GRAPHIC MIGRATIONS:
Precarity and Gender in India and the Diaspora

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Introduction

Theorizing “Subaltern Secularism” in the Crisis of Modern Migration
“As the postcolonial and post-Cold War model of global authority takes shape…we need to […] consider how a deliberate engagement with the twentieth century’s histories of suffering might furnish resources for the peaceful accommodation of otherness in relation to fundamental commonality.”

–Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*

“[T]he pervasive losses of the twentieth century need to be engaged from the perspective of what remains…This attention to remains generates a politics of mourning that might be active rather than reactive, prescient rather than nostalgic, abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather than reactionary.”

–David Eng and David Kazanjian, “Introduction: Mourning Remains”

As I took a taxi to the University of Pennsylvania’s Van Pelt library on a day of freezing temperatures a few years ago, the cab driver Naveed Samuel had asked me with an old-fashioned politeness, hearing my accent, “Where are you from, Miss?” This usual and too familiar ethnic exchange, typical of immigrants with un-American accents in America, led to my revealing I was from India, and asking him where he was from. Immediately, he switched languages, and in Urdu, said, “I

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am not from India, I am from Pakistan." Acknowledging this, I had then inquired about what part of
Pakistan he hailed from. "I am from Karachi. But my parents were from India: my father was from
Allahabad, and my mother was from Palanpur," he replied. "Did they go to Pakistan during the
Partition?" I asked him. "Yes, they went there in 1947," he said, "because of the Partition." He was
then quiet; nothing more was shared about Partition or their displacement. I don't know why I then
shared with him, "My grandfather was from Karachi." And then we were silent: both, in some ways,
divided and linked through the history of Partition's mass displacements, through this shared history
of migration, of places lost to our respective families in the melee of fragmented nation formation.

I share this small story because it reminded me that the 1947 Partition of India is not only
something I have been studying about and writing about for the last twenty years in the libraries I
have inhabited around the world. It is also an unfinished past that scattered millions across the
subcontinent for sure, but also, eventually, to other shores: North America, East Africa, Hong
Kong, and England. When the British announced the decolonization and division of India in August
1947, to create the new nations India and Pakistan on the basis of religion, what followed the
drawing of borderlines (over a hasty seven weeks) by the Boundary Commission chaired by the
English lawyer Cyril Radcliffe is by now well-documented, including in W.H. Auden’s famous 1966
poem “Partition.” Using incomplete and likely inaccurate census data, Radcliffe’s plan distributed
cities and villages like a pack of cards. What followed was a wave of ethnic violence and mass
migration. As Hindus and Sikhs attacked Muslims, and Muslims attacked Hindus and Sikhs, by
unofficial counts, two million died, and between twelve and sixteen million migrated across the new
borders by June 1948. This was, as noted Pakistani-American author Bapsi Sidhwa observes, “the
largest and most terrible exchange of population known to history.” 3 In this conflict, women and

children especially were subjected to sexual violence, abduction, mutilation, and murder.\textsuperscript{4} Post-47, across South Asia, new political-institutional formations, as well as public discourse, instantiated religion as a central category that shaped the identity of citizens in South Asia. Along with the subcontinent’s own particular web of social stratification, this ensured that the place of the secular within the national community would remain a vexed affair. The complex relationship between religion and secular citizenship in South Asia has historically shaped how Partition refugees were treated in its new postcolonial nation-states; it also laid the ground-work for, among other things, the hegemonic production of cultural communities as religious communities in both Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan.

This book begins with the 1947 Partition migrations that accompanied decolonization to explore two issues that dominate public sphere discourses about nationalism across many spaces in the world today: namely, migration, and the role of religion in public life. As we mark the 72\textsuperscript{nd} anniversary of the 1947 Partition in 2019, this book takes up David Eng and David Kazanjian’s invitation, and turns to what remains after Partition—what Urvashi Butalia recently called “the business of living with the consequences of that history.”\textsuperscript{5} This spirit—of seeing what remains and what is created after Partition—animates my inquiry into migration stories across diverse media archives, to explore how they shape secularism and citizenship in India, and in its diaspora. In doing so, I argue that Partition’s history of violent displacement continues to be a constitutive, everyday dimension of so many South Asian lives around the world, even today. In one sense this is true, because it is evident that since 1947, India and Pakistan have fought three wars, Bangladesh was created out of East Pakistan after a bloody war in 1971, and the region of Kashmir remains a critical

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flashpoint for potential nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan. In this context of conflict and crisis, I tracking the afterlife of the Partition migrations through the public cultural archives of literature, film, photography, and print culture can help us to recognize what else remains (or is created) after 1947. In the analysis that follows, I draw upon a range of texts and objects that constitute a public cultural archive about migration and citizenship, primarily, though not exclusively, from India. I show how this archive creates a minor, critical discourse about “restorying” (to use Vishwajyoti Ghosh’s term) the post-47 animosities of Partition. This archive, my book suggests, offers us new political visions of secularism and geopolitical peace in the subcontinent. Graphic Migrations thus analyzes the cultural discourse about migration and refugee experience from the 1947 Partition, as represented across a range of media, to ask: What is the relationship between the intergenerational narration as well as recuperation of Partition’s migration stories, and the contemporary political crisis of secularism unfolding in India and its diaspora?

I turn to the migration stories embedded in this book’s cultural archive as performances that, to appropriate Yen Le Espiritu’s words, “conjure up social, public, and collective remembering.” Following Espiritu, I see this book as a “bringing together of seemingly different and disconnected events, communities, histories, and spaces in order to illuminate what would otherwise not be visible about the contours, contents, and afterlives of war and empire,” past and ongoing, in transnational South Asia. In Nothing Ever Dies, Viet Thanh Nguyen describes what he calls “an ethics of memory” in the texts and objects that address America’s war in Vietnam; this, for Nguyen, is “a just memory that strives to remember both one’s own and others.” This ethical commitment to a just memory resonates: my desire is not only to write the gendered refugee’s memory into the story of the nation

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8 Espiritu, Body Counts, 21.
in South Asia and South Asian America, but also to argue that it is through this labor of remembering and storying the legacies of division and displacement, at once aesthetic and political, that we can reinvent a just community in the public sphere. This is urgent today, especially because Partition’s particular combination of the religious territorialization of political division, the “expulsions” (to use Saskia Sassen’s term) of millions, and the production of normative citizenship on the basis of religion and ethnicity, has become too familiar and banal on the stage of world history in the contemporary moment. Witness the mass expulsions of Rohingya Muslims, Syrians, or Tamil Sri Lankans by war and state violence in the twenty-first century, accompanied by the new, often institutionalized modes of discrimination against those marked as Muslim in democratic societies like the United States.\(^{10}\) The story I tell here, then, about what remains and what is created after the 1947 Partition migrations is one that reflects more broadly, on how geopolitical conflict, religion, and displacement have unfolded in world history and across many national contexts in the decades that followed. A comparative and transnational approach to decolonization, division, and displacement in the mid-twentieth century has grown increasingly visible in much contemporary public culture as well as scholarship. From a host of interdisciplinary and multi-media standpoints, cultural production as well as scholarly conversation have endeavored to recast apparently disparate national histories as part of a transnational history of modern global migration. In what follows, I explain how this book resonates with this new comparative dialogue, and intervenes in it, by way of its focus on migration stories and the cultural imagination of gendered secular citizenship.

