

Women's Oral History and Survivors' Testimonies of India's Partition: A Feminist Analysis

**by
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B.A., University of Delhi, 2016

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

in the
School of Communication
Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Spring 2020

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Abstract

This thesis applies the principles of feminist and postcolonial methodology to analytically compare two types of oral history projects on women survivors from India's 1947 Partition: grassroots feminist projects conducted by Indian feminists and activists Bhasin and Menon and Butalia; and the "1947 Partition Archive", a depoliticized, open access digital repository of oral testimonies housed by the Stanford University Library. In analytically comparing the projects, the objective is two-fold: to recognize the potential of oral history as a feminist methodology that identifies participants as co-producers of knowledge where only by including them as active agents in the analysis, can new forms of feminist and anti-colonial knowledge emerge; and to argue that in order to ethically generate and share oral accounts in the digital age, where the danger of commodification can override the potential for democratization, there is a need to revisit questions of agency, empowerment and reflexive practices, ideals that are at the core of recent anti-colonial feminist research.

Keywords: oral history; indigenous and feminist methodologies; Indian Partition; post-colonial; community-based research; feminist knowledge production; digital archives

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the guidance, support and motivation of my committee members. A special thanks to Dr. Kirsten McAllister, my senior supervisor, for her invaluable feedback, patience and constant encouragement. I am also grateful to Dr. Dara Culhane for her immensely helpful comments and questions as well as her expertise on the subject.

I also want to thank the School of Communication for supporting me both academically and financially through graduate school as well as the Dr. Hari Sharma Foundation for their scholarship award that helped support my research.

Lastly, I want to extend my gratitude to all the courageous women who survived the catastrophe that was the Partition and continue to tell their stories to the world. Also, my sincere thanks to researchers and activists Urvashi Butalia, Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon for their laborious and ground-breaking work on women's history of the Partition.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

My thesis analytically compares two distinct kinds of oral history projects of women survivors from India's 1947 Partition: oral histories conducted by grassroots Indian activists and feminists in northern India and the "1947 Partition Archive" which is an open access digital repository of oral testimonies collected by volunteers and housed by Stanford University's Library in the United States of America. Concerned with the relations of power and research, my thesis examines how the use of grassroots, feminist methodologies can result in the creation of new forms of knowledge informed by women's experiences in comparison to the depoliticized digital accounts of the Partition gathered by the "1947 Partition Archive".

I begin with an examination of the expansive oral history projects conducted by Indian feminist historians Urvashi Butalia (her 2000 book, *The Other Side of Silence*)¹ and Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin (their 1998 book, *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*), each of which spanned the course of a decade during which Butalia and Menon and Bhasin travelled across northern India in search of communities of women survivors of the Partition. They lived with these women, shared home-cooked meals and listened to their stories over the course of ten years. With an emphasis on building relationships, practicing reflexivity, sharing authority and acknowledging their own positionality in doing research with survivors of violence, these feminist historians have been co-creators in producing new forms of knowledge, and bringing forth stories that have been obscured in official histories of the Partition.

I analytically compare my analysis of their projects with the "1947 Partition Archive" (2010 – present) – a digital repository of oral histories that is housed with the Stanford University Library. With interviews conducted by what the "Archive" refers to as 'citizen historians', who are in fact volunteers, the "memories"² of Partition survivors

¹ Originally published in 1998.

² Survivors' testimonies collected by the "1947 Partition Archive" are referred to as "memories" on the website's homepage at <https://www.1947partitionarchive.org/>

accumulated by the “1947 Partition Archive” are open to public access.³ Unlike a state-sponsored archive, the collection of testimonies is funded entirely by “trust-funds”, crowdsourcing and individual donations.⁴ However, despite its claim of democratizing historical documentation (The 1947 Partition Archive, n.d.), the “1947 Partition Archive” seems to be entirely focused on amassing testimonies and maximizing its viewership. With little evidence of showing any ethical consideration for working with ‘memory’ and ‘testimony’, and specifically with survivors of violence and trauma, this thesis argues that unlike feminist oral historians Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000), the “Archive” has failed to develop a research methodology that is rooted in collaboration, relationship building and co-production of knowledge. Referred to as the “remembrance industry” by Ruth Linden (1993), I will argue that the “1947 Partition Archive” commodifies survivors’ memories, problematically fetishizing their experiences.

My comparative analysis of the oral histories by Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) with the “1947 Partition Archive” seeks to answer a fundamental question: who gets to create knowledge and for whom? Further, as Srigley, Zembrzycki and Iacovetta (2018) have asked, “since there is power inherent in sharing stories, who exactly is empowered when those stories are shared?” (12). Therefore, the objective of my thesis is two-fold: to recognize the potential of oral history as a feminist practice that identifies women as producers of knowledge, where only by including their lives realities at the center of historical analysis, new forms of knowledge can emerge; and to argue for increased transparency in the research process and adherence to ethical research practices, especially in a shared digital space that can be accessed publicly.

