Throughout the narrative, Saleem seems most comfortable with Mary, the “cooking ayah” whose eyes reveal more than textbooks, and who, as a domestic worker, is completely outside the biological families of both Saleem and Shiva. Towards the end of the text, he even empowers her as a teacher, though he must rework her domestic process for his historical needs. Brutalized by enforced sterilization and the effects of his “crack death,” Saleem reveals that the entire narrative of *Midnight's Children* was made possible by an encounter in a “back room” restaurant with chutney made at Mary's factory. Accompanied by his son, Saleem eats a “congratulatory, reviving meal,” and is shocked that he encounters Mary's chutney in an unfamiliar form:

Yes, a little aluminum bowl of chutney, green, my God, green as grasshoppers...and before long a puri was in my hand; the chutney was on the puri; and then I had tasted it... it had carried me back to a day when I emerged nine-fingered from a hospital and went into exile at the home of Hanif Aziz, and was given the best chutney in the world... the taste of chutney was more than just an echo of that long-ago taste—it was the old taste itself, the very same, with the power of bringing back the past as if it had never been away (525).

The chutney, produced by his “erstwhile ayah, the criminal of midnight, Miss Mary Pereira, the only mother [he] had left,” contains the restorative power of memory, a narrative antidote to the violence enacted on Saleem’s body by the public monstrous mothers who appear at the end of the text. Mary is the only remaining maternal figure to Saleem, who, as a boy was surrounded by mothers, women who “couldn’t get enough of [him]” and giggled after his circumcision as his “..mutilated organ waggled angrily in the air” (144).

Mary’s chutney enters the text when Saleem needs the memories of his “green as grasshoppers” life as a contrast to the dark reality of his present. Before he makes his way to that backroom restaurant, the narrator’s “organ” is mutilated by a monstrous mother who first enters the narrative as the green-faced witch of childhood nightmares:

...Widow’s arm comes snaking down the snake is green the children scream the fingernails are black they scratch the Widow’s arm is hunting see the children run and scream the Widow’s hand curls round them green and black. Now one by one the children mmff are stifled quiet the Widow’s hand is lifting one by one the children green their blood is black unloosed by cutting fingernails it splashes black on walls (of green) (239).

This early description of “The Widow” takes place in the chapter titled “At the Pioneer Café” in which Saleem witnesses his mother’s meeting with her ex-husband Nadir Khan, and the passage does not reveal the public identity of the witch-figure, instead describing her violence against children in this long stream of images. The description of The Widow incorporates much of the imagery of the novel, most notably the color green, which is emphasized as the color of the bright green chutney made by Mary Pereira and also arises

again and again as one of the stripes in the saffron and green Indian flag. The color thus ties her to imagery of Indian nationalism, but in this depiction that imagery is distorted—instead of pairing green with bright saffron, the green is paired with black, foreshadowing the Emergency and Indira Gandhi’s power as a moment of national darkness. Rushdie writes of Gandhi’s appearance: “...she had white hair on one side and black on the other; the Emergency, too, had a white part—public, visible, documented, a matter for historians—and a black part which, being a secret macabre untold, must be a matter for us” (483). Thus the Widow’s hair, representing notions of “public” and “secret” histories, presents the purpose for the narrative as an unmasking of the “dark” untold narratives, most often revealed through individual stories. The parting of the Widow’s hair also creates a connection between her power and that of William Methwold, whom Saleem claims as a biological father. Both part their hair in the middle and Saleem asserts that William Methwold’s part “...has a lot to do with my beginnings. It was one of those hairlines along which history and sexuality move. Like tightrope walkers” (105).

The Widow at first seems to be a fairy-tale image of feminine monstrosity, but at the end of the novel she emerges from Saleem’s nightmare and is revealed to be the very real Indira Gandhi. Rushdie aligns “the Emergency,” a period of the suspension of civil rights and numerous violent atrocities, with the moment of Indian Independence. Just as he intersperses the narrative of his own birth with public imagery and Nehru’s triumphant speeches, the moment of his son’s birth coincides with the beginning of the Emergency, a political movement put into place by Nehru’s daughter as a result of perceived subversive threats to the nation. Pavrati’s painful labor occurs as Gandhi is being persuaded to begin the Emergency:

...and she would surely die if the baby did not come now, and in my ears ticktock the pounding ticktock until I was sure, yes, soon soon soon and when the triplets returned to her bedside in the evening of the thirteenth day they screamed Yes yes she has begun to push, come on Pavrati, push push push, and while Pavrati pushed in the ghetto, J.P. Narayan and Mararji Desai were also goading Indira Gandhi, while triplets yelled push push push the leaders of Janata Morcha urged the police and Army to disobey the illegal orders of the disqualified Prime Minister, so in a sense they were forcing Mrs. Gandhi to push...the Prime Minister was giving birth to a child of her own... (481).

This depiction aligns Gandhi's "labor" with Pavrati's, depicting the Widow as a monstrous woman giving birth to a national crisis and aligning both moments with the phrase "push push push." As the baby is wrapped, "...the word Emergency is heard for the first time, and suspension-of-civil rights, and censorship-of-the-press, and armored-units-on-special-alert, and arrest-of-subversive-elements" (481). Rushdie's use of hyphens to connect the words in these phrases further emphasizes the "birth" of these elements into the national consciousness, and he again aligns the Emergency with the moment of Indian independence, calling the moment "...the birth of the new India and the beginning of a continuous midnight which would not end for two long years" (482).

Indira Gandhi gives birth to a national crisis and "continuous midnight," but she also attacks the narrator Saleem in a much more private fashion, invading and draining his body in her attempts to sterilize the "midnight children." She is the final mother in the text, emphasized by Rushdie's inclusion of Saleem's aside to Padma "'Yes, Padma Mother Indira really had it in for me" (484). Male impotence is a constant presence in the novel, arising as a result of the public intrusion onto private life; both Nadir Khan and Ahmed Sinai—Amina Sinai's two husbands—have sexual problems linked directly to the Partition of India. At this point in the text, however, the invasion of the public onto the private becomes very material, as the nation—through this monstrous mother—attempts to control the reproductive power of

its citizens in order to fight overpopulation and perceived political threats. Though the select group of children—now adults—is attacked more purposefully and thoroughly by Indira Gandhi, Rushdie connects their sterilization to the mass sterilizations that were actually performed during the Emergency, including in the narrative Gandhi's assertion that it was only happening to "a small percentage of the population of India" (499). Saleem argues that Gandhi envisions the midnight children as a threat to her own "slogvanized centrality" emphasized in her campaign motto: "Indira is India and India is Indira" (491). This attack of a perceived subversive threat is not accomplished by executions, but instead consists of irreversible sterilization of all midnight children: "They were good doctors: they left nothing to chance. Not for us the simple vas- and tubectomies performed on the teeming masses...ectomies were performed, but irreversibly: testicles were removed from sacs, and wombs vanished forever" (505). National borders are again confirmed by an "invasion" into the reproductive power of its citizens. Rushdie writes that the children, "...were not only missing little balls and inner sacs, but other things as well," and though he is describing the children's loss of their midnight powers, the phrase resonates as a depiction of the results of unwanted sterilization enforced by national policy (505)

Rushdie's description of the sterilization process is a sharp contrast to Indira Gandhi's own comments about her programs, and this discrepancy—something Rushdie refers to both in the novel and in his non-fiction writing—provides the context for his literary intervention. He writes in *Imaginary Homelands*, "She said that there were some people around who claimed that bad things had happened during the Emergency, forced sterilizations, things like that; but, she stated, this was all false. Nothing of this type had occurred" (14). The record, however, confirms that sterilizations were quite common, and a 1979 article in *Population*



*and Development Review* reports that, in the last year of Indira Gandhi's government, at least 8 million sterilizations were performed (Nortman 277). This, Rushdie continues, suggests the need for alternative historical forms to challenge the "official" record. A 1977 *Time Magazine* article describes the militarized process through which sterilizations were carried out, describing men "sleeping in fields" to avoid the required vasectomies and depicting "...early-morning gunfire...when villagers resisted a sudden dragnet conducted by police squads seeking candidates for sterilization." The article also aligns with Rushdie's description of the information war that took place following the Emergency, and ends by noting that "...an official claimed the village would be bombed if any outsiders learned of the incident" (Time). This depiction depicts both the physical and historical violence conducted by the state in the interest of national security. Both types of violence intrude on the private spaces of the village, assaulting non-combatants in the interest of the state; this "war" against an Indian village thus aligns Gandhi's actions with Bhabha's description of the "unhomely" invasions of the nation into the private lives of its citizens.

Saleem, sterilized and beat about by historical forces, is the individual representative for this type of unhomely invasion. "Drained above" by well-meaning parents and below by a national sterilization initiative, Saleem's "buffeted" body links him to the ailments of both male and female ancestors and aligns with his narrative difficulties. He is "cracking" all over like Aadam Sinai, but also possesses a fever that, "like a bad stink...oozed through [his] cracks," reminiscent of the old-maid's bile that seeps from his Aunt Alia. Though not expanding physically, Saleem experiences a pregnancy of unsaid histories aligning him with Reverend Mother's pregnancy of silence: Mary Pereira's chutney thus becomes both medicinal and labor-inducing, providing a seeping link to maternal creative power. Rushdie

introduces the concept of maternal power throughout *Midnight's Children*, writing of "...the occult power of umbilical cords," the material connection between mother and child (353). Saleem seems most comfortable with Mary, perhaps because she is not a biological mother, but her process of canning and preserving still brings to mind readers' first encounter with a "well-sealed jar," the container that held Saleem's umbilical chord:

Inside the envelope: a pickle-jar, emptied of lime kasaundy, washed, boiled, purified—and now, refilled. A well-sealed jar, with a rubber diaphragm stretched over its tin lid and held in place by a twisted rubber band. What was sealed beneath rubber, preserved in glass, concealed in manila? This: traveling home with father, mother and baby was a quantity of briny water in which, floating gently, hung an umbilical cord (140).

Saleem implies that he cannot tell if it was his or "the other's," but the image of the cord preserved within a jar links each chapter of the novel—also held within the "well-sealed" jar—to this material connection between mother and son.

Rushdie reinforces Saleem's need for a maternal intervention by consistently reminding readers that our narrator finds his own story terrifying and unspeakable. The "unhomely" intrusion of the public onto the private arises in Rushdie's novel as cracks in both body and narrative: both are breaking apart, and Saleem can contain neither. He is terrified from the first line of the text by the potential scope of his narrative. He explains, "I was born in the city of Bombay," beginning the story in quite possibly the most traditional of manners, but the narrative immediately begins to unravel. This statement is not followed by a definitive period, instead collapsing into ellipsis, and the narrator struggles against this disruption by introducing the even more traditional "...once upon a time" (1). But neither of these traditional phrases is enough to sustain Saleem against the unwieldy story he must tell. Throughout the first paragraph—in which he hesitatingly reveals the moment of his own birth—he constantly interrupts his own narrative, chiding himself with "'No, that won't do"

and “spell it out,” prodding his own story into being. But even though Saleem is finally able to begin his story, throughout the text he constantly intrudes, noting moments when he cannot continue to write, casting doubt on the reliability of his memories, and arguing with himself about what narratives are appropriate to include. At the beginning of the chapter where he will describe his sterilization, he writes:

I don't want to tell it!—But I swore to tell it all.—No, I renounce, not that, surely some things are better left?...But surely not the whispering walls, and treason, and snip snip, and the women with the bruised chests?—Especially those things.—But how can I, look at me, I'm tearing myself apart...cracking up, memory going... only fragments remain, none of it makes sense any more! (485).

In this passage Saleem's fears about his physical body coalesce with his primary fear about the narrative: that, when all is said, it will not *mean* anything. The culmination of this terrifying series of images—“treason,” “snip snip,” “cracking up”—is that none of the story “makes sense anymore,” the most horrifying of possibilities to a narrator whose entire storytelling process is an attempt to create meaning through historical intervention.

Cracking, Saleem explains, is one of the “disintegrating effects of draining,” and Mary's chutney, seeping, bright green, and full of memories, is a sharp contrast to this image of drainage and dryness. Though the text does not end optimistically—Saleem is not healed by Mary's chutneys—the concoctions nevertheless possess restorative powers, positively influencing both the narrator's medium for his story and its containers. Though Mary has been removed from the private spaces of the home, turning her chutney-making talents into a lucrative business--“Braganza Pickle; best in Bombay”--her creations possess personal and maternal meaning for Saleem. After tasting the chutney of memory, he demands to see the jar, and its image, “a winking, saffron-and-green neon goddess,” become an “abracadabra, an open sesame....opening the last door of my life” (525). The chutneys open the door to his

life and to the narrative possibilities embedded within the stories he will tell. The last nine pages of the text describe Saleem's pilgrimage to Mary's pickle factory, and her transformation from mother to teacher, "finishing an education which began in this very air-space when I stood in a kitchen as she stirred guilt into green chutney" (527). Because Mary, once a servant, has transformed herself, changing her name to Mrs. Braganza and living with Alice in the same space that was once Saleem's nursery, his return to her is also a return to his childhood home. Saleem ensconces himself within this maternal center--the factory employs only women and Mary "admits no males except [Saleem] into her new, comfortable universe" (259). Only within the exclusive confines of the pickle factory is Saleem able to negotiate the difficult narrative he must birth.

Saleem's education at the pickle factory is centered on the creation of chutney blends, and these creations mimic the mode of his story through their focus on blending and seasoning. Rushdie writes of Saleem's pickles, describing the mixture of spice bases, detailing the addition of "tumeric and cumin...fenugreek...garlic...stick cinammon, coriander, ginger...not to mention the flavorful contributions of the occasional speck of dirt" (531). But Saleem must also come to terms with the struggles of the preserving process, reconciling himself "to the inevitable distortions of the pickling process. To pickle is to give immortality after all: fish, vegetables, fruit hang embalmed in spice-and-vinegar; a certain alteration, a slight intensification of taste, is a small matter, surely?" (531). Mary's method of pickling thus provides Saleem with an alternative historical form, one that acknowledges the possibilities for historical meaning in intimate lives, but that also leaves room for error and "dirt." This image of the seasoning process allows Saleem—and Rushdie—to come to terms with the impossibility of attaining historical "truth" and find both meaning and

narrative possibility in the distortions of personal memory. Throughout the novel, Rushdie inserts moments of narrative struggle, when Saleem grapples with only having “shreds and scraps” from which to build his story or discovers that he included a wrong date for an important historical event. The description of the pickling process links the narrative to Mary’s chutney—a condiment teeming with memories, which had the power to bring back the past to Saleem. These intimate memories, unshaped and unreliable as they are, ultimately become powerful as historical interventions. Michael Reder writes in “Rewriting History and Identity: The Reinvention of Myth, Epic, and Allegory in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*” that Saleem’s narratives are “personal, and...far from ‘perfect,’” emphasizing the significant encounter with “reality” that can occur when “the artist, the magician, the storyteller...base their art on the manipulation of ‘reality’” (239).

Saleem’s encounter with the chutney influences the creation of his narrative, a piece of writing that he shapes through the inclusion of domestic objects as significant markers of meaning. “Buffeted” by the idea of too much history, overwhelmed with the possibilities for his narrative, the small objects of his memory—a sheet, pepper pots, the dirty laundry closet—stabilize the narrative at troubling moments and allow Saleem to domesticate and personalize his story. In a chapter fittingly titled “Movements Performed by Pepperpots,” Saleem connects the fate of the nation to his manipulation of small, domestic objects. His aunt’s husband General Zulfikar—one of many “collected fathers”—describes “troop movements,” and Saleem, Rushdie writes, “with the fate of the nation in [his] hands...shifted condiments and cutlery” (348). In addition to the meaning found in infinite spice combinations and domestic markers, Saleem also seems drawn to the order of the pickling process. He says that, above all, he wants to give the narrative “(in my thirty jars and a

jar)...shape and form—that is to say, meaning” (531). Thus, though the form of the chutney—its intimate meanings and possibilities for distortions—is significant, the “meaning” of the narrative is only captured through Saleem’s ability to contain it. However varied its contents, at the end of each chapter he can close and label a jar, providing order to a narrative that at every turn resists his attempts to control it.

Though Rushdie is, of course, describing Saleem’s artistic process, his description of the narrator’s encounter with Mary’s chutney mirrors his own depiction of his role as a writer in *Imaginary Homelands*. He describes his realization that his own memories, however flawed, could be a rich resource for creating a narrative history, that “the broken mirror” could be “as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed” (11):

I knew that I had tapped a rich seam; but the point I want to make is that of course I’m not gifted with total recall, and it was precisely the partial nature of these memories, their fragmentation, that made them so evocative for me. The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were *remains* (12).

Rushdie again and again clarifies that he is not, in fact, Saleem, but the small memories of a childhood in Bombay that provide the basis of the story do arise out of the author’s own personal history. “Partial” histories, misremembered, personal, situated in the home, become the basis for the historical interventions of both author and narrator. Rushdie’s describes the “shards of memory” acquiring “greater resonance” because of their status as remains, a description that aligns with Saleem’s final comments on his pickles of history. Each jar, he explains, contains “the most exalted of possibilities: the feasibility of the chutnification of history; the grand hope of the pickling of time! I however, have pickled chapters” (529). Pickling these disoriented, disintegrating memories becomes a way to both acknowledge and combat the “unhomely” divisions that occur in the wake of national division, and perhaps because of their “flaws” these pickles contain “the most exalted of possibilities,” becoming

receptacles for lost memories. Partition, the final scarring act of colonization, divides and disorients family structure and individual identity, but the preservation of private, flawed memories can make a historical intervention into national meaning.

Rushdie has commented that the ending of the novel was intended to be pessimistic: Saleem's imagines himself exploding as a "bomb in Bombay" and ends the text with a description of him and his son being trampled into "specks of voiceless dust" (533). But perhaps readers can find an image of hopefulness embedded within these descriptions. Saleem's greatest fear, after all, is not *meaning* anything, being forgotten in what he terms "a nation of forgetters"—the same nation that would trample him and his son into voicelessness. At the end of the text, however, the presence of the narrative—the thirty jars on a shelf—suggests that Saleem has prevailed against voicelessness through his return to the matriarchal center and his appropriation of a feminine mode of storytelling. He writes of his story, "One day, perhaps, the world may taste the pickles of history...their smell may be overpowering, tears may rise to eyes; I hope nevertheless that it will be possible to say of them that they possess the authentic taste of truth" (531). Rushdie's use of domestic arts as a feminine form of storytelling is troubling; only Mary has control over her "art," and, though Saleem is taught by Mary, he must transform and alter her teachings to fit his larger, political task. Such choices leave little possibility within the novel for true feminist intervention into historical meaning, and the only historical efforts made by women are, like Indira Gandhi's information campaign, attempts to distort the truth. Nevertheless, Rushdie creates a narrator who is forced to look outside traditional, masculine modes of history-making in order to create a meaningful intervention into the narrative of his country. Confronted with "a vision" of the world "that is as divided as it is disorienting" and a nation that itself has been

“cracked,” Saleem’s ultimate privileging of female modes of storytelling as an alternative to disintegration and meaninglessness suggest that Rushdie, in 1980, was struggling for a way to create his own intimate history.

### **Salman Rushdie’s *Shame***

In a 1995 interview with David Cronenberg, Salman Rushdie describes how he developed the central idea for his 1983 novel, *Shame*. The book started as a “draft screenplay of an honour-killing which took place in England” in the 1980s before he realized that he “...was actually writing this novel about honour and shame” taking place in Pakistan. In a 1983 lecture at the University of Aarhus published in *Kunapipi*, he discusses this choice, stating that “shame and its opposite, which is honour, seem to me to be kind of central to the society I was describing, to such extent that it was impossible to explain the society [Pakistan] except by looking at it through these concepts” (14). Partition takes up less textual space in *Shame* than *Midnight’s Children*, but the novel’s focus on shame and gender within the context of Pakistan’s emerging national identity prompts consideration of the ways in which Partition influences Rushdie’s search for new historical meaning. Though the text is ostensibly a roman á clef focusing on the lives of two 1970s Pakistani prime ministers, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, Rushdie plays with the form of the novel, inventing family ties between Bhutto and Zia and turning his focus towards these domestic connections and the women that surround the two men, known in the novel as Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder respectively. Rushdie writes a text that presents the female body and fertility as grotesque while also ultimately suggesting revolutionary possibilities located largely in both female domestic tasks and the violence of Sufiya Hyder, whose nickname



“Shame” gives the novel its title. Unlike *Midnight’s Children*, in which Saleem is able to harness domestic artistry to give form to his story, the women of *Shame* possess the power to make historical interventions, again suggesting the ways in which intimate lives push back against the narrative of the nation. Rushdie turns his eye to the lives and bodies of the mothers that surround the political figures at the center of his novel, imagining new historical possibilities emerging through the figure of the shamed woman in the wake of both Partition and the political upheavals of 1970s Pakistan.

While significant portions of *Midnight’s Children* take place at the moment of Indian Independence and Partition, in *Shame* Rushdie is more concerned with the 1970s culture of political and sexual repression, and Partition intrudes on the text only in Bilquis’s family history. Rushdie’s writings on Partition, however, demonstrate the ways in which partitioned psychologies persisted, even thirty years after the moment of national division. In *Midnight’s Children*, he writes of unease in 1970s Pakistan, stating that

...at the deep foundations of their unease lay the fear of schizophrenia, of splitting, that was buried like an umbilical cord in every Pakistani heart. In those days, the country’s East and West were separated by the unbridgeable land-mass of India; but past and present, too, are divided by an unbridgeable gulf (404).

This passage invokes the image of the umbilical cord, a physical marker of reproduction, to describe the divided psychology of the “Pakistani heart,” transformed by both geographic and historical confusion. Rushdie addresses the divide between past and present in Pakistani culture, an issue he explores in *Shame* as well, linking the culture of Pakistan to that of migrants, individuals who “...come unstuck from their native land” (85). He states that “the worst thing” about “migrant people and seceded nations...is the emptiness of one’s luggage,” indicating the loss of historical meaning following the geographic division of the nation (85). Rushdie suggests that Pakistan, a word formed from an acronym “thought up in England by a

group of Muslim intellectuals,” thus “imposed itself on history, settling down on partitioned land, forming a palimpsest on the past. A palimpsest obscures what lies beneath” (86). This historical loss seems to haunt Rushdie and is imagined as a kind of violence, “the obscured world forcing its way back through what-had-been imposed” (86).

Though Rushdie resists the straightforward social history of gendered partition violence found in texts by Bapsi Sidhwa and Shauna Singh Baldwin, he nevertheless describes the book as dealing “...centrally, with the way sexual repressions of that country [Pakistan] are connected to the political repressions” (*Kunapipi* 14). Much has been said about Rushdie’s choice to turn the focus towards women’s lives in *Shame*. The author himself draws attention to this choice, informing the reader in one of his asides in the book that the women have “taken over” his narrative<sup>13</sup>:

I had thought, before I began, that what I had on my hands was an almost excessively masculine tale... But the women seem to have taken over; they marched in from the peripheries of the story to demand the inclusion of their own tragedies, histories, and comedies... It occurs to me that the women knew precisely what they were up to—that their stories explain, and even subsume, the men’s (180).

Rushdie’s definition of what constitutes an “excessively masculine” tale is especially revealing in the context of the longer novel. He defines “sexual rivalry, ambition, and power...patronage, death, revenge” as aspects of his masculine narrative (180). Upon writing the narrative, however, Rushdie becomes drawn to the links amongst the various repressions he encounters in Pakistan, explaining, “Repression is a seamless garment; a society which is authoritarian in its social and sexual codes, which crushes women beneath the intolerable burdens of honor and propriety, breeds repressions of other kinds as well...So it turns out my ‘male’ and ‘female’ plots are the same...” (180). The novel’s focus on

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<sup>13</sup> Rushdie is quoted as saying that readers can identify the narrator of *Shame* “...pretty closely” with himself, “...much, much more closely than you could identify Saleem Sinai” (in Ahmad 132).

mothering and reproduction thus reveals the way in which the “masculine” aspects of Rushdie’s narrative intertwine with and are influenced by the patriarchal culture of “repression.”

Critics have discussed gender in *Shame* much more extensively than *Midnight’s Children*. While some critics, including Ambreen Hai, view *Shame* as a feminist text, many also critique Rushdie’s use of misogynist stereotypes in his creation of female characters. Aijaz Ahmad calls attention to this parade of the “oldest of misogynist myths: the virgin who is really a vampire, the irresistible temptress who seduces men in order to kill them,” and also characterizes the female characters as a “gallery of women who are frigid and desexualized...demented and morose...dulled into nullity...driven to despair...or suicide” (149). Ahmad continues to challenge Rushdie’s attempt at feminist historiography, writing that though, “Rushdie himself has stressed the importance of women in *Shame*...he seems to have fashioned a macabre caricature of what female resistance might be; the woman herself becomes, in this version, a rapist” (149). While acknowledging the presence of stereotypical female characters in the text, I would argue against Ahmad’s assertion that Bilquis and Rani, the two wives at the center of most of the novel, are “...paltry, shallow creatures themselves, capable of nothing but chirpy gossip” (144). Rushdie presents Rani as an artist/historian who uses a time of imprisonment to create eighteen tapestries detailing the horror of her husband’s political power as prime minister. Though some of the shawls are used to detail Iskander’s sexual infidelity, most extend beyond “gossip” to present truths about Pakistani history that Rushdie suggests even his own narrative cannot reveal. These forms of subversion allow Rushdie to play with and ultimately expand beyond stereotypes about

female sexuality and power, suggesting a need for intimate, subaltern national histories that challenge the dominant modes of representation in Pakistan.

Rushdie begins a section of his novel titled “Shame, Good News, and the Virgin”—the nicknames of the three daughters of Rani and Iskander—with a chapter called “Blushing” in which he details the honor killing that inspired the novel. He describes a “Pakistani father” who “murdered his only child, a daughter, because by making love to a white boy she had brought such dishonour upon her family that only her blood could wash away the stain” (117). This brief contemporary story aligns with Partition violence and, in a few short sentences, presents many of the issues surrounding women’s sexuality that fill *Shame*. The young girl’s sexuality is clearly linked to family and community honor, her body transformed into a vehicle through which this honor is violently sustained. This anecdote thus also links shame to violence, indicating that the young girl’s murder is a purifying force for the family, “[washing] away the stain” of her transgression and reasserting their sense of honor within the larger community. Rushdie describes how the central character of the novel arose out of this young girl’s death:

My Sufiya Zinobia grew out of the corpse of that murdered girl, although she will not (have no fear) be slaughtered by Raza Hyder. Wanting to write about shame, I was at first haunted by the imagined spectre of that dead body, its throat slit like a halal chicken, lying in a London night...I thought of the crime as having been committed right there, publicly, ritually, while at the windows eyes. And no mouth opened in protest (119).

Shame is thus first located in the female body, the shape of a woman murdered by her own family and treated like a “halal chicken” without condemnation from the larger community. Out of this murder, Rushdie spins backwards to 1970s Pakistan, his central female character literally being birthed out of the corpse of that honor killing. The murder—taking place within the context of the family and with the silent blessing of the larger community—

reveals the ways in which shame gets mapped onto female sexuality and, ultimately, onto motherhood and reproduction.

*Shame* is a text teeming with mothers. Emphasizing the importance of reproduction to the novel, Rushdie begins the text with an extensive family tree showing the connections between Harappa and Hyder. The tree at first resembles a typical family history, but on further consideration one notices the odd notations that fill its branches. The two sisters and three brothers of Bariamma give birth to “11 legitimate sons” but a dotted line extending to the right indicates that the brothers also fathered “(many illegitimate offspring).” The chart also emphasizes the gender of the offspring: the 11 legitimate sons triumphantly give birth to “32 boys” while Bariamma’s offspring, listed side-by-side reveals only “1 daughter.” Finally, the family tree is full of nicknames suggesting the importance of gender roles to the novel. Bilquis’s father is listed as “*Mahmoud ‘the Woman,’*” Naveed Hyder, the second daughter of Raza and Bilquis, is nicknamed “Good News” while her cousin Arjumand Harappa is listed as “the ‘virgin Ironpants.’” Rushdie’s choice to include this family tree at the beginning of his political novel reveals his interest in the ways reproduction is inextricably linked to national power.

The first section of the novel is titled “Escapes from the Mother Country,” a choice that again draws attention to the link between the maternal and the national. Rushdie begins the text in fairy-tale form, leaving out the “once upon a time” but including many of the tropes of fairytale fiction. The first lines of the text read: “In the remote border town of Q., which when seen from the air resembles nothing so much as an ill-proportioned dumb-bell there once lived three lovely, and loving sisters” (3). The classic form of the fairytale continues with the image of the sisters’ entrapment in their castle home. The women are kept

hidden away in their father's house, "...kept inside the labyrinthine mansion until his dying day; virtually uneducated, they were imprisoned in the zenana wing where they amused each other by inventing private languages and fantasizing about what a man might look like when undressed" (5). Rushdie also militarizes their home, describing it as a "high, fortress-like, gigantic residence" (5). Aijaz Ahmad writes that this early focus on entrapment gives readers "...the sense that Pakistan is a cage," a theme that Ahmad suggests continues throughout the novel (139).

Rushdie's descriptions of the women change dramatically after they collectively birth a child; they are ultimately transformed from "lovely, loving sisters" into conniving witches. After a party that opens the house for the first time to outsiders, "...it began to be bruited about the bazaars of Q. that one of the three nose-in-air girls had been put...into the family way" (9). This out-of-wedlock pregnancy introduces the first moment of "...shame, shame, poppy-shame" into the text (9). The women react to this "shame" by further militarizing their home, installing "...secret panels which can shoot out eighteen-inch stiletto blades, sharp sharp" (12). They also share the symptoms of the pregnancy, transforming shame into triumph by refusing to acknowledge who the pregnant sister is, a choice that also allows them to share the act of mothering:

Now the three of them began, simultaneously, to thicken at the waist and in the breast; when one was sick in the morning, the other two began to puke in such perfectly synchronized sympathy that it was impossible to tell which stomach had heaved first. Identically, their wombs ballooned towards the pregnancy's full term. It is naturally possible that all this was achieved with the help of physical contrivances, cushions and padding and even faint-inducing vapours; but it is my unshakeable opinion that such analysis grossly demeans the love that existed between the sisters. In spite of biological improbability, I am prepared to swear that so wholeheartedly did they wish to share the motherhood of their sibling—to transform the public shame of unwedlocked conception into the private triumph of the longed-for group baby—that, in short, twin phantom pregnancies accompany the real one; while the simultaneity of their behavior suggests the operation of some form of communal mind (13).