The Remains of Partition: Art, Storytelling, Public Culture

\(^{10}\) For a compelling analysis of this crisis of secularism as it has unfolded across the world in the contemporary moment, see Andrew Copson, *Secularism: Politics, Religion, and Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
The cultural “restorying” of the Partition migrations, in ways that situate 1947 in a transnational conversation about world history, has attracted new energy in the last decade. For instance, a 2013 exhibition of videos, prints, photographs, paintings, sculptures, and installations entitled “Lines of Control” at Cornell University’s Johnson Museum in 2013 was part of an ongoing initiative started in 2005 by the London-based non-profit arts organization Green Cardamom. Curated by Iftikhar Dadi, Hammad Nasar, and Ellen Avril, the exhibition explored partition as a productive space in a transnational context. The works were startling, playful, and profoundly moving, as they addressed the issues that emerge (and indeed, remain) when land and communities are divided to create new nations. While a majority of the artists focused on India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, the exhibition included artists and scholars who expansively addressed partition in other geographies: North and South Korea, Ireland and Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine, Sudan and South Sudan.\(^ {11}\) The exhibition thus exemplified postcolonial critique, insofar as “postcolonialism has always been about the ongoing life of residues, living remains, lingering legacies.”\(^ {12}\) Relatedly, and more recently, Arie Dubnov and Laura Robson curate a similar comparative historical exploration of decolonization and partitions. They observe, “Partition is not a long-standing or natural solution to the problem of pluralism; it is a consequence of a particular alignment of global interests, dating from the inter-war period, that privileged ethnic nationalisms and ethnically purified nation-states as the building blocks of a modern world order.”\(^ {13}\) Inherent in these geo-political conditions of the mid-twentieth century then were the tendencies toward ethnic homogeneity and ethno-nationalism that would eventually generate by the 1980s and 1990s, genocidal violence and mass expulsions.


\(^{13}\) Arie Dubnov and Laura Robson, eds., *Partitions: A Transnational History of Twentieth-Century Territorial Separatism* (Stanford University Press, 2019).
across Asia and Africa. If, as Deepika Bahri notes, “[t]he work of the artist remains the exercise of memory and recollection,”\textsuperscript{14} then this exhibition has foregrounded two dimensions of postcolonial modernity central to \textit{Graphic Migrations}: one, that geopolitical partition—whether called that or not—has dominated the twentieth-century political histories of belonging and citizenship in many geographies across the world, after 1945. Spanning spaces from India to Korea, Vietnam, China, Germany, and others, political division into different nation-states has split many societies hitherto undivided. Two, artistic praxis can create new spaces for us to apprehend and illuminate that which remains, recollects, and is created after Partition. Talal Asad suggests, “The past is a legitimate object of critique from the standpoint of the present just as the present is an object of critique from the standpoint of the past.”\textsuperscript{15} This dual approach informs my approach to the past of the Partition migrations, as I turn to them in order to understand their specific shape and texture, as well as to understand present-day India, and South Asian America.

Some of the questions that preoccupy this inquiry are: How did the violent Partition migrations, given that they were shaped by religious or ethnic difference, shape postcolonial discourses about secularism in independent India and beyond? In our cultural archives—of fiction, memoir, oral histories, and visual culture—what is the relation between stories about displacement and rhetorics about ethnonationalism? What is the role of the gendered refugee in new postcolonial national cultures, and what is her relation to the secular? What new insights into the legacies of the Partition migrations emerge through the South Asian diaspora? This book tracks the changing fates of the secular and secular citizenship in South Asian and South Asian American art and media after Partition’s ethnic migrations. Further, it argues that this archive of art and media makes visible the tensions that coalesce around religion and citizenship, even as it identifies an insurgent practice, a

\textsuperscript{14} Deepika Bahri, \textit{Native Intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics, and Postcolonial Literature} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 119.

“subaltern secular,” that displaces many of the ethno-nationalist verities of post-partition South Asia and South Asian America. Doing so also entails “provincializing Europe” as well as America;\(^{16}\) it entails displacing Euro-America as the subject of world history, attending instead to the political divisions and related migrations that accompanied mid-twentieth-century decolonization and pre-Cold War politics across the world. *Graphic Migrations* dwells on these divisions, displacements, and secular intimacies of post-45 Asia, and also explores their impact on Asian American experience. Resonant with the new energies of Critical Refugee Studies and Asian American approaches to Cold War Studies, as exemplified in works like Yen Le Espiritu’s *Body Counts: The Vietnamese War and Militarized Refugees*, Lisa Yoneyama’s *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes*, Lisa Lowe’s *The Intimacy of Four Continents, War*, Cathy Schlund-Vials’ *War, Genocide, and Justice: Cambodian American Memory Work*, Josephine Nee-Hock Parks’ *Cold War Friendships*, and Viet Thanh Nguyen’s *Nothing Ever Dies*, which, in different ways, note the intricate historical relations between Asia and North America constituted through violence and displacement, I insist that we cannot separate the story of modern decolonization in South Asia from the intimate, immigrant histories of contemporary Asian American life.

Since the late 1990s, new attention to this gendered history and memory of the Partition has generated the field of Partition Studies, as historians and cultural studies scholars—especially feminist scholars—have revisited Partition from a range of perspectives. While literary and film critics have analyzed the prolific literature and film that bears witness to the complex violence of Partition, feminist historians have criticized the patriarchal construction of women as objects of families and communities at this time—a construct that undermines their access to equal rights as political subjects as well as citizens, and underlies the subsequent forced repatriation of women who

had been abducted and raped in 1947, and who were resettled with new families in both India and Pakistan.\textsuperscript{17} There is also now a substantial body of work on the regional histories of particular linguistic communities—Sindhis, Bengalis, Punjabis—who were the largest populations affected by Partition.\textsuperscript{18} Finally, substantial attention in this field hitherto, including in my own work, has been devoted to ethnic violence, memory, and trauma.\textsuperscript{19}

Extending the arena of these scholarly conversations in Partition studies, but shifting focus to the dimension of displacement, this book is interested in the migration stories of 1947 and their legacies for the cultural imagination of secularism and gendered citizenship. In this, it traverses both the subcontinent and its diasporas; while anchored in literary cultures, it is engaged with the subcontinental and diasporic public cultural exploration of the remains of decolonization in through other media, objects and practices. Accordingly, it considers literary fiction in dialogue with cinema, photography, oral histories, advertising, experimental art installations, and new digital media archives of migrant testimonies like the 1947 Partition Archive. That the Partition migrations have become newly relevant in South Asian public spheres across media forms is evident in such transnational, new media oral history projects that have emerged in the last decade. It is also evident in the proliferation of literary and cinematic production, as well as in the phenomenal success of the 2013 Partition-themed commercial “Reunion,” which Google Inc. created for its South Asian markets—


and I will return to this neoliberal aesthetic mapping of Partition’s trauma and globalization later. It is clear, then, that the remembering of 1947 is complex and newly resonant across South Asia. It is also, as I will show through the feminist and queer perspectives and representations considered here, profoundly gendered: just as ethnic/religious difference functions as a central category defining citizenship, heteronormative conceptions of gender, sexuality, and belonging critically mark the experience of displacement and citizenship in the cultural archive under consideration in this book. Among my arguments is that this remembering of Partition is, at least in part, an ethico-political response to the current crisis of secularism unfolding in India, where minority citizens continue to experience increasingly violent disenfranchisement, loss of citizenship, gendered violence, and daily discrimination (I elaborate on the signs of this crisis later in this introduction). Thus, in the memory-work ongoing across texts, media, and institutions, intellectual vigilance must attend not only to memorializing Partition, but also to how we institutionally memorialize the Partition toward bipartisan political ends.