³ According to the ‘Archive Access’ section on the “1947 Partition Archive’s” website, a “subset” of oral history interviews can currently be publicly accessed through the Stanford University Libraries’ Digital Repository at <https://exhibits.stanford.edu/1947-partition>. The subset includes 51 full interviews and their summaries. “Pending funding required for the accession, all interviews will be available via online streaming via the Digital Repository over the coming years” (Archive Access, n.d.). Currently, researchers and academics can request to access the raw, unprocessed data in the “Archive” by submitting a request and paying the subsequent fee depending on the “footage” being accessed.

⁴ While the website does not list its online donors, a list of all the ‘Founding Donors’ can be found under the ‘Founding Donors’ section of the “1947 Partition Archive’s” website at https://www.1947partitionarchive.org/Founding_Donors. Some “Archival Level Founding Donors” include Acton Family Fund, Tata Trusts and Silicon Valley Community Foundation; whereas “Seed Level Founding Donors” to fund the “Archive during its early days primarily include individual donations.

1.1. Context

In 1947, as the British crown prepared to exit colonial India after nearly a hundred years of rule, various social, political and historical factors⁵ resulted in the division of the Indian sub-continent into the independent nation states of India and Pakistan. According to Bhasin and Menon (1998), the main factor was the colonial state's social, political and ideological manipulation and the mobilization of Muslims in response to the growing animosity and fear of increased Hindu hegemony in a post-independence India. Tensions between Hindus and Muslims further escalated with the creation of separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims and the growing rivalry between the Muslim League and the All India Congress. Some scholars, however, reject this idea of differences between Hindus and Muslims, and instead point to the role of other determinants such as "class compulsions, the politics of power, and the pressure on the British to arrive at a negotiated settlement, that led to a rapid consolidation of strength by the Muslim League" (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 6). Regardless, according to Partition scholar Gyanendra Pandey (1998), "the singularly violent character of the event stands out" (2). The end result was that by the year 1948, "more than fifteen million people had been uprooted, and between one and two million were dead" (Dalrymple, 2015), along with millions of people who were transformed into refugees (Pandey, 1998, 2).

The experience of Partition, however, was not only violent, it was also deeply gendered. Violence against women often involved "communal rape, kidnapping and forced [religious] conversion" (Hardgrove, 1995, 2427) across different borders and public and private sites, ranging from women being attacked while crossing the border to being targeted in their own neighborhoods and even their own houses. Since notions of 'honor' and 'purity' were attached to women's bodies by the state, the community and the kin, their violation was seen as a symbolic violation of territorial claims and familial, religious and national communities. Hence, both the state and the family (on both sides

⁵ According to Pandey (1998), the Partition of the Indian sub-continent and the creation of the independent countries of India and Pakistan resulted from a culmination of a number of forces – the political tensions between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, regional and regional disturbances that were spreading like wildfire throughout the country and a final assertion of colonial power by the British Crown. The actual Partition itself happened with remarkable suddenness and in a manner that was completely unanticipated by the British exiting India. The official boundaries between the two nations were drawn two days after they had been announced independent and the consequent bloodbath that followed this division was entirely unprecedented, so was the horrifying nature, scale and method of this violence.

the border) became heavily invested in 'recovering' and 'rescuing' abducted women and restoring them to their rightful places (Hardgrove, 1995, 2427). Compelled by the complaints of relatives who were searching for the "missing" women from their families as early as August 1947, the Indian and Pakistani governments entered an Inter-Dominion agreement in November of that year (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 67). Following the passing of multiple ordinances in both countries, the recovery efforts culminated in the Indian Parliament legislating the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Bill in December 1949 (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 67). Invoking the Hindu mythological figures of Ram and Sita⁶, "leaders expressed their concern over the 'moral depravity' that characterized this 'shameful chapter' in the history of both countries" (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 68). They stated that the dishonoring of their "innocent sisters" was not an issue that could be ignored. In 1948, the official estimate pegged the number of abducted Muslim women in India at 50,000 and 33,000 Hindu and Sikh women in Pakistan, a figure that was, according to a social worker, Mridula Sarabhai, was actually ten times more (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 70).

The Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Bill was passed in the face of disquiet from the families of missing women and to facilitate speedy recovery of women. The Bill was critiqued for being arbitrary for the following reasons: defining an "abducted person" as "a male child under the age of sixteen years or female of whatever age" (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 71); giving virtually unlimited powers to the police to forcefully recover abducted women with no accountability and complete immunity from inquiry; the poor conditions and confinement women were subjected to in recovery camps; the denial of any rights or legal recourse to the abducted women; forcible recovery of unwilling women; the arbitrary resolution⁷ of the question of children borne outside of marriage; and no set date for the Bill to remain in effect (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 73).