Here, the women are empowered to use their bodies to overcome the societal shame surrounding an unplanned pregnancy. The narrative voice appears in awe of the sisters' control over their bodies, locating their ability to mimic the physical characteristics of pregnancy in the "love that existed" in their sisterly community. These "phantom pregnancies" create subversive possibilities for the sisters to regain control over their reproductive power in a patriarchal culture of shame, transforming "...the public shame of unwedlocked conception into private triumph" (13). During the birth of their son, Omar, the three sisters give birth in their father's death bed, and all are able to breastfeed the baby, who "...was passed from breast to breast, and none of the six was dry" (14).

Though the narrator at first appears in awe of the triumphant possibilities of this shared pregnancy, the portrayal of the sisters transforms after the birth of their son. Though the sisters had been locked in the castle throughout their lives, Rushdie describes their time of entrapment as both limiting and fulfilling; they spend their time daydreaming about sexual possibilities and "inventing private languages." The narrator's descriptions of Omar's childhood are strikingly different, characterized by the notion that he was "... fed at too many mammary glands" in the "mother-country" of the sisters' house (24). The mothers breast-feed Omar until he is six, an act the narrator describes as giving them "the greatest of pleasures" (30). He compares Omar to "wolf-children" who breastfeed "...on the feral multiple breasts of the hairy moon-howling dam," an image that paints Omar as human while depicting his mother as "moon-howling" animals (24). In these moments of Omar's childhood, the narrator begins to describe the mothers in animalistic, grotesque terms tinged with the language of sexual desire. Omar is over-indulged and excessively mothered, trapped in a decaying, overflowing house by insatiable women who "caress" him when he

“howls” (24). The house, “Nishapur,” seems to transform as the sisters take over the ownership. What had been described in fairy-tale terms, a fortress-castle with three sisters locked away, is transformed into decaying “mother-country.” Omar “[hates] his mothers for their closeness...for their tendency to lapse giggling into the private languages of their girlhood” (29). The narrator portrays the sisters shared motherhood as alternatively empowering and disgusting, a writing of feminine power that aligns with Rushdie’s portrayals of mothering throughout both *Shame* and *Midnight’s Children*.

Rushdie also ultimately explains how the sisters are punished for their unnatural behavior. “Squabbling” over decisions about Omar, the sisters become separated, “never properly reunited” until they give birth to a second son (34). This division results in grotesque transformations to their bodies: “they divided up in the wrong way, they got all mixed up, so that Bunny, the youngest, sprouted the premature grey hairs and took on the queenly airs that ought to have been the prerogative of the senior sibling” (34). These transformations results in “chaos” in which the women become “psychological centaurs, fish-women, hybrids,” words that gesture towards a disgust with the female form that is transparently located in their reproductive power (34). Though the narrative suggests that the sisters’ loving connection creates the power to subvert shame, the results of this alternative form of mothering are described as unnatural. The narrator ends this description of their transformation by asking, “Who would not have wanted to escape from such mothers?” before suggesting that Omar’s story is poorer than “the other Omar’s” because it is “marinated in bile” (34). In both *Midnight’s Children* and *Shame*, Rushdie links “bile” to the female body, invoking this abject imagery to suggest that Omar’s creativity was sapped by the sisters’ excessive mothering. The narrative voice also suggests that “...it would be easy



to argue that [Omar] developed pronounced misogynist tendencies at an early age.—That all his subsequent dealings with women were acts of revenge against the memory of his mothers” (35). When the mothers give birth again, Rushdie describes Omar as feeling “admiration” but their first son’s only comment is: “‘The old witches...they managed to do it again’” (52). The fairytale format beginning on the first page of the novel thus contains two coalescing narratives: the lovely, loving sisters awaiting their prince are transformed into witches suckling two excessively mothered sons.

Pregnancies fill the novel, and in these early sections there is another unplanned and thus shameful pregnancy. A young Omar hypnotizes Farah Zoroaster, a girl he desires, after he realizes she is “too self-contained to succumb to any conventional assault” (48). Though the narrator does not describe a sexual act occurring between Farah and Omar, the language of violence intrudes on their interaction, militarizing the act of seduction by portraying Omar’s advances as “assaults” and suggesting that Farah was hypnotically manipulated. The next paragraph begins “Afterwards, when her womb began to swell,” suggesting to the reader that this coercive act resulted in a pregnancy (48). Farah is “expelled...for calling down shame upon the school” and “thrown out by her father, who had suddenly found that his empty customs house was too full to accommodate a daughter whose belly revealed her adherence to other, unacceptable customs” (48). These descriptions, following closely the narrative of the three sisters’ subversive shared pregnancy, demonstrate the shaming results of reproduction outside the frame of marriage, and Omar expresses that Farah’s expulsion from home and school “made [him] understand [his] mothers at last” (49). Farah’s marriage “by force” to Eduardo Rodriques, a teacher at the school, does not diminish the shame of her pregnancy, and the couple quickly leave town. Farah ultimately returns, bringing:

...neither husband nor child. Nobody ever found out what had become of Eduardo and the baby for which he had sacrificed everything, so of course the stories would circulate without fear of disproof: a miscarriage, an abortion in spite of Rodriques's Catholic faith, the baby exposed on a rock after birth, the baby stifled in its crib, the baby given to the orphanage or left in the street (51).

These invented narratives of the lost baby indicate the ways in which gossip circulated around pregnancies read as "shameful." Three of the five alternatives listed in these stories suggest that Farah would kill her baby, and others suggest abandonment. The mystery of the missing baby is never solved, but Rushdie's decision to include this brief story of an unplanned pregnancy deepens his exploration of the ways in which reproduction is policed by the larger culture of honor and shame. Omar later impregnates Shahbanou, an ayah who becomes a proxy wife when he marries the mentally disabled Sufiya. She is "dismissed from service on the grounds of her immorality" and "left without a word, without attempting to apportion blame. Omar Khayyam kept in touch with her, he paid for the abortion and made sure she did not starve afterwards, but that solved nothing; the damage had been done" (231). Again, Omar is allowed to continue unscathed after these illicit pregnancies, while the women are "damaged" and marked by their pregnancies.

Many other women in the text are confined by their gender and status as wives and mothers, even when not "marked" by the shame of an unplanned, out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Following "Escape from the Mother Country," the second section of the novel introduces readers to the yet-to-be-born Sufiya Zinobia, "elder daughter of General Raza Hyder and his wife Bilquis." The narrator states, "This is a novel about Sufiya Zinobia" before clarifying that it would "...be more accurate, if also more opaque, to say that Sufiya Zinobia is about this novel" (55). Though the novel is "about" Sufiya, the violent, mentally disabled daughter of a powerful father, the narrator clarifies that "...it is not possible to know a person without

gaining some knowledge of her family background” (55). But Rushdie does not begin this description of her “family background” with narratives of her famous father, instead turning the attention once again to mothering by introducing the story of “how it was that Bilquis grew frightened of the hot afternoon wind called the Loo” (55). Rushdie frames the story of Bilquis’s domestic entrapment within a narrative of Partition violence, during the time:

...immediately before the famous moth-eaten partition that chopped up the old country and handed Al-Lah a few insect-nibbled slices of it, some dusty western acres and jungly eastern swamps that the ungodly were happy to do without (Al-Lah’s new country: two chunks of land a thousand miles apart. A country so improbable that it could almost exist) (57).

This is one of the few moments when the act of Partition intrudes on the text, and the narrator appears dismissive while also introducing the language of violence, portraying the “chopping up” of the “old country” as a traumatic and nonsensical act, creating an unlikely nation out of two pieces of “dusty” and “jungly” land.

Bilquis’ marriage to Raza is made possible by Partition violence: she meets him after her father’s movie theatre is bombed for playing a “double bill” of “stone-godly” and “one-godly” movies (58). Bilquis’s father is another example of Rushdie’s interest in the maternal. Named “Mahmoud the Woman” after caring for his daughter following the death of his wife, the meaning of his name is transformed by his attempts to “rise above all this partition foolishness” (58). Rushdie writes that, “this affectionate title came to mean something more dangerous...they meant Mahmoud the Weakling, the Shameful, the Fool” (58). This linguistic fact that this narrative presents—that “mother” can easily transformed to mean “weakling,” “shameful,” and “fool”—is significant, indicating the danger of mothering in a patriarchal culture. Mahmoud himself expresses anger at the flexible meanings of the word,

telling his daughter, “what a term! Is there no end to the burdens this word is capable of bearing? Was there ever such a broad-backed also such a dirty word?” (58).

When one of many possible “gardeners of violence” bombs the theatre, Bilquis survives but is left “naked and eyebrowless” in the streets, her father dead, and her clothes and eyebrows burned off by the “deadly wind” created by the bomb (60). Rushdie describes Bilquis’s shame at walking naked through the street:

...she clutched at herself for shame, holding on to herself in that rushing sea as if she were a straw; and she felt around her neck the remnants of a length of muslin. The dupatta of modesty had stuck to her body, fixed there by the congealed blood of the many cuts and scratches of whose very existence she had been unaware (61).

Rushdie again links shame and violence through the language describing Bilquis’ walk; the blood of her injuries allows her to keep the “dupatta of modesty,” even when losing everything else. Bilquis quickly notices, however, that no one is noticing her bleeding and partially nude body. The narrator implies that injured, naked women were not rare during this time, stating, “In that generation many women, ordinary, decent respectable ladies of the type to whom nothing ever happens, to whom nothing is supposed to happen except marriage children death, had this sort of strange story to tell. It was a time rich for stories, if you lived to tell your tale” (61). Though this is the only mention of gendered Partition violence in the text, against this absence Rushdie suggests the presence of countless other missing narratives, countless other Bilquis, bleeding and naked, barely noticed by those who walked beside her.

Locked with other Muslims “for their own safety...in the red fortress,” Bilquis encounters the charismatic Raza Hyder, who clothes her and “[conquers] her in double-quick time” (63). Both the fortress location of this seduction and Rushdie’s choice of the word “conquer” militarizes their marriage, which occurs “beneath the bitter eyes of the dispossessed multitudes” (63). Following their wedding, Bilquis even travels “in a troop

transport” to Pakistan after the army is “partitioned like everything else” (64). Once in Pakistan, Bilquis is further entrapped in her role as Raza’s wife. Raza’s grandmother, Bariama, insists that the forty wives of her siblings’ offspring sleep separately from their husbands because “...the mere fact of being married did not absolve a woman of shame and dishonour that results from the knowledge that she sleeps regularly with a man” (71). Though Rushdie includes several incidents in the text in which men experience shame, the narrative continually suggests that shame is inextricably linked to women’s bodies and reproductive power. Here, married couples cannot sleep together because it would cause shame for the woman, but no mention is made of shame surrounding men’s sexuality. Pregnancy, too, is considered shameful, and it is required that the pregnant wives act as though “all conceptions were immaculate and all births virgin” (71). Motherhood is not empowering for the woman but is instead read as another marker of their shame. These strange sleeping arrangements reveal cultural stigmas surrounding female sexuality, the men “[importing] their wives to live and breed in battery conditions, like shaver chickens,” needing them to reproduce desired sons but not respecting their bodies enough to improve their living conditions (72).

When Bilquis becomes pregnant, it is assumed that she will birth a boy because in this family home, thirty-two male cousins had been “born in wedlock” while “only two girls had been born in the entire family” (72). This gender imbalance is a source of great pride for the family, and Bilquis hopes to continue the trend, asserting that she is “making a boy” for the family (76). The assumption that Bilquis will birth a son contributes to Raza’s public persona; after Raza “[pulls] off an attacking coup so daring that there was no option but to call it a triumph,” it is understood “...that a man whose wife is about to bear him a son is

capable of anything. Yes, it was the unborn boy who was responsible for this” (76). Bilquis reproductive power is thus co-opted by her husband, who can use it to develop his “reputation for invincibility, a reputation that quickly became invincible itself” (76). When the unborn son dies, “...strangled to death in the womb” by the umbilical cord, the blame for this loss is shifted back to the mother. Bilquis is told by Raza’s cousin that her “barrenness” is a “disgrace” that is not “[hers] alone” (83). The cousin demands: “Don’t you know that shame is collective? The shame of anyone of us sits on all and bends our backs. See what you’re doing to your husband’s people” (83). These statements again introduce the idea of communal shame, linking honor to the female body’s reproductive power and suggesting that Bilquis’s ability to reproduce is “owned” by her husband’s large extended family.

Bilquis eventually births two daughters, the elder Sufiya Zinobia who is given the name “Shame” by her family, and a younger, vain daughter Naveed who is referred to as “Good News,” names that connote each daughter’s role in the family. Unable to “make” the son she promises to her husband, in later years Bilquis becomes privately invisible: “...a shadow hunting the corridors for something it had lost, the body, perhaps, from which it had come unstuck. Raza Hyder made sure she stayed indoors...and [she] became less than a character, a mirage, almost, a mumble in the corners of the palace, a rumour in a veil” (209). This passage emphasizes both her entrapment in the family home and her utter loss of identity. She is a “mumble,” “a rumour,” and always imagined beneath the folds of a veil, a symbol Rushdie continually uses in the novel to invoke feminine invisibility in the larger patriarchal culture. Though she is privately entrapped, Rushdie emphasizes her importance to Raza once he becomes prime minister. Too busy for a “family life” of any kind, he makes sure “...his devotion to the *concept* of family was well known” (263 emphasis mine). Lost

within the family home, disconnected from her own body, Bilquis is nevertheless presented “once a week” at a local television studio for Raza’s “broadcast to the nation” (263). Rushdie describes her as veiled and in “soft focus,” emphasizing the ways in which the watching nation sees only the marker of mother and wife, not the reality of Bilquis’s domestic life. Raza’s need to demonstrate devotion to “family values” displays the importance of a visible family life to political power. But both the untruth of his devotion to family and the “soft focus” through which Bilquis’s presence is obscured gestures towards the loss of the real family narrative. The public, televised story of the Hyder family and Bilquis’s presentation as public mother diverges drastically from her actual entrapment within the family home.

Like her mother, Naveed Hyder, known throughout the novel as “Good News,” is entrapped in her marriage. Rushdie aligns Good News with the honor killing at the heart of the book. On the eve of her wedding to Haroun Harappa, she sleeps with Talvar Ulhaq, but unlike Anna her father does not murder her in order to regain honor for the family. After bemoaning, “Such shame...such havoc wrought to the plans of the parents,” Raza raises his “Army pistol” but finds himself “unable to use it” (173). Instead of being murdered, Good News is quickly married to Talvar, a handsome polo star. Rushdie locates Talvar’s attraction to Good News in his imaginings of her fertility, stating, “He had foreseen in Naveed Hyder the children who had always been his greatest dream, the profusion of children who would make him puff up with pride while she disintegrated under the awesome chaos of their numbers” (171). This image of mothering emphasizes the weight of the children, crushing Good News Hyder while only increasing her husband’s “pride.” Rushdie’s use of the word

“disintegrated” also foreshadows Good News’s eventual loss of identity beneath the weight of her reproductive role as mother and wife.

After giving birth to “fine, healthy twin sons” soon after their marriage, Good News begins a stream of births that is both comical and horrific. Reversing the trope of too-many-mothers that begins *Shame*, Good News “produces” too many children, giving birth to triplets, then quadruplets, then quintuplets, eventually birthing so many children that “everyone had lost count of how-many-boys-how-many-girls” (217-18). Good News, however, is “incapable of coping with the endless stream of humanity flowing out between her thighs,” and Rushdie presents her pregnancies as acts of violence imposed on her by Talvar:

He came to her once a year and ordered her to get ready, because it was time to plant the seed, until she felt like a vegetable patch whose naturally fertile soil was being worn out by an over-zealous gardener, and understood that there was no hope for women in the world, because whether you were respectable or not the men got you anyway, no matter how hard you tried to be the most proper of ladies the men would come and stuff you full of alien unwanted life. Her old personality was getting squashed by the presence of the children who were so numerous that she forgot their names, she hired an army of ayahs and abandoned her offspring to their fate (218).

Good News’s womb is owned by her husband, who views her as the passive “vegetable patch” in which he can “plant the seed” of his children. Her reading of the reproductive process reveals the ways in which her desires for her body are subsumed beneath Talvar’s insatiable need for more children. This understanding of female reproductive power also diminishes the woman’s role in creating the child; she is passive, fertile ground while Talvar is an eager, active gardener. Beneath the agricultural metaphor, the language in this passage also militarizes reproduction; Good News must follow Talvar’s orders when he comes to her “once a year.” This “over-zealous” approach to reproduction perverts the power of Good News’s “naturally fertile” body and causes her to disconnect from her pregnancies and her



role as mother. Rushdie's use of the phrase "alien life" is particularly telling: Good News feels that the children are imposed on her from outside, and the pregnancies are thus foreign to her body.

When a pregnant Good News commits suicide<sup>14</sup> to avoid giving birth again, Rushdie invokes the tropes of motherhood even in the arrangement of her dead body. In the narrative of her death, Rushdie first calls her by her married name, "Begum Talvar Ulhaq," indicating that even her name has been subsumed beneath her husband's identity. She is found "...in her bedroom at the Hyder residence, hanged by the neck dead. On the floor beneath her dangling feet lay the broken rope of her first attempt, snapped by the enormous weight of her pregnancy" (241). The language in this passage directly links Good News's death to her pregnancy; the weight of the pregnancy made it more difficult to hang herself but also ultimately pulls her down to her death. Rushdie also emphasizes her determination to kill herself, suicide becoming an act of defiance from which "she had not been deterred" even though the first rope had been broken by her pregnant weight (241). Good News leaves a narrative of her suffering as an explanation for her suicide:

A suicide note had been attached to the obscene globularity of her midriff by a baby's safety-pin. It referred to the terror of the arithmetical progression of babies marching out of her womb. It did not mention what she thought of her husband, Talvar Ulhaq, who would never be brought to trial on any charge (241).

Rushdie reimagines the pregnant body through this grotesque imagery; her stomach is described as "obscene," once again linking reproduction to shame. The choice to have Good News attach the suicide note to her stomach with a "baby's safety-pin" is also significant, providing another link between the children she gave birth to and her choice to end her life.

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<sup>14</sup> Good News is not the only woman who commits suicide in *Shame*. Iskander Harappa's discarded mistress, Pinkie Aurangzeb, kills herself on the "...day of his death, when after setting fire to an old embroidered shawl she hacked out her own heart with a nine-inch kitchen knife" (107).

Suicide becomes, for *Good News*, the only way to reassert agency over her body. Pregnancy is her prison, and her determination to commit suicide thus becomes an act of subversion, a way for the female body to escape, fighting back against the “arithmetical progression of babies” over which she has no control.

Against this tide of mothers, imprisoned by (in)fertile bodies or the walls of their home, Rushdie envisions two forms of female resistance, art and violence. In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie introduces female domestic labor as a model for Saleem's narrative, but the women in the text do not use their artistry for political purposes; Saleem must reinvent their tactics in order to make a historical intervention. *Shame*, however, imagines a female artist whose power to subvert the dominant historical narrative extends beyond the text itself. Rani Harappa is the link between the Harappa and Hyder families—she is Iskander Harappaa's wife and Raza Hyder's cousin. Imprisoned in her home by her prime minister husband, her entrapment continues even after his death when she and her daughter are “...kept under house arrest for six years exactly” (197). Throughout this imprisonment, during which mother and daughter are estranged because of differing “memories” of their husband/father,<sup>15</sup> Rani embroiders: “An epitaph of wool. The eighteen shawls of memory” (201). These shawls of memory, depicting “unspeakable things which nobody wanted to hear” empower Rani as *both* artist and historian. Rushdie writes that, “Every artist has the right to name her creation...she would write her chosen title: ‘The Shamefulness of Iskander the Great.’ And she would add a surprising signature: *Rani Humayaun*. Her own name

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<sup>15</sup> Arjummad identifies strongly with her powerful father and also views her female gender as a prison. Her father informs her that she must “Rise above [her] gender as she [grows.]...his daughter takes him at his word, and when her breasts begin to swell she will bind them tightly in linen bandages, so fiercely that she blushes with pain. She will come to enjoy the war against her body, the slow provisional victory over the soft, despised, flesh” (129). Later, she tells her father, “This woman's body... it brings a person nothing but babies, pinches, and shame.” (107)

retrieved from the mothballs of the past” (201). Rani is more powerful as an artist than any of the female characters in Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, who use cooking and sewing as an outlet for private pain. Not only does Rani depict a subversive historical account of her husband’s time as prime minister, but she is also given the power to name both tapestries and self, recovering her identity through the retrieval of a lost name.

Samir Dayal suggests in his 1998 article “The Liminalities of Nation and Gender: Salman Rushdie’s *Shame*,” that the novel “...offers no positive alternative” for either Pakistan or its characters (58). Yet though Rani’s shawls depict horrifying realities of the nation, I would argue that a reading of the shawls as historical interventions also presents the redemptive possibility of artistic subversion. Rushdie details for five pages the intimate histories that the shawls present, contrasting statements about the artistry of the shawls—“a delicate border,” “red embroidery”—with descriptions of their terrifying imagery. The art of embroidery allows Rani to create histories that voice the unspeakable. This contradiction—that the shawls speak the unspeakable—indicates the powers of subversion located in the domestic arts. The shawls transfer shame from Rani to her husband, depicting his sexual infidelity but extending beyond the personal to the historical realities of his power as well. She includes “...*the white girls in the village [who] swell and pop*” after affairs with Iskander but does not dwell on his sexual infidelity, choosing instead to detail every last incriminating incident of his corruption. Rushdie emphasizes the skill of her artistry as the means through which the alternative histories can be voiced. On one work, “the allegorical shawl, Iskander and the Death of Democracy,” Rani embroiders Democracy as a woman with Iskander’s hands around her throat. The woman’s “eyes bugled, her face turned blue, her tongue protruded, she shat in her pajamas...and Iskander with his eyes shut squeezed and

squeezed” (203). This depiction marks Iskander’s destruction of democracy as gendered, linking sexual violence to political repression through the use of Sufiya as the model for the girl, “...young...small, physically frail, internally damaged” (204). Rani also includes Generals who dispassionately watch the murder, which is “...reflected by a miracle of needlewoman’s skill in the mirrored glasses they all wore” (204).

The “torture shawl” and the “white shawl” also depict the sources of Iskander’s political power:

...she embroidered the foetid violence of his jails, blindfolded prisoners tied to chairs while jailers hurled buckets of water, now boiling hot (the thread-steam rose), now freezing cold, until the bodies of the victims grew confused and cold water raised hot burns upon their skins: weals of red embroidery rose scarlike on the shawl; and the white shawl, embroidered white on white, so that it revealed its secrets only to the most meticulous and squinting eyes: it showed policeman, because he had given them new uniforms, white from head to toe, white helmets with silver spikes, white leather holsters, white jackboots up to the knee... *he turned a blind eye, understand, he wanted the police strong and the Army weak, he was dazzled, daughter, by whiteness* (204).

The contrast between Rani’s delicate embroidery and the historical truths her shawls depict is striking. With her thin embroidery thread, she creates images of Pakistan’s jails, indicating with “thread-steam” the alternatively hot and cold water thrown on prisoners and with “red embroidery” tracing the lines of prisoners’ scars. This shawl challenges traditional historical narratives by extending its vision beyond the narrative of political power to the tortured and imprisoned, suggesting the need for subaltern histories of Pakistani society. The artistic brilliance of the white shawl, embroidered with white thread on white fabric, demonstrates the power of embroidery as historical form. This shawl can only be understood by those who most desire to see and Rani’s aside, further explaining Iskander’s infatuation with the colonizers who surrounded him, also suggests that the shawls function both personally and politically. They are both an intimate message from mother to daughter and an intervention

into the larger culture's understanding of the sources of Iskander's political power. Eleni Coundouriotis argues that Rani's shawls are "equally subversive" to Sufiya's later violence, "because [her act] proposes a new way of seeing" (219).

While Rani's shawls are included in the text as a significant historical intervention, Rushdie does not end the novel with these shawls, instead focusing the closing chapters of the novel on the violence of Sufiya Zinobia. Aligning Sufiya with the monstrous mothers who began the book, Rushdie frames her story using the form of a fairytale, beginning one description of Sufiya with the words "...once upon a time there was a retarded daughter, who for twelve years had been given to understand that she embodied her mother's shame" (140). Sufiya, too, transforms throughout the narrative of her life, embodying both beauty and beast and ultimately closing the novel with an explosion of violence similar to the "bomb in Bomay" that ends *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie chooses to make Sufiya the kind of women most would ignore: she is "of slight build," walks awkwardly because of "imperfectly coordinated" arms and legs, and has a "small, severe face that made her seem unusually mature" (207). Yet beneath this exterior, Rushdie states, Sufiya is

...one of those supernatural beings, those exterminating or avenging angels, or werewolves, or vampires, about whom we are happy to read in stories, sighing thankfully or even a little smugly while they scare the pants off us that it's just as well they are no more than abstractions of figments; because we know (but do not say) that the mere likelihood of their existence would utterly subvert the laws by which we live, the processes by which we understand the world (208).

Like Rani's shawls which depict the "unspeakable," the existence of Sufiya Zinobia as "supernatural being" and "unspeakable monster" disrupts the culture's sense of reality by moving the monster beyond the space of narrative to inhabit a real life. Rushdie states that Sufiya functions as "disorder's avatar" because, "[There] is no place for monsters in civilized society" (210). He suggests that Sufiya's violence, her transformation into "exterminating or

avenging angel” is so terrifying precisely because it reveals, “that savagery could lie concealed beneath decency’s well-pressed shirt” (210). Rushdie aligns Sufiya with Anna, the name he gives to the young woman killed by her father for sleeping with a white man, and Sufiya—birthed out of Anna’s corpse—is monstrous precisely because Rushdie makes her the embodiment of the savagery and shame that lie beneath codes of community honor. Her monstrosity thus serves to make visible the forces of violence at the heart of conceptions of community.

Thus her violence, the material marker of her transformation into a “monster,” does function as a historical intervention by making visible the disorder and shame that lurk beneath “cultured soil” (210). In her article “Materialism, the Uncanny, and History in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Salman Rushdie,” Eleni Coundouriotis aligns *Beloved* and Sufiya as “monstrous (unreal) women” who become “transformative agents of history” (207). Aijaz Ahmad remarks that Sufiya Zinobia comes to represent every misogynist stereotype about women, most notably the succubus who seduces, then kills her mate. Similarly, Samir Dayal states that Rushdie “...again and again dredges up” negative “images of women...from the blackest water of male anxieties” (54). Yet Rushdie seems aware of the stereotypes he employs, and in fact seems to play with, rather than support these misogynist visions of female power, exploring the possibilities of subversion located in shameful stereotypes. Sufiya’s acts of violence also rework traditional domestic relationships, reconfiguring the patriarchal family structure through violence.

Sufiya Zinobia was supposed to be a boy. As the first child of Bilquis and Raza born after the death of their son, her birth was imagined as a “rebirth” that could give them back the male child that they had lost. Raza even argues with the midwife with

“words...inexorable as tanks” insisting that the child is male, even demanding “to see the hospital supervisor” because “Genitalia! Can! Be! Obscured!” (88). He yanks the baby out of its wrap, insisting that there is a “bump” that might indicate a male child; when the child’s gender is confirmed she begins “...it’s true—to blush” (89). Rushdie’s collection of “daughters-who-should-have-been-sons” (107) locates shame in the form of the female body, implying that shame begins at the moment at which a disappointed father sees female genitalia. Raza’s rough handling of Sufiya’s newborn body and his horror at her female form further emphasize the ways in which the patriarchal culture of shame begins within the family structure at the moment a female child is born. Though Sufiya’s shame will later come to be associated with her perceived disabilities, the novel suggests that it is also located in this moment of familial disappointment.

Blushing becomes the textual marker for Sufiya’s shame and a sign of the female body rebelling against itself. At ten, “her parents were still perplexed by these reddenings” and think they occur too often (124). Rushdie links blushing to violence, imagining that her blushes are “like petrol fire” and that “her clothes smell of burning” and ultimately suggesting that her violent behavior is located in the overwhelming force of this burning (126). This construction of blushing imagines it as both painful and destructive to the woman, and shame eventually has a physical effect on Sufiya’s body: “something frightful had begun to happen to the girl’s tiny body. It had started to come out in huge, blotchy rashes, red and purple with small hard pimples in the middle; boils were forming between her toes and back was bubbling up with extraordinary vermilion lumps” (145). Rushdie imagines shame as a material change in Sufiya’s body, locating it in “pus bursting from her sores” and the rashes that cover her body (145). These physical changes also come to

represent the fight between “Sufiya Zinobia Shakil” and the “Beast” that is inside her, and Sufiya suffers two extreme illnesses that Rushdie states “were attempts by her ordinary self, by the Sufiya-Zinobia-ness of her, to defeat the beast, even at the cost of her own life” (208). This construction of Sufiya’s violence identifies the Beast as something that comes from the outside, reworking the stereotype of the succubus by suggesting that it is society’s shame, not Sufiya’s own nature as a female, that creates this “blood-creature within” (208).

Rushdie describes Sufiya fighting the Beast, “[tossing] in her bed...pouring out from inside the fearsome alien shapes” (226), and this language aligns her violent shame with her sister’s pregnancies, an internal change forced upon her from the outside. Though several of her violent acts take place before her marriage to Omar is arranged, their domestic arrangement increases the intensity of her shame. Rushdie locates her growing blushes in her awareness of the strange domestic situation in which she is entrapped:

Then the bad shapes again, because if she has a husband, and a husband is for babies, but babies-aren’t for you, then something must be wrong. This gives her a feeling. Just like a blush, all over, hot hot. But although her skin tingles and her cheeks burn it is only happening on the inside; nobody notices these new internal blushes...Sometimes she thinks, ‘I am changing into something,’ but when those words come into her head she doesn’t know what they mean. How do you change into something? The bad, wrong words and the feeling sharper and more painful. Go away go away go away. Go away (227).

By locating Sufiya’s “new internal blushes” in her domestic relationship with Omar, Rushdie imagines the horror lurking beneath the surface of domestic relationships. The word “husband” haunts and confuses Sufiya, and she finds both having and not having sex with her husband equally troubling: “The horrible thing and the horrible not-doing-the-thing” (227).

Though Rushdie includes passages describing Sufiya committing senseless acts of violence against both animals and humans, the incidents he describes in detail begin to take on the forms of domestic relationships. The first act of violence Sufiya commits is the murder



of the “two hundred and eighteen turkeys of Pinkie’s loneliness” (143). The turkeys are left to “rot in the heat” after she “had torn off their heads and then reached down into their bodies to draw their guts up through their necks with her tiny and weaponless hands” (144). This incident serves to illustrate how Sufiya’s shame became violence, and Rushdie explains that she had been “..burdened with being a miracle-gone-wrong, a family’s shame made flesh” and “...had discovered in the labyrinths of her unconscious self the hidden path that links *sharam* to violence” (144). Rushdie contrasts her “tiny and weaponless hands” with the violence she creates, again locating the form of her terror not in her own body but instead in *sharam*, and the “hidden path” through which shame and violence coalesce.