This question, about how memory projects address the standpoint of the present, and articulate modes of recuperation and redress, has been central to much Asian American scholarship. Viet Thanh Nguyen argues, “Given the scale of so many historical traumas, it can only be the case that for many survivors, witnesses, and inheritors, the past can only be worked through together, in collectivity and community, in struggle and solidarity. This effort of a mass approach to memory should involve a confrontation with the present as much as the past, for it is today’s material inequalities that help to shape mnemonic inequities.”¹²⁰ My book uncovers how migration stories and their graphic address of national citizenship in this multi-media archive imagine collectivity, negotiate community, and forge transnational as well as secular solidarities. As it chronicles the representation of Partition migrations across various media—literature, film, new media, and print

culture—*Graphic Migrations* offers a new story about how the 1947 migrations, decolonization, and refugee experience shape discourses about gendered citizenship and secularism in India and, more broadly, in South Asian-America. It also shows that post-Partition literary and film narratives about migration and community influence and contest dominant conceptions about secularism and citizenship in the stories they tell.

I draw upon the work of Ranajit Guha and the Subaltern Studies collective, that, two decades ago, called for recognizing the Indian peasant less as an object, and more as an agent of national history. In what follows, this book will argue that we must recognize the migrant, and indeed the refugee, as an agent of national history. In other words, the refugee is constitutive of the nation. I realize that this is a radical claim; by convention, refugees are often discursively constructed as outsiders, as objects of pity, as peripheral subjects, and as burdens on the places and nations in which they arrive. Yet, I am arguing, as other scholars also have, that it is urgent that we displace this dominant rhetoric, as well as this political view. Yasmin Saikia eloquently observes, “To assert its power, official history in South Asia since the colonial times and even now depends on people forgetting much of the lived past. We cannot afford this kind of history any longer. The different, possible narratives preserved in people’s memories must be explored and acknowledged if we in South Asia are to confront what decolonization really means.”21 *Graphic Migrations* explores narratives of Partition migrants’ memories, and engages these with the cultural representation of decolonization and displacement in literature, film, print culture, advertising, and photography. By weaving together a range of representations of migration across media, my project labors to uncover how migrants and refugees, through their embodied signification and their ethical practices, become political critics as well as literal and figurative producers of secular imagined communities in postcolonial South Asia.

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In what follows, I discuss the key epistemic categories—“subaltern secular” and “migrant”—that organize this analysis, and constitute the conceptual scaffolding of the book. Graphic Migration orients them toward the feminist aesthetic, ethical, and ecological critique of state, citizenship, and globalization that will appear in the book’s chapters on different literary and media forms. Whether South Asian or Syrian, migration narratives are a powerful starting point from which we can rethink recent debates about how and when religion and secularism appear in public life and shape community—witness the work of Saba Mahmood, Talal Asad, Judith Butler, and others in the last decade. The South Asian negotiation of migration, religion, and conflict in public culture offers an alternative to the model of secularism in European enlightenment modernity, where it has largely signaled the desacralization of cultures. I use the terms “ethnic” and “religious” interchangeably, when referring to the political modernity of colonial identities like “Hindu” and “Muslim”; my goal is to interrupt discourses that reproduce the false binary of religion versus modernity, such that particular non-western religious communities and identities get marked as atavistic, communal, non-modern, and recidivistic others to the project of Post-Enlightenment modernity. Further, engaging Subaltern Studies with the anthropologist Talal Asad’s concept of a historically mobile “secular” (as distinct from the static ideology of secularism) I describe what I call the “subaltern secular”—the set of embodied acts, practices, performances, and representations in public culture that emerge from migrants and minorities in the nation-state. Following this, I will lay out the stakes that organize the story this book tells about how migration animates the lived secular and problematizes the postcolonial state, even as it inaugurates new vernacular aesthetic modes of building imagined communities. The next section explains the contours of the current crisis of political secularism in India, and its transnational links to post 9/11 America, Islamophobia, and the

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Indian-American diaspora. This contemporary crisis shapes minority rights and citizenship in the subcontinent and the diaspora; it also signals the stakes and relevance of this project to rethink Partition and the postcolonial nation-state’s production of statelessness.

**Secularism in Crisis**

South Asia scholars following developments in India through mainstream newsmedia (like NDTV, the Hindu, etc.) and public sphere accounts will be familiar with the changing face of ethno-nationalist public discourse since the 1990s, as Indians across classes and communities have debated the meaning and relevance of secularism, national culture, and equal citizenship in India. There is a new sense of anxiety, as recent political developments as well as embodied violence experienced by members of minority communities have created fear and concern across urban and rural India. Alongside this sense of anxiety and fear, geopolitical relations in the region are complex and ambivalent: tensions over the political reorganization of Jammu and Kashmir are high, and yet, in a heartening pro-peace development, a new bilateral agreement between India and Pakistan has led to the opening of a special corridor called the Kartarpur corridor that allows Indian citizens to directly cross the border to visit one of the holiest Sikh shrines in Kartarpur for the very first time; visitors get a special permit for the day, and thus bypass the formidable process of getting a visa. The corridor was inaugurated by Indian PM Narendra Modi and Pakistani PM Imran Khan on 9 November 2019. Thus far, leading political figures like former PM Manmohan Singh, as well as ordinary citizens have crossed the border to visit the shrine.23 This opportunity to facilitate cross-border travel, although under-girded by the privileged status accorded to religious pilgrimage, is a positive political step between the two nation-states. At the time of this writing, it is unclear what

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the future holds for Kashmir, India, and South Asia; for anyone following Indian politics, it should be increasingly evident that, since 2014, secularism in India is newly in crisis.

Of course, there is a long history of India’s move to the right over the course of the twentieth century that has made secularism a contested discourse. Shabnum Tejani has well-historicized the evolution of an ideology of secularism in India through the anti-colonial nationalist movement, from 1890-1950.24 My concern is with the representation of secularism in the post-1990 moment as increasingly under siege, in a country whose political institutions had constitutionally enshrined the idea of the Indian nation as a secular and inclusive community. In Walled States, Waning Sovereignty, Wendy Brown has noted, “[a]s it is weakened and rivaled by other forces, what remains of nation-state sovereignty becomes openly and aggressively rather than passively theological. So also do popular desires for restored sovereign might and protection carry a strongly religious aura.”25 Brown’s theorization of the sovereign theological and walled nation-state illuminates the changing nationalisms we are witnessing across Asia, Europe, and North America. In 2007, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and Anuradha Dingwaney Needham edited a collection of essays that announced the Indian crisis of secularism, and analyzed it from a range of disciplinary perspectives.26 The essays in this volume, as Rajan and Needham noted, were committed to “revisioning secularism and its modalities: secularism possesses too much energy for it to be only dismissed as useless or obsolete”. (31) They addressed the spread of violent extremism and polarization across India, its historical roots and cultural antecedents, as well as its particular imbrication with other forms of difference like caste and gender. Since that reckoning, this crisis of secularism in the face of hegemonic ethno-nationalism has persisted, and I am suggesting, intensified.27 Public and private discourses in India, it is obvious,

27 See, for instance, the essays in Chatterji, Hansen, and Jaffrelot, eds., Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism is Changing India (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2019). Other works that study the changing face of secularism in India include
have increasingly diminished the spaces in which inter-ethnic or inter-religious relations are unmarred by othering and conflict. Significantly, a parallel mode of polarization emerged in the United States after the attacks of September 11, 2001, in which racialized religious identities, and instigated the growing visibility of minority immigrant identities oriented around religion in the South Asian American diaspora. Hate crimes as well as discrimination against Arab Americans, Sikh Americans, Muslim Americans, and anyone appearing brown dramatically changed the experience of a hitherto invisible model minority group, which became a threatening ‘other’ after 9/11. This unleashed new modes of both racialization and community-formation for South Asian Americans.

While I have commented on this racialization of US citizenship elsewhere, scholars like Lopamudra Basu have more recently documented its cultural impact, as well as the Asian American aesthetic response to it, as in Ayad Akhtar’s plays. From the emergence of religion-based identities in the diaspora like “Hindu American”; the proliferation of minority student organizations on US campuses that center on religion; and the increasing memberships and political clout of affluent religious sectarian communities (courted by local politicians from New Jersey to Illinois and Georgia), we are witnessing a reinvention of South Asian American identity that fissures along religious lines, in community centers that are increasingly based inside spaces of worship, be they Hindu temples, Sikh gurudwaras, or Muslim mosques.


29 Scholars like Arvind Rajagopal, Vijay Prashad and Biju Mathew have well-documented the rise of Hindu nationalism in the diaspora. See for example, Biju Mathew and Vijay Prashad, “The Protean Forms of Yankee Hindutva,” Ethnic and Racial Studies 23, no. 3 (2000): 516-34. Of course, as many South Asianists delineate, there exists a long history of South Asian immigration, which has varied in its address of communalism or politicized religion, depending on the historical moment, ranging from the 1920s to the post Partition generation, and later, in the professional, educated immigrant classes of the 1960s and 1970s. Vijay Prashad’s The Karma of Brown Folk and more recently, Anupama Jain’s How To Be South Asian in America illuminate some of the contours of this multilayered history. However, I am most interested in the formation of “Hindu American” in the post 9/11 moment, where the intersection of hate crimes against those of South Asian and Middle Eastern descent, Islamophobia, and overseas Hindu nationalist organizations has drawn South Asian Americans (and British Asians) into imagined communities and political identities rooted in religion that, I believe, need to be reflected upon in a historical way.
What is the genealogy of this disappearing secular, and its changing lives in post-47 South Asia and Asian America? How can we understand its changing historical manifestation in the spaces of culture, lived experience, and storytelling? In what sense might we call the secular a minority discourse and a subaltern practice, despite its constitutional enshrinement? Priya Kumar notes the complexities and contradictions of the political understanding of “secularism” as it appears in India’s constitutional commitment: “If it has been asked to grapple with the thorny question of multi-religious and multiethnic coexistence and to serve as a means of unifying the nation, then it has also been deployed to provide state protection to minority religious communities. Thus, it has been asked to negotiate between uniform rights and liberal citizenship on the one hand, and special rights for minority religious groups, on the other.”

In the Indian context, questions about religion and Indian secularism have been intimately tied to the notion of justice since independence. As Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph observed, rather than being based on the division between the state and religion, the “Indian constitution declares India to be a secular (and socialist and democratic) state,” one that is “neutral and impartial toward all religions.” Thus, the constitution is based on the recognition of all religions as equal, and as constitutive of equal but separate communities: “In the language of Article 25 of the Constitution, as interpreted by the Supreme Court, every person shall have the protection of the law to profess, practice and propagate his/her religion.” Yet, there is a difference between formal constitutional political secularism and the historical realities of secularism as they play out in state politics, as well as in the lived experience of Indian citizens. Anshuman Mondal has parsed this well: as he points out, while the Indian state constitutionally adopts “a position of secular neutrality” standing above and beyond all religious or faith-based communities, in practice, it has

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30 Kumar, Limiting Secularism, 45.
functioned to protect minority communities and interests through mechanisms like separate electorates, as well as “reserved quotas for government appointments, resource distribution and the recognition of special legal provisions for Muslims with respect to personal law.”

Saba Mahmood has invited us to historicize such formations of secularism in postcolonial societies in the Global South, as they relate to minority rights and equal citizenship. By analyzing secularism’s relation to the modern nation-state as well as civil society in Egypt, Mahmood illuminates how the “two dimensions of political secularism—its regulatory impulse and its promise of freedom—are thoroughly intertwined, each necessary to the enactment of the other.” Thus, she reminds us that, for many such communities and societies, secularism “also entails the reordering and remaking of religious life” in ways that might be “themselves foreign to the life of the religions and peoples it organizes.” Given this, Mahmood cautions us to be alert to the possibilities and perils of secularism in postcolonial societies: “[t]his dimension of political secularism—shot through as it is with paradoxes and instabilities—needs to be understood for the life worlds it creates, the forms of exclusion and violence it entails, the kinds of hierarchies it generates, and those it seeks to undermine.”

My project hopes to remain attentive to this duality that characterizes political secularism, in order to explore the imaginative possibilities and the historical limits of the invention and performance of the lived secular, and its impact on minority rights as well as citizenship in South Asian cultural contexts. It turns to locate what Robert J. Young has described as the secular practices that “still figure in significant ways in an alternative configuration with the religious.”

Thus, while I acknowledge Mahmood’s argument that political state secularism can be productive of

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the very inter-religious or inter-ethnic conflict it claims to be an alternative to, I want to create space, through this analysis of a unique cultural archive, for uncovering new formations and performances of the “secular”—in migrant and refugee experience—that interrogate not only ethno-nationalism, but also the political institutions of state modernity from a minor perspective. In the process, I suggest, these cultural texts about migration, memory, and citizenship are counter-narratives that invent alternative ways of imagining community within and beyond the nation.

The complexity of the relations among the state, religious identities, rights, and the creation of a peaceful civil society has been well-addressed in the prolific body of work by Mushirul Hasan. Acknowledging the historical reality of the political life of Islam and documenting the heterogeneity of what constitutes Islam, Hasan argues that beyond the simplistic and reductive polarization of the secularism vs. communalism debate, we need to examine how religion is lived in syncretic modes in a global and secular civil society, even as we carefully attend to the relation between the state and religion. Indeed, Hasan asserts, “In a society where religion plays a dominant role in virtually every walk of life it is my business and the business of every historian to bring secularism into our discussions, and to affirm its validity as a principle guiding the nation.”

Hasan invokes here the responsibility of the scholar to offer a political critique of ethno-nationalism and to contest its claims on the nation as an imagined community. Talal Asad has relatedly noted the link between secularism and the liberal state, arguing that “secularism and liberal democracy were centrally involved in linking religion to the nation, attaining civil rights for citizens (especially social and political equality), and thus forming the liberal democratic state as a power state.” Resonant with this, Deepa Ollapally has reminded us that, while the Indian Supreme Court has consistently upheld political secularism, “[t]he Indian state’s political secularism had become increasingly strained, particularly

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since the 1980s. Interestingly, after 11 September 2001, the question of religion and its role in the public sphere has also emerged at the forefront in public debates about citizenship and belonging in Euro-American contexts. Yet, this question has long held much resonance in postcolonial societies, where, often, decolonization was marked by religious/ethnic violence, and this violence displaced large numbers of people, turning them into ethnically marked refugees (internal and external) stranded in a system of nation-states.