Sufiya’s violence continues and becomes more purposeful as the novel progresses. She attacks Talvar Ulhaq at the moment of his marriage to her sister, an act of violence that seems meaningful in the context of his later abusive relationship with Good News. Rushdie describes the attack:

...the demon had already hurled Sufiya Zinobia across the party, and before anyone moved she had grabbed Captain Talvar Ulhaq by the head and begun to twist, to twist so hard that he screamed at the top of his voice, because his neck was on the point of snapping like a star...The combined efforts of the five desperate people succeeded in detaching Sufiya Zinobia’s hands before Talvar Ulhaq’s head was ripped off like a turkey’s; but then she buried her teeth in his neck, giving him a second scar to balance that famous love-bite, and sending his blood spurting long distances across the gathering, so that all her family and many of the camouflaged guests began to resemble workers in a halal slaughterhouse (178).

Sufiya disrupts the wedding, a ceremony designed to celebrate the marital relationship of Talvar and Good News, and the emergence of the “demon” at their nuptials reveals the shame and violence at the heart of the patriarchal family structure. While Sufiya’s act of rage appears nonsensical to bystanders—including her sister who remarks that her parents “should have had her drowned at birth” (179)—Rushdie later subtly blames Talvar for Good

News's eventual suicide, and Sufiya's enraged act of violence can thus be seen as a reaction against the husband's control of his wife's reproductive power. He thus casts Sufiya not as a senseless monster, but instead as a being with far more insight into the marriage of Good News and Talvar than the other guests at the wedding. In addition to invoking the tropes of marriage during the moments of Sufiya's greatest acts of violence, the reference to her "teeth in his neck" creating a second "love bite" also aligns sexuality with the "blood spurting long distances across the gathering" (178). Rushdie earlier invoked the image of a halal slaughterhouse in his description of the honor-killing that inspired the book, and he deploys this imagery again to reimagine the marriage ceremony as slaughterhouse.

Rushdie describes Sufiya's next act of violence by first detailing the mysterious corpses found "in a rubbish dump near a slum" (228). He describes four "...adolescent, male, pungent" bodies whose "...heads had been wrenched off their necks by some colossal force: literally torn from their shoulders. Traces of semen were detected on their tattered pants" (228). These murders again invoke the tropes of domesticity; Sufiya, "shame's avatar," rises from bed and dons a burqa, finding and sleeping with four men before beheading them with the force of her arms. Interestingly, Rushdie refers to the murdered men as "Four husbands [who] come and go," again envisioning the violence through the frame of marriage. Rushdie tinges Sufiya's act of violence with sexuality, aligning her murders with stereotypical fears of a succubus or black widow, a woman who kills her mate after she is sexually gratified and finds pleasure in violence. But he also invokes the domestic, having Sufiya disrupt a wedding as "shame's avatar" and calling the four men who sleep with her in an alley her "husbands." This familial framework for her violence presents possibilities for subversion in her horrific acts. Like Rani's shawls, Sufiya's violence makes

visible what the culture does now want to acknowledge: that violence is already at the heart of domestic relationships. Rushdie, for example, emphasizes that Talvar will not be brought to court on “formal” charges following his wife’s suicide, revealing the ways in which women’s suffering is unacknowledged by the larger culture. Sufiya, however, materializes this suffering, transformed into the symbol of shame, cloaked beneath the burquas that Rushdie writes are easy to find in a “sad house” (231).

Sufiya’s final act of violence reimagines the wedding night meeting of a new husband and wife. Omar waits for her at his mothers’ house, the fortress-like castle that begins the novel, and Rushdie describes him as a “bridegroom on his wedding night” awaiting his bride (304). Like Omar’s mothers, Sufiya is presented using animal imagery, described as crouching “...on all fours, naked, coated in mud and blood and shit, with twigs sticking to her back and beetles in her hair” (304). He even refers to her arms as “forepaws” and describes rising “up on her hind legs” to attack her husband. His headless body quickly falls away from her, and Rushdie then imagines the body of Sufiya Zinobia exploding: “...the power of the Beast of shame cannot be held for long within any one frame of flesh and blood, because it grows, it feeds and swells, until the vessel bursts” (305). The novel ends, like *Midnight’s Children*, with an explosion leaving only a cloud-like form of Omar’s body: “the silent cloud, in the shape of a giant, grey and headless man, a figure of dreams, a phantom with one arm lifted in a gesture of farewell” (305). Rushdie foreshadows this explosion earlier in the text, writing, “*If you hold down one thing you hold down the adjoining*. In the end, though, it all blows up in your face” (181). This image of an exploding fortress, a “Mother Country” in flames after shame literally transforms a woman’s body into a bomb,

functions both as a moment of violence and historical erasure that makes visible the destructive forces of repression.

History is threatened in both *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, and Rushdie ultimately locates the possibility for artistic subversion in narratives that turn inwards to uncover personal histories. These intimate narratives make interventions into the discourse of the nation at a time characterized by loss and historical erasure following Partition, the Emergency, and the political upheavals of 1970s Pakistan. In *Midnight's Children*, Saleem turns to canning and preserving as an artistic model capable of holding the truth of memory while leaving in imperfections and factual errors, reworking artistic techniques he learns from reconnecting with his ayah Mary. These jars, inextricably linked to women's bodies and reproductive power, allow Saleem to create a narrative that is at once personal and political; the domestic and the national thus continually intertwine in his story, uncovering lost stories of the intrusion of the national onto private lives and bodies. In *Shame*, Rushdie imagines greater possibilities for feminist subversion, linking political tyranny to gendered repressions and empowering female characters to make these repressions visible. Though Rushdie writes of artists who create controversial tapestries or chutneys seeping with memories, what he ultimately discovers through these narratives is the power of the novel itself. Written at a time when politicians distort the truth, recreating facts to best serve their political purposes, Rushdie locates historical intervention in the novel's ability to vacillate between personal history and political narrative. Drawing on the gendered language of national identity, Rushdie writes two novels tied to maternal bodies and reproductive power, utilizing images of maternal creativity to make order out of his own fragmented vision of a postcolonial and partitioned nation—and a postcolonial and partitioned self.

### Chapter Three

#### **“Broken Inflection of Mother”: Haunted Spaces, Haunted Selves in Seamus Deane’s *Reading in the Dark* and Deirdre Madden’s *One by One in the Darkness***

I don't suppose that there was any point at which I ever felt that there was a visible gap between what people call politics and my private life. The two things were always integrated. I learned that a political system, especially when it's a rancid one, as in Northern Ireland, has an effect on personal relationships -- in fact, it spreads right through the whole society. Especially when the political system is based on various forms of coercion and colonization. (Seamus Deane “Secrets and Lies”)

Child, she'd tell me, I think sometimes you're possessed. Can't you just let the past be the past? But it wasn't the past and she knew it (*Reading in the Dark* 42)

In a 1997 interview with *Salon*, Seamus Deane describes what he terms the “rancid” political system in Northern Ireland as a force that intrudes on and shapes his private life, articulating a confusion between politics and personal life that fills much of partition literature. In Deane’s novel this confusion, and what Homi Bhabha terms the “disorienting,” “unhomely,” effect of the public intrusion on the private, arise through the imagery of haunting, traumas becoming phantasmal intrusions on the concrete world of domestic space. In *Reading in the Dark*, Deane presents the link between history and haunting early in the text with a quote from the narrator’s mother, who admonishes her son for his attempt to understand their family’s traumatic past. She tells him that he must be “possessed,” defining his obsession through the language of haunting and asserting that the boy could cure himself if only he would let the “past be the past.” Deane’s narrator describes the nature of trauma in both *Reading in the Dark* and Deirdre Madden’s *One by One in the Darkness* when he asserts that “it wasn’t the past and she knew it,” demonstrating the narrator’s understanding of the ways in which trauma remains a quiet yet lingering presence in spaces and lives long after the time of the initial, haunting event (42).

Though published before the two novels in this chapter were written, Eve Patten's 1995 article, "Fiction in conflict: Northern Ireland's prodigal novelists," announces the beginning of a new era in Irish fiction in her 1995 article, one characterized by novelists examining the Troubles from and through the position of childhood. She writes that

fiction from Northern Ireland has begun to change dramatically. This is a manifestation, firstly, of the emergence of a new generation of writers who have come of age since the beginning of the Troubles and whose reconstructions of childhood experience effectively undercut the moral baggage and creative paralysis of their predecessors (129).

Deane and Madden, whose novels were released in 1996 shortly after Patten wrote the above words, align with Patten's descriptions of novelists who are able to find meaning in "reconstructions of childhood experience," examining questions of sectarian boundaries, communal violence, and individual identity using the simultaneously limiting and freeing frame of childhood. Though the novels' explorations of trauma function quite differently—the tropes of haunting in Madden's text explore a psychological rather than phantasmal state—both texts reveal the ways in which the trauma arising out of Partition and the Troubles invaded and transformed domestic space. Joe Cleary writes in *Literature, Partition, and the Nation State* that "...violence does not end with the act of partition: violence is not incidental but constitutive of the new state arrangements thus produced," and Madden and Deane's texts explore the intrusion of this violence into the familiar spaces that surround the children in their novels (11).

In both *One by One in the Darkness* and *Reading in the Dark*, the authors' use of the frame of childhood also facilitates an examination of the link between mothering and haunting. Most tales of haunting envision the phantasmal as a threat to the material space of the home, and the images of subtle intrusion often associated with haunting give the authors a

framework for depicting the quiet yet pervasive process of domestic transformation that occurs in the post-partition nation. The tropes of haunting are thus useful to exploring the disorientation between public and private in the time following the reconfiguration of national space, but they also allow authors to explore trauma in relation to the family. In *Reading in the Dark*, a shadow on the stairs is alternatively a disappeared uncle, a traumatized mother, and the narrator himself—ghosts who belong to the realm of the fantastic coalesce with individuals haunted by political traumas visited on their private homes. The figure of the ghostly or haunted mother, an image that arises in both novels, becomes a touchstone for the ways in which political traumas invade both domestic space and individual identity. The violence that surrounds the children in both texts is often mediated through their mothers, and their understanding of trauma is shaped by the mother/child relationship.

The ghostly mother thus marks a private trauma, but these haunted women are also linked to unspoken histories, haunting becoming a way in which untold narratives of violence emerge. In Linden Peach's recent book on the contemporary Irish novel he includes a chapter titled "Secret Hauntings" in which he reads *Reading in the Dark* alongside Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a reading that is particularly insightful in conjunction with Bhabha's use of *Beloved* in *The Location of Culture*. Though Peach connects both texts through their indebtedness to modernist authors like William Faulkner and the textual fascination with "family secrets," I find that *Location of Culture* provides a more useful framework for reading Madden and Deane alongside *Beloved*. Bhabha writes that Morrison's novel describes "...historical world, forcibly entering the house of art and fiction in order to invade, alarm, divide, and dispossess" (18). Similarly, both Deane and Madden reveal untold—or poorly told—

histories as forces that encroach on the daily lives of their characters. In her work on haunting in American fiction, Kathleen Brogran differentiates between the ghosts of gothic literature, who “function as a plot device—providing crucial information, setting in motion the machinery of revenge or atonement...as a source of the pleasurable thrill we derive from the uncanny,” and the ghosts of recent American literature who “...signal an attempt to recover and make social use of a poorly documented, partially erased cultural history” (2). Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* is thus “a historical novel in the form of a ghost story” combating what Brogran terms a national “amnesia” about slavery (63).

The trope of the haunted individual further imbeds the “partially erased” traumatic history in the space of the home. Though Deane is hesitant to link the mother in *Reading in the Dark* directly to the nation, and does not align the mother in this text with any understanding of “Mother Ireland,”<sup>16</sup> he does assert that her pain ties her directly to Irish history:

In this novel where the personal and political are so closely intertwined, the mother’s grief is, in some ways, aligned to Irish history in that it is something that is real, that is actual, and yet that cannot be articulated, cannot be fully represented, even to herself, never mind *by* herself to others....The mother is, in her grief, taking the shock, the trauma of a history into herself, but can find no escape from it (2).

Deane’s description of the mother’s pain further suggests the usefulness of haunting as a way to understand her trauma. The mother cannot explain her secret “even to herself”—her knowledge is so buried that it becomes like a family curse, seeping into their home, invisible but forceful, and radically changing the shape of the family. The unspeakable forces of grief and trauma manifest themselves through the phantasmal, and the ghostly becomes a way to

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<sup>16</sup> When asked in a 1997 interview with Carol Rumens whether the mother in this novel “[represents] Mother Ireland, Deane replied “I never thought of her as so. She’s more intelligent than the father, more sensitive than he” (30).



articulate the psychological transformations in an individual whose life has been intruded on by violence. Deane's use of the phrase "the trauma of a history" is particularly telling. While trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth focus on an individual's traumatic experience as a wound that "...imposes itself, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (*Unclaimed Experience* 4), in both Deane and Madden's texts both the family and the larger culture become traumatized by violent, untold events, extending Caruth's vision of the traumatic to include those who did not directly experience the violent event. Thus history becomes a kind of nightmare, imposing itself in the material haunting of the home or a haunted psychology in which the possibility of sudden, unexpected violence is always present.

Jaques Derrida also links history and trauma in his work on haunting in *Specters of Marx*. He states: "Haunting is historical, to be sure...but it is not dated, it is never docile given a date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of the calendar" (3). Haunting thus suggests a new kind of historical meaning, marking an intervention not only in the types of stories that are voiced but also challenging the nature of historical time itself. Similarly, Peter Buse and Andrew Stott suggest the importance of return to our understanding of the ghostly (8). They write, "Ghosts are a problem for historicism precisely because they disrupt our sense of a linear teleology in which the consecutive movement of history passes untroubled through generations" (14). Ghosts are thus reminders of the continued presence of hidden histories, their ability to linger and reappear suggesting the need for alternative modes of historical understanding aligning with the child narrator's statement in *Reading in the Dark*: "it wasn't the past and she knew it" (42).

The hauntings in Deane and Madden's fiction thus voice intimate stories of trauma that cannot be fully articulated in the material world; in *Reading in the Dark* these private understandings of violence contrast with history taught in schools, and in *One by One in the Darkness* Madden's domestic focus makes an intervention into inadequate media coverage of Northern Irish violence. What intervention do Deane and Madden attempt to make? Both texts, centered on private homes and told, at least in part, through the perspective of childhood, work to subvert the mentality that Partition was an avoidance of war, instead positing that the continued violence, lasting in one text to 1994, was itself a new, intimate type of war. In both Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark* and Deirdre Madden's *One by One in the Darkness*, homes and individuals are haunted by the psychology of Partition and its continued violence. The tropes of haunting—invaded spaces, cursed families, ghostly presences, and individuals tormented into madness—align with the invasions of the public onto private lives in the postcolonial state.

Seamus Deane describes the revelation of traumatic family secrets as creating a “double effect” characterized by the realization that one's family history has “all been different” than perceived. He further develops the imagery of this recognition through the language of haunting:

...The first effect is to make everything phantasmal. Everything you thought was secure and actual has now become almost ghostly and haunting, and yet at the same time, the very moment it becomes that, it becomes super-real: it is *the* reality that puts the quotidian, one that you thought was secure, out of court. Violence has that effect. There's nothing more actual than violence, but the witnessing and the experience of violence actually make the ordinary world seem almost unreal... suddenly the actual and the phantasmal are seen not as opposites but as comrades (30).

Thus in both *Reading in the Dark* and *One by One in the Darkness*, quotidian objects like the “lids of the saucepans [trembling] on the range” can symbolize the presence of grief,

transformed into haunted objects representative of loss and unspoken mourning. These saucepans and the “bubbling water,” details Deane includes after the Grandfather’s death in *Reading in the Dark*, represent the transformation of the everyday into something “ghostly and haunting.” In *One by One in the Darkness*, the trauma of a sudden act of violence is represented in a remodeled kitchen, altered not to update the appliances and tile, but instead to literally cover over a murder that occurred in the center of this family home. Though Madden does not integrate elements of the supernatural into her novel, the haunting presence of political violence within the home and neighborhood nevertheless aligns with Deane’s description of making “the ordinary world seem almost unreal.”

**Seamus Deane’s *Reading in the Dark***

*“Here’s a conundrum. There’s a place where a man died but lived on as a ghost, and where another man lived as a ghost but died as a man, and where another man would have died as a man but ran away to live as a ghost. Where would that place be?” (231)*

The first sentence of Seamus Deane’s *Reading in the Dark* reads, “On the stairs, there was a clear, plain silence,” opening the text with a quiet awareness of the unspeakable while situating readers on the silent staircase that will become a touchstone for the narrator’s memories of childhood and his haunted mother. The section, titled “Stairs” and headed “February 1945” is only two pages long, aligning with the other brief chapters in the text that describe seemingly isolated childhood memories, sometimes jumping as much as ten years between sections. Deane, a literary critic and poet long before becoming a novelist, arranges these short, sparse vignettes into chapters, explaining that the idea for the novel originally came from a series of memories that, when juxtaposed, gained a greater meaning:

The novel was a long time in the making. It began as a series of flash memories... I realized that the memories actually had a lot of raw material but, like in a movie, by positioning one piece beside another, each actually became more powerful because of its neighborhood with the other. In fact, the novel, since it was told from the point of

view of a young boy, couldn't proceed by large, sustained blocks; the flash image was part of the key to the structure (*English Media Magazine* 1)

This description of the author's writing process mirrors Salman Rushdie's inspiration for *Midnight's Children*. Rushdie writes in *Imaginary Homelands* that his novel was "...of memory and about memory," created from "broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost" (11). Thus Deane's building-block memories, beginning when the narrator is only five years old, facilitate his attempt to mimic the narrator's process of coming to understand his family's history. Deane has also acknowledged that these memories come largely from his own childhood, and when asked in a 1997 interview "how much" of his family story was in the novel, Deane replied: "A good deal. I have been insistent in saying that it's fiction, it's not a memoir, but there is a good deal of autobiographical material in it. It is a conflation of two or three family histories, with my own family the most prominent among them" ("Secrets and Lies" par 4). This type of intimate history, tied to both the personal life of the author and the public life of the nation, was quite common during the 1990s. Gerry Smyth writes in *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination* that *Reading in the Dark* is "one of a number of high-profile autobiographical or semi-autobiographical Irish texts to appear" during that decade (133). Smyth goes on to say that these highly personal books demonstrate a "...desire to relate a range of previously unspoken (or only whispered) stories from the margins, or more accurately interstices, of official island culture," articulating the ways in which this specific set of texts worked to insert the stories of intimate lives back into the "official" narratives of nationhood (134).

The young narrator's attempt to order and recount the unspeakable history of his family—and his tension with family members who do not want the history told—mirror Deane's own struggles to publish such a highly personal novel. When asked what he is

working on in a 1993 interview, he seems embarrassed by the long process of writing and revising this intimate story, stating, “I’ve also written a novel about the North and finished it several times, then refused to publish it, called *Reading in the Dark*. You may have seen it advertised. It was supposed to come out about six times... (“An Interview” 50). After the novel was published, Deane clarified that he could not publish the book while certain members of his family were alive<sup>17</sup>: “... not only my parents. I could have written it, but I couldn’t have *published* it before their death” (English and Media Magazine 2). Thus, though clearly a novel about nationhood—the text was described as “*the* novel of partition”<sup>18</sup> by Mary Burgess—the story is also about family, and the ways in which intimate, everyday lives can be transformed by political systems. Eamonn Hughes writes in a review titled “Belfastards and Derriers,” that the text is “...fittingly for a Derry novel, a stiflingly enclosed world and the action never strays beyond the confines of the family; indeed, the places of the novel are held together not by a streetplan of the city nor by the topography of the north-west but by the web of family relations” (153).

Deane’s narrator lives close to the decades-old border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, and he even describes his habit of border-play, stating, “We liked to cross and re-cross it, half-expecting that something punitive would happen because of these repeated violations” (48). But, as Eamonn Hughes suggests in his description of the familial

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<sup>17</sup> Deane is also quoted in Fraser describing the impact that the publication of the novel would have on his extended family: “I was always thinking that my brother and sister would be annoyed if it was published before my mother was dead,” he explains. “I think that was why I found it so hard to finish the book. Of course, some of it did happen, and some of it didn’t. I could only write when I used the real names of my sisters - if I gave them different names the narrative ceased to be true. Still, family histories like this, if not exactly common, are at least widespread in our part of the world. I knew three families in Derry with that sort of history.” (Fraser T9)

<sup>18</sup> Burges writes: “Cleary’s analysis overall might have been stronger had he edited the lengthy treatments of his three Irish texts and included analyses of Seamus Deane’s *Reading in the Dark* (perhaps *the* novel of partition), Eoin MacNamee’s *ResurrectionMan*, and Robert MacLiam Wilson’s *Eureka Street*” (876).

topography of the novel, though the boys imagine their interactions with the border as potentially dangerous, the space in which they play is clearly not a militarized zone. The private house is the actual location of potential threats, and family life is full of haunting reminders of prior traumatic intersections of the political and the private. So though the novel is so purposefully bound by the private spaces of the home, the meaning of the text is deeply rooted in Partition. Gerry Smyth writes that "...large parts of the action, and of the narrator's understanding of events, are based on the existence of that expeditious map line that came into being during the revolutionary period and the emplacement of Derry as a Northern Irish city" (140). But the boys' border play indicates that the violence surrounding the "expeditious map line" did not take place on some borderland battlefield, instead intruding into their neighborhood and private homes.

Much like Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, Deane's use of a child narrator situates the story in the home, allowing Deane to reveal the transformed nature of these private spaces in the 1940s and 50s—times that are bookended by the 1922 partition of Ireland and the second period of "The Troubles" beginning in 1968. Like Lenny, Sidhwa's central character in *Cracking India*, Deane's nameless narrator speaks as an adult, and the novel never slips into a stream-of-consciousness meant to mimic the thought processes of a very young child. Yet though the vignettes are clearly told in retrospect as isolated memories, the narrator does not endow these recollections with his adult understanding, instead emphasizing a childlike sense of ambiguity. One of the clearest examples of this type of narration takes place in a chapter titled "Disappearances." Though the title foreshadows the central trauma of the text in which the narrator's uncle has disappeared and is presumed dead, the chapter begins with a folk tale about fairies, explaining that "People with green

eyes were close to fairies, we were told; they were just here for a little while, looking for a human child they could take away” (5). Deane then introduces the narrator’s siblings and describes, in two short paragraphs, a trip to Duffy’s Circus where the children saw a magician named Bamboozelem whose main magic trick is his sudden disappearance at the end of his act (6). When Baboozelem finally disappears, leaving behind smoke and a “moustache...smiling the wrong way” the narrator recounts his own confusion from the perspective of childhood:

Everyone laughed and clapped. Then the moustache disappeared too. Everyone laughed harder. I stole a side-long glance at Eilis and Liam. They were laughing. But were they at all sure of what had happened? Was Mr. Bamboozelem all right?...Everyone was laughing and clapping but I felt uneasy. How could they all be so sure? (6).

Though Deane uses the language of adulthood—not many five-year-olds would describe themselves as “uneasy”—he nevertheless portrays the childhood confusion through the frame of a very young mind. The narrator’s uneasiness at this early, playful disappearance also foreshadows his persistent desire to unravel the mysteries of his family history while his siblings remain unaware of their parents’ hidden secrets.

Framing the story through a child’s perspective is central to Deane’s exploration of the question of knowledge, but the child narrator also situates the act of history-making firmly in the private home. A sharp contrast to the narrator’s teacher who insists that history “...is about trends, not people,” Deane’s intimate histories suggest that stories hidden in the domestic patterns of his characters’ lives might reconfigure historical meaning. “Stairs” opens the novel by orienting the reader in its short two pages to the transformed spaces and haunted mother that fill the vignettes that follow. The text opens with a description of the “clear, plain silence” on the stairs, then describes the details of the space:

It was a short staircase, fourteen steps in all, covered in lino from which the original pattern had been polished away to the point where it had the look of a faint memory. Eleven steps took you to the turn of the stairs where the cathedral and sky always hung in the window frame. Three more steps took you on to the landing, about six feet long (3).

This description depicts the intimacy between a child and his house—a five-year-old’s first attempts to know the world by counting the number of stairs up to his room--and also introduces the connection between the materiality of domestic space—“lino from which the original pattern had been polished away”—and the power of memory. Our sense of the space is immediately transformed by the intrusion of the narrator’s mother, who commands him not to move, telling him that a “shadow” is between them (3). This “unhomely” moment is disorienting for both narrator and reader, in part because it disrupts the narrator’s sense that a space so familiar to him could hold such hidden meanings. Deane then recounts a negotiation between mother and son, her urging him to go back downstairs, his desire to feel and see the ghost that haunts their home. The tone of this early moment is playful, and though the home is envisioned as potentially threatened, the narrator describes his mother as someone he still loved. He finds her, “...small and anxious, but without real fear” in contrast to the haunted, haunting woman she will later become (4). In this passage, the mother has access to the ghostly and becomes the force through which unspoken family traumas are felt in the home.

The narrator’s response to this close encounter with the supernatural is excitement: “We were haunted! We had a ghost, even in the middle of the afternoon. I heard her moving upstairs. The house was all cobweb tremors” (4). But though the young boy is joyful about the possibility of a ghost, on his return to the kitchen Deane describes an encounter with a younger, healthy mother that nevertheless reveals the sadness that haunts the family. Using the space of the kitchen, the center of the home and the location in which the narrator most



frequently interacts with his family, Deane describes the mother entering "...looking white," foreshadowing her later role as the ghost at the center of the house. When prompted by the young child to explain her statements on the stairs, she dismisses her own reaction as a mere trifle, explaining that there was nothing on the stairs, "...nothing at all. It's just your old mother with her nerves. All imagination. There's nothing there" (4). Her attempt to explain away this early encounter with "haunting" is subverted by the narrator's description of his mother at the end of the vignette. She is "...crying quietly at the fireside," and he sits with her, staring "...into the redness locked behind the bars of the range" (4). This brief scene introduces the idea of hidden family sorrows that will fill the narrative but also sets up domestic space as a place in which that sadness is felt and understood. The kitchen, often perceived a space of comfort and family togetherness, is transformed in this novel by the traumatic invasion of family secrets. Deane introduces the presence of burning as he describes mother and son sitting fireside, an image that later comes to represent both the violence outside their home and his mother's increasing mental illness.

The haunting presences in the home disorient the narrator, introducing traces of violence into the space that should be the most comfortable, but Deane also explores his disorientation through the limited perspective of childhood knowledge. In the fourth vignette "Feet," the narrator is under the kitchen table, "the plastic tablecloth" hanging "...so far down that [he] could only see [the adults'] feet" (12).<sup>19</sup> Though his perspective is limited both by the tablecloth and the whimpering of a nearby dog, the eight-year-old narrator nevertheless attempts to piece together bits of conversation to create a coherent narrative. At this point in the novel, the narrator's sister Una is dying, and his space beneath the table

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<sup>19</sup> The scene also mirrors a scene in *Cracking India* in which Lenny observes her parents discussing the political events in Lahore while hiding beneath the kitchen table.

provides him with both protection from the pain of her illness and a vantage point from which to watch the adult interactions and gain information about the events. This scene also emphasizes the narrator's attempts to understand his mother and father's relationship; it is their feet that he "watched the most," first describing his mother's shoes "...that needed mending" and his father's "work-boots...huge, with the laces thronged round the back" (14). He reads the emotions of his parents through the movements of these shoes: "She was still crying. Their feet shifted, and I thought she was going to fall, for one shoe came off the ground for a second. Then they steadied and just stood there. Everything was silent, and I scarcely breathed" (15). This passage describes the way in which the young narrator's understanding of family traumas is mediated through his limited understanding of his parents' relationship. This description of what the narrator terms his "first death" also introduces his attempts to understand trauma through the space of the home. After Una's burial, the narrator returns to her room, burying his face "...in the pillow where her pain had been, wanting to cry and not crying, saying her name inside my head but not out loud, inhaling for something of her but only finding the scent of cotton, soap, of a life rinsed out and gone" (16). This desire to cry and speak her name paired with his greater need to remain silent prefigures patterns of silence that surround trauma throughout *Reading in the Dark*. His attempt to locate a memory of his sister in the home by burrowing into pillow where she suffered, suggests that domestic objects can serve as markers of trauma. Here, the absence of any trace of Una actually becomes the haunting presence, the smell of soap not a positive thing but a reminder of a "a life rinsed out and gone."

Throughout the text the narrator reveals folk stories he has been told at various times during his childhood, and these stories align with the more realistic fears that haunt his life,

envisioning haunting as a threat to the home that can extend to individual identities as well.

Deane explains that these “scary” stories “...are very subtly coded ways of dealing with trauma and difficulty,” further stating that the narrator, who searches for “facts” and a coherent historical narrative in which to locate the truth,

...fails to understand the oral, folkloric modes of language which the older generation use to encode their colonial trauma—the local legends of the disappeared, the supernatural tales of hauntings, metamorphosis and deception, of mysterious sex-change and identity-change, of entombment and entrapment, and all of the other tropes of dispossession contained in the stories told by the boy’s father, aunt Katie and crazy Joe (Rumens 30).

Though the narrator does not recognize the significance of these stories and their connection to his own family trauma, the haunted tales themselves are crucial to Deane’s development of the text. In his book *Fiction and the Northern Ireland Troubles since 1969*, Elmer Kennedy-Andrews describes the spaces of the text as a “‘concrete’ world...infused with ghostly sounds and presences,” mixing reality “...with the poisonous irruptions of the past” (215). Kennedy-Andrews’s description of Deane’s textual world captures the ways in which trauma is depicted in the text—through both the materiality of the domestic objects that surround the narrator and the “ghostly” infusions that haunt those objects. Kennedy-Andrews later describes the border region setting of the novel as “...a kind of liminal space where the real world and fairy-land, fact and fable, fiction and autobiography, public and private, meet” (215). Thus the doubleness of domestic space—its ability to be at once concrete and ghostly—mirrors other challenged binaries in *Reading in the Dark*.