Disentangling these various connotations of secularism for the Indian context is the first step. In his anthropology of secularism, Talal Asad suggestively argues that instead of subscribing to discourses that posit religion and secularism as inherently opposed and static ideologies, we are better served by exploring the “secular” as constituted through a set of embodied practices, as an articulation always in flux. He proffers that the secular is “a concept that brings together certain behaviours, knowledges, and sensibilities in modern life.” Arguing that “the sacred and the secular depend on each other,” Asad offers “a counter to the triumphalist history of the secular” that shows how the secular “is neither continuous with the religious that supposedly preceded it (that is, it is not the latest phase of a sacred origin) nor a simple break from it (that is, it is not the opposite, an essence that excludes the sacred).” Shabnum Tejani’s analysis of secularism similarly argues for a rethinking of the simplistic divisions between secularism and communalism that have long shaped discourses about the role of religion in public and political life in India. Working back from our present moment of crisis, the chapters of this book open up a series of inquiries into the secular, as it becomes legible in the stories of migration and refugee experience from the 1947 Partition—a

41 Asad, Formations of the Secular, 25.
42 Ibid., 26.
43 Ibid., 25.
modern division of territory based on religion. Among the questions under consideration are: Do the violent Partition migrations of 1947 generate the cultural demise of the secular? Does the experience of forced migration, statelessness, and loss turn the refugee away from the secular? Beyond the official discourses of state secularism, what can our cultural archive of the Partition migrations illuminate about modern statelessness, citizenship, and secularism?

Displacing conventional approaches that treat secularism as an elite cosmopolitanism or a Western political ideology, and building on the work of Edward Said, Judith Butler, and Talal Asad, I deploy the term “secular” in a performative sense: the secular then refers to the set of embodied acts, practices, and representations through which one articulates an ethical relationship with subjects who occupy that space of difference. In an interview where he was questioned about his brave conception of secular criticism and the secular intellectual, Edward Said explained that for him, “the dense fabric of secular life can’t be herded under the rubric of national identity or can’t be made entirely to respond to this phony idea of a paranoid frontier separating ‘us’ from ‘them’—which is a repetition of the old sort of Orientalist model.”

This productive dissonance between secular life and the borders of national identity could not be more evident than in the novels by Bapsi Sidhwa, Arundhati Roy, and Shauna Singh Baldwin, or in the Indian and Pakistani films like Mammo and Khamosh Pani, that this book examines. The cultural works I consider represent the fraught, incomplete, and dense fabric of secular life as it is invented, contested, and under erasure. In *The Idea of Human Rights*, Charles Beitz has illuminated why we need to understand human rights not as an abstract political idea, but as “an emergent political practice.” Similarly, I suggest that the secular emerges as a political and ethical practice, from the violent, religion-based mass migrations of decolonization in South Asia. In *The Intimate Enemy*, Ashis Nandy has observed that both within

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India and the West, we can find the capacious ability to live with cultural ambiguity and instability, a mode that rejects the simplistic and false opposition of mythic spiritualism or a radical Westernized rationality. This generative instability for me is linked to the emergent secular—a resistant embodied performance, a practice, and an ethical mode of living that this book tries to identify in the spaces of public culture and everyday life. For me, this mode of living is a form of planetary cohabitation that instantiates a political critique of decolonization and ethno-nationalism.

*Graphic Migrations* then inquires into the discursive grammar of “the secular” as it appears in Indian and South Asian American culture, even as it unravels the relationship between migration and the secular after the 1947 Partition. Engaging Asad’s conception of “the secular” as a presence and a practice constantly made and remade through representations, actions, bodies, and objects in everyday life, this book tracks how literary and film texts, as well as print and digital cultures, invent and address the relation between violent migrations and this historically mobile “secular” (distinct from the static ideology of “secularism”) in the sensual, political formation of individual subjectivity and collective community. In the process, it alights on particular aesthetic representations of gendered migrants and citizens as it maps hegemonic as well as critical discourses about belonging, nationalism, and religion in India and its North American diaspora.

One might ask: why turn to migration stories, to tell the story about Indian secularism, or South Asian secular practices? To be sure, many scholars including Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Manav Ratti, and Priya Kumar have well analyzed the literary representation of Indian secularism more broadly. Further, within the field of South Asian literature and culture, as Neha Vora has also observed, the study of Indian migration has traditionally involved a focus on the migration circuits

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that took Indians to the West.\textsuperscript{48} However, I turn to migration stories about and after 1947 in order to interrupt the present of hegemonic and violent ethno-nationalism in South Asia and South Asian America. I argue that the historical experience of Partition’s mass migration—its cultural representation and its political legacies—offers us new “fugitive knowledges” of how the secular and religion are imbricated, then and now; it can illuminate how, from the midst of violent, religion-based dispossession, those who are abjected and exiled can forge the “secular,” as a political practice, and as an ethical, non-violent response toward geopolitical peace in the subcontinent.

Indeed, Judith Butler has suggested that “the very possibility of ethical relation depends on a certain condition of dispossession from national modes of belonging, a dispossession that characterizes our relationality from the start, and so the possibility of any ethical relation.”\textsuperscript{49} The radical marginality (if not invisibility) of millions of dispossessed Partition refugees in our hegemonic histories and discourses of the Indian nation-state marks their minority perspectives, at times, as subaltern, in relation to the nation-state. It is in this subalternity that the texts in my cultural archive locate the emergence of a minor, ethical secular. Engaging the scholarship of the Subaltern Studies Collective, this book identifies and names this minor secularism—one emerging in the spaces of minorities’ lived experience—as the “subaltern secular.” This secular does not entail the rejection of religion; indeed, it is a mode of pluralism, planetary co-habitation, and relationality that is premised on the recognition that, “very often, religion functions as a matrix of subject formation, an embedded framework for valuations, a mode of belonging, and embodied social practice.”\textsuperscript{50} How gender, race, class, caste, nationality, ecology, and disability shape the cultural imagination of Partition’s refugees, citizens, and subaltern secularisms will be part of the story this book tells.

\textsuperscript{49} Butler, “Is Judaism Zionism?,” 88.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 72.
As such, gender is a central marker of difference in my analysis of the public cultural representation of post-47 migration and secularism. Much feminist scholarship across the disciplines on South Asia and South Asian America has illuminated the history of South Asian women’s identities, roles, and rights in the context of both colonialism and postcolonial independence. Relatedly, scholars have well-explored queer sexuality and oppression, desire and rights, in modern India. In Partition Studies, Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin have uncovered the complex violence experienced by abducted women during the Partition, tracing the complicity of the patriarchal state and ethnic community in rendering female agency and access to equal citizenship subaltern.51 In this book, I complement this feminist historiography by examining how notions of heteronormative masculinity and femininity mark subjectivity, citizenship, and statelessness in and after decolonization. In this multi-media archive of migration stories, a majority of the artists and cultural producers considered have turned out to be women and feminists. They represent displacement and citizenship, as well as its failures, for a keen eye on how heteronormative gender norms shape historical experience and subject formation under decolonization and patriarchal postcoloniality. They illuminate subaltern intimacies, and minority affective solidarities; their stories about gender, embodiment, violence, family, and kinship offer a powerful critique of heteronormative ethno-nationalism, often offering a more inclusive and secular vision as an alternative. On the one hand, my analysis uncovers how dominant texts—from Hindi cinema, to literature, as well as media and print culture—reproduce or rearticulate heteronormative ideas about gendered citizenship, and the national family. On the other, it argues that some literary works as well as art films disrupt just these sedimented normative ideas about gender, sexuality, and belonging, offering in the process a feminist critique of hegemonic nationalism and geopolitical conflict that generate statelessness. Linking both is my analysis of how encoding gendered embodiment and bodily performance

51 Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin, Borders and Boundaries, ibid.
becomes central, across media, to the cultural project of imagining belonging and witnessing histories of loss on the peripheries of the nation. In the next section, I consider how collective story-telling events in the diaspora about the Partition migrations, can constitute one form of diasporic memory work—bearing witness to refugee experience under decolonization, and instantiating a transnational, ethical secular.