The narrator’s descriptions of his home and family are thus interspersed with brief tales of hauntings that, though situated in the distant past, are clearly linked to the traumas of the present. After recalling his first memories of Uncle Eddie’s story, the narrator recounts a brief tale of an exorcism, suggesting that the two stories—both of which involve a

mysterious disappearance—align. In the exorcism story, a woman who has “taken up” with another man while her husband was at sea is threatened by her returned spouse. He takes up residence near their former home and spends his days watching the house in which his wife and her lover reside. All three—wife, husband, and lover—soon die, and the house where the infidelity took place is transformed: “The windows of the house could not be opened and the staircase had a hot, rank smell that would lift the food from your stomach” (8). The priest attempts to exorcise the home, and traps a spirit in the glass of a window sealed with “wax from a blessed candle” (9). He explains that if anyone “near death or in a state of mortal sin” came by the window, a child would appear begging for release, “But if the snib was broken open, the devil would enter the body of the person like a light, and that person would then be possessed and doomed forever. You could never be up to the devil” (9). Though the story is presented in a few short sentences, it introduces a threat to domestic space that is envisioned both as entrapment and as a rotting force that can enter and transform a private home. The space of the house, haunted by a woman’s sexual infidelity and death, is materially altered by the sorrow within it. Introducing the concept of a haunted individual, Deane also suggests in the retelling of this story that the trauma within a “haunted house” can threaten an individual’s identity. The person who opened and released “the devil” within the house—cast in this version as a begging child—would himself be “possessed and doomed forever,” taking on the qualities of a haunted self.

Several stories within the text are retold and revised as the narrator ages, adding and changing details to depict the multiple meanings encoded in the traumatic tale. The narrator’s first recollection of the exorcism story takes place in the section titled “Eddie” when the narrator is seven years old. Much later in the novel, when the narrator is thirteen,

the story is revised and retold by Liam, the narrator's brother, in a section titled "Haunted." Liam's purpose in telling the story is to explain the curse on the Grenaghan family, relatives of a girl whom the narrator is attempting to date. The central points of the story are similar, including children who are trapped in the house by a door that will not open and a lover and woman both found dead. Indicating the power of the supernatural to enter the material world, the woman dies "...in her bed, a look of terror on her face, not a mark on her body" (171). The most significant difference between these two stories is that, in the first tale, only the home and individual were under threat, while in the second tale, the trauma extends to future generations of the family. Deane writes that the curse threatened all homes and individuals within the two families whose relatives died:

Every house belonging to a Grenaghan or a Falkener was haunted. Some days, you couldn't go up the stairs to the bedrooms, or you couldn't get down the stairs from them. No one saw anything—there was just this force that blocked and stopped all movement, that made the house shudder, and left behind it a confused noise as of voices far off, wailing (173).

As Deane writes of these stories, the nature of the trauma is "subtly coded" within the language of the tale; they are ostensibly just stories of intimate trauma and sexual infidelity. Despite their seemingly private language, however, the descriptions of the types of trauma visited on homes and individuals align with language used throughout the text to describe intimate sorrows that are closely tied to national, political concerns. In this story, the "...voices far off, wailing" that haunt the spaces of the home mirror Deane's later description of the secret within the narrator's family house, a space that is described as a "labyrinth...with someone sobbing at the heart of it" (42).

As the text progresses, more and more "haunted" tales intertwine with the narrator's memories. Aunt Katie, modeled after Deane's own aunt by the same name, is the central

story-teller in the text, and her first story, similar in nature to *Turn of the Screw*, explores themes of entrapment and childhood knowledge within the setting of rural Ireland. In the story, a young woman named Brigid McLaughlin is hired as a nanny for two orphans who speak only “...an Irish so old that many other Irish speakers couldn’t follow it.” Her only requirement is to keep the children within the private space of the large home and its grounds. The children begin to “switch,” first hair colors, then voices, then genitalia so that the boy becomes a girl and the girl transforms into a boy. They continually deny their transformations, causing Brigid to imagine that she herself might be going insane. Finally, the children disappear, and when she takes a priest to the house, also the location of the children’s parents’ graves, they see a “greenish light wavering” over the children who disappear and are “never seen again.”

This transformation brings about a destruction of the home—“all the mirrors in the house had been shattered, all the clocks were stopped at the hour of ten”—but also results in Brigid becoming a haunted self, talking incessantly to “everyone who would listen,” transformed into a woman “completely strange in the head” (73). But, after a while, she becomes silent—another trope for the haunted self in this novel: “Until the day she died she never spoke again, would never leave her room, would never have a mirror near her” (73). Though the form of this story appears to be a simple retelling of a classic horror narrative, Aunt Katie’s emphasis on silence and speech, and on the madness of the former nanny, repeats several tropes that will be revisited throughout the novel when men and women labeled insane—including, ultimately, the narrator’s mother—are actually transformed by traumas that are at once political and personal.<sup>20</sup> Brigid’s desire to both speak and remain

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<sup>20</sup> Significantly, two characters who help the narrator piece together the story of his family trauma are both considered “strange in the head.” “Crazy Joe,” a man “..regularly consigned for periods to Gransha, the local

silent also aligns with Deane's depiction of the struggles within the narrator's family, the ambivalent need to voice a story of trauma twinned with the conflicting impulse to keep it quiet. These vacillating desires themselves cause characters within the text to go "strange in the head," and in Brigid's story this personal haunting also extends to her family. The possibilities of haunted homes, haunted selves, and haunted generations are emphasized by Katie's pronouncement of the last line of the story: "And the blight's on that family to this very day" (73)

Though the other stories—tales of boys transforming into girls or of roadside seductions by a disappearing woman—are frightening, a haunted tale told by his father ultimately reveals a narrative of disappearances similar to his own family trauma. A section titled "Field of the Disappeared" describes a trip made with his father when the narrator was ten years old to Buncrana, the location of a "family feud" that the narrator has only limited information about. On a walk in the country his father stops the boys, asking them if they see anything peculiar in the view of the sea. The father eventually tells the boy that the area is "...the Field of the Disappeared. The birds that came toward it would pass from view and then come back on either side; but if they flew across it, they disappeared" (53). The field was avoided by farmers, who believed that "...it was here that the souls of all those from the area who had disappeared...collected three or four times a year...to cry like birds and look down on the fields where they had been born" (54). But the pain of these "disappeared" people threatens the private homes near the field: "You weren't supposed to hear pain like

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asylum," provides the final pieces of the story late in the novel. (195) Larry, a man who never speaks, is originally thought to be silent because of a sexual encounter with a devil disguised as a woman. It is instead ultimately revealed that he is haunted by his role in Eddie's death: "You could stand in front of Larry and talk into his face for ten minutes and all you'd get would be a shifting of his eyes from your face down to his shoes and back up again. The man who had sex with the devil. The man who had killed my father's brother. All on the same night" (193).

that; just pray you would never suffer it. Or if you were in a house when the cries came, you were meant to close the doors and windows to shut them out, in case that pain entered your house and destroyed all in it” (54). This pain of the disappeared mirrors the pain that had entered and transformed the narrator’s own family—at this point in the novel Eddie is known only as “missing”—and this connection is emphasized by the narrator’s sense “...that there was something more to be told,” but his father will not complete the story.

The concept of a home transformed by pain and trauma, here threatening to enter “...your house and [destroy] all in it,” subverts the image of the home as a haven from public, political life. In a vignette titled “Reading in the Dark” the narrator is drawn to an image of home-as-haven that arises in a childhood writing contest, a vision of a safe home and a mother untouched by outside trauma that contrasts with the haunted imagery repeated throughout the novel. Deane first provides the context for the novel’s title, discussing the books of the narrator’s youth and his practice of imagining their stories in the darkness of his childhood bedroom, thinking about “...the various ways the plot might unravel, the novel opening into endless possibilities in the dark” (21). The vignette ends with the narrator’s description of the writing contest in which the model essay is simply “...an account of [the winner’s] mother setting the table for the evening meal and then waiting with him until his father came in from the fields” (21). The story, written by a “country boy,” surprises the narrator with its detailed descriptions of domestic space, including “...a blue-and-white jug full of milk and a covered dish of potatoes in their jackets and a red-rimmed butter dish with a slab of butter, the shape of a swan dipping its head imprinted on its surface” (21).

The teacher instructs the students that this simple piece was “...writing...telling the truth,” and the narrator, embarrassed by his own essay, is impressed by this depiction of



“ordinary life.” He remembers, “...that mother and son waiting in the Dutch interior of that essay, with the jug of milk and the butter on the table, while behind and above them were those wispy, shawly figures from the rebellion” (21). This brief memory is crucial to the development of the novel, a fact emphasized by Deane labeling the three pages with the title of the entire text. Here, the narrator describes his early inspiration, the “model” story that depicts an intimate moment between mother and son surrounded by the material markers of domesticity. Yet Deane’s depiction of home, mother, and son in *Reading in the Dark* is strikingly different from this childhood ideal. In a 1996 interview with the *Guardian*, Deane describes *Reading in the Dark* as an attempt to reveal the way in which the public intrudes on private lives. He states, “What we misleadingly call ordinary life is destroyed by politics in our part of the world, generation after generation. I had to show how that happens” (Fraser 9). Thus, Deane’s novel and the stories the narrator tells take this moment of childhood inspiration—the meaning found in the ordinary—but disrupt the concept of home as a place separate from the “wispy, shawly figures from the rebellion” (21). Deane, rather, shows the ways in which these ghostly political figures transform the space of the home, threatening the “blue-and-white jug” or the “red-rimmed butter dish” and ultimately haunting both mother and son.

The novel opens by describing a private home imbued with and haunted by a hidden sadness, and as the vignettes progress and the narrator ages this image of the home intertwines with stories of other houses transformed by the phantasmal. Chapter one, a section of the novel filled primarily with the young narrator’s limited perspectives of his home and family, closes with a vignette titled “Pistol” in which these threats to the home finally emerge as a clearly political rather than supernatural force. The narrator finds a “long,

chill pistol, blue-black and heavy” in a family wardrobe and takes it outside to show his friends, realizing too late that because of his “cousins in gaol for being in the IRA” the family was “marked” as a potential threat to the police. The concept of the “marked” family depicts the integration of personal lives and political concerns that Deane has described in several interviews, and the ensuing destruction of the family home indicates the very material way in which an invasion of private space could take place.

As the family is “huddled downstairs,” the policemen tear the house apart, and though their oft-repeated purpose is to find the gun, their commitment to the destruction of the material space extends beyond a quiet, polite search. Deane’s description emphasizes the utter violation of the private spaces within the home: “...the house was being splintered open. The linoleum was being ripped off, the floorboards crowbarred up, the wardrobe was lying face down in the middle of the floor and the slashed wallpaper was hanging down in ribbons” (29). The destruction of the home clearly moves beyond activities that might reveal the lost gun—“slashed wallpaper” and “ripped off” linoleum can thus be understood not as a necessary search but instead part of the continuing process of intimate violence intended to confirm and defend political power in this borderland city. When the policemen move to the kitchen, the center of family life, they continue the destruction of the intimate spaces of the home, opening “...a tin of Australian peaches and [pouring] scimitar slices and sugar-logged syrup all over the floor.” “Objects,” Deane writes, “...seemed to be floating, free of gravity, all over the room” (30). Though the destruction in this vignette is much more materially threatening than the hauntings encountered throughout the text, Deane’s description of the floating objects and slow-motion feeling to this attack align “Pistol” with other short sections describing desecrated houses.

The search quickly moves from a destruction of the home to a violent interrogation of the narrator, his brother, and his father. Deane's emphasis on the child narrator's perspective creates a haunting vision of the interrogation:

Where was the gun? I had had it, I had been seen with it, where was it? Policemen with huge faces bent down to ask me, quietly at first, then more and more loudly. They made my father sit at a table and then lean over it, with his arms outspread. Then they beat him on the neck and shoulders with rubber truncheons, short and gorged-red in colour (30).

Deane's focus on the "huge faces" of the policemen depicts the terrifying scene from the narrator's perspective. The home becomes a militarized space and the children are here cast in the role of subversive threats to the safety of the neighborhood and country. The violence against his father is particularly terrifying for the narrator, but when the policemen do not get the location of the gun out of him, they turn to his sons: "So they beat us too, Liam and me, across the table from him.... my head bounced so hard on the table with the blows that I bit hard on my tongue" (30).

Though both the destruction of the private home and the horrific violence visited on the bodies of both sons and father make visible the intrusion of the public onto the private lives of the characters in *Reading in the Dark*, the haunting effects of this interrogation linger long after the material threat had passed. This vision of postcolonial violence aligns with Bhabha's description of the "unhomely"—the haunting lingers and disorients, permanently transforming the space of the home:

For long after, I would come awake in the small hours of the morning, sweating, asking myself over and over, 'Where is the gun? Where is the gun?' I would rub the sleep and fear that lay like a cobweb across my face. If a light flickered from the street beyond, the image of the police car would reappear and my hair would feel starched and my hands sweaty. The police smell took the oxygen out of the air and left me sitting there, with my chest heaving (30).

Thus, the intrusion of violence into the family home—the violation of the intimate spaces of family life and the violence against him and his relatives—remains a haunting presence within the house through the ghostly repetition of the narrator’s fears. He appears entrapped by the “sleep and fear” that hang over him at night, and ordinary objects and sounds become sinister, indicating the continued presence of trauma in the house. The reality of this haunting manifests itself in his physical symptoms, not only does he perceive mundane events as terrifying, he also registers the fear through his physical reactions: a heaving chest and sweaty palms.

Though the political tension in a 1940s Derry home is clearly a focus in the novel, the larger threat to the family is the haunting “secrets” that surround Eddie’s death in the years immediately following Partition. Though not a direct experience of the narrator or his mother, this trauma comes to haunt the home in much the same way as the police visit. Deane gradually reveals parts of the secret history, but even at the close of the novel all of the parts are not clear, most hauntingly the human emotions that the narrator searches for. He does not merely want to know what happened, but also when each member of his family knew, and what his parents knew and felt when they entered into their marriage. This unspeakable history haunts the spaces of the novel from the first page of the text, and as the novel progresses it becomes clear that the initial “shadow” on the stairs is Eddie. When the novel opens, the narrator only knows that Eddie disappeared in April, 1922, the year after partition. Gerry Smyth writes of the significance of this year to the novel: “The events that lie at the heart of the story take place in 1922 when the ‘meaning’ of [Derry] in geo-political terms was being contested” (140). The narrator, at times as young as seven years old,

attempts to understand the meaning of Eddie's disappearance through overheard conversations and carefully worded questions.

The first utterance of the events surrounding Eddie's disappearance takes place in a vignette titled "Eddie," in which the narrator describes a gathering of his uncles and father:

They had stories of gamblers, drinkers, hard men, con men, champion bricklayers, boxing matches, footballers, policemen, hauntings, exorcisms, political killings. There were great events they returned to over and over, like the night of the big shoot-out at the distillery between the IRA and the police, when Uncle Eddie disappeared. That was in April, 1922. Eddie was my father's brother (9).

The narrator's depiction of this casual meeting emphasizes the importance of repeated narratives to this group of men and introduces the narrator's heroic image of his lost uncle. Though narrator and reader later discover that Eddie did not die in a "big shoot-out," when the narrator is young the loss of his uncle is materially represented in the burnt distillery whose ruins are reachable on foot. The men's stories and the boys' desire to visit the ruined space both confirm Eddie's continued haunting presence in their lives. Deane writes of the distillery, "No one knew when or if the building would be repaired or knocked down and replaced. It was a burnt space in the heart of the neighborhood" (35). In Gerry Smyth's work on space and *Reading in the Dark*, he writes that "...the narrator's house, the police barracks, and the distillery all carry intense emotional and political charges, and these charges are in turn realized in the architectural form of the different buildings" (139). Thus the material destruction of the distillery, and the narrator's need to revisit and reimagine it, portray the ways in which buildings can create and sustain historical meaning.

Yet Smyth's argument that *both* house and distillery "carry intense emotional and political charges," also suggests the power of trauma to "haunt" spaces in which it did not occur. The narrator's description of his family, and the way in which Eddie's loss haunts

them all, emphasizes the spatial elements of their connection while locating haunting in individual suffering rather than a particular location:

So broken was my father's family that it felt to me like a catastrophe you could live with only if you kept it quiet, let it die down of its own accord like a dangerous fire. Eddie gone.... A long, silent feud. A lost farmhouse, with rafters and books in it, near the field of the disappeared. Silence everywhere. My father knowing something about Eddie, not saying it, not talking but sometimes nearly talking, signaling. I felt we lived in an empty space with a long cry from him ramifying through it. At other times, it appeared to be as cunning and articulate as a labyrinth, closely designed, with someone sobbing at the heart of it (42).

In this vision, both those who know and those who seek to know are haunted by the traumatic cry of the individual, here represented as a "long cry" from someone who could be Eddie or the much more vague "someone sobbing at the heart" of the home. The brokenness of the family is something that can be tolerated if ignored, but as the narrator's description of his family progresses, the image of haunting subverts the possibility of escape. The silence, at first envisioned as a possible escape from the "dangerous fire" of family secrets, becomes instead a haunting presence itself, further emphasized by the persistent cries of pain that lie within the family's past. The final sentence, depicting the family home as a labyrinth, something that can be escaped if you solve it, reveals the motivation for the narrator's endless questioning. Here, the narrator seeks to travel to the "heart" of the sorrow, to reach the center of the labyrinth, to find some sort of escape from the family sadness by naming and locating the trauma. Cathy Caruth describes a similar juxtaposition of silence and shouting in her reading of the Tancred story from Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Tancred accidentally murders his lover while she is in disguise, and the act is repeated after he "slashes with his sword at a tall tree." The tree repeats the trauma both materially, by bleeding, and linguistically, by crying out in the voice of his lost lover (2). Caruth describes how the story "...represents traumatic experience not only as the enigma of a human agent's

repeated and unknowing acts but also as the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth that Tancred himself cannot fully know” (3). Deane’s description of the narrator’s family aligns with these tropes of trauma; the secret history of Eddie’s death is repeated through ghostly presences in the home, surrounded alternatively by silence and “sobbing,” both indicating the unknowability of history itself.

It is the narrator’s grandfather who finally reveals, on his deathbed, the nature of Eddie’s disappearance to both the narrator and his mother, a revelation that further frustrates the narrator in his attempts to locate the truths of the family trauma. During the grandfather’s illness, he begins to talk to the narrator, giving him bits and pieces of information that his own mother and father have withheld, knowledge he characterizes as history, telling the narrator that “There’s a lot of ancient history in this town they couldn’t teach and wouldn’t if they could” (122). This contrast between formal history and the intimate history of the family suggests the limits of historical meaning. Public forms of history that the narrator encounters in school “couldn’t” incorporate the family’s private trauma, both because the details of the haunting act are in many ways unknowable and because such private forms of knowledge are not valued in systems of public education.

Though the narrator learns parts of the story through his grandfather, it is his grandfather’s confession to the mother that ultimately pushes her into guilt and madness. Deane’s choice to open the text with mother and child on the stairs frames the novel with their relationship and introduces us to a sensitive woman who, as more of the family’s traumatized history is revealed, is transformed into a haunted self. The narrator describes his mother as a woman who “... had a touch of the other world about her. So people would say.

And she seemed pleased enough to hear it” (50). The mother is clearly in touch with the supernatural, but after her father reveals the full nature of Eddie’s death, she becomes consumed with the haunting effects of the tragedy. After one visit with her father, she comes downstairs to rejoin the family, but begins “...to shake and cry...she cried and cried, the whole top half of her body shuddering” (123). When the narrator attempts to comfort his mother, “She groaned, bent over as though her stomach ached,” and repeated Eddie’s name, adding “this will kill us all” (126). This begins the process of transformation in the novel, from a silent haunting where Eddie’s death was kept quiet, to a fuller realization of the nature of the trauma. This shift causes the haunting to transform from imagined “shadows” on the stairs to actual haunted selves. His mother instructs the narrator to ignore his grandfather’s words, and at the close of this vignette the narrator writes that this moment “...was the beginning of her long trouble. I stayed there. Grandfather upstairs, the house darkening, Aunt Katie not yet returned, my heart haunted by tremors” (124).

Significantly, the narrator imagines these “troubles” as a force visited on both the material home—which darkens—and his own haunted heart. This period in the novel, characterized by his mother’s increasing mental illness, is the result of the revelation of the full story of Eddie’s death. Eddie, the narrator’s uncle, was not killed in a shoot-out at a distillery, but instead was executed as an informer by the narrator’s grandfather at a farmhouse near the field of the disappeared. Though the narrator’s father knows that Eddie was executed as an informer, and might know that his own father-in-law had ordered the execution, the final secret the grandfather reveals is that the execution was a mistake: “Eddie had been set up. He had not been an informer at all” (133). As the text progresses, the narrator comes to know more facts about the execution, including that the real informer was



his mother's lover and later his Aunt Katie's husband, and he becomes obsessed with when his family members knew different elements of the story. However, it is the false nature of the accusation that sends his mother spiraling into a "haunted" state. The loss of Eddie, her husband's brother and her former lover, is manageable when she imagines him as a traitor, but the final revelation that he was innocent and framed makes the loss unbearable.

The narrator describes the secret itself as if it were some sort of disease, hoping that "with his [grandfather's] death the effect of what he had told [him] would magically pass away or reduce" (132). This attempt at "magical" thinking does not work, however, and the narrator describes the secret as though it were a parasite that will "re-embed itself in my mother and go on living," the mother becoming a receptacle for the family's history (133). The trauma repeats itself through her ghostly state, the present overtaken by the traumas of the past. When the narrator returns from a trip with his father and brother during which his father "reveals"<sup>21</sup> that Eddie was shot as a traitor, the mother seems to know what has been told. As the men return to the family home and join the mother in the kitchen, she "... looked up and the whole history of his family and her family and ourselves passed over her face in one intuitive waltz of welcome and pain" (141). Here, the mother in the kitchen becomes the visible sign of their shared traumatic history. This doubling of "welcome and pain," indicates the nature of her suffering—even positive interactions with her husband and family are imbued with the sadness of the secret she carries. The historical haunting embeds itself in his mother, and she becomes a "carrier" of the family's traumatic narrative, causing

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<sup>21</sup> The father is actually not revealing anything to the narrator, who already knows more of the story of Eddie's death than his father's confession reveals. The son's awareness of his father's lack of knowledge challenges the traditional father-son dynamic and forces the narrator to view his father as somewhat childlike. The narrator describes his father in this moment: "The big gom, wailing into it, innocent as a lamb, believing he had a dirty little secret (140).

her psychological trauma and distancing her from her own children and family members. Much like the characters in folk stories forever altered by knowledge of the phantasmal, the mother is transformed by her historical understanding into a haunted individual

In the first vignette that is titled “Mother,”<sup>22</sup> taking place when the author is thirteen years old, he describes his mother’s physical and emotional transformation. While the first chapter depicts a traumatized woman who is “without real fear,” in this chapter the tropes of the haunted home—entrapment, burning, and terror—are deployed to describe his mother’s emotional state. She seems weighted down and trapped by her knowledge “...as though there were pounds of pressure bearing down on her; and when she say, it was as though the pressure reversed itself and began to build up inside her and feint at her mouth or her hands, making them twitch” (143). The tension within her and the burden of the secret at the heart of her marriage manifests itself physically through her twitching hands and appearance. The narrator compares this moment to the early vignette on the stairs; he still finds her frozen on the landing “...looking out the lobby window, still haunted, but now with a real ghost crouched in the air around her” (143). He describes her movement from the stairs to the space of the kitchen, “...her heart jackhammering, and her breath quick, to stand at the range and adjust the saucepans in which dinner simmered, her face in a rictus of crying, but without tears” (143). Again, Deane uses the space of the kitchen to illustrate a traumatized mother who now, understanding the full narrative of Eddie’s death, is visited by real ghosts and ultimately transformed into a ghost herself. The reality of this haunting is emphasized by the transformations in her body—her heart and her breath are out of her control. Deane also describes a woman unable fully to feel the terrified emotions that haunt her physical form—

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<sup>22</sup> A second “Mother” vignette takes place when the narrator is eighteen.

her face is in a “rictus of crying” but she, like the narrator at the time of Una’s death, is unable to bring forth real tears.

The narrator’s mother at first appears distraught and physically transformed by the pain of her knowledge, but as the text progresses this haunting also seems to alter her mental state. She repeats the phrase “burning. It’s burning. All out there, burning,” both on the stairs and when she is found sobbing and freezing in her bedclothes outside. Burning becomes the central image of the pain she suffers, and she tries to explain it to her son: “‘See that?’ she’d say. ‘The pain is terrible. The flame is you, and you are the flame. But there’s still a difference. That’s the pain. Burning’” (145). Her description emphasizes the intimate nature of the trauma she suffers; the secret is so central to her own family and identity that she can barely differentiate between the two. In *English and Media Magazine*, Deane describes his use of burning imagery and darkness to display the link between public and private violence in the novel:

All through the novel there is a link between darkness and fire and intimacy as well as between intimacy and violence. From that distillery fire forward the young child actually sees the city as a city that is in some sense burning, always burning... You can hear the sound of a fire in a society that is breaking down (3).

Thus, the narrator’s mother becomes the receptacle for this image of the broken down society, and her repetition of the phrase casts both the outside world—“all out there”—and individual identity—“the flame *is* you”—as caught in the fire of a “society that is breaking down.”

The children are frightened by their mother’s transformation, and the narrator describes himself as “ashamed” by his mother’s distant state: “She was going out from us, becoming strange, becoming possessed, and I didn’t want anyone else outside the family to know or notice” (143). Thus the nature of her trauma is private, something to be kept inside,

encoded in the spaces of the home. The patterns of her sadness are marked in the house; she wanders its spaces, "...touching the walls, tracing out scrolls of varnish on the sitting-room door with her finger," as though the materiality of the home might contain some cure for her haunted state. She also repeatedly climbs the stairs "...to gaze out the windows," and when the narrator sees his mother performing these actions he seems to take on some of her pain—his cheeks "burnt and the semi-darkness seemed to be full of eyes" (143). Her strange actions haunt the narrator's childhood and transform his relations with his siblings. Deane describes how a casual game of football between the narrator and his brother Liam is altered by his mother's haunted state. They still played, but their movements are "...quick and loud with the panic we both felt. If we fought, we did so in the same high-edged way, striking clean blows, no wrestling or snarling about" (147). This boyhood restraint demonstrates their transformed childhood and, like the tales in which a haunting has the power to curse future generations, demonstrates the ways in which traumas can bleed into and transform those who were not directly involved in the initial painful act. In this depiction of the brothers, at play but not *true* play, the boy's actions become an awkward performance of what they feel other boys are doing. Deane's choice of words—"quick and loud," "panic," "high-edged"—emphasizes a pervasive anxiety that surrounds their mother and thus haunts all childhood actions. Deane ends the description of their football game by writing of the sky: it "sloped up into the sun and down into the stars, and she went on, scarcely moving, haunted and burning, audibly, inaudibly," presenting another contrast between silence and speech (147).

The narrator's childhood is transformed both by his altered mother and his own desire to uncover the family's history: ultimately, he becomes the most significant haunted self in

the novel. Nameless and knowledgeable, to his mother he is a constant reminder of their shared secret. Again and again, the narrator describes the nature of the trauma in spatial terms that eventually extend to the body itself. In the following passage, the narrator expresses his desire to know his mother's suffering, to reach her emotionally at a point in their lives when she is speaking only to the younger children, holding one of them "...close to her breast and [bending] down to say things in her new voice into his shy face, things that enthralled and mystified me" (150):

I wanted to run away...But I also wanted to run into the maw of the sobbing, to throw my arms wide to receive it, to shout into it, to make it come at me in words, words, words and no more of this ceaseless noise, its animality, its broken inflection of mother....The hairbrush lay in the corner of the kitchen where she must have thrown it. I picked it up and tugged at the strands of her hair caught in the wire bristles, winding them round my fingers, feeling them soften on my skin as though the tightness were easing off them into me. I felt it traveling inside, looking for a resting place, a nest to live in and flourish, finding it in the cat's cradle of my stomach and accumulating there (148).

Part of the nature of this broken state—a postcolonial quality Deane elsewhere describes as "maimed" condition<sup>23</sup>--is his inability to articulate the nature of the trauma. Their shared silence creates and enforces a distance between mother and son, and though he reaches out for her and is even willing to "throw himself" into the pain, her efforts to stop him are her few attempts at self-preservation. Deane's description of the narrator's desire to get to his mother, even if it is through the hairs on a thrown brush, reveals the way in which the trauma seeps into the narrator's sense of self. As he plays with the hair from his mother's brush, he literally feels both hair and trauma "traveling inside," eventually accumulating and resting in his stomach.

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<sup>23</sup> English and Media Magazine 2.

The vision of the narrator as a ghostly figure coincides with both his nameless state throughout the novel and Deane's own description of his sense of the book. He writes that his view of the novel "...is that it's about a young child who never earns a name. He never achieves sufficient identity (to use that terrible word) to deserve the name or the sense of self he's looking for in relation to his parents" (Fortnight 29). Thus, the narrator becomes a translucent presence in the text: he is the window through which readers come to understand the narrative, but he is also so ghostly that he is never able to mark a substantial presence in the novel. The knowledge that he thinks will help him locate a place for himself within his family actually creates substantial barriers between himself and his parents. He writes of his mother:

She knew it all now. She knew I knew it too. And she wasn't going to tell any of it. Nor was I. But she didn't like me for knowing it. And my father thought he had told me everything. I could tell him nothing, though I hated him not knowing... Was it her way of loving him, not telling him? It was my way of loving them both, not telling either. But knowing what I did separated me from them both (194).

The repetition of the versions of the verb "to know" throughout the novel, combined with Deane's focus on the boy's education, suggests the importance of epistemology to the text. But Deane also clearly links knowledge to emotions; here the mother "doesn't like" her son because of the knowledge that he has, the son "hates" the father for not knowing about the secrets of the tragedy, and he imagines that it is his "way of loving them both," to protect them from the information that he has gathered (194). Though the narrator initially believes that uncovering and speaking the history will cure his haunted family, he ultimately reveals that in a very practical way, his knowledge separates him from the rest of his loved ones. In her 1996 review of *Reading in the Dark*, Anne Devlin describes the distance imposed between mother and son by the narrator's knowledge as one of the most notable and

disturbing achievements of the text, writing that she has "...nowhere read a portrait of a woman going mad with grief as shattering as the portrait of the mother in this tale nor anywhere a sense so achingly described as that of the boy's distress at losing her, through having too much access to history" (17).