Restorying Migration: The Popular Representation of Refugees’ Stories

“The chronicler is the history-teller … In the storyteller the chronicler is preserved in changed form, secularized, as it were.”

–Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller”

In April 2016, a unique community event in Philadelphia aimed at generating a new public dialogue on the 1947 Partition migrations revolved around storytelling. In a tiny, intrepid gallery devoted to South Asia-related arts called Twelve Gates Arts, I was part of a collaboration to organize an event called “Voices of Partition,” presenting witness voices from India and Pakistan. In the birthplace of America, Indian and Pakistani Americans gathered to share memories of the birth of India and Pakistan. Co-hosted by the online digital video project The 1947 Partition Archive as part of their global series “Voices of Partition,” it was an unexpected success: a flood of RSVPs meant that the gallery had to double their seats; people were standing and sitting on the floor in the aisles, just squeezing into the space to listen. Three local South Asian American senior citizens—Hindu and Muslim—shared their memories of migrating as children across the new and bloody borders of India and Pakistan in 1947. Dr. Sagar and Dr. Reena Banka had ties to Lyallpur and Lahore (Pakistan), and Mrs. Khurshid Bukhari was originally from Patiala (India). They described the fragmented, episodic memories of how they heard about ethnic violence in August 1947, how

their parents decided to leave their homes, and how they slowly rebuilt their lives in the shadow of homes and friends lost, in new countries. Many commonalities emerged across their stories: all said that their parents thought that they were moving temporarily—until things calmed down. None imagined the closed borders and wars the two countries share today.

As the gentle and eloquent speakers narrated their experiences and shared old black and white photos, a new and palpable emotional community was forged between the speakers and their multigenerational audience. The witnesses shared their memories of that troubled time, inevitably colored by their childhood. Mrs. Bukhari’s harrowing tale of a narrow escape from Amritsar, to which her Patiala-based family had fled after increasing violence, ended with her reminiscing about a certain kachori stall in Patiala. She said, “Oh, I would love to eat those kachoris again.” Someone from the audience warmly said, “I’m from Patiala, and that kachori-wala is still there!” In the Q and A, others in the audience who had also migrated in 1947 started sharing their stories, their journeys. A 21-year-old South Asian American young man noted that when he discovered that his grandfather had migrated to Pakistan during Partition, it had transformed his sense of his identity: “I guess we were refugees. Refugees.”

What emerged in this diasporic gathering of those who once were refugees was an eagerness to remember that experience, without rancor toward the other religious community: for example, Dr. Sagar Banka affirmed that beyond religion, it was the Punjabi language that, here in the US, often bound him in closer friendships with Pakistani Punjabis than with Indians from different parts of India. The shared familiar itineraries of beloved cities (Lahore, Dehradun, Patiala) and schools spun new inter-religious, inter-national emotional bonds in this contingent community, flecked with the red and gold paintings of the Lahore-based artist Komail Aijazuddin. To draw upon Yen Le Espiritu’s words in a different context, this dialogue vividly illuminated “the living effects of what seems to be over and done with.” Straddling public worlds and private memories, it became a way to
“reclaim the ‘something else’ that resides at the intersection between private loss and public commemoration [my italics].”

Established in 2011, Twelve Gates Arts’ goal is, in its founder Aisha Khan’s words, to “create and promote projects that cross geographic and cultural boundaries. The ‘gates’ refer to the fortified gates that walled many ancient cities such as Delhi, Lahore, Jerusalem, and Rhodes—inside which lay the heart of each city’s art and culture.” Cathy Caruth has argued, “In a catastrophic age, that is, trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others, but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves.” This “Voices of Partition” event opened the gates of our political borders and divided cultures, starting an unfinished conversation about the shared losses of Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi Americans. This dialogue enacted what Cathy J. Schlund-Vials has described, in a different context, as the “renegotiation of history through survivor memory.” It allowed people, through the sharing of remembrances past, to not only see that Indians and Pakistanis have much more in common than our politicians would like us to acknowledge, but also to forge new relations of peace that might have consequences in the subcontinent. In this sense, then, the Voices of Partition conversation that day emerged from what Viet Thanh Nguyen has called the idea of “just memory,” where the remembrance of one’s refugee pasts also invoked the contemporary suffering of Syrian refugees today. These storytelling practices, as art historian Svetlana Boym has noted in her work on immigrant experience, “do not reconstruct the narrative of one’s roots but rather, tells the story of exile.” The event showed how telling

53 Yen Le Espiritu, _Body Counts_, 107-108.
stories about migration, loss, and trauma can create exilic intimacy. This intimacy in Boym’s words, “does not cover up the common loss and pain of displacement but allows one to survive it, to go beyond it.”\(^{57}\) Of course, the project to recall and recognize refugee dispossession also raises the question of what counts as justice and redress. As Lisa Yoneyama has argued in a different context: “Any idea of a successful transitional justice must then embrace a critical awareness of Cold War legacies in the region [Asia], thus ultimately challenging the dialectics of redressable and unredressable as integral to the (in)justices sustained by post World War II neocoloniality and the structures of American dominance.”\(^{58}\) This problem, of identifying what injustices and traumas are redressable or unredressable under the conditions of post WWII neocoloniality, and how they are so, is embedded in many of the literary, film, and aesthetic works considered in the forthcoming chapters. Among my arguments is that many of the cultural texts in this archive perform the secular, as a way to redress the violence of the modern state’s neocoloniality; they critique the failure of the state and state secularism to protect its displaced subjects, while performing, from the periphery, a subaltern secularism.

Refugee stories have not always been welcomed and heard as these were in 2016 in Philadelphia. While the Holocaust scholar Shoshana Felman has suggested that “testimony is the literary—or discursive—mode par excellence of our times, and that our era can precisely be defined as the age of testimony,”\(^{59}\) in the South Asian context, until the scholarly work done over the last two decades by Indian feminists and publishers like Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, and Kamala Bhasin, testimonies about the 1947 Partition were largely ignored. To be sure, the facts and figures existed in extensive social scientific studies, especially of the Punjab and Bengal experience.\(^{60}\) But the

\(^{57}\) Ibid.
\(^{58}\) Yoneyama, 36.
\(^{60}\) To mention a few: Rai (1965); Samaddara (1999); Corrucini and Kaul (1990); Saif (2010).
curious elision of Partition refugees’ testimonies in part stems from the long history of political censorship of refugees’ voices immediately after 1947 in India. For instance, in my first book *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender, and National Culture in Postcolonial India* (2008), I showed how in the early national period, articles in urban English language newspapers in India repeatedly express the fear that refugees’ traumatic stories will incite further ethnic violence against local Muslim citizens. In London, the 15 August 1947 issue of the *Times* printed the following news item: “District Aflame: The trouble in the east Punjab started about a month ago in the Hoshiarpur district, where refugees from Rawalpindi spread tales of suffering and requested co-religionists to avenge them. A peaceful district was thus set aflame.” Another newspaper report from Lahore argues, “The chief danger at the moment is that the tens of thousands of Muslim refugees who are trekking westwards with tales that are grim enough in reality, but become more lurid with every telling, will cause a wave of reprisals in West Punjab” (*Times*, 26 August 1947). In one news report, a Sikh man waiting in the long queues for passage in Karachi via ship to Bombay in 1947 is quoted as saying, “Our community is on good terms with the others. We have no fear of our neighbors but fear that feelings may be stirred up against us by the refugees from Punjab” (*Times*, 30 August 1947). Similarly, an editorial from the *Times* in August 1947 asserts: “As the refugees toil across the frontier in each direction . . . [s]tories brought by Sikh and Hindu survivors from the Western Punjab caused the slaughter of Muslims in Paharganj and other wards of old Delhi by neighbors with whom they have dwelt in amity for centuries” (*Times*, 13 September 1947). In the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, an editorial from September 1947 laments:

The aftermath of the horror in the Punjab is sporadic outbreaks of violence in many parts of the country. Much of this trouble is undoubtedly due to the stories carried by refugees which are one-sided, often distorted and lose nothing in the telling. Refugees deserve everyone’s sympathy and aid in their plight, but however pitiable their cases may be, they cannot be
allowed to become a source of vengeance propaganda or the organizers of further killings. (14 September 1947)

In these accounts, refugees’ narratives are variously described as “propaganda,” “one-sided,” “distorted,” “communalism,” and sources of “vengeance”—through a rhetoric of negation, their stories become seen as stories that cause “slaughter.” Such fear and anxiety generated widespread censorship of refugees’ narratives in the Indian public sphere, even as collectively, this refugee experience has remained un-memorialized and un-mourned for over seventy years by the nation-states involved—Indian, British, and Pakistani. (This failure to memorialize the Partition is rendered especially stark by the fact that even the traumatic and shameful Komagata Maru experience of 352 British Asian migrant subjects denied entry into Canada in 1914 has been memorialized by both the Indian and Canadian governments.) The above anxious journalistic and political representations of refugees evince the simultaneous universalization and demonization of refugeeness that, Liisa Malkki has shown, mark public discourse about refugees even today: they are at once “a focal object of intervention and knowledge,” a threat to the national community and its private citizens, and a polluting danger in their liminality to “the categorical order of things.”

Yet, Malkki writes, if we “radically historicize our visions of culture and identity,” then we might come to recognize how the migrant’s displacement “can generate a different and sometimes subversive reshuffling of nationalist verities.”

Saskia Sassen has argued that it is time we recognize that contemporary “[m]igrations are acts of settlement and of habitation.” Insofar as recent scholarship in both postcolonial studies and Asian American studies historicizes geopolitical migration by pointing to neocolonial and imperial wars and politics, and insofar as it points to the dissonance between state borders and the shared

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human realities across those borders, it resonates with the inspiration for, and the stakes of, this book. Through its aesthetic archive of migration stories across literature, film, and media, *Graphic Migrations* interrogates the ethno-nationalist verities of present-day India and South Asian America.

In returning to the 1947 Partition migrations, this book identifies an insurgent archive that incites empathy, to forge new relations toward inter-national peace. Across media, much cultural production considered here is marked by a certain negotiation of what Rajini Srikanth has described as empathy: “Without giving up our right to furious rage and deep sorrow, we can also find within us the emotions and perspectives that could lead to reconciliations and new friendships…We cannot be selective about who we identify and accept as our neighbor, because we are constituted by all our neighbors as they are constituted by us.”

In any analysis, the language used to name those displaced is key if we are to understand the aesthetics and politics of representing displacement, and of historicizing migrants’ belonging and unbelonging in the nation. In the Indian context, Partition refugees’ positionality is complex: in the years immediately following Partition, depending on whether the refugee was Hindu or Sikh, as well as factors like gender, location, class, and caste, s/he has often been constructed, simultaneously, as an Indian citizen to be assisted by the Indian state, in public discourse. Nonetheless, the Indian state has seen fit to suppress refugees’ voices and narratives of pain and suffering through its censorship of news media, fearing they would incite more ethnic hatred in civil society. Underlying this national anxiety is the often unspoken assumption that, given that British India was partitioned in 1947 on ethnic grounds, the Hindus and Sikhs displaced as a result would espouse anti-Muslim prejudice, and the Muslims displaced would espouse anti-Hindu and anti-Sikh feeling. Indeed, L.K. Advani, one of the foremost leaders of the Hindu nationalist BJP Party, was once a Partition refugee, as are some

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contemporary supporters and workers of that party. However, the voices and texts in this archive complicate such assumptions. For instance, some of the most successful personalities in the Hindi film industry—like G.P. Sippy, B.R. Chopra, and Yash Chopra—were once Partition refugees, and their cinematic oeuvre bears the imprint of this displacement, even as it creatively contributes to the cultural imagination of the secular in India.\textsuperscript{65}

By exploring how the secular appears in cultural narratives about migration and normative citizenship across media, this book aims to track the convergences and divergences of these stories about ethnic violence and displacement with the dominant discourse about refugee experience that has shaped the reception—and, I would argue, erasure—of refugees’ perspectives in South Asia. Giorgio Agamben has suggested that, increasingly, “states of exception” have become the norm in most Western democracies and that the refugee “is nothing less than the limit concept that radically calls into question the fundamental categories of the nation-state, from the birth-nation to the man-citizen link.”\textsuperscript{66} What categories and politics might be renewed in the refugee stories from South Asia and South Asian America? Scholars like Yen Le Espiritu, Lisa Yoneyama, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Mimi Thi Nguyen, Cathy Schlund-Vials, and others have generated important new dialogues in the fields of Critical Refugee Studies and Asian American Studies. This path-breaking scholarship has reinvigorated attention to displacement and memory in the context of the American empire, and located the experience of raced minority citizenship in the United States as constituted by its transnational historical relationship with war and geopolitical conflict in Asia.\textsuperscript{67} Simultaneously, even as the world’s population of refugees grows every year, and affluent nations from Australia to Germany and the United States ambivalently struggle with accepting refugees from Asia and Africa.

\textsuperscript{65} Gulzar, Govind Nihalani, and Saibal Chatterjee, eds., \textit{Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema} (Mumbai: Prakashan, 2003), 70.
As the World Health Organization reports, there are 258 million international migrants, and 763 million internal migrants in the world today, with 86% of the world’s forcibly displaced population hosted by developing countries.⁶⁸ Like Malkki, Mimi Thi Nguyen has noted how the refugee is a complex figure: “A historical event, a legal classification, an existential condition of suspension or surrender…and a focal point for rescue or rehabilitation, the refugee figure is mired in complicated and ever emerging matrices and crises of referentiality.”⁶⁹ I draw upon the energy of new Asian American scholarship on refugees, citizenship, and justice in transnational Asia, to examine the changing representation of South Asian migrants and refugees in and after 1947 as a point of departure from which we might reconsider the nation-state, citizenship cultures, and secularism in South Asia and South Asian America. My desire here then, in part, is to write the specific and diverse experience of Partition refugees into the story of independent, secular India, as well as South Asian America. I do so in order to recast this peripheral story not as an anomaly, but as a constitutive part of contemporary, transnational South Asian life. More broadly, the stakes of this project also emerge from my Arendtian investment in rethinking and recasting the contemporary, global crisis of growing statelessness produced by war, authoritarianism, and conflict that extends around the world, from Syria to Iraq, Guatemala, Honduras, Yemen, and the United States. If, when, and how we represent the precarity generated by modern migration in our media and our public culture, matters—and the next section gestures to the broader public relevance of rethinking how dominant media represent gendered migrants and refugees, by turning to Hannah Arendt’s theorization of statelessness and her critique of the modern system of nation-states.