When the narrator comes, through revelations from "Crazy Joe," to understand the whole of the trauma, Deane's depiction of this narrative process emphasizes his ambivalence at finally piecing the most important parts of the story together. The narrator intersperses statements describing the facts he has learned—"My mother's father had my father's brother killed," "My mother had gone out with McIlhenny, the traitor who set Eddie up for the execution"—with statements about who knows what facts—"My father didn't know it all," "Katie didn't know that" (194). Perhaps most interesting is the narrator's increasing frustration with the unraveling mystery. The more he knows, the less satisfied he is with the act of knowing; the truth, the hidden story itself, does not heal his family, and his knowledge only implicates him in the complicated web of violence and betrayal that entraps his mother. Though this passage appears a full recitation of the facts, twenty pages later, the narrator only has questions: "What did you know, Mother, when you married my father? What did he know? When did you tell each other? Why did you silence me, over and over?" (217). The narrator describes his memories of his mother with the repetition of the phrases "Haunted, haunted," expressing that "Now that everything had become specific, it was all more insubstantial" (243). Deane seems to undermine traditional conceptions of knowledge by describing the frustrating incompleteness of the narrative that emerges. In another statement, the narrator militarizes the relationship between mother and son, suggesting that as she realizes what he knows, she "...became hostile" creating a "low-intensity warfare..." and

eventually asking him to leave, telling him that she cannot “look after his father properly” with him in the house (225, 235). Thus, both silence and knowledge have the potential to haunt and transform; here knowledge is just as frustratingly “insubstantial” as ignorance, causing increased fractures in the family structure, rather than healing the existing ones.

The narrator’s final attempt at piecing together the story—after he realizes he cannot tell his mother, father, or brother what he knows, he writes it all down in Irish—is ultimately unsatisfying. The narrator reads it aloud to his father in Irish—a language he knows the man cannot understand--telling him it was an essay “on local history” (203). Both father and mother listen, his father clueless to the nature of the story while his mother grows more and more angry. The narrator, however, is traumatized, not healed, by finally revealing the full story, and cannot even hear his mother’s response because he is crying too loudly. Deane has stated that he finds the ending of the text challenges American visions of knowledge: “There’s no talking cure, no implication that by revealing everything you will somehow overcome it!” (Fortnight 30). In his article “Irish Ghost Stories” for the online magazine *Salon*, Andrew O’Hehir argues that this personal frustration with the pieced-together narrative mirrors the always incomplete nature of more public forms of history: “Beneath this dense weave of fact, fiction, and fantasy is the boy’s sense that his own family’s story remains unsatisfyingly incomplete. This frustration is connected, of course, to the messy, unfinished quality of history itself” (O’Hehir 1). Deane thus writes against a linear narrative of history-making; the search for “truth,” in this novel, does not push progress forward, and the intimate family history that is ultimately revealed acts as another force of violence within the family.



**Deirdre Madden's *One by One in the Darkness***

*"She had always thought of her childhood not principally in terms of time, but as a place to which she could always return. Now that was over. What was the word Lucy had used two years ago? 'Desecrated.' That was it. 'The place is desecrated.'"* (143).

Late in Deirdre Madden's *One by One in the Darkness*, she describes one of the sisters central to the narrative, Helen, at work on her homework. Listening to the radio, Helen hears the story of a twenty-year old soldier killed the night before and thinks of his family. In this moment, Madden contrasts political concerns—Helen next thinks that "Northern Ireland is a horrible place," imagining tension at home because Uncle Brian had been selling the *Republic News*—with the domestic concerns of a teenaged girl (163). Contrasting these moments of political intrusion on the life of the family with the domestic setting that surrounds Helen, Madden describes "...the bathroom door opening" and the scent of a "sudden blast of honeysuckle perfume" (163). When Helen returns to her schoolwork, she finds she only has a passage to write for her history class. Revealing the disconnect between the everyday lives of these Northern Irish sisters and the historical understanding of national space, the prompt asks her to: "Describe and assess the circumstances which led to the Partition of Northern Ireland" (163).

*One by One in the Darkness* and *Reading in the Dark* both share the word "darkness" in their titles—describing the sensation of attempting to piece together the meaning of an unspeakable family trauma—and both open with strikingly similar scenes. Deane begins his text by describing a "clear, plain, silence" on the stairs of a childhood home, and the first words of *One by One in the Darkness* are:

Home was a huge sky; it was flat fields of poor land fringed with hawthorn and alder. It was birds in flight; it was columns of midges like smoke in a summer dusk. It was grey water, it was mad wind; it was a solid stone house where the silence was uncanny (1).

Both novels thus describe an unhomely silence in the space that should be most familiar and “solid” to the child or visiting adult, creating an image of home as a space whose familiarity can continually be subverted by a haunting act of violence. Released in 1996, the same year as *Reading in the Dark*, *One by One in the Darkness*, now out of print, picks up historically where Deane’s narrative leaves off. Though the texts share thematic similarities, both using the framework of the home to understand the intrusion of public events onto private spaces following the Partition of Ireland, the differences between the two narratives are numerous. While Deane’s novel is centered on a male child born in 1940 and coming of age in the in-between years bookended by Partition and the Troubles, Madden’s sisters, born in the 1960s, experience a clear transformation in Irish culture as they approach adulthood. Deane’s text also explores a family who is already “marked” as politically dangerous, while Madden’s narrative is centered on a more financially privileged family experiencing diverse political awakenings as the Troubles begin. Liam Harte and Michael Parker mention Seamus Deane in their reading of Deirdre Madden’s fiction, articulating the key similarity between the two novels as the fact that in both texts, “the murder of a family member...suffuses childhood retrospectives with an intense, abiding sorrow” (234).

Images of haunting are central to both novels’ explorations of this childhood sorrow, but, unlike Deane, Madden never imagines haunting as a supernatural occurrence; she uses the word “haunted” several times throughout the text, but always to describe a psychological state rather than a true ghostly presence. Nevertheless, her focus on what some critics have labeled the “quotidian” aspects of everyday life situates the novel in the girls’ childhood home, portraying the ways in which transformations in the larger Irish culture were mediated

through domestic space.<sup>24</sup> These violent changes, including both a more general militarization of the surrounding neighborhoods and homes and the eventual murder of the sisters' father in the kitchen of a family home, create a presence that—much like a true “haunting”—subtly transforms the spaces of their lives. And, similar to the narrative in Deane's texts, these transformations are first felt in the haunted spaces that surround them, but eventually the phantasmal presence of violence extends to and transforms individual identities as well. The girls' mother Emily is a peripheral figure in the novel; she is important to the sisters, but Madden's narrative focuses on sisterly bonds and their shared childhood in 1960s Northern Ireland. However, as the trauma at the heart of the text begins to emerge more clearly, the novel focuses on Emily's suffering as a touchstone for the ways in which trauma haunts and transforms an individual's identity.

Thus, while Madden's focus on the materiality of domestic space—the remodeled kitchen, the older Cate's closet full of designer clothes—is mentioned by some critics as a weakness in her fiction, her keen eye for description captures the way in which shifts in domesticity align with traumatic, political occurrences. As Deane writes, “...the witnessing and the experience of violence actually make the ordinary world seem almost unreal,” and the ghostly domesticity in Madden's text facilitates an exploration of the way Partition influences everyday life, even over seventy years after the new border-line was drawn. While in Deane's text his intimate histories present a sharp contrast to the history that is taught in the many classroom scenes in the novel,<sup>25</sup> Madden seems most interesting in contrasting the subtle transformations of the private home with representations of violence in

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<sup>25</sup> Liam Harte writes extensively about the importance of education and history in *Reading in the Dark* in “History Lessons: Postcolonialism and Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*.”

the media. In *One by One in the Darkness*, the media is continually represented as—if not getting the story wrong—at least lacking empathy, unable to reach the whole of the truth. In a conversation with her journalist friend David, Helen discusses her discomfort with the media, explaining that “...taking things and making stories about them...making up stories out of a few facts, and presenting them as though that interpretation was the absolute truth” is what she “can’t stand” about media representations of violence in Northern Ireland. When David asks her if she would have liked it better had her father’s death been ignored, she calls the medium “...a blunt weapon itself...it isn’t fitted to dealing with complexity, it isn’t comfortable with paradox or contradiction” and says that reporters “...couldn’t care less. They have no empathy, no imagination” (51). Helen’s description defines this media coverage as a kind of violence itself; the act of narrativizing her father’s death to fit within the framework of television news becomes a “blunt weapon.” The space of the novel, and its focus on an intimate understanding of the repercussions of just one trauma, thus becomes an artistic intervention into the lack of “empathy” and “imagination” in media coverage of violence.

The central plot of the novel traces the return of Cate to the family home two years after her father’s death to announce her pregnancy. Pregnancy and the maternal thus frame the text, and Cate’s unexpected pregnancy emerges as a sign of hope to her traumatized family. Madden’s choice to depict the continuing effects of Charlie’s death two years after he was murdered, instead of the reaction of the women immediately following the act, allows her to trace the subtle changes in the family’s sense of home that remain after the initial shock has dissipated. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews writes that Cate’s return home two years after her father’s death is a confrontation of the disorienting effects of violence: “Returning home

means facing the demons of violence and terror, recognizing the strangeness of the familiar world. Homecoming is to experience the loss of home” (155). Madden avoids the language of ghosts and shadows that fills Deane’s novel, but nevertheless Kennedy-Andrews articulates the ways in which the haunting presence of a trauma can create a loss of the familiar, the safe, the sense of home as haven, even though the material structure may remain as it always was. The structure of *One by One in the Darkness* itself implies a kind of haunting; early scenes of the girls’ childhood, beginning in a time when they were scarcely aware of the outside world, are juxtaposed with later chapters that describe Cate’s visit home two years after her father’s 1992 murder. Madden also shifts the role of narrator amongst the three sisters and their mother as the chapters progress, and Kennedy- Andrews writes that these alternating chapters “...are used to highlight contrasts between the sense of security and plenitude associated with the past and the feelings of loss and anxiety which pervade the present” (152). Though this clear vision of the organization of the chapters envisions the early, innocent chapters as a contrast to the later, haunted sections, as the childhood sections progress the home space seems increasingly under threat from outside influences, and the children appear more and more aware of the effects of politics on their young lives.

Cate—known as a child as Kate<sup>26</sup>—is the first narrative voice in the novel, and the early “childhood” chapters describe a life full of an innocent sense of security, illustrated through her depiction of Uncle Brian’s house as the haven of their childhood. Madden writes that “...even if you closed your eyes and tried your hardest, you couldn’t imagine a nicer

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<sup>26</sup> Cate changes her name because, as a journalist, she feels Kate “...was too Irish...too country, and she been delighted when she hit on the idea of changing the ‘K’ to a ‘C.’ Cate thus attempts to escape her Northern Irish identity through both a shift in location and the change of a letter. Because I will be talking about alternating chapters of the novel in contrast, I have chosen to refer to her throughout this chapter as “Cate.” Madden writes her as “Kate” in the early chapters.

house than Uncle Brian's, with its two little windows sticking out of the roof and the porch and the shiny front door that was the colour of chocolate" (14). But she is also careful to emphasize that this feeling of "niceness" comes not just from the quality of the space itself, from the "twisted apple trees," and "the low wall which enclosed a straggling garden"—descriptions that emphasize the flawed nature of the setting—but instead from the emotional associations Cate and her sisters have with the home. Clearly foreshadowing the later militarization of private space in the text and the violent act that will occur in Uncle Brian's kitchen, Madden writes that, at this point in their lives, "...the back door was seldom locked, so they went into the house through the scullery, and then went on into the kitchen. They didn't bother to knock: nobody expected them to" (15). Though Deane's novel clearly subverts a vision of 1968 as a starting point for violence and trauma—particularly in the more urban setting of Derry-- Madden's text suggests that, for this family, there was a possibility for a haven from political strife in the private home.

The alternating "childhood" chapters, though not touched by the death of their father Charlie, are quickly haunted by an awareness of changes in the outside world. Eamonn Hughes describes the way in which Madden's eye for the domestic "...explores how various factors, among them the beginnings of the Troubles, bring about a change in [the] sense of home" (155). Madden is able to develop this sense of shifts in home in part because she articulates such a clear vision of what home means to each of the three sisters. Sally, the youngest and frailest<sup>27</sup> of the girls, is the only sister to remain religious, having a faith that her sister believes ran "in a straight and unfractured line direct from her childhood," and is

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<sup>27</sup> Sally's nosebleeds are the source of her frailty and a cause of concern for the family, particularly the sisters' grandmother, who travels with Sally to a monastery and "someone in Ardboe who had a cure for nosebleeds" to try to find a solution.

also the only sister to remain in the town of her youth—a characteristic that, when paired with her unwavering religious faith, is understood by her sisters as a kind of naiveté. In a childhood chapter, Madden describes from Sally’s perspective her perception of the spaces of home:

...the pattern of their lives was as predictable as the seasons...The scope of their lives was tiny but it was profound, and to them, it was immense. The physical bounds of their world were confined to little more than a few fields and houses, but they knew these places with the deep, unconscious knowledge that a bird or fox might have for its habitat. The idea of home was something they lived so completely that they would have been at a loss to define it. But they would have known to be inadequate such phrases as: ‘It’s where you’re from, ‘It’s the place you live, ‘It’s where your family are’ (75).

This passage functions almost as a defense of Madden’s domestic focus. Sally describes a vision of home that is alternately confining and expansive, and this is how the idea of home and hearth functions in the novel. Madden’s limited focus actually facilitates a full exploration of the impact of public events on both these “tiny” but “profound” spaces and the larger community.

Just after this passage in which Sally describes the sisters’ expansive vision of home, the outside world intrudes—at this point only in the form of “photographs...newspapers, reports on the television” (75). Sally is becoming aware of the “Orange marches,” events that hint at the militarization of domestic space because the girls’ parents complain “...that you were made a prisoner in your own home whether you liked it or not” while these events took place. This chapter also describes their parents’ involvement in the increasingly violent civil rights marches. Their mother Emily, in part as a rebellion against her own mother, insists “that the whole family go to cheer” for the march from Belfast to Derry. Madden describes a “mixture of fear and excitement” felt by the girls that they will “...experience many times in the coming years” (80). Their father instructs them that they are watching

history, and these early moments of participation in civil rights activity are tinged with a hopefulness that is quickly lost. The girls are increasingly aware of the violence taking place in their country, if only through television reports "...of marches which ended in violence; of bomb attacks on water and power installations; and endless political wrangling" (94). The children intuitively recognize the importance of these changes to the adults, and though they are not old enough to understand the scope of the political events, they learn the significance of those events to their day-to-day routine, understanding "...not to interrupt any of these discussions, nor to make a noise while the news was on the radio or television" (94).

At first the images they see in some ways mirror traditional patterns of war—though non-combatants fight with soldiers, "policemen...in full riot gear battle against people throwing stones and petrol bombs"—there is still distance between the violence and the girls. Using the child's perspective, Madden articulates that "Derry was a little more than an hour away by car, but it wasn't a city they ever visited," implying that—like a traditional "battlefield"—the girls' distance and unfamiliarity with the spaces they saw on the television separated their lives from the violence. But just a paragraph later, Madden describes the way in which the violence spread to Belfast, marking this moment as significant with the words "trouble broke into their world"<sup>28</sup> (95). Miss Regan, a friend of their mother Emily whom they often visited in Belfast, lives on a street that they quickly recognize in a "television news report" (95). The house that "they visited every Christmas" is on a street with a "burnt-out car," and the girls hear reports that people "in that part of the city had been forced to flee their homes" (95). This moment is significant because the violence has extended both

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<sup>28</sup> Madden uses similar language several page later. She describes an event—"the eldest brother of Helen's school friend Willy Larkin, died planting a bomb at an electricity pylon"—as something that "broke into their lives and upset them" (103).



geographically and domestically to include the girls' lives—it is no longer taking place only at protests or in distant cities.

As a marker of the encroaching forces of violence surrounding the spaces of the girls' lives, this moment is significant. Madden carefully distinguishes the feeling of seeing violence on television from the childhood recognition of a place you had once visited marked with a burnt-out car. Miss Regan comments that she does not know if she can ever return to her house “or if [she’ll] have a house to go to...” (95). The increasing militarization of the private spaces and neighborhoods quickly extends closer to the girls' home, creating an image of this new form of violence that aligns with Miss Regan's description of the situation being “like a war,” a phrase that captures the idea of everyday violence that intrudes on day-to-day life without breaking into what would be fully defined as “war” (95). In a 1979 article titled “Social Violence in Northern Ireland” James K. Mitchell describes the fine line between war and “normal”: “For the last decade conditions have hovered precariously short of open civil war, a situation in which the semblance of normal life is just possible for most citizens, but in which some are killed and the prospect of violence threatens all” (179). The encroaching presence of British troops—which Emily initially believes might be a positive step—begins in Derry, extending to Belfast, “...then all over the North.” Madden writes that “It was strange” for the girls “...to see their heavily armoured vehicles on the quiet country roads. Helicopters would land in the fields near their house, their blades beating flat the grass and startling the cattle where they grazed” (96). The juxtaposition of military vehicles with the spaces of their neighborhood is disorienting for the sisters, transforming images that formerly had only been seen through the television into the spaces of their lives.

Soon, the British troops enter the girls' home; Cate sees two soldiers in the backyard, and the men come inside the home to interrogate the family. The soldiers, polite and somewhat friendly—taking the name of the family dog as they record information about those who live in the home—quickly ask a series of questions about the family and then leave. The girls recognize the strangeness of this event:

The watched from the window as the soldiers walked away out from the shadow of the house and into the bright sun, fanning midges from their faces. As soon as they were out of sight it was as if they had imagined this strange thing, that two soldiers, one in full battle dress and with a gun, the other with an accent they could barely understand, had come into their room and asked them all sorts of odd, personal questions, and then gone away again (98).

The interaction between the soldiers and the family mirrors Bhabha's description of the "unhomely" moment in which "the private and the public [become] part of each other" (Location 9). The girls' attempt to reconcile their knowledge of this event with their prior experiences in the space of the home results in confusion. Madden's descriptions emphasize the limited understanding of childhood; they know simply that it is a "strange thing" the soldiers have done, an act made even stranger by the jarring recognition of "full battle dress" and a gun in their private home.

This interrogation has a somewhat friendly tone, and the family is not fearful of the soldiers or their impact on their daily lives. As violence escalates, however, the mood in the rural area shifts. The soldiers "stopped coming to the houses to ask for information, and they stopped attempting to buy things in the local shops" (99). The families hear rumors that young men from the area are "...being stopped at checkpoints and beaten up for no apparent reason" (99). Checkpoints thus take on an entirely different character, becoming a place for violence to intrude on ordinary lives. Madden describes this intrusion in a vignette in which Charlie, the sisters' father, is stopped at a road block "...a few hundred yards from his house"

on his way to the store to pick up a newspaper (99). After asking him his “name and occupation,” the soldiers examine his license and look in his trunk, eventually letting him proceed to the store only to stop him again a few minutes later on his way home. This event is disorienting on multiple levels; Madden’s quiet mention that the checkpoint is only a short distance from their home focuses reader attention on the image of a militarized encounter so close to the would-be haven of home. The soldiers’ repetition of the act, stopping him “...less than five minutes later,” and “poker faced” asking the “...same questions again, as if he had never seen him before,” also captures the element of performance in these militarized moments. The stoic soldiers run through the motions of the interrogation, though both they and Charlie know that its purpose was served with the earlier stop. Charlie is frustratingly unable to break up the performance; he too must pretend that he was not stopped five minutes ago. Madden writes that these repeated intrusions so close to home transform Charlie, breaking his “legendary patience” and leaving him “sullen and resentful” (99).

Soon after Madden’s depiction of Charlie’s frustration, she writes that another event “broke into their lives and upset them” (103). The much-admired older brother of a childhood friend dies planting a bomb “at an electricity pylon,” and Madden’s language here draws attention to his death as another moment that breaks the girls’ childhood sense of security (103). Madden describes the “unsettling” feeling of watching the television that evening and hearing a familiar name, contrasting “the hushed, grieved tones” that surround the incident in their neighborhood to the newscaster who has trouble pronouncing the location of Tony’s death and tells the story “...blankly and without emotion” (103). This contrast—between the intimate understanding of a trauma and media depiction of an event—

is emphasized throughout the text, and the novel itself serves in a way as a lengthy counter-history of one incident of violence portrayed by the media in a cold, emotionless way.

The incident marks a change in the childhood chapters of the novel; the neighborhood had been increasingly militarized but now was transformed into a new kind of war zone. The sisters heard the bomb explode right before they went to sleep that night. Madden writes that “...they’d both known at once it wasn’t thunder, and not just because the weather earlier that evening hadn’t promised thunder. Already they learnt to distinguish between the noise and the flat, sullen trailing sound a bomb made” (104). The sisters were familiar enough with the sound of bombs to recognize the distinct noise, and yet Cate’s unemotional response—she wonders aloud “where that is”—reveals the importance of the recognition that this bomb had killed someone they knew. Madden articulates the way in which this violent incident transformed the spaces of their home, writing that “A strange atmosphere hung over everyone and everything at the time of Tony’s death, a hushed and grieved air, and there was a distance between people, as though no matter how much they talked, they remained deeply isolated from each other” (104). Tony’s funeral is a cause for more controversy in the family, as the “air of dignified sadness” is broken by men and women firing “a volley of shots over the open grave” creating a response of whistling and cheers. The girls note that Uncle Brian “clapped the hardest of all,” and Madden depicts the developing tension in the family by ending the chapter with their father’s response. He tells the girls “‘Never forget what you saw today; and never let anybody try to tell you that it was anything other than a life wasted, and lives destroyed’” (105).

The increasing presence of bombs and bombings in the girls’ lives transforms everyday objects into potentially violent threats. In one vignette from the girls’ childhood,

Cate, “...so busy chattering and laughing with her friends,” leaves her school bag on the bus—something that could happen to any child. But with the increase in violence, a “major security alert” is called when the empty bag is seen on the bus; Cate’s father tells her that “...they have the town centre closed off and the army’s getting ready to blow up your school bag” (133). Cate and her father go to the police and the young girl is reprimanded by an “RUC man” who tells her, ““If I had my way, wee girls like you would be locked up in a cell for the night, to show you how serious this is, and then you wouldn’t be so quick as to leave your property lying around in future”” (134). This reaction aligns with security posters that instructed citizens to be on watch for unusual or discarded objects. Below, a poster from the 1970s asserts that any ordinary object could potentially be a threat:



<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/images/posters/security/index.html>

*Conflict Archive on the Internet: Conflict and Politics in Northern Ireland (1968-present)*

Both the poster and the reaction to Cate’s bag on the bus reflect the way in which, in the postcolonial and partitioned state, the ordinary is infused with the possibility of violence. This reaction is not necessarily alarmist—innocent-seeming items *could* “be firebombs” and the reminder to “report anything suspicious” is an attempt to increase awareness and create a safer environment. Nevertheless, Madden’s depiction of the reaction to Cate’s forgotten school bag captures the ways in which this vigilance against the “suspicious” tinges daily

lives with violence, even in moments when a schoolbag is just a schoolbag. The mundane things that surround people--signs of life, work, or childhood--become “haunted” objects when infused with the possibility that “...they could be firebombs.” This understanding of violence aligns with Deane’s description of the double-vision created by the recognition of violent possibilities in familiar spaces. The “actual”—a backpack or discarded bag on the bus—and the “phantasmal”—the imagined possibilities of explosions and death—collide, haunting busses and sandwich shops with the possibility of terror.

These moments of transformation included in the “childhood” chapters, describing in brief paragraphs an event that transforms the family’s sense of space and self, are matched in later chapters with more detached descriptions of the militarized landscape. In the intervening years between childhood and adulthood, the girls have ceased to recognize the strangeness of the militarized landscape. Helen’s journalist friend David is nervous to bring his lover , Steve, back to Belfast, telling her: “But what if he hates it? Seeing soldiers all over the place; and the barracks all fortified and stuff; that’s going to frighten the life out of him. And what if anything happens?...what if a bomb goes off, or the car gets hijacked or something” (56). Though these passages present the militarized landscape through the potential visitor’s eyes, what is perhaps more revealing is David’s acceptance of the threat of violence. “Seeing soldiers all over the place” has become normal for Helen and David, and it is only through the eyes of the visitor that David rereads the landscape as potentially threatening.

After an initial visit during which David carefully maps out his route so as to avoid anything that might startle Steve, he is troubled by Steve’s enthusiastic response to Belfast and commits to showing him the whole city during a subsequent visit. Madden describes

David's thorough tour of the militarized city; he takes him down a road he had been afraid to drive on with him before:

...pointing out the heavily fortified barracks and all the other things which, before he would have been at pains to conceal...the Republican murals on the gable walls around the lower Falls, then took him over to the Shankill and showed him the Loyalist murals. The 'Peace Line,' an ugly structure of corrugated iron and barbed wire, which separated the two communities, apparently shocked Steve more than anything else he saw... (5).



Martin Melaugh "Bombay Street, Belfast"

The image of the peace line above demonstrates the confrontation between public conceptions of space and the private home. Strikingly, this "ugly structure of corrugated iron and barbed wire" was also the most shocking element of Steve's tour, perhaps because the implied violence of the barbed wire is so jarring when placed adjacent to private housing. Like Steve, Cate is returning to Belfast from London, and Madden seems particularly interested in Cate's reading of the landscape upon her return. During her trips Cate often drives "for hours through the countryside alone, trying to fathom Northern Ireland in a way which wasn't, if you still lived there, necessary. Or advisable. Or possible, even" (83). Cate's desire for an understanding of the landscape briefly drifts into sentimentality, and she imagines moving back to Northern Ireland to live in one of the ivy-covered houses she passes

on her route. These positive imaginings contrast with her inability to articulate her own feelings about Northern Ireland; she expresses that she would be at “a complete loss” to find a word “to sum up her feelings” about the nation, even noting that she does not know if the word would be positive or negative. She drives through a town that she has always admired, Femanagh, a place of “flowers and an air of quiet prosperity” that she thinks her friends in London would admire, a contrast to their idea of what Northern Ireland was (83-4). But when she hears a report that a twenty-year old “RUC reservist” had been shot while “working in his father’s vegetable shop,” her re-interpretation of the town is striking. She does not want to drive through the same spaces again, knowing that this time they will be imbued with the sadness of the young man’s death. Police tape marks the area where the young man was killed, a checkpoint “...had been set up and every car was being stopped and the whole thing was ghastly and depressing. She thought of the young man dead and felt ashamed of her own easy sentimentality earlier in the day” (85). Here, Cate’s desire for a geographical understanding of Northern Ireland, her attempt to make sense of the space of the country by taking these long drives, is intruded on by a moment of violence. Madden’s description of her emotions emphasizes their resigned nature: “the whole thing was ghastly and depressing” seems almost an afterthought, an acknowledgement that the words “ghastly” and “depressing” cannot quite capture the emotions of her rereading of the town.

*One by One in the Darkness* writes violence in two ways: there are the gradually encroaching effects of the militarization of their surroundings, first the children seeing a street they recognize on television, then soldiers in the home, followed by the death of someone they knew. But though the women are haunted and transformed by these larger transformations in their neighborhood and nation, it is the murder of their father that violates



the sacred spaces of home most fully. Though Charlie's death is the central violent act of the text, it is rarely referred to directly, and though readers are immediately aware that something traumatic has happened to the family, the full narrative of the murder is not revealed until late in the novel. Referring to Cathy Caruth, Elmer Kennedy-Andrews suggests that this narrative mirrors "...the subjective processing of trauma" which does not "...[produce] a rational, linear narrative" (153). The repercussions of the event emerge slowly, but what actually happened is fairly straightforward: Charlie is shot in Uncle Brian's kitchen, in the domestic setting once favored by the girls for its trees and unlocked doors. The shooters were clearly looking to kill Uncle Brian, a detail that further complicates the emotions surrounding the event and its continued impact on the families.<sup>29</sup>

This shooting happens two years before the contemporary chapters of the novel, but the gap between the shooting and moment of return does not lessen the haunted feeling held within both Uncle Brian's home and the home of the sisters, in fact allowing Madden to explore the ways in which the domestic captures and distills the women's response to the violence. Cate expresses that she "...had always thought of her childhood not principally in terms of time, but as a place to which she could always return. Now that was over. What was the word Lucy had used two years ago? 'Desecrated.' That was it. 'The place was desecrated'" (143). The repetition of the phrase "desecrated" is significant to the novel, a haunting image of the transformation of the sacred space of the home and an articulation of the ways in which violence becomes a lingering presence in a location where the traumatic act occurred. Madden works to develop a sense of the sacred in domesticity in order to make this later pronouncement all the more profound. In the following passage, Madden describes

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<sup>29</sup> Madden explains that Emily, "...lost Brian too, that night: she did to some degree hold him responsible, and that he also blamed himself was of no real help to her" (28).

how the choice not to renovate the kitchen of a family home is seen as a kind of spiritual tribute to their father:

Lino had given way to thick carpet in the bathroom; the red brocade curtains in the parlour had been replaced with pale blinds; the bedrooms had lost their austerity and become chintzy and floral sprigged....only the kitchen was left untouched, and that was deliberate. Their father, who had been happy with other changes made, had always held out over that...neither the sisters nor their mother desired to make any change to the room: they wanted it to remain as he'd known it (21).

This passage paints the image of the kitchen as the heart of the home, the one location that should not be renovated, if only to hold significant family memories. "Because nothing had changed," Helen thinks, "there was something timeless about the kitchen" (21). The sisters want the kitchen to remain as it had always been as a tribute to their father, his politicized death acknowledged by this bit of reverence in the most domestic of places.

Helen is comforted by the idea that the place remains the same, and even likes to "half-close her eyes and imagine that it was twenty, twenty-five years ago, that if she were to go to Uncle Brian's house now she would find it, too, as it was in the past" (22). As a location of violence, Uncle Brian's house has been forever transformed by their father's death. The depictions of the actual act of violence in the novel are very limited; the first is a dream in which the act is mediated through their mother's mind. Emily's oft-repeated fantasy focuses on the element of remorse. She describes the feeling of dreaming "night after night" that she stood in Lucy's kitchen, "...and at her feet was a long thing over which someone had thrown a check table cloth. There were two feet sticking out at one end, wearing a pair of boots she'd helped Charlie to choose in a shop in Antrim. The other end of the cloth was dark and wet; there was a stench of blood and excrement" (125). The contrasts in this scene are striking: Madden carefully adds the detail of the "check table cloth" in the middle of a familiar kitchen, but quickly subverts the traditional familial knowledge of the

kitchen with the image of Charlie's dead body and the smell of blood and feces. In this moment, the home is utterly violated, the markers of family and domesticity, a table cloth, the tiles of the kitchen floor, forever infused with the memory of this horrifically traumatic scene. Emily's dream ends with an image of a man cowering in the corner crying and pleading that he is sorry for Charlie's death. This presentation of remorse does not align with the actual events of the murder, but instead seems a way for Emily to reinforce her own lack of forgiveness, because no matter how many times this scene replays itself in her mind, she always tells the boy in the dream that she will never forgive him. Madden writes that Emily "...couldn't tell her daughters what it was like to wake from a dream like that and know it was the truth... to have prayed to God every day in her life, and to be left so that she could feel no compassion, no mercy...was a kind of horror she had never imagined" (125). Thus, the "horror" of Charlie's death is located both in the trauma of his loss and in the utter transformation of Emily's sense of self. Derrida explains in a footnote to his *Specters of Marx* that the word "haunting" can also be translated to mean "...an obsession, a constant fear, a fixed idea, or a nagging memory," emphasizing the ways in which haunting is located in the psychology of the haunted. The repetitive, obsessive nature of Emily's dreams aligns with these tropes of haunted. Like the narrator's mother in *Reading in the Dark*, she has become a haunted self, tortured by the repetition of her husband's death and her own inability to locate any forgiveness for the murderers.

On the second-to-last page of the novel, Madden clarifies our vision of the murder by revealing to Helen—in a moment that she describes as "no dream"—an actual description of the violence:

...she saw her father sitting at Lucy's kitchen table, drinking tea out of a blue mug. She could smell the smoke of his cigarette, even smell the familiar tweed of his

jacket. He was talking to Lucy, who was working out in the back scullery: she'd been doing the dishes when he arrived, and he told her to carry on with what she was about. He glanced up at the clock and said, 'I wonder what's keeping Brian that he's not home yet,' and Lucy replied, 'There's a car pulled up outside now, but it's not Brian's, by the sound of it.' And as soon as she spoke these words he heard her scream, as two men burst into the back scullery, and knocked her down to the ground as they pushed past her; and then Helen's father saw them himself as they came into the kitchen, two men in parkas with the hoods pulled up, Halloween masks on their faces. He saw the guns too, and he knew what they were going to do. The sound of a chair scraping back on the tiles, 'Ah, no, Christ Jesus no,' and then they shot him point-blank range, blowing half his head away. As they ran out of the house, one of them punched the air and whooped, because it had been so easy (181).

This description of the murder is haunting in part because of its emphasis on the everyday quality of this day and the ease with which the men were able to disrupt and desecrate the domestic. Madden's domestic focus—her description of the “blue mug,” the “tweed of his jacket,” and the normal conversations taking place in the kitchen as he drank his coffee and Lucy did the dishes—serves only to make the final act of violence all the more jarring. Madden's description of the violence is matter-of-fact; the men push Lucy to the ground, and shoot him at “point-blank range, blowing half his head away.” The effect of this description, so late in the novel, is jarring—it tinges all prior domestic scenes with the memory of this sudden intrusion and captures the strangeness of the fact that it could be “so easy” for a man to be shot while drinking tea in his brother's kitchen. The image of his murder coalesces, of course, with Emily's dream of its aftermath—the smells in the kitchen and the table cloth covering Charlie's dead body.

Uncle Brian's house is forever transformed—“desecrated”—by the violence of their father's death, and the trauma of his murder is first envisioned in the novel through the description of Brian and Lucy's renovated kitchen. Before the reader knows what happened in the kitchen, Madden describes its renovation, stating that “About a year earlier, [Brian and Lucy] had it completely modernised: the stove ripped out, fitted pine units installed, a vinyl

floor covering laid over the red quarry tiles... “ (22). Home renovation here becomes an attempt to recover a sense of safety in the spaces of a “desecrated” house; memories of Charlie’s sudden, violent death in the most familiar room of their home resonate in the space, and they thus attempt to transform it entirely. Some of the renovations seem a direct response to the murder—of course they would want to cover over the “red quarry tiles” where Charlie’s body had fallen. But more interesting, perhaps, are the renovations that serve to make the kitchen unrecognizable: the appliances being “ripped out,” “pine units” replacing the old cabinets. These renovations seem to be an attempt to transform the kitchen so that it does not fit with their memories of the night of the murder. After the renovation, Emily and Lucy “...both cried and that their mother had kissed Lucy and told her that she’d done the right thing, because life had to go on” (21). Thus, the transformation of the kitchen becomes an attempt to recover the continuity of everyday life, to cover over the violence and continue.

But though one can create new spaces, renovate kitchens or even move to a new house, the violent intrusion into the home inevitably repeats itself through the psychology of haunting. Aligning with her careful descriptions of the shifts in domesticity that the encroaching militarization and violence created, Madden depicts each woman’s grief surrounding Charlie’s death through the lens of domesticity. Cate describes the way in which his death transformed them all; she felt that “...just by looking at them, people might have guessed that something was wrong, that something had frightened them; and that fear was like a wire which connected them with each other and isolated them from everyone else” (9). Each woman’s transformation—written by Madden as something that began in childhood and was given a final push with Charlie’s death—is felt in her daily life, the things

she chooses to surround herself with, how she decorates (or doesn't decorate) her apartment, her thoughts as she stands in front of a classroom of young students. Emily's grief takes the form of an obsession with gardening, and Madden details the woman's relationship with the flowers and plants that surround her. She had "always been fond of flowers and plants," but now is obsessed with gardening as an escape from her own emotions; it is "the only thing that made any sense to her" (106). She even "...made a garden of her husband's grave. She didn't know how to pray for him, so she cultivated roses on the earth that sheltered his body" (106). Again, Madden emphasizes the sacred possibilities of the domestic. Just as the sisters wish to keep the kitchen as their father had seen and enjoyed it, Emily feels that the gardens she cultivates in the spaces outside their home and on Charlie's grave can take the place of a prayer. The patterns of domestic life become a way for her to grieve when religious meaning fails for her.

Helen, who describes a "hairline crack" in her "steely self-containment," asserts that going home "was to push against the crack with her fingers and feel it yield and fear that some day it would split open completely" (24). Her response to her father's death is to flee the domestic, both by only returning home as a purposeful act of pain and by choosing a "new construction" home in Belfast. While the novel is full of descriptions of the sisters' emotional attachment to their home and Uncle Brian's home, Helen searches for a place in Belfast to which she could have "...no emotional attachment whatsoever":

... the horror of what had happened to their father had remembered then a dream she had, years ago, when she was at university, of watching Brian's house burning down, and weeping because she would never be able to go there again. And now, even though the house was intact, it was lost to her. She grew to appreciate the very sterility of the place in Belfast: having moved in as soon as the builders moved out she was confident that it was, psychically, a blank (44).

Helen's new house is an escape from the "psychic" remnants of violence felt in the homes of her childhood. Madden describes a childhood dream of Helen's in order to emphasize again the loss of Uncle Brian's house as a space of safety and family togetherness. But though the material house still stands, "it was lost to her," and she will not return to it. Perhaps more significantly, the *idea* of home is also lost to Helen: she seeks to inhabit a space that has none of the markers of self, no history of prior inhabitants, and no tinge of past violence having occurred in its spaces. These domestic desires indicate the psychological process of grieving both her father and the lost family house through a rejection of the material markers of home.

Madden uses the character of Sally, haunted by the psychology of random violence, to articulate the mundane yet terrifying quality of the everyday fears that arise when surrounded by violence. Madden's descriptions of Sally's psychological suffering also align with Caruth's writings about the repetitive nature of trauma. When Cate reveals her pregnancy and expresses that she knows Sally loves children, Sally thinks: "To say how much she felt the family needed something like this would have been to point up how haunted and threatened she had felt herself to be over the past two years" (145). This is one of Madden's only uses of the word "haunted" in the text, and after these words she briefly describes a scene at Sally's school in order to illustrate the woman's haunted psychology. While teaching, she sees an unfamiliar van at the gates of the school. She thinks "this is it" and has the children put their crayons down, close their eyes, and put their heads on their desks. Nothing happens, but Sally expresses that she was fearful because "she might not have been wrong," that over the course of her life many individuals had been murdered while performing tasks that might have "nullified their risk of danger":

Bricklayers and binmen on their tea break had been shot. They'd killed a man driving a school bus full of children; opened fire on supporters at a football match; and shot

people sitting in a bookie's watching horse racing on television. Men lying in bed asleep beside their wives or girlfriends had been woken up and murdered...So no one had ever gone into a primary school in Northern Ireland and opened fire on a gaggle of five-year-olds and their female teacher: what did that prove? Nothing, Sally thought. Just because a thing hasn't happened doesn't mean that it never will (147).

This passage, more than any other, captures the psychology of fear that occurs when any action—even those, like teaching young children, that would seem to guard one from terror—is tinged with the possibility that violence *could* happen. The most mundane of activities is always accompanied by its ghostly counterpart and these fear thus becomes the mundane background to everyday life. Horror can arise, like in this moment, as a sudden jolt of terror but, for the most part, it lives in the backgrounds of the sisters' lives. Like a ghostly presence, it changes the spaces that surround one, transforming the ordinary into the phantasmal. Thus, Sally's description of herself as "haunted" is startlingly accurate; she is a haunted self, presenting no outward material changes, but instead a subtle, inner transformation that marks the doubling possibility of violence. Again, Sally's fear of terrorism is strikingly similar to Caruth's descriptions of those who experience traumatic events. The psychological effects that Madden describes can thus be understood as the result of living in a traumatized culture. Here, what Caruth describes as a "wound of the mind" is not suffered as the repetition of an accident experienced by the individual, instead becoming mapped onto the larger "wounded" culture.

Though the text opens with Cate's return home and it is her pregnancy that drives the plot of the contemporary chapters, Helen seems to be the narrative's central voice. She has become a lawyer who defends paramilitaries, and is troubled by what she terms the surprising "hypocrisy" of her actions. Seeing an old friend who had been in jail for being in the IRA "and possessing explosives," she tries to ignore these violent thoughts while talking



with him: “And if she was prepared to turn a blind eye and hold her mind back from certain things like a dog gripped by the collar, was that not...the deepest hypocrisy?” (170). The death of her father

...still haunted her dreams, the thought of it could ambush her at any moment of the day. Something as trivial as the nicotine stains on the fingers of the man selling her newspapers could bring him back to her, but only for a fraction of a second, only to take him away again, and leave instead the terrible image of him going (175).

This passage, another of the few times Madden uses the word “haunted,” emphasizes the violence of trauma’s repeated return. Her use of the word “ambush” aligns with the description of her father’s death: the thoughts come back as suddenly as the violent act itself. Here the ordinary, represented by nicotine stains, is tinged not with the possibility of violence but instead with its reminder. The memory of her father is paired with its ghostly double, and the phrase “terrible image of him going” indicates not that she thinks of him, only to remember sadly that he is dead, but in fact that any thought of him is followed by the mental repetition of his murder.

The actual description of her father’s murder follows five pages later as the novel closes, and the last page of the book contrast images of the sisters’ childhood home with Helen’s expansive imaginings of the larger world. The “...image of her father’s death was infinitely small, infinitely tender: the searing grief came from the tension between that smallness and the enormity of infinite time and space” (181). And yet, she continues that she could only feel “forgiveness” or “comfort” if “...she could have conceived of a consciousness where every unique horror in the history of humanity was “known and grieved for,” a grief that would extend beyond her own suffering. The novel closes with the repetition of one of the first lines of the book, spaced as though it were part of a poem:

In the solid stone house, the silence was uncanny.

One by one in the darkness, the sisters slept (181). The spare details of these lines contribute to their meaning. Madden first presents the “solid stone house,” a description that emphasizes that the material structure has not been harmed in any way; the place itself, and thus one’s sense of home, indicate a permanence that cannot be moved. But this image of the solid house is quickly subverted by her next phrase “...the silence was uncanny” (181). Such a phrase indicates that what might be the ordinary silence of nighttime is here imbued with the uncanny: the house may appear solid, but in fact it is an “unhomely” house, haunted by their father’s violent death and the militarized culture that invaded their childhood. The next phrase, the last of the novel, emphasizes the separation of the sisters and their inability to comfort each other.

Both Madden and Deane evade narratives of progress or healing; grief is not a process so much as a haunting presence that invades the most private of spaces, transforming the ordinary and infusing it with the familiar tinge of violence. *Reading in the Dark* and *One by One in the Darkness* suggest that traditional narratives of the violence in 1990s Ireland, found in history textbooks or television coverage, are wholly inadequate for describing the militarized culture, glossing over the emotions that surround a violent act in the months and years to follow. The narratives become all the more inadequate because of the unique nature of the violence and the new kind of “war” that emerges: there is no battlefield, and instead the public intrudes on the private, creating an “unhomely” vision of the domestic and forever altering conceptions of home and hearth. Attempts to understand the violence within the framework of the historical discipline or a newspaper story thus become a “blunt weapon,” another kind of assault with no sense of the possibility that the presence of violence, as Deane suggests, can seep into or “curse” future generations or

forever transform one's sense of the ordinary. Nevertheless, the language of haunting provides these authors with a vocabulary for discussing the repercussions of violence within the domestic spaces of home. The use of the imagery of phantasmal presences, along with the childhood perspective and "flash narrative" style of both books, evade what Helen in *One by One in the Darkness* understands as the violence of "making up stories out of a few facts" (50). For both authors it seems that literary culture, with its access to the possibilities of phantasmal intrusions and its ability to convey the most quotidian details of life, can thus make an intervention into our understanding of violence in post-partition Northern Ireland. The novelists' gaze, falling as it does on a mother who feels that she is burning both outside and inside, and sisters whose sense of the ordinary is haunted by the possibility of violence, captures what traditional, limited understandings of violence cannot. No, there is no "talking cure," and the books present no solutions and no comfort for the haunted, only the possibility that the effects of one act of violence among many can be understood.

## Chapter Four

### **Mothering the Border: Reproduction and the Urban Bachelor in *Fat Lad*, *Ripley Bogle* and *Eureka Street***

...she dreamt of monstrous births and repulsive babies. The thing had seemed like a virus in her. She had expelled it. That was enough (*Eureka Street* 317).

Either we shoot them or we outbreed them.  
Bernadette Devlin McAliskey<sup>30</sup>

Both Max, a character in Robert McLiam Wilson's *Eureka Street*, and Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, a Republican activist in Northern Ireland, link women's bodies and the act of birthing to violence. While McAliskey militarizes pregnancy, making visible the link between women's bodies and the "numbers game" of Northern Ireland politics, McLiam Wilson reimagines Max's pregnancy through images of monstrosity, emphasizing the young woman's lack of agency over her own reproductive power. Max understands pregnancy as a foreign invasion of her body; her bulging stomach thus imprisons her and the act of birth becomes a monstrous "expulsion" of a "virus." Bernadette McAliskey describes the "numbers game" with shocking clarity, suggesting that violence and breeding are the two options available to political groups in Northern Ireland. She presents pregnancy as a logical alternative to murder, ultimately imagining women's bodies as possible agents of violence against the "other." In this construction, the woman's body is viewed as a weapon, an image that eliminates the active power of the birthing woman, instead imagining her as an object to be reloaded, a defense against the increasing numbers of the opposing nationalist group. This militarization of the womb explodes conceptions of pregnancy as a private, domestic act

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Conrad, Kathryn. "Fetal Ireland: Reproduction, Agency, and Irish National Discourses"

based entirely within the framework of the family. Pregnancy, the pregnant body, and the fetus itself instead become part of the struggle to define the space of Northern Ireland. In both of these constructions, women lose control over their pregnant bodies, and the act of reproducing ultimately imprisons rather than empowers them.

In this chapter, I argue that the bachelor-in-Belfast frame of *Eureka Street*, *Ripley Bogle*, and *Fat Lad* provides Robert McLiam Wilson and Glenn Patterson with a lens through which to examine anxieties about women's sexuality and reproductive power in the transforming city of Belfast. I use the phrase "bachelor in Belfast" because, though the three novels differ widely in terms of the class and religious background of their diverse protagonists, all three texts focus primarily on young, single men in the urban setting. The first line of *Eureka Street* is "all stories are love stories," and the male characters in each of the novels engage in a series of romantic relationships that propel the plot against a backdrop of Troubles violence. Terrorism, police interrogations, and the militarization of everyday life intrude on the texts, pushing up against and ultimately transforming the lighter narratives of romance, career, and family.

But though the outward focus of the novels is on masculinity, McLiam Wilson and Patterson, young male writers who are often heralded as a "new generation" of Northern Irish authors, write against the backdrop of 1980s and 90s debates about abortion and sexuality. Thus within these coalescing narratives of public violence and private lives lurks a subtle exploration of the ways in which both plots—public and private—are invested in anxiety over female sexual identity and reproduction. All three novels include an abortion or forced miscarriage, and the texts also explore the culture's investment in sexuality, most notably through women who are shunned or publicly shamed because of supposed sexual

transgressions. Thus sex and pregnancy are imagined as sources of power for men, while women often lose agency precisely because of their power to reproduce. Though the characters' gendered experiences shape the texts, the women in these novels—and the abortions and monstrous births at the heart of each text—are often ignored in criticism of the works. McLiam Wilson and Patterson have been analyzed together in numerous articles and books, but the critics focus on masculinity, the emergence of a “bourgeois” Belfast, or the concept of modernity in the authors' depictions of the city.<sup>31</sup> These themes are certainly important to the novels, but the texts are also deeply invested in exploring the ways in which reproductive identities shape the way we think about national identity and the limits of community. Narratives of domestic violence, sexual transgressions, and reproduction thus align with the novels' larger explorations of the militarized city and terrorist violence.

### **Sexual Politics in Northern Ireland**

Mary K. Meyer, in her article “Ulster's Red Hand: Gender, identity, and sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland,” describes women's bodies as “...[demarcating] the nation, a word that comes from the Latin *natio* < *natus*, born, and *nascar*, to be born” (122). In Northern Ireland, the power of the female body to imaginatively demarcate sectarian identity is materialized; through pregnancy, women directly influence the population and thus the permanence of the national border. Similarly, Lorraine Dowler argues in “The Mother of All Warriors: Women in West Belfast, Northern Ireland” that, in Northern Ireland, the “primary role of women remains that of reproduction of the body politic” (78). This emphasis on women as reproducers of the “body politic” and defenders of the national border

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<sup>31</sup> see Robert Kirkland “Bourgeois Redemptions: the Fictions of Glenn Patterson and Robert McLiam Wilson” and Linden Peach “Posting the Present: Modernity and Modernization in Glenn Patterson's *Fat Lad* (1992) and Robert McLiam Wilson's *Eureka Street* (1996).”

takes place within the context of a small Protestant majority and predictions by demographers that the populations would “equalize” by 2050, potentially causing the Catholics to gain enough political power to reverse the partition of Ireland and Northern Ireland<sup>32</sup> (79). Dowler, a professor of Geography and Women’s Studies, describes a respondent in her study who had given birth to five children by the age of 25; the woman “...asked her doctor to sterilize her, but he refused, explaining that she was young and could bear many more children for Ireland” (79). This encounter between woman and doctor demonstrates the ways in which the female body is seen as national object; the young woman’s desires for her body are subordinate to the male doctor’s belief that she should carry more children for the nation.

Manifesting political investment in the reproductive lives of women, Ian Paisley, leader of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster and the Democratic Unionist Party, urged women at a rally in the 1990s to “Go home and breed babies for Ulster!” a statement all the more shocking when one considers that Paisley is still the mainstream leader of the Protestant cause (Jacobs 50). Paisley’s words at first imply that women belong in the private world of the home, but the second part of his statement—urging women to bear babies for the specific space of the nation—suggests that the home is not a haven from the violence of the conflict, but simply another front on which the war is fought. Thus the private house is invaded both by the very personal assassinations of individuals in their own homes and through the militarization of pregnancy itself. This construction of women’s birthing bodies as a battleground of national concerns is not unique to Northern Ireland. Anne McClintock describes the role of Afrikaner women as reproducers of the “white nation” in her 1991

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<sup>32</sup> Mary K. Meyer notes that the border dividing Ireland and Northern Ireland “...was deliberately drawn according to census data by the British government at the time of partition (1921) to include Protestant communities in the province and ensure a loyal, Protestant majority” (125).

article “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven’: Women and Nationalism in South Africa,” explaining that in 1961 women were “exhorted to do their national duty and ‘Have a Baby for Republic Day’” in order to defend white national identity (110). Both Paisley’s public statement and the South African slogan emphasize that reproduction is inextricably tied to sectarian identities, making visible the importance of women as creators of the political body, especially within postcolonial states with contested borders and national identities.

V. Spike Peterson, presenting an altered version of a framework created by Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, suggests in “Gendered Nationalism: Reproducing ‘Us’ versus ‘Them’” that the patriarchal nation views women in five “dimensions”: “...as Biological Reproducers of the Nation”; “as Social Reproducers of Group Members and Cultural Forms”; “as Signifiers of Group Difference”; “as Participants in Political Identity Struggles”; and as “Societal Members Generally” (43-6). Of these different constructions of feminine national identity, Peterson is most interested in the “battle of the cradle,” the ways in which the state is invested in the reproductive bodies of its female citizens. Her analysis claims that:

...reproduction is the most political—power-laden and potent—of activities. Conventionally ignored as a dimension of the ostensibly apolitical private sphere, the power relations of reproduction fundamentally condition who ‘we’ are and how groups/nations align themselves in cooperative, competing, and complementary ways (42).

Thus Peterson argues for an understanding of the politics of reproduction within the framework of the national, political sphere, militarizing this relationship with the phrase “*battle of the cradle.*” She further describes “pronatalist policies” that deny “access to abortions” and provide rewards for pregnancy as part of this dimension of women’s national identity. The framework Peterson presents suggests that masculine anxieties about the state



become mapped onto female bodies and, that through the institutionalization of the “public-private dichotomy,” women are “excluded from the definition of group interests and are compelled to comply with male-defined needs” (42).

When women are defined by their status as mothers, political communities are clearly deeply invested in female reproductive power and sexual identity. This investment in the reproductive lives of the nation’s female citizens is perhaps most visible in public debates about abortion in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. These debates, taking place primarily in the 1980s and 90s and continuing until today, further reinforced the border between the two spaces. Kathryn Conrad titles the section of *Locked in the Family Cell* that considers abortion and partition: “Part(ur)ition: The Amendement, the North, and the Politics of Containment,” suggesting with this phrasing alone that reproduction and the shape of the nation are inextricably linked. Conrad describes the 1983 abortion referendum in Ireland as an act that “...fixed even more solidly the border between North and South” and a 1983 *Irish Times* article refers to the referendum as causing a “second partition” (91). Conrad ultimately argues that, “...what was at stake was not so much the medico-legal and religious definitions of fetal ‘life’ but rather political territorial boundaries,” and further suggests that Ireland’s commitment to the referendum necessitated “...abandoning that troubling political contingency, the North” (93).

Abortion is illegal in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, with the primary difference being that “abortion information is legal in the North” (Locked 110). Though this sounds like a small difference, the public debate in 1992 over “Miss X,” a thirteen-year-old rape victim stopped from going to Britain for an abortion, again reinforced the border between North and South and “...caused national controversy and international

outrage” (Fletcher 568). A cartoon depicting the event is marked with the words “17<sup>th</sup> February 1992...the introduction of internment in Ireland....for 14 year old girls.” The drawing, created by Martyn Turner and published in the Irish Times, shows a young, pregnant girl clutching a teddy bear and standing in the middle of an Irish map. A barbwire fence encloses her in the space of the Irish Republic, ostensibly keeping her from leaving the shores of Ireland to travel to Britain or from the small, unenclosed land indicating Northern Ireland. The gentle bulge of her pregnant stomach and stuffed animal she holds emphasize her youth and innocence, a sharp contrast to the militarized fencing that entraps her in the Irish nation. In this cartoon, violence, national borders, and pregnancy coalesce as Turner visualizes the reinforcement of the border through changing abortion policies.

As Kathryn Conrad writes, abortion is an issue in which national investment in reproduction is made visible: “...the national self both relies upon and must deny agency to the self that is the pregnant woman: women thus become subject to Ireland rather than subjects in Ireland” (115). The importance of this debate extends beyond the significance of the individual issue, revealing the ways in which the nation depends on the domestic sphere and female reproductive power for both the imaginative and material construction of the nation. It thus seems very significant that, as these debates emerged, McLiam Wilson and Patterson each include an abortion or forced miscarriage in three novels that are ostensibly about masculinity in the militarized city. These abortions, and the acts of sexualized violence that fill the texts, allow the authors to explore the ways in which the politics of reproduction coalesce with the masculine culture of sectarian violence.

### **Robert McLiam Wilson's *Ripley Bogle* and *Eureka Street***

Robert McLiam Wilson is committed to breaking with traditional narratives of the Northern Irish conflict. When discussing the filming of a television series based on his novel *Eureka Street*, he instructs readers that they might be surprised by the vision of Northern Ireland found in his work: "There are no former IRA men, there is no love across the barricades. There is only one balaclava (sporting a male stripper), and no one knows the names of any of the guns" (Belfast Surrenders par 22). Though McLiam Wilson is describing the adaptation of his second novel, his first also aligns with this desire to intervene and transform narratives of the Northern Irish conflict. *Ripley Bogle*, published when McLiam Wilson was only 25, is a first-person narrative taking place over four days in the life of the title character, a homeless young man originally from Belfast who wanders the streets of London throughout the novel describing his physical condition, personal history, and present state as a "...filthy, foodless, cashless tramp" (7). The majority of the novel's action takes the form of a flashback, and the narrative ultimately focuses on the process of story-telling itself. In the context of the squalor surrounding him, Bogle describes "thought and memory" as his "gifts," asking "What else is there?...I remember and I think. I have a lot of time and few true distractions," comparing himself to Dickens and Orwell as someone who creates narratives enriched by "fruitful early pavement-licking experiences" (7).

Jennifer Jeffers explains that the novel was written before "The 1990s revival and celebrations of all things Belfast" and before *Eureka Street*, a text that "...makes fictional love to the northern star" (133). Bogle presents a vision of his Belfast childhood focused not on "the names of any of the guns," but instead on the disorientation and trauma associated

with witnessing political violence as part of one's everyday life. Critics have noted that McLiam Wilson's use of both homelessness and the disorienting perspective of childhood memories help him to disrupt conventional understandings of life in Belfast. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews describes Bogle's "radical displacement," stating that he is: "...situated on the margins of society, distanced geographically, intellectually, and ideologically from his West Belfast, Catholic, Nationalist, working class origins" (115). This "radical homelessness" gives Bogle what Eve Patten terms "...a pervasive irony [that] provides an enabling distance from which to survey and destabilize configurations of home" (130). Likewise, Patten goes on to discuss the ways in which McLiam Wilson's "use of a childhood perspective... becomes the primary means in the novel of usurping previous compensatory readings of the North" (136). These critics focus on the ways in which McLiam Wilson's narrative strategies create a challenging vision of Troubles violence, but *Ripley Bogle* also reimagines Belfast through the frame of gender. Bogle's focus on female sexuality and reproduction is subtle, and perhaps critics ignore these moments simply because there are so few of them. Gender intrudes on the text in four major scenes: Bogle's description of his birth, the accidental mutilation of a young girl's genitals during Internment Night, the tarring and feathering of a pregnant neighborhood woman, and Bogle's involvement in his girlfriend Deirdre's abortion. Though each incident is unique, they all depict cultural confusion and complicity against a background of sexualized violence.

Bogle's focus on reproduction begins with the novel's opening section, "It Begins," in which the narrator recounts the events of his conception and birth. This narrative move aligns the text with *Midnight's Children*, another novel in which reproduction and nationality intertwine, and in brief interview included in the American edition of the text, McLiam

Wilson acknowledges Rushdie as an influence on his writing style.<sup>33</sup> We are introduced to Bogle as he describes in a bracketed and italicized scene the brief relationship between his parents: “(Enter man with money. He waits. Enter woman, misclothed and passionate. They rut. Exeunt)” (1). The dramatic nature of the passage introduces Bogle’s conception, but begins with the paternal rather than maternal figure—the “man with money” whose absence from his life Bogle cites as the cause of the “personal problems” that are dramatized throughout the novel.<sup>34</sup> Bogle’s eye is always on masculine action, and even at the moment of his birth he emphasizes his own movement against the “unwilling production” of his mother’s pain. Bogle describes his mother’s cry: “Aaaaaaaeeeeeeeeiiiiiccchhhh! ... Birth scene. The calm cry of parturition,” pushing his perspective into the scene by ironically rewriting her clearly panicked scream as “calm.” He then describes the actual moment of his birth:

Little bastard pushing hard now. Has to. Stretching those mother’s loins to impossible, inelastic lengths. His first debt. ... With a quiet, weary retching noise, Mrs Bogle completes her ripened task. From her parted, stirruped legs plops a son. (2).

Bogle reconfigures the actions of his birth as a kind of violence against his mother, foreshadowing his later violent intrusion into Deirdre’s pregnant body. This monstrous memory of his birth matches his later description of his mother as a “...real rolling fatbag” (8). Bogle’s hatred for his mother and desire to reach his biological father—the nameless “man with money” whose action begins both his life and the novel itself--introduce the narrative fascination with paternity. By opening with this scene, rather than the first chapter describing his present condition, McLiam Wilson frames the narrative with the pain of a

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<sup>33</sup> McLiam Wilson acknowledges Joyce as an influence, but says “So was Tolstoy and Dickens and Balzac and Rushdie and Heller.” Glenn Patterson also acknowledges Rushdie’s enormous influence on his writing in “I am a Northern Irish Novelist.”

<sup>34</sup> “I think many of my personal problems stem from the fact that I never knew who my father was” (237).

birthing body while also introducing Bogle's narrative tendencies to revise and dismiss female suffering. Though Bogle is at times sympathetic to female characters, gesturing towards empathetic possibilities for the women whose pain he describes, when faced with a traumatic situation he more often dissolves into a joke or simply—with his power as narrator—changes the subject.

Bogle appears to distance himself from female characters like his mother throughout the novel, but in the first chapter following the brief description of his conception and birth, he acknowledges that he has been "...spending increasing amounts of my time in thinking about my birth" (5). His birth narrative is the first story he tells, and his comments about it foreshadow the later revisions and omissions that characterize his power as narrator. He says that thinking about his birth is: "...a futile thing to be doing...The event was, alas, poorly documented and my own recollections of it are ranged upon the impenetrable side of hazy. However, that is probably how it was—more or less. I feel it in my bones" (5). Here, in the first pages of the text, Bogle claims his narrative power to "penetrate" and revise the "poorly documented" events of his life while also introducing his textual fascination with women's bodies and reproduction.

As Bogle's rambling narrative continues, he slowly introduces the violence that provided the background to his childhood; murders, bombs, and terror insert themselves into his narratives of school experiences and childhood friends. Bogle can hardly recount an incident of his young life without it intertwining with an act of political violence. Late in the novel, for example, his "Cambridge Common Entrance Examination" is interrupted by the sound of three "fifty-pound bombs" detonated in a nearby garage, indicating the intrusion of the political onto the personal narrative of a student in Belfast (187). One of the first

moments of Troubles violence occurs in the midst of a story about a fight with a school bully, D. Stark. In parenthesis—one of the ways in which McLiam Wilson inserts descriptions and commentary about violence into the narrative—Bogle acknowledges that he should be wondering about “whatever happened” to this childhood foe. He continues that this is “...easy and trim in the telling...D. Stark was shot dead by an army foot patrol in the Ardoyne,” a Catholic neighborhood in Belfast (32). The description of this shooting spins Bogle into one of his first riffs on Troubles violence:

Oh yes, those Troubles! Those nasty Irish things! The Northern Irish Conflict certainly did its bit for the decoration of my early years. I made damned sure that I got a good seat...I spent a great deal of my childhood seeing things that I shouldn't have and making the acquaintance of uncomfortable notions that certainly could have waited a decade or so for their entrance (32).