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⁶⁸ https://www.who.int/migrants/en/
Like the Voices of Partition event in Philadelphia discussed above, several public events organized in India have also revisited and remembered the Partition migrations through memory work. For example, from 4–6 August 2017, a landmark event called “Remembering Partition” was organized in Mumbai, India. On the eve of celebrations that would commemorate the 70th anniversary of India’s freedom from British rule, this event was comprised of a series of exhibits, installations, film screenings, panel discussions, and music performances revolving around the 1947 Partition migration, its memories, and its legacies. The packed schedule of discussions and performances over three days and nights of “Remembering Partition” revolved around refugees’ experiences; it also invited dialogue on the contemporary stakes of rethinking the historical experience of citizenship for those who are religious minorities in India and Pakistan under governments that espouse extremist religious nationalist views. Simultaneously apparent was the shared aspiration to work toward geopolitical peace between India and Pakistan. As India celebrated the 70th anniversary of its independence on 15 August 2017, this event was a public invitation to remember that this independence came with a price: the price of displacement, paid by the millions who lost homes, lives, families, and belonging in 1947.

Organized by a progressive and secular-activist organization called the Godrej India Culture Lab, this was the first, three-day long, sustained, multi-disciplinary, multimedia public dialogue that reckoned with the Partition—ever held in India, or in the world. The Godrej Group is one of India’s leading industrial conglomerates, with its roots in the Indian anti-colonial swadeshi movement. Founded in 1897, it is largely managed and owned by the Godrej family from India’s minority Parsi community. Envisioned and curated by the India Culture Lab’s visionary director Parmesh Shahani,

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and catalyzed by a dynamic team that included the manager Dianne Tauro and senior associate Kevin Lobo, “Remembering Partition” was hosted in a state-of-the-art Vikhroli campus in suburban Mumbai.\textsuperscript{71} The programming involved over seven exhibits of art installations, some of which displayed refugees’ letters, objects, and fashion that explored the Partition migrations from a transmedia perspective. As Shahani recalls, “In our collaborative museum of memories, we had invited citizens of Mumbai to bring their own objects for display – things that their parents or grandparents had brought with them, and it was so moving to see the everyday ordinariness of these objects.”\textsuperscript{72}

‘Remembering Partition’ also included panel presentations and luminous dialogues over three days with guest speakers and Partition witnesses who shared memories about the mass migrations, as well as reflections and research on their legacies. The speakers included Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis from a range of fields; activists, filmmakers, scholars, teachers, performance artists, musicians, fashion designers, photographers, writers, actors, and others participated in the robust, heartbreaking, and fiercely passionate conversations that unfolded over those three days. From Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, Lalita Ramdas, Salima Hashmi, Nandita Das, Vishwajyoti Ghosh, Anusha Yadav (The Indian Memory Project), Nina Sabnani, Tanvir Mokammel, Guneeta Singh Bhalla, and Ramesh Sippy, the speakers traversed geographies from South Asia to the UK and USA. Local undergraduate college students sporting jeans and red tee-shirts with “#rememberingpartition” printed on them volunteered their time and labor over the three days to help set up, guide, troubleshoot, explain, and manage the various events and exhibits. The hashtag #rememberingpartition trended on Twitter for several days after the event, realizing the Lab’s goals.

\textsuperscript{71} The Godrej India Culture Lab is a new public cultural space in Mumbai that fosters challenging dialogues year round through speaker events, art exhibits, film and media engagement, on a range of politically resonant and social justice issues, from LGBTQ rights to poverty, migration, trans inclusion, urban development, environmentalism, etc.

\textsuperscript{72} Parmesh Shahani. “Re: #rememberingpartition question.” Message to Kavita Daiya. 5 December 2019. Email.
to extend its critical conversation online. About the transnational heterogeneity of cultural performances, screenings, and panelists, Shahani explains, “It was important to us that the performances were representative and inclusive in terms of genre as well as the feelings they evoked. Hence the conscious decision to invite Askari to perform a Soz Khwani—a lamentation, and to end with Kabir Café on an optimistic note—Kabir’s mystical poetry infuses the entire subcontinent, irrespective of geographical boundaries.” Gesturing to the activist, pro-peace, and transnational commitment of the memory work ‘Remembering Partition’ wanted to create, Shahani explains, that his goal was to generate a dialogue “about linkages and possibilities that continue between the now three countries – hence we made sure that voices like Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, a Pakistani filmmaker and activist with two Academy Awards, and artist Salima Hashmi, who is also the daughter of noted poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz from Pakistan, were heard, as was filmmaker Tanvir Mokammel, the nine times National Film Award winner from Bangladesh, who screened the first worldwide preview of his film *Simantorekha* (The Borderline) here, about the effects of Partition on both sides of Bengal.”

For me, one of the surprising dimensions of this event was that, daily, it drew over 600 attendees, from across four generations; it was standing room only at the state-of-the art auditorium, as people huddled on the floor and steps to listen in. People from all walks of life, from scholars and artists, to activists, senior citizens, students, and school children showed up to hear and participate in this important, and long-overdue, dialogue on the 1947 Partition. This creative and path-breaking three days of dialogue and artistic exploration that honored refugees’ experience also identified Partition’s many legacies of war and conflict in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Many speakers reflected on the enduring legacies of the Partition, from India-Pakistan wars to the violence in

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73 Parmesh Shahani, “Re: #rememberingpartition question.” Message to Kavita Daiya. 6 December 2019. Email.
Kashmir; others also highlighted feminist and queer perspectives on the Partition migrations. The focus on gender and sexuality was complemented by the central art installation at “Remembering Partition,” called “Well of Remembrance.” The installation partially recreated a brick well, but was painted black. A white fabric suspended from the ceiling memorialized the fact that thousands of women jumped into wells during Partition to avoid sexual violence and lost their lives in the process.

The fabric symbolized the long scarves or sarees women often wore in northern India, its suspension in the air violently halting space as well as time as it invited us to contemplate the women’s free fall to death. The installation served as a stark reminder of the differential price that women paid around 1947.
Figure A.2: “Well of Remembrance” installation at “Remembering Partition” event.

Photo credit: Godrej India Culture Lab
The heterogeneous representational modes employed to remember partition here illustrated the persistent interest in, and new spaces for, dialogues about Partition refugees that had not yet happened in such a public, collective mode, across three generations, in India. This event unveiled the “thick transnationalism” of the memory and legacy of Partition migrations. The following week, an exhibit at Bikaner House in the capital New Delhi was launched and curated by the 1947 Partition Archive and Aanchal Malhotra, a granddaughter of Partition refugees. It drew nearly a thousand viewers daily, to encounter video oral histories installations and photographic displays that crossed religious, ethnic, caste, class, gender, and national borders. More recently, the public conversations created through pop-up exhibits by the 1947 Partition Archive in Berkeley, New Delhi, and Madison have generated large audiences, testifying to the resonance of Partition stories in the present. In a different context, Jennifer Green-Lewis notes, “We re-create the past in response to popular demand— that much seems clear.” These new public cultural initiatives, I am suggesting, recreate the past and reflect on the prevailing sociopolitical crisis of secularism, in order to perform an imaginative response to this crisis through memory work. They also signal how cultural forms are being mobilized to challenge ongoing political violence, and the state’s discursive erasure of South Asia’s shared cultures. Through a range of historicizing discursive practices that constitute collective publics for memorialization, people on the ground are working toward an alternative future beyond extremism and nuclear war, and for secular cohabitation in South Asia.