Bogle's description of Troubles violence aligns with McLiam Wilson's desire to be a different kind of Northern Irish writer. His statement that the Troubles were “Those nasty Irish things!” seems part dismissive and part performance, acknowledging what Eve Patten terms the “exotica” of British fascination with Belfast violence (137). This flippant declaration works as a technique to distance Bogle from the trauma he has witnessed and also matches the tone he uses throughout the novel whenever he encounters an event that is difficult for him to recount. In an author interview included at the end of the text, the interviewer comments to McLiam Wilson that Bogle “...doesn't seem very interested in politics.” The author explains that he is interested in portraying those who “...do not care whether Northern Ireland is Irish, British, or independent” but whose lives are nevertheless intruded on by the surrounding violence. Bogle's introduction of the Troubles works to frame the violence by thinking beyond its political meaning to the intimate effects it had on his young life.

The narrator names the “beginning” of his experience of “Murder, violence, blood, guts, and sundry other features of Irish political life” as Internment Night, an evening in August, 1971 when soldiers invaded the homes of Belfast’s working class Catholic citizens in the middle of the night (32). This scene illustrates the ways in which public and private coalesce in 1970s Belfast: the intrusion of soldiers into the spaces of his childhood transforms the neighborhood into a strange kind of battlefield. Henry MacDonald, in an article written for the *Guardian* to protest the restriction of civil rights following September 11, recounted the events of Internment Night in a way that aligns with Bogle’s experiences. The “casualties” of Internment Night for his family were both the material structure of their home and their sense of normalcy within the private world of domestic space. MacDonald writes:

The brickwork around the front door of our home on Eliza Street in Belfast's Markets area was smashed to pieces by a British Army Saracen...In the early hours, in their blind quest for republican suspects, working on outdated RUC intelligence, the Army cleared the barricades away and in the process almost reduced our living room to rubble. The new red bricks that later replaced the old damaged ones were a reminder of internment night for the remaining nine years we lived there (1).

This description emphasizes the ways in which the private home held the trauma of Internment Night; even the renovated bricks became a “reminder” of the strange intrusion.

However both Bogle and MacDonald, remembering the events through their childhood perspectives, seem more disoriented than traumatized during Internment Night. Bogle describes “...soldiers everywhere. Soldiers with blackened faces running into unlit, sleeping houses and dragging half-dressed men out...soldiers shouting; soldiers punching; soldiers kicking...while the screams and execrations of frenzied women dinned the tepid night air” (34). In this passage, his narration emphasizes the active nature of masculine, nationalist violence—“shouting,” “punching,” “kicking”—against the background of the



ineffectual cries of “frenzied women.” Though Bogle never directly links nationalist violence to gender, in his image of Internment Night the men are either violent, exciting intruders or entirely absent, like his father. The women provide the crying, screaming backdrop to the scene and he refuses to sympathize with their strong reaction to the intrusion into the family home. As a young male child, Bogle states that his fear is subsumed beneath the novelty of the experience, especially his excitement at encountering in his bedroom “...a massive West Indian corporal” (33). He is elated to interact with a “...real black man” and does not register their interaction as terrifying, instead describing an interaction in which the soldier is “sheepish” (33). MacDonald’s description of the events aligns with Bogle’s; he says the night was like “Boy’s Own adventure, with, as the song went, ‘armoured cars and tanks and guns’, outside my window” (1). In his book *(de-) constructing the North: Fiction and the Northern Irish Troubles*, Elmer Kennedy-Andrews writes that McLiam Wilson’s use of the child’s perspective is “defamiliarising,” and that Bogle’s viewpoint “...cuts beneath conventionalized ways of seeing, displacing received Irish Catholic Nationalist perceptions of Internment Night, and offering an alternative narrative of the Troubles” (117).

This “alternative narrative” of Troubles violence also reimagines Internment night through the frame of gender. A sharp contrast to his own frenzied confusion and enjoyment, Bogle identifies his mother as a “frothing harpy” who is “deranged” and “apoplectic” at the intrusion into the family home. In fact, he revises conceptions of Internment Night violence by pitying the “unsuspecting” soldiers who have to deal with the “insistent bellow” of his mother (33). Though Bogle’s sarcastic tone distances him from his mother’s pain, McLiam Wilson nevertheless uses his narration to introduce a gendered vision of Northern Irish violence. Bogle goes outside to escape the cries of his mother and witness the events of

Internment Night, and in doing so encounters an accidental act of violence that goes beyond the destruction of the hearth to mutilation of the female body. His neighbor, Muire Ginchey, who is “always showing off...by walking along the barbed wire on her father’s fence,” runs out of her house during the chaos to try her trick at night (35). As she walks on her “tightrope of barbed wire,” Bogle sees a group of soldiers misidentify Muire as an armed man trying to escape the neighborhood (35). Though Bogle tries to interfere, the sound of the gun and Bogle’s own screams cause Muire to fall, her body twists “...in terror and she [slips], dropping straight down, her open legs straddling the barbed wire” (36).

The events that follow resist traditional interpretations; the mutilation that occurs is not a willful act and the man who almost shot her, whom McLiam Wilson names “Wilson,” is horrified by Muire’s injury. In fact, it seems that McLiam Wilson uses the event to demonstrate how Muire’s mutilation defies comprehension for the soldiers and witnesses, who wait silently for the ambulance unable to make sense of her injury. An act of violence taking place between British soldiers and a Catholic girl seems to fall outside the lines of Internment Night, which in McLiam Wilson’s construction consists of the violent apprehension of Catholic men and destruction of material property. The shocked wordlessness that follows Muire’s injury gestures towards the incomprehension that surrounds her injury. The only sounds Bogle hears are Muire’s mother and the soldier crying “‘I’m sorry. I’m sorry...I’m so sorry’” (37). When Bogle returns to the present moment, he remarks that Muire is “...no record-breaking matriarch, for sure. I think we can definitely rule that one out, gynaecologically speaking” (38). Here, the narrator distances himself from the terror of witnessing the injury with an ironic tone, further deflating the moment with the comment that Muire is probably “...a rancid, hard-eyed, Irish tart like the rest of them now”

(38). Though Bogle's language drifts into this misogynistic characterization of Muire, his narrative voice varies between sympathy and distance: he also states that she was a "...nice kid" who "didn't deserve" the violence that was visited on her body.

Later in the text, the flow of Bogle's narrative again connects nationalist violence to female sexuality, here aligning the need for control over the sexual lives of women with the patriotic desires of the male community. In a page-long discussion of the postcolonial situation in Northern Ireland, Bogle steps outside both descriptions of his current condition and narratives of his past in order to make a brief political commentary. He describes his sympathy for the British, saying that "to be fair" the Troubles were not only their problem:

...they had committed some worthy cock-ups in the preceding four hundred years or so and Bloody Sunday had been a little tactless...The British were onto a very bad thing in Ulster. They couldn't win: if they left there was civil war and if they stayed they got crapped on from all sides. It couldn't have been much fun (111).

Bogle's language aligns with McLiam Wilson's own statements about the British presence in Northern Ireland. When asked about the "conflict between the English and the Irish," McLiam Wilson responds that "...describing what is happening in Northern Ireland as a conflict between the English and the Northern Irish is inconceivably foolish. The English are not really involved" (Conversation 330). After his statements about the British, Bogle then connects their investment in the Northern Irish conflict to their involvement in India, Pakistan, and Palestine, all countries that had been partitioned: "In India, those Indians and Pakistanis were always kicking the dung out of each other as the dear old Brits tried to pull out... It was the same with Palestine after the war" (111). Here, McLiam Wilson looks beyond the violence of the Northern Irish conflict to a larger frame of partition and nationalist violence; in this passage, Bogle attempts to free the British from blame—calling

them the “dear old Brits”—while also drawing attention to their presence and participation in several similar situations.

Though Bogle never clearly links his experiences with violence against women to his rants about the political situation in Northern Ireland, it is directly after this passage that he describes the torture of a girl who was impregnated by a British soldier. The description of this act indicates a shift from the dynamics of Muire’s encounter--a young Catholic girl accidentally injured by a British soldier—to purposeful violence as a regulating force *within* a community. In typical Bogle fashion, he introduces the scene not with gravity but with the curious statement “I’ve seen someone tarred and feathered as well,” as though the violent acts he has witnessed form, together, a kind of collection. He then causally emphasizes the gendered nature of the torture by stating “The victim of the tarring was a girl. (Most of them were),” also indicating with the phrase “most of them” that this type of “punishment” was a common practice in his neighborhood community (111). The woman, Mary Sharkey, was “...having a little lamb through the fructile offices of some corporal from the Royal Engineers,” and a group of young men plan “...punitive action” (111). The Catholic men who decide to “punish” Mary for her sexual relationship with a British soldier are described as particularly “patriotic,” emphasizing commitment to a political cause as the source of their violence.

Bogle describes his childhood terror at the scene: “They nabbed Mary and tied her to a lamp post at the bottom of our cul-de-sac. They stripped her and shaved her head. To my surprise, I wasn’t enjoying it at all...The bastards actually boiled the tar in front of her” (112). Bogle’s description emphasizes the public nature of the “punitive action,” taking place in the neighborhood in which both the tortured woman and the young men lived

together. The punishment involves physical and psychological torture, but the image of her shaved head and naked body on display in their community also sexualizes the act. Bogle describes the growing discomfort of the numerous men and women watching the act, for whom “public humiliation” would have been enough without adding “brutality,” but the onlookers do nothing to stop the violence (112).

Bogle’s emotional reaction to Mary’s torture reveals his empathy for the young woman. Though he continues to distance himself from her pain through his narrative, he describes the sound of her screams as the men “chucked” the tar at her naked body as “real throttled-cat belches of outrage” and “deathly wails.” His mother intervenes and pushes him into the garden where he can no longer see the action, and he reveals that he had become hysterical and had a “little fit to himself” (112). When he sees Mary again moments later she is in “...bad shape...Her hair, now matted and clogged, had been roughly shorn into violent, spiky tufts. On the few patches of visible skin, [he] could see that her flesh was already blistered and cracked horribly” (113). McLiam Wilson again uses the frame of childhood to provide a disorienting vision of the violence: here, Bogle sees and comprehends the action but cannot make sense of his own emotional response.

At this moment of utter incomprehension and terror, Bogle’s stepfather intervenes. Bogle refers to this man as “father” even though he is not the man introduced in the scene describing Bogle’s conception. Early in the novel, Bogle describes his “definitely dead” father as an “old shitpot” who “...once tried to disembowl [him] with a broken bottle” (8). He also hints that his father was murdered, stating that he would have killed him himself had not the man emptied “...the majority of his vital organs over the kitchen floor” (8). In this scene with Mary, it is revealed that it is his father’s intervention on the woman’s behalf that

causes his death, an incident that challenges Bogle's earlier description of his father and again depicts the intrusion of violence into the family home. Bogle's father approaches the young men, and though the group tells him to "...go home like the wise man you are," he steps past them and carries Mary away from them "...in his strong father's arms" (114). Bogle appears proud of his father in this memory, stating that his action served as a sharp contrast to the "...coward's stillness of his inactive, unbraved, fully Irish neighbors" (114). Here, Bogle extends the blame for the violence against Mary beyond the youths who stripped her and tied her to a pole to the entire community and even—through his use of the phrase "fully Irish"—to the national culture that would accept this kind of violence. Through Bogle's wavering voice, McLiam Wilson reveals a sharp criticism of the gendered nature of Northern Irish nationalism.<sup>35</sup>

Bogle's description of his father's act of heroism contrasts with an earlier characterization of his murder, and his second retelling of his father's death reveals the trauma of this family story. Two of the "boys" the elder Bogle interrupted when he rescued Mary were in the "Provies," and Bogle states that they:

received their satisfaction by shooting him twice in the abdomen as he was walking home from the pub one night. That was a dirty trick. A nasty place to shoot someone. It took my father an awfully long time to die and he did it all on our kitchen floor. He just dripped away, all sticky and warm. By God, there was tons of the stuff. Thick, oozing pools of scarlet gore formed on the cracked linoleum, streaked and mudded by boot and shoe...I'm pretty cool about it now but at the time I was insane with horror and grief. I was only a kid and he was my dad after all (115).

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<sup>35</sup> This scene also aligns with the vision of sexualized violence depicted in Seamus Heaney's "Punishment," which describes the body of a woman "punished" for presumed sexual betrayal being recovered from a bog. The narrative voice of the poem acknowledges his own complicity in violence against contemporary women, "betraying sisters/ cauled in tar" and the mixture of his own horror and understanding of the "tribal, intimate revenge" created through such "punishment." In *Eurkea Street*, McLiam Wilson satirizes Heaney by introducing a poet called Shague Ghintoss and having one of his protagonists, Jake, summarize Ghintoss's poetry: "*The blah blah under the brown blah of the blah blah hedges*" (174).

This passage, perhaps more than any other, reveals the power of Bogle's narration to describe the incomprehensible terror of violence within the family home. He calls the murder of his father a "dirty trick" and their choice of his stomach as target a "...nasty place to shoot someone." These phrases capture the cruelty of the act while also simplifying Bogle's pain through language that cannot fully articulate the trauma he has experienced. Then, the violence enters Bogle's childhood home when he reveals that his father took an "awfully long time to die" on the family's kitchen floor. Though Bogle's description is matter-of-fact and avoids a full emotional response, McLiam Wilson uses this distancing narrative voice to give a startling description of the intersection between a father's bleeding body and the "cracked linoleum" of the kitchen floor. Even when Bogle seems to be reaching some emotion through his use of the phrase "By God," he resists a full response to the horror, indicating that he is "pretty cool" about the memory while still stating that he was "insane with horror and grief" when his father first died. This act of violence presents the intrusion of trauma into the family home, but also develops the gendered nature of Troubles violence. The men kill Bogle's father for intruding and ultimately stopping their "punishment" of the pregnant Mary; his death is thus an extension of their desire to police the sexuality of neighborhood women.

Each act of gendered violence revealed in the text pushes the trauma closer and closer to the narrator. He first witnesses a neighborhood friend accidentally mutilated during internment night, then a young woman tortured on his street and his father murdered for helping her. The final trauma suffered by a female body is actually performed by Bogle himself. When his girlfriend Deirdre becomes pregnant, Bogle performs a violent abortion, leaving Deirdre in a haze of mental illness that causes her to lash out against him throughout

the remainder of their relationship. McLiam Wilson uses the descriptions of the act to explore Bogle's inability to comprehend and articulate the event, and he also stated in the interview included in the American printing of *Eureka Street* that he simply "...wanted to illustrate something about the character in the sense that he was a complete motherfucker." Liam Callahan, in an otherwise insightful *New York Times* review of Ripley Bogle, chooses not to mention Deirdre by name, instead referring to her as one of the two women Bogle "tangles with." He further describes her as "dangerously obsessed and very disturbed" and mentions that she cut Bogle's "back to shreds," while neglecting to include the textual explanation for her "dangerous" mental state. I mention this not to chide Callahan but to demonstrate the ways in which Deirdre's suffering is pushed to the background: by the text, the narrator, and by most readers. Callahan names the "intimate terror" of Belfast without unpeeling the gendered layers of the violence McLiam Wilson depicts, and, in doing so, Deirdre is reduced to a madwoman, a monster that Bogle has to control. In one of his italicized asides, Bogle explains "I'm hard on Deidre aren't I? ...According to me, Deirdre was a monster. Cruel, selfish, blindly stubborn. There is a certain amount of truth in this but I claim no innocence on my part" (192). Through this passage, McLiam Wilson draws attention to Bogle's characterization of Deirdre as monstrous, suggesting that readers look beyond her erratic actions to the background of violence and loss that characterize her presence in the text.

McLiam Wilson's introduction of the relationship between Deirdre and Bogle plays with the "love-across-the-barricades" theme common in Northern Irish fiction. In his work on partition literature, Joe Cleary discusses the use of romance as a way to think about the nation:



In these novels, the obstacles that hinder the union of the lovers are also those that hinder the consolidation of the nation-state. The novels thus heighten the reader's desire not only for the removal of the obstacles to the romance, but also for the kind of state where its consummation could occur...what these foundational fictions have in common is they meld erotic and patriotic desires in narratives that imagine reconciliation and assimilation of different national constituencies cast as lovers destined to desire each other (113).

Though Deirdre and Bogle are from different religious backgrounds, their relationship is not used "to model a desired harmony in the political sphere," in part because McLiam Wilson works to eliminate desire from their relationship (Kennedy-Andrews 90). When Bogle first describes his infatuation with Deirdre, he introduces her as "...short, stumpy, Protestant, and rich" before adding that she "...was also surprisingly stupid" (76). He refers to his desire for her as a mistake, and though there are obstacles to their relationship—like McLiam Wilson himself, Bogle is thrown out of his house for dating a Protestant girl—this romance-across-the-divide lacks longing and romantic characterization that Cleary describes.

In keeping with McLiam Wilson's desire to rework stereotypical narratives of the Northern Irish conflict, the consummation of the relationship between Deirdre and Bogle is not a joyous union in which the couple transcends political barriers. Their sexual relationship instead ends with a traumatic pregnancy and horrifying forced miscarriage. In the first version of Deirdre's pregnancy presented in the novel, Bogle depicts himself an innocent bystander to Deirdre's pregnancy and miscarriage, even asserting that he had not slept with her at the time of conception. Though Bogle later claims that his revision of the events was merely a narrative trick meant to make him appear more likeable, in these early description he occasionally seems to convince himself of his own innocence. He describes himself finding out about Deirdre's pregnancy and subsequent miscarriage through her father, explaining that, "It was, by all accounts, the result of a botched backstreet abortion"

that nearly causes Deirdre's death (146). Bogle struggles in his narrative description of the act, stating that "It had been the usual bog job—the miscarriage, that is. In other words, the rejected, mangled foetus had been voided and deposited in the family toilet bowl. Not a nice way to go" (146). In this version of the events, McLiam Wilson gestures towards the emotional and physical consequences of a "botched backstreet abortion" while emphasizing Bogle's inability to comprehend the consequences of Deirdre's pain. This difficulty is presented in part through what Bogle terms the "semantic [difficulties]" of narrating an abortion. After describing the "ungodly spoor dying its toilet death," he concludes "Poor kid...Poor whatever it was," indicating his narrative difficulty in describing the discarded fetus (146).

Bogle focuses his narrative attention on Deirdre's emotional transformation following the abortion; first admitting that he "had to" have sex with her at this point because "...she was, quite obviously, off her rocker... Refusal would cause hysteria," emphasizing his own benevolence towards the mentally ill woman (185). In his descriptions of Deirdre as hysterical and violent, Bogle is at his least sympathetic. He links her mental illness to her violent sexual desires and paints Deirdre as a hysterical monster and himself as her generous savior. He describes her desire to tell the "story of her miscarriage" while they have sex," stating that, "At the point of joyous cessation she concluded her tale by saying the 'baby' had looked just how any baby of ours would have looked" (185). He then recounts her increasingly violent desires as a list of attacks, stating that "She would attack me with my own cricket bat; she would spit on me, revile me, punch me, scratch and throttle me in her transports of licentious ecstasy" (185). One night she attacks him in his sleep, cutting into his

back with a pair of scissors; at this point he dismissively calls her his “interesting young lover” (186).

As the novel draws to a close, Bogle admits his involvement in Deirdre’s abortion. He presents his prior description of the events simply as “spoof number two” in a series of three “lies” that he confesses to at the end of his narrative. The first omission involves his complicity and involvement in the death of his friend Maurice and takes seventeen pages to recount. Deirdre’s abortion follows, and it takes the narrator only two pages to confess that he was the father of her child—that the “sprog, the mess, whatever you want to call it” was his—and that he was the one who suggested, planned, and administered the abortion. Bogle’s detached, sarcastic tone influences his telling of this event. He first asserts that the act and its emotional consequences were much weightier for him as a Catholic, stating that “Protestants had abortions all the time, practically every day. It was no sweat for them,” parroting common stereotypes of the different community’s beliefs about abortion (313). Bogle then describes the details of the abortion, indicating that because it was illegal “...we had to improvise...I decided I’d do it myself” (313). He researches abortion methods at the library, “swotting up on the joys of baby squashing...A quick sandpaper job on the uterine cavity or whatever and she’d be right as rain. She wouldn’t even notice it was missing” (313). Bogle’s description of his plan presents his own incomprehension of the pain that Deirdre would experience during and after the abortion. McLiam Wilson pushes Bogle’s simplification of the events to the extreme with the phrases “joys,” “right as rain” and, “she wouldn’t even notice”—in order to indicate Bogle’s constant need to distance himself from Deirdre’s experience.

Even his description of the act itself trivializes the pain that Deirdre felt; he presents the scene entirely from his own perspective, explaining how he “[roots] around for fifteen minutes—shoving, poking, punting, cranking,” as though he were administering the abortion to an inanimate object rather than his lover (313). He sums up the process as simple: “Medicine was easy. A matter of simple physics. Human salvage” (314). Jennifer Jeffers comments on the strangeness of this description, even suggesting that Bogle’s inability to connect with Deirdre’s loss might indicate the entire narrative is a lie. She writes that his “...admission comes from a man who seems not to have actually *experienced* the abortion of his own child” (137). McLiam Wilson juxtaposes the horror of the abortion with the flippant tone that Bogle uses to narrate the act, intensifying the brutality of Bogle’s actions through a lack of narrative empathy. Bogle appears completely incapable of imagining the abortion from Deirdre’s point of view, and the distance he creates through his sarcastic tone allows him to evade addressing the emotional impact of the event. The irony deployed in this scene thus intensifies our perception of the horror of Bogle’s action because he refuses to treat the scene with dignity. After apologizing for trying to have sex with Deirdre immediately following the abortion, recognizing that this action was “the worst bit” and exclaiming “God, I wish I hadn’t done that!” Bogle and the narrative quickly move on to “spoof number three.” This lie involves his romance with Laura, a woman with whom he earlier claims to have had a passionate, idealized love affair. The final confession is that he never slept with Laura and invented the story of their affair (316). Bogle claims that this lie was the worst of the three because it was utterly fabricated instead of just revised.

McLiam Wilson presents the “backstreet” and improvised abortions necessary for women in Northern Ireland as particularly brutal, and Deirdre’s abortion thus aligns with the

other acts of violence against women in the text. The presentation of his final lies about the abortion just after his description of his friend Maurice's death also align political violence in Belfast with Bogle's "quick sandpaper job on the uterine cavity" (313). As he parrots political feelings about abortion, including the notion that his religious background would make the act much harder for him to deal with, Bogle reveals the ways in which religious and national constructions of women's bodies create a culture that continually privileges male perspectives and misreads female pain. Though Deirdre's forced miscarriage can be read as an entirely private act of brutality between the two lovers, Bogle's desire to control the reproductive process aligns with more visibly public acts of sexual policing. Each moment of gendered suffering in the novel ultimately demonstrates the ways in which the violent nationalist culture of "intimate terror" shapes the regulation of personal relationships and female sexuality.

*Eureka Street*, McLiam Wilson's second novel, was published in 1996, eight years after *Ripley Bogle*, and though Bogle appears briefly in *Eureka Street*, the novel demonstrates a dramatic shift in both style and content. The rambling, unreliable Bogle, decaying on the London streets, is replaced by two young Belfast residents with a more positive vision of the urban setting. In fact, one critic writes that *Eureka Street* "...makes fictional love to the northern star," suggesting that the novel can be read as a romance between a man and his city (113). In contrast to the birth screams of Bogle's mother, *Eureka Street* begins with the phrase "All stories are love stories," setting up a narrative that, at its simplest level, tells the "love stories" of two Belfast men. Jake, a Catholic from a working-class background who now lives an affluent "...leafy kind of life in a leafy kind of area," voices a narrative describing his interactions with women and deep affection for Belfast. The

other protagonist, Chuckie, a rotund Protestant also from a working-class neighborhood, creates a scheme to make money, falls in love with an American woman and visits the United States, all against the backdrop of random Belfast violence.

The frame of the novel is so firmly set on these two male characters, and the tone so jovial and witty, that some American critics ignored more serious elements in the novel, and the text—incredibly successful in Europe and Ireland—was not widely read in the United States. The New York Times review was sub-titled: “The misadventures of a bunch of drunken 30-somethings in war-torn Belfast,” trivializing the plot and thematic focus of the novel. Sarah Ferguson, the author of the review, goes on to simplify the formula of *Eureka Street*: “Take one horny, argumentative Roman Catholic, add his bumbling Protestant drinking buddy, stick the two of them in a genuine ‘Oirish’ pub in scenic, war-torn Belfast, surrounded by sexually adventurous women and random terrorist bombings, and watch the sparks fly” (Ferguson).

Such reviews ignore the ways in which the lighter plots of masculine “misadventures” and “sexually adventurous women” present McLiam Wilson with opportunities to explore how ordinary moments intertwine with and are influenced by the backdrop of random violence. In a review of *Love and Sleep*, another Northern Irish novel, in *The Guardian*, Sean O’Hagan writes that Jake “...tries in vain to keep his bearings in a Belfast where everyday life is thrown out of kilter to a surreal degree by sustained, indiscriminate violence,” suggesting deeper thematic possibilities behind McLiam Wilson’s focus on the ordinary (par 4). Thus the text--and its vision of commonplace life in a militarized city--actually represents an important historical intervention in our understanding of post-partition Troubles violence. And though the central focus of the plot is the male characters, their

desires, dates, and pasts, McLiam Wilson also uses this frame of romance and pursuit to explore concepts of gender and sexuality in an urban space that is experiencing both economic growth and random terror. McLiam Wilson does not have the domestic focus of other Northern Irish novelists like Deirdre Madden and Seamus Deane. Instead, he seems much more interested in the public spaces of the urban area, and his unmarried protagonists live outside of traditional family structures. Yet despite the public settings of much of *Eureka Street*, this novel of bachelorhood seems strangely focused on motherhood and reproduction. Like *Ripley Bogle*, Jake's primary emotional experience in the text is his most recent girlfriend's abortion, and *Eureka Street* ultimately uses plot points related to motherhood and sexuality to explore how gender and political identity intertwine in 1990s Belfast.

In one of the only mentions of gender in the critical works on *Eureka Street*, Linden Peach notes a scene in which Chuckie walks through San Francisco and mentally juxtaposes the violence visible in the streets with the hidden presence of domestic violence. This scene can serve as a model for reading McLiam Wilson's exploration of gender. As Chuckie walks down the street, he notices the hostility that surrounds him:

There was plenty of fight too. Every block or so, Chuckie would see a brawl erupt in some bar, on some street. Men kicked each other's heads to pulp, smashed bottles in faces, pulled and used knives. Outside one nightclub, he saw too marines beat a lone sailour...And there were the noises of the incidents he did not see. The muted sound of war from the interiors of houses, apartments, and bars. The dull shout of angry men and the stifled screams of women (267).

Here, McLiam Wilson links the visible, active violence of American streets—men beating each other “to pulp”—with domestic violence that is quite literally muted. This vision of domestic violence also extends the textual exploration of private brutality beyond the setting of Belfast to American culture as well. Peach writes that this passages reveals “...a connection between the macho violence of the streets and the violence inflicted on women in

the home. The latter has often been, and is, concealed. But its emergence into greater public consciousness...disrupts how more public 'macho violence'...is perceived" (Peach 28).

Peach's comments also highlight the way in which gendered violence transforms the larger narrative of terror and bombings in the text. Though McLiam Wilson's explorations of gender are muted and seldom acknowledged in writings about *Eureka Street*, they nevertheless "disrupt" how we read other masculine acts of violence in the novel. Thus the abortion, monstrous birth, and hostile reaction to a lesbian relationship that appear in the novel connect with its larger exploration of Belfast culture.

Following the opening line that frames the text—and all narratives--as romance, Jake's voice begins *Eureka Street* with a short vignette of romantic pursuit. He notices a waitress with "short hair, a very round ass and the big eyes of a hapless child" and flirts with her throughout the night, taking her home to his flat before she reveals that she has a Protestant "policeman boyfriend" (4). This brief encounter reveals the politicization of personal relationships in urban Belfast; instead of first-date small talk, he notices and is disturbed by a cop who greets Mary "by name," noting that "There was still enough of the working-class Catholic in me not to like that" (3). The thwarted evening with Mary causes Jake to think about his recent ex-girlfriend Sarah, a British woman who had left Northern Ireland to return to a place "...where politics meant fiscal arguments, health debates, local taxation, not bombs not maiming not murder and not fear" (5). The intimate and the political continue to collide, and in this passage McLiam Wilson draws attention to the fact that it is these differing definitions of the political that interfere with Jake and Sarah's personal relationship. McLiam Wilson contrasts the couple's tolerance of Belfast violence by having



Jake recount how he likes “...the helicopters chuckling comfortingly as they hovered over all those Catholics out west” (5). The sound, which disturbed Sarah, helps him to sleep.

Jake recounts the details of their break-up later in the novel, describing their two years together, the flat they shared, and his worries about her safety as a journalist. After doing “...three days’ reporting on an Armagh pub massacre in which six people died,” she resigns from her job, “and bought a plane ticket” leaving Belfast and their relationship (73). Two weeks later she tells Jake that she had an abortion soon after arriving in London. Sarah’s possession of the financial resources necessary to travel to London and have a medical abortion seemingly makes the experience quite different than the traumatic improvised abortion that takes place in *Ripley Bogle*. Sarah is entirely absent from the text—we never hear about her decision process or any pain she suffered because of the abortion—and this absence allows Jake’s emotional response to act as the primary narrative of Sarah’s act. He explains “She had crushed my heart flat. I didn’t know how much I would have wanted to be a father but I didn’t know how much I didn’t either. It was always a surprise how much that hurt” (74). Though there are only a few passages in which Jake describes his feelings about Sarah’s abortion, their break-up and her choice to end the pregnancy nevertheless shape the text of this romance, drawing attention to the larger exploration of sexuality and reproduction in *Eureka Street*. Sarah only reappears in the text by way of a note urging Jake to “forgive,” but her absence—and the absence of their child—is referred to by Jake at several points throughout the novel.

McLiam Wilson’s choice to include Sarah’s abortion as a central experience in the romance plot of the novel emphasizes the importance of reproduction to the text. Jake later describes his desire to serve as an informal foster parent for Roche, a troubled child who

from an abusive family, as stemming from his larger need to be a father. He reflects on his envy when he discovers that Max, Chuckie's American girlfriend, is pregnant:

...it was my big secret. It was hilariously broody. I desperately wanted to procreate. It was a need in me that made me sweat in the middle of the night. For months I had been assailed by dreams of ready-made sons and daughters arriving on my doorstep (apparently motherless), five years old and already reading Pushkin. Roche would never constitute an adequate substitute for the beribboned marvels of my fantasies. It was one of the reasons I was pissed at Sarah. I couldn't live with the thought of her killing the kid (309).

Here, Jake reveals his frustration with his own lack of control over the reproductive process, all the while framing his own emotions as "hilariously broody" because they do not fall in line with his vision of masculinity. Though he is initially dismissive about his desires, the revelation that the need for a child "made [him] sweat in the middle of the night" indicates the deepness of his sense of loss at Sarah's abortion. Jake's dream that "ready-made" children show up on his doorstep "apparently motherless" also indicates a desire to procreate without a female influence. The elimination of the mother from these parental fantasies indicates Jake's desire for control over the reproductive process; in some ways, Jake wants to *be* a mother. These passages disrupt readings of the novel that characterize it as a trivial love story and Jake as an urban bachelor in search of sex. Even the paragraph included on the back of the American edition of the book name Jake and Chuckie as "unlikely friends" who "...search for the most human of needs: love. But of course a night of lust will do." Such summaries of the novel ignore the textual fascination with motherhood and reproduction that McLiam Wilson gestures towards through Jake's overwhelming desire for a family of brilliant, motherless children.

Continuing the textual fascination with mothering, Chuckie's American girlfriend, Max experiences pregnancy twice in the novel. The first pregnancy is told in flashback form,

and is first revealed only as a “bad thing” that happened to Max before she moved to Belfast. After Chuckie follows Max to the United States and discovers her current pregnancy, she reveals to him the “...secret thing that had happened to her when she had run away,” that she had “found herself pregnant” by an unknown man and let the pregnancy go past the time in which it could legally be terminated (316). Max treats the pregnancy as an invasion of her body, and she tries to force a miscarriage by shooting “cheap crack” directly into her stomach. After giving birth, the living baby frightens her, and she abuses the hospital staff and refuses to see her child. When she first finds out the baby is living, “...she dreamt of monstrous births and repulsive babies. The thing had seemed like a virus in her. She had expelled it. That was enough” (317). The child is born addicted to drugs and soon dies. Though Max’s actions are clearly violent—and she herself acknowledges the horror of this time as she narrates the story to Chuckie—her attempts to regain control over her body frame pregnancy as a prison that she could not escape. Her terrifying dreams cast pregnancy as monstrous, almost as though her body was haunted by the baby and, in giving birth, she had exorcised the alien and unwanted invasion. This incident initially seems out of place in the larger context of the novel: it takes place in the United States and does not fit with our knowledge of Max’s current life. Nevertheless, it seems that McLiam Wilson uses both of Max’s pregnancies to explore anxieties about female reproductive power. While men continually imagine pregnancy in terms of power and control, women appear out of control of their pregnant bodies, experiencing a loss of agency throughout their pregnancies.

In addition to the inclusion of abortions and monstrous births in the two “romance” plots central to the novel, McLiam Wilson also explores issues of sexuality in Northern Ireland by describing a lesbian relationship that emerges between Chuckie’s mother and one

of her longtime friends. In her essay “Women Troubles, Queer Troubles: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Selfhood in the Construction of the Northern Irish State,” Kathryn Conrad notes the ways in which the larger political culture of Northern Ireland shapes community response to issues of sexuality, linking homophobia directly to “the issue of reproduction”:

The causes of homophobia and heterosexism, like misogyny and sexism, can be traced to multiple sources. But resistant nationalisms, such as unionism and Irish republicanism, remain invested in reproducing their body politic, they thus rely on and work to ensure the inviolability of the heterosexual family unit to ensure that reproduction (55).

Queer identity thus presents a challenge to the desire for a family structure that reproduces the members of the nation. And, though Conrad explains that the causes of homophobia are of course always multiple and varied, the perceived incompatibility of gay and reproductive identities is one of the reasons that the community rejects these relationships. McLiam Wilson’s choice to have Peggy’s identities as a mother and a lesbian coalesce reveals the ways in which homosexual relationships challenge traditional conceptions of home and family in the Northern Irish setting.

In the novel, Peggy’s relationship with Chuckie identifies her entirely as *mother*. McLiam Wilson emphasizes how limited Chuckie’s conception of Peggy’s identity is by describing the son’s inability to think of his mother outside of the domestic space of the home:

The interior of No. 42 was the only scene in which he could properly think of his mother. It was where she belonged. She was so of the place that sometimes the distinction between the woman and her house grew blurred, and sometimes it was hard to tell where one ended and the other began. The tiny house was like the tiny woman. Plain, small-scale, indoors (241).

Here, not only are the distinctions between a woman and her identity as a mother and caregiver blurred, Chuckie expresses that he cannot mentally distinguish between his mother

and the home in which she raised him. His definition of “mother” aligns with the limiting language of the Irish Constitution, a document that fully defines womanhood through motherhood and domestic space. The final words of this passage emphasize the limitations of this conception of gendered identity to Chuckie, his mother is “tiny,” limited to the “small-scale” world of the home and unable to fully exist outside of that place.

Chuckie’s limited understanding of his mother’s identity is disrupted by her romantic relationship with another woman. The relationship between Peggy and Caroline begins after Peggy witnesses the random bombing of a sandwich shop and is traumatized by what she sees. McLiam Wilson’s description of this bombing is continually cited as one of the most interesting parts of the novel. He describes its effects in a chapter that begins with the introduction of a young female character, Rosemary Daye, who walks to get a sandwich on her lunch break, thinking about a new love interest and a skirt she has just purchased. McLiam Wilson’s description of her death is jarring. He writes that she “smirked happily, and stepped under” the arm of a man holding the door open for her, then she “...turned to murmur some thanks and stopped existing” (222). McLiam Wilson continues to describe the confusion and pain that follows the bomb blast, recounting the “stories” of many of the victims and creating a startling image of the disorienting aftermath of the violence.

There are several male victims of the bombing, but McLiam Wilson focuses most of his attention on Rosemary Daye and Natalie, Liz, and Margaret Crawford—a mother and her two young daughters killed instantly by the blast. Though he gestures towards masculine pain—particularly through a paragraph about Robert Crawford, father of Natalie and Liz and husband of Margaret—McLiam Wilson frames this incident through gender as well. He clearly labels the terrorist as the “...*men* who planted the bomb” and, through his narrative

focus on the women injured both physically and mentally by the attack, presents the bombing as an act of masculine violence. In a later chapter, it is revealed that Peggy witnessed the events of the bombing, sitting "...uninjured but motionless, for nearly fifteen minutes" (241). The traumatic effects of what she sees is emphasized by McLiam Wilson through the repetition of the word "unfortunately": "Unfortunately, Peggy had sat there, uninjured but motionless, for nearly fifteen minutes... Unfortunately she had been only thirty yards away. Unfortunately her eyes remained open. Unfortunately she didn't look away (241). McLiam Wilson also explores the invisibility of these emotional injuries. Media attention is focused on those who are dead or physically maimed, and McLiam Wilson draws attention to the media searching for the stories that fit its purpose. For example, Robert Crawford's inability to come to terms with the deaths of Margaret, Natalie, and Liz ultimately makes him unsuitable for television reports. In the chapters following the bombing the text expands conceptions of "injury" to include those who witness and must process a violent act, including stories of "victims" who would never be included in media coverage.

After the bombing, Caroline cares for Peggy, and their relationship develops out of Peggy's process of recovery. Before McLiam Wilson describes the relationship from Peggy's perspective, he explains the dramatic reactions of the larger community. Jake expresses that their relationship was "... spectacular news. People called a press conference. Peggy and Caroline were the most Protestant and the most working-class women I had ever met" (341). Jake's inability to comprehend a lesbian relationship between these mothers indicates the ways in which their sexual identities challenge their status within religious, political, and familial communities. Jake further describes what he terms the "seismic effect" that their relationship had on "Eureka Street and Sandy Row" (341). Depicting male discomfort with

their sexuality, McLiam Wilson writes that: “Uncomplicated men watched their wives with new attention and fear. Several men gave their wives preventive beatings just in case they might have considered stepping out of line in this most unProtestant fashion” (341). Here, violence becomes a regulating force within the home, the husbands evidently believing that they could control the sexual lives of their wives, ending any possibility of transgressive sexuality through the brutal use of physical force. Though McLiam Wilson presents this vision of spousal abuse as a brief aside, it nevertheless draws attention to the ways in which the men police female sexuality within the home.

As McLiam Wilson depicts the development of Peggy and Caroline’s relationship, he connects their experiences with men to the increasing violence in Belfast, aligning the terrorist acts in the text to the brutality that is present in personal relationships. Peggy remembers life before the increased violence of the Troubles and before her relationships with men, aligning the two as “...a time when everything was different” (372). She connects the changes in her private life to the material changes that surround her, explaining that “Buildings had disappeared and new ones had sprouted; violence and husbands had come, their effects equally devastating” (372). This passage draws attention to the masculine violence that influences the shape of both the streets and their lives. Hughie, Chuckie’s father and Peggy’s ex-husband, is described as particularly brutal. The couple marries after Chuckie’s birth, and their relationship is so harsh and erratic that Peggy cannot even remember when Hughie left for good, only recalling that “...his latest absence just stretched out and became permanent” (373).

Peggy’s sexual experiences prior to beginning her relationship with Caroline are very limited. McLiam Wilson writes that she “...had slept with only one man...They had

copulated thirty or forty times. This double score of erotic incidents came to represent the world of sex for Peggy. It was a small and slightly vicious world” (341). She later describes her former husband’s sexual behavior as “brutal,” and McLiam Wilson presents her relationship with Caroline as a way for her to escape the “vicious world” of her prior sexual life. After developing the relationship between Caroline and Peggy, McLiam Wilson links the sexual lives of other characters to the political situation in Belfast. One character, Slat Sloane reveals that he “...could only sleep with right wing women. It was the only thing that worked for him. The more overtly Nazi the better” (352). He tells Jake that he has sex with them “...because they hated him” (353). Jake comments that “It was good to see the local conditions weren’t entirely passing us by. I was glad that my friends’ sex lives were incorporating the sectarian and post-colonial experience” (353).

*Eureka Street* follows the traditional format of a conventional romance plot: Max and Chuckie and Jake and Aoirghe overcome a variety of obstacles and ultimately enter blissful romantic relationships. In fact, the last lines of the text describe Jake and Aoirghe in bed together, waking up and smiling at each other “...with clear eyes.” This satisfying ending belies the ways in which the text challenges traditional conceptions of gender and romance in the militarized city of Belfast. By including both an abortion and traumatic miscarriage in the novel and exploring neighborhood reactions to an emerging lesbian relationship, the text gestures towards debates concerning sexual identity and reproduction taking place during the time of publication. McLiam Wilson, who begins the text by asserting that *all* narratives are stories of love, ultimately presents a subversive vision of love by looking at romance through the prism of sectarian violence and 1990s debates about politics of reproduction.



### **Glen Patterson's *Fat Lad***

In a piece titled "I am a Northern Irish novelist," Glen Patterson connects both his subject matter and writing style to the influence of Salman Rushdie, stating that reading *Midnight's Children* was "...the single most important factor in [his] decision...to turn to Northern Ireland for my subject matter" (151). He explains that Rushdie's "...treatment of countries as collective fictions (willed and imposed) and as a significant character in their inhabitants' lives accorded perfectly with [his] own ideas of how to begin reimagining Northern Ireland" (Peripheral Visions 151). Like McLiam Wilson, Patterson indicates a desire to "reimagine" Northern Ireland and uses Rushdie, an author for whom the domestic and national collide on every page, as one of his models for the act of representing the "collective fictions" of the nation. This desire to imagine, through fiction, the impact of politics on ordinary lives—the nation becoming a "character" in the worlds of everyday individuals—seems to stem in part from Patterson's early experiences in 1970s Belfast. Later in the same article, Patterson explains his childhood knowledge of how tiny transformations in the political world could alter the shape of his neighborhood:

Even as children, I remember, we took a great interest in politics, keeping a close watch on political shifts and realignments. Small movements in these circles, we knew (the shaking of hands, the easy flow of a pen across a page, the lifting of a telephone), could lead to enormous upheavals on our streets. The order to introduce Internment, for instance, on 9 August 1971 (my own tenth birthday) ended with 1 per cent of the population of Belfast on the move (151).

Patterson aligns the intimate memories of childhood—his birthday—with the upheavals in the Belfast street, drawing attention to his awareness, even at a very young age, of the influence of "small" changes in the political world on the shape of his life. Like McLiam Wilson's *Eureka Street*, *Fat Lad* includes a very visible act of terrorist violence as a central moment in the novel; in the last pages of the novel the Bookshop that Drew works for is

destroyed in a bombing and Patterson presents the news using the form of a newspaper story. Patterson, however, also connects these traumatic moments of violence in the Belfast streets to less visible forms of brutality that intrude on private lives outside the view of television cameras.

*Fat Lad* at first seems to focus primarily on Drew Linden's hesitant return to Belfast. He comes back to the city after a lengthy absence to take a position as an assistant manager at a European book chain, hoping that after a set amount of time in that position he can move on to manage the Paris branch. He leaves behind a British girlfriend—for whom “everything associated with [Belfast] filled her with distaste,” and engages in a series of romantic encounters as the text progresses (9). Elmer Kennedy-Andrews notes that in *Fat Lad*, Patterson “...writes the city as part of a rapidly metamorphosing, postmodern culture, from the point of view of twenty-six year old Drew Linden, a thinly veiled portrait of the artist as a young man” (107). But though the novel at first seems to focus primarily on Drew's current romantic and professional desires in the postmodern city, Patterson intersperses the primary narrative with flashbacks to Drew's childhood experiences during the 1970s and the lives of Drew's sister, father, and grandmother. In her essay on “Northern Ireland's Prodigal Novelists,” Eve Patten calls Patterson's work “...a restorative fictional anthropology,” indicating the possibilities for fiction to intervene in our understandings of Northern Ireland by grouping him with authors who she claims have “subjected the heavy contingency of Northern Irish literature to a series of rearguard tactics, in order to renegotiate its terms of representation” (130). The structure of a romantic plot, promised in the novel's initial focus on Drew's girlfriend Melanie and new love interest Kay, also allows Patterson to reinsert gender and the domestic into narratives of Belfast violence.

Through his use of multiple perspectives, Patterson carefully connects domestic violence within the space of the home and neighborhood to the larger culture of nationalist violence. Individual and national identities first coalesce in the title of the novel, which seemingly refers to the “lad” at the center of the story but is also an acronym used to remember the counties of Northern Ireland. Through the use of flashbacks that track Drew’s childhood awareness of the violence that surrounded and invaded his Belfast neighborhood, Patterson draws attention to the ways in which Drew’s personal identity was shaped by the Troubles. Throughout the text, readers know that Drew is returning to Belfast after a long absence and that he is uncomfortable with his family and his former home. It is not until midway through *Fat Lad*, however, that Patterson describes Troubles violence and family abuse using Drew’s childhood perspective. In this section, the young child is equally confused by the bombings and beatings that fill his eight-year-old life, ultimately blaming himself for both.

Patterson depicts the intersection between domestic life and political violence when he traces the path of a bullet that finds itself in a neighbor’s pantry. “In the early hours of the morning of the second Saturday in August 1971” a sniper sends a bullet careening through a nearby neighborhood. After passing “...treetops, road signs, traffic lights, advertising hoardings, lampposts, church spires, flagpoles,” the bullet approaches a house:

... it drilled a perfect hot-poker hole in the glass, puncturing with ease the roll blind, the drapes, the kitchen’s boast door, and the chipboard wall of the larder, where it entered and exited in turn a box of Kellogg’s cornflakes, a packet of Polson’s cornflour, a packet of Atora suet, a box each of Whitworth’s sultanas and raisins, a tin of Campbell’s cream of tomato soup (120)

Patterson’s detailed description of what he terms “the carnage in the cupboard” emphasizes the intrusion of the bullet into the familiar objects of the family home (120). His use of

recognizable brand names makes the scene all the more disorienting, and though no one is injured, the intersection of a bullet with cans of soup and boxes of cereal provides an unforgettable image of how the ordinary is quite literally invaded in Drew's Belfast neighborhood.

Though police forces are slow to respond to the bullet in the cupboard—Internment has begun and “hundreds of homes had been burnt...twenty people had been killed”—when they do arrive the neighborhood becomes briefly militarized. The neighborhood children are delighted rather than frightened by the “*two* army land-rovers in attendance” (121). In a passage that carefully connects the militarized neighborhood to violence within Drew's home, Patterson describes Drew's father watching the tanks outside before beating the young boy:

Children clambered over the army land-rovers and tried on the soldiers' black envelope caps...Suddenly his father's right hand broke out of the orbit of the left and slammed into the back of his head and the next thing Drew knew he was on his backside on the floor. Little noises were flaring like match-head in his ears. His father kept his eyes fixed firmly on the window (121).

This moment connects the turmoil outside the house to domestic violence within, emphasizing this link through Patterson's focus on the father's gaze “fixed firmly” outside the house while Drew suffers on the floor. Drew feels guilty, blaming himself for his father's violence and for “...every Friday night drinker and Saturday shopper atomized, every limb lost, every face disfigured...every last body found hooded and dumped in verges and entries, playgrounds and burnt out cars” (122). Like Saleem in *Midnight's Children*, young Drew imagines that the entire scope of Troubles violence is somehow related to his own presence in Belfast. Such identifications emphasize his childlike misinterpretation of the violent culture that surrounded him, but also testify to the power of political violence to intersect

with and influence the everyday life of a young child. Patterson's prose, which places passages about his father's violent temper in between paragraphs describing the larger culture of violence, implicitly connects the larger culture of nationalist brutality to Jack Linden's brutal anger.

Similarly, Patterson links Troubles violence that takes the form of "urban warfare" to more personal, sexualized forms of violence taking place within Protestant and Catholic communities. Like *Ripley Bogle*, *Fat Lad* includes a scene in which a young woman is punished for engaging in a romantic relationship outside the lines of her community. This scene includes two reversals of McLiam Wilson's depiction of sexualized violence—the "punishment" takes place in the Protestant rather than Catholic community, and Patterson extends the scope of his vision of gendered torture by having women assault Anna. Drew becomes obsessed with Anna, the sister of a woman he is dating in Belfast, and visits Dublin hoping to talk with her. They establish a deep connection, and Anna explains how, as a Protestant, her relationship with a young Catholic man changed the scope of her life. After her relationship with Con becomes known in her neighborhood, she is:

...grabbed by a crowd of girls as she walked home late along the Woodstock Road after seeing Con. The girls tied her to a bus stop, egged on by their boyfriends and their boyfriends' friends...They punched her and kicked her and spat on her. Called her a Taig-loving whore, chalked on the footpath at her feet: FREE RIDE. Before untying her, they hacked off her hair and made a pile of it in front of her and set it alight. (Do you know what that smells like? Not just a singed eyebrow, or a stray lock shriveled by a match, but a whole head of waist-length hair? It fucking stinks) (240).

This incident, taking place on Anna's seventeenth birthday, imagines the scope of sexualized violence extending to the larger culture, not defining these acts of "punishment" as entirely masculine acts. Transgressing the sexual boundaries of her community, the act of taking her hair and burning it in front of her can be seen as an assault on her femininity and sexuality.

The violence thus becomes a way to regulate sexuality within the community, policing the “borders” of Protestant neighborhood women and defining Anna—through the words “whore” and “FREE RIDE”—as a woman who has transgressed sexual boundaries.

The community’s investment in female sexuality is further emphasized by the contrast between their response to male and female sexual transgressions. Con, Anna’s lover, is threatened for entering into a relationship with her. He leaves home after a “...man he didn’t know from Adam stopped him in the street close to his home and pressed something cold in his hand. A live bullet. It wasn’t meant as a souvenir” (240). But while Con’s life is threatened, the difference between these two “punishments” is striking. The man merely gives Con a warning, giving him a chance to flee or change his behavior. And while the warning indicates that the community is willing to kill Con for his sexual transgressions, the threat of murder does not include the brutality of the behavior towards Anna or the implied desire to regulate his sexuality. He is not publicly shamed and humiliated, and there is no attempt to desexualize him or attack his masculinity. This difference makes visible the importance of *female* sexuality to both Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland. The act of sexual betrayal only necessitates brutal, public “punishment” for the women who engage in the transgressive relationships.

Patterson also historicizes the link between political communities and female sexuality through the use of Greta Linden’s perspective. Greta, Drew’s grandmother, describes the anxiety surrounding the newly drawn border shortly after Partition. Her husband joins “the Specials” in order “...to hold the line against the Sinn Feiners and defend what had been so hard one” (153). This defense is necessary in part because Northern Ireland seems “...a fragile thing...their queer-looking new country...Oh they were desperate

times altogether” (153). Like Rushdie, who describes Pakistan as an improbable country, Patterson makes visible the sense of unreality in the post-partition space. The reason for this anxiety over the “queer” shape of their country can be connected in part to the geography of Ireland’s island borders, which present a challenge to partitionist mentalities. Though the country is at “peace,” Greta describes it as a “rare kind of peace” characterized by curfews and “people...still on edge” (154).

This border anxiety manifests itself in the domestic and sexual lives of the Protestant women Greta describes; the perceived fragility of their new country is directly related to the “...numbers of Catholics” and she voices the feeling the community was always:

...looking over their shoulders all the time to see were they catching up. Numbers, numbers numbers, they’d’ve put your head away listening to them. It was simple arithmetic, they said: if the Catholics kept breeding faster than the Protestants, then sooner or later the Protestants were bound to be outnumbered, and when they were the border would be rubbed out and they’d be lost for ever in a United Ireland (154).

The materiality of the border is thus directly related to reproduction, a construction that transforms women’s bodies into “the weapons” with which the partitioned border is defended. Her husband’s anxiety over the border influences her sexual and reproductive experiences; she has “five children by the time she was twenty-seven,” before she decides that “something had to be done” (154). Here, the material shape of Northern Ireland is literally dependent on women’s reproductive power. The mother’s bodies themselves are militarized, becoming the means through which national identities are constructed. Though the central focus of these lines is on masculine desire to control the reproductive process, Patterson also includes a vision of female community and resistance. The women in Greta’s neighborhood, all who are experiencing similar pressure from their husbands to be continuously pregnant, decide to “[look] out for each other” and share strategies for forcing

miscarriages “...howling with laughter at some of the things...crying their hearts out at the memory of some of the others” (155). The inclusion of this community decision to help women end their pregnancies, regaining agency over their bodies, demonstrates subversive possibilities--even within the traditional family structures of 1930s Belfast.

Most critics analyzing the literary works of Robert McLiam Wilson and Glenn Patterson acknowledge that, through their use of diverse perspectives and experimental narrative strategies, the authors transform traditional narratives of the Northern Irish conflict. What is often ignored, however, is each novel’s deep investment in female sexuality and the politics of reproduction. Through their use of urban bachelor protagonists, the authors seemingly take the plot--and thus the focus of the novel-- outside of spaces and narratives of home. Yet through the inclusion of an abortion or forced miscarriage in each “bachelor” novel, the texts implicitly connect the sexual lives of their characters to larger political structures, revealing the ways in nationalist cultures in Northern Ireland are deeply invested in maternal bodies and reproduction. Extending their exploration of gendered nature of Belfast society beyond the scope of abortions, the authors ultimately reveal a larger analysis of the influence of random violence and a militarized, masculine culture on intimate relationships and sexual politics in Belfast. McLiam Wilson and Patterson write against those who believe that the only “Troubles violence” is that which exists between communities, instead revealing the brutality within neighborhoods and homes. The authors thus make an intervention into our understanding of Troubles violence, connecting the violent acts most visible to the media—terrorist violence that intrude on shape the novels—to the “...muted sound of war from the interiors of houses...The dull shout of angry men and the stifled screams of women” (267).



## Epilogue

“The Boundary Commission”  
You remember that village where the border ran  
Down the middle of the street,  
With the butcher and baker in different states?  
Today he remarked how a shower of rain  
Had stopped so cleanly across Golightly's lane  
It might have been a wall of glass  
That had toppled over. He stood there, for ages,  
To wonder which side, if any, he should be on.  
(Paul Muldoon)

Anyone who believes that U.S. troops can simply and suddenly leave Iraq without risk of unleashing great horror—or who regards religious or ethnic partition as a solution instead of a desperate ploy—should look back at the summer of 1947, when the British Empire packed up and India fulfilled its "tryst with destiny" (as Jawaharlal Nehru described its awakening to independence), only to plunge into a monstrous spree of ethnic cleansing (12 million people uprooted, as many as 1 million murdered) that continues to take its toll today (Fred Kaplan "Remembering Partition: The Parallels Between India '47 and Iraq '07" *Slate* August 9, 2007).

Paul Muldoon's poem "The Boundary Commission" relocates the national boundary to the realm of the neighborhood, imagining the border not as a line on the map but rather as a visible structure running "down the middle of the street" in a small village community. The language of the poem draws attention to the intersection between the ordinary, suggested by the "butcher and baker"—characters who bring to mind the nursery rhyme "Rub-A-Dub-Dub"—and the national, indicated by both the title of the poem and the ambiguous "village" through which the border runs. With this focus on the anonymous, ordinary town, Muldoon's poem highlights the distance between the bureaucratic negotiations referenced in the title and the individual experience depicted in the language of the text. Similarly, Fred Kaplan's article on current plans to partition Iraq suggests that seemingly simple bureaucratic solutions to ethnic conflict—here described as the United States "simply and suddenly leaving Iraq" with partition as a "solution"—resist imagining the effects of these new lines

on the millions of individuals who would be uprooted in order to relocate to the part of Iraq dealt to their particular religious community. Fiction written in response to the violence of the Indian partition and the Northern Irish Troubles confronts this lack of imagination directly, drawing attention to the power of the political to enter and transform the private world of the home, particularly in spaces in which the lines of community are redrawn and confirmed through patterns of intimate violence.

When I first began this project in 2005, I thought I was writing about the past. I envisioned the dissertation as having an entirely historic focus on novels written about partitions of India and Ireland in the early twentieth century. Novels of the Northern Irish Troubles pushed my study forward, and as I began to pay attention to events related to partition in the contemporary media, I realized that the ramifications of both events were still very much part of our present global situation. A July 2007 news article describes the partition of India as the “split that poisoned the world” and claims that Cyril Radcliffe’s line “created the biggest problems in the world today. The mosque wars in Pakistan this week, the nuclear-arms race between India and Pakistan and much of the al-Qaeda threat can be traced to his short stay [in Mumbai]” (Saunders par 2). Similarly, Pankaj Mishra’s August 2007 article “Exit Wounds” claims that the partition of India

...was a deeper tragedy than is commonly realized—and not only because India today has almost as many Muslims as Pakistan. In a land where cultures, traditions, and beliefs cut across religious communities, few people had defined themselves exclusively through their ancestral faith...The British policy of defining communities based on religious identity radically altered Indian self-perceptions (2-3).

Mishra also connects contemporary political issues to the decision to partition India, citing a 2002 massacre of “more than two thousand Muslims” by Hindu nationalists (6). This incident, along with the continuing “dispute over Kashmir,” which has led to “a nuclear arms race and nourished extremists in both countries,” reveal the “human costs of imperial overreaching” in the former colony. Such claims suggest that the division of a national space is never a simple solution to the complex problems of community identity.

Though these recent situations confirm that patterns of violence continue to emerge along the lines of community, the current political situation in Northern Ireland suggests the hopefulness that can be found in unity rather than further division. On May 8, 2007, Ian Paisley, leader of the majority Protestant party and Martin McGuinness, leader of the majority Catholic party, “were sworn in as leader and deputy leader, respectively, of the Northern Ireland executive government” (Cowell par 2). While the two remain committed to very different visions of Northern Ireland—Paisley’s party supports continued union with the United Kingdom while Sinn Fein still desires the eventual reunification with Ireland—their political unity suggests a more optimistic vision for a future free of sectarian violence. These negotiations seem far from the spaces of the home, but a *Guardian* photo essay about the still-present “Peace Lines”—walls placed between Catholic and Protestant communities—suggests that the influence of this decision has shaped the way Northern Irish citizens envision their own private spaces. In the essay, residents speak about their hopefulness that the Peace Lines will no longer be needed, and one woman describes a change in the material structure of her house influenced by the recent political union of the two parties. Six years ago, she had “petrol poured through her letter box” as a threat, but two

weeks before this July 2007 interview, she had “taken the grills off her windows that had previously been there to protect them,” demilitarizing the space of her home (Oliver).

The current conflict in Iraq resonates with those familiar with the Irish and Indian partitions. Separate religious groups fear losing their political voices within the space of the larger nation as the (neo-) colonial power retreats. The retreating nation desires to order the state before withdrawing from its spaces. Dividing Iraq thus becomes an almost obvious answer to American politicians debating the quickest exit route for troops, and the United States Senate approved a plan by Senator Joe Biden for a “soft partition” of Iraq on September 26, 2007. But such a simplistic solution ignores the complex ways in which communities are constructed. Though there might be spaces with Shiite, Sunni Arab and Kurd majorities, a recent *New York Times* article suggests that five million individuals “would have to be moved to create an ethnically coherent place” (Shanker par 13). The article, called “A Separate Peace: Divided they Stand But on Graves” includes a quote from Joost Hillerman, who suggests that, in Iraq: “The geographic boundaries do not run toward partition at all...There is no Sunnistan or Shiastan. Nor can you create them given the highly commingled conditions in Iraq, where people remain totally intermixed, especially in the major cities” (par 13). These descriptions suggest that intimate patterns of violence could emerge as religious groups struggled to define community boundaries, violence that once again might not be pushed to new borders, instead arising in the “intermixed” urban spaces themselves.

Already the war in Iraq brings to mind Homi Bhabha’s description of the “unhomely” intrusion of the political into the private spaces of home and family. A lack of clear line between combatants and non-combatants means that American soldiers have entered homes

and killed entire families who posed no threat to their forces. Torture at Abu Ghraib designed to humiliate Iraqi prisoners took decidedly sexualized forms, and four American soldiers were recently sentenced for raping a fourteen-year-old Iraqi girl and killing her and her family. Though these horrific incidents drew media attention, estimates of civilian deaths—ranging from under 100,000 to over 600,000—suggest the many untold stories of loss that have not been documented in the media. Thus fiction that provides a social history of the horrific—and often gendered—violence that arose in the wake of the Irish and Indian partitions does more than memorialize the trauma suffered by individuals when their lives were intruded on by the political struggles that surrounded them. In the wake of our current global situation, these novels, and their attempts to reinsert the intimate into the historical narrative, also mark an important intervention into future political negotiations that will determine the shape of both nations and individual lives.

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