The very terms of the Bill were deeply problematic insofar as there was no mechanism in place to determine who had been abducted and who had left of free will

⁶ In the ancient Hindu epic Ramayana, lord Rama's wife Sita is forced to walk through fire (referred to as an ordeal of fire or Agni Pariksha) in order to prove her purity to her husband after being abducted by the demon Ravana.

⁷ Children borne out of marriages with the members of the 'Other' were considered "illegitimate" (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 104) as per the Bill and therefore couldn't be socially or legally acknowledge either by the Indian state or by the religious communities and the kin (124). A number of women were thus forced to leave their children behind when they were sent to their country of "origin".

(Butalia, 2000, 114). The Bill outlined the following criteria: “after March 1, 1947, any woman who was seen to be living with, in the company of, or in a relationship with a man of the other religion would be presumed to have been abducted, taken by force” (115), robbing women of all agency to even speak for themselves, let alone make decisions independently.

Evidently, the Bill was based on the common assumption that “all abducted women were captive victims and wanted nothing more than to be restored to their original families as soon as possible” (Butalia, 2000, 104). Both arbitrary in its conditions and ambiguous in its execution, the Bill was guided solely by the alarming concern about the abduction and conversion of women, through marriages, to Islam. “Abduction and conversion were the double blow dealt to the Hindu ‘community’ so that the recovery of ‘their’ women, if not land, became a powerful assertion of Hindu manhood at the same time as it demonstrated the moral high ground occupied by the Indian state” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 115-116). It becomes clear that the state was governed by the same ideological concerns as the community and the kin in policing women survivors of the Partition.

However, as it became evident later, it was impossible to determine if a “recovered” woman had been “abducted” in the first place. As Bhasin and Menon (1998) have argued, women were abducted in such varied circumstances that it was impossible to assume that all of them were eligible for ‘recovery’. “Abducted” women who did not wish to be recovered pleaded that “their liaisons had been made freely and under no compulsion” (118), and as Bhasin and Menon (1998) further elucidate, many women had taken advantage of the social and political turmoil to marry outside their religious communities. Further, a number of women were afraid that they wouldn’t be accepted by their kin after being ‘tainted’ by the hands of the ‘Other’ and thus refused to go back to them out of the fear of rejection and shame. The messy formulation of the Abduction and Recovery Bill, therefore, was evident in the disturbing culmination of the recovery program. Social workers were “faced with the appalling consequences of dividing women ‘like apples and oranges’ and deciding fortunes on the basis of who fell into which basket” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 118). Moreover, once the Bill was legislated in the Parliament, recovery teams were dispatched on both sides of the border to ‘recover’ abducted women. With lists compiled on the basis of complaints that were filed by relatives of missing women, the recovery team “used all kinds of tactics to locate and

'rescue' the women" (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 117). This included going undercover and using extreme measures such as torture to obtain information because, as one of the liaison officers claimed, Pakistan "would use all kinds of false propaganda" (118) to threaten and discourage women from leaving. However, despite the Indian state's deep-seated, public preoccupation with the "women's question", the national narrative of Partition as a "history of struggle" has excluded "the dimensions of force, uncertainty, domination and disdain, loss and confusion" (Pandey, 1998, 4) as experienced by Partition survivors and thus, erases the nuances and "messiness" that characterized individual experiences of people.

Even though close to 750,000 women were assumed to have been abducted and raped by men of 'Other' religious communities (Butalia, 2000, 3), official records of the Partition focus largely on the constitutional, governmental and political debates surrounding the event. Authored by elite nationalist men like Nehru, Gandhi and Jinnah, these texts were narrowly focussed on the project of nation building and failed to address the social and emotional impact of Partition violence on ordinary people, especially minorities. Emphasis remained on the "socialist direction of Nehruvian policies, The Five Year Plans, and the regional politics of post-1947 India" with little to no mention of the dramatic transformation that marked India's independence (Didur, 2006, p. 9-10). Experiences of ordinary people, especially the marginalized, like women and children, remain unexplored and untouched to a large degree in both official government records and historical accounts on the independence and Partition.

It is astonishing how, despite the immensity of the violence that characterized India's Partition, "very few scholars have studied the role of this essentially constitutive ethnic and gendered violence in colonial and postcolonial history" (Didur, 2006, p. 9). While there was an unprecedented focus on writing literary and testimonial accounts aimed at articulating the 'local' experience of Partition (such as Kushwant Singh's 1956 book *Train to Pakistan*) in the years immediately after 1947, it was only in the 1980s, with a marked rise in sectarian violence that subaltern studies scholars and feminists "began to initiate transnational conversations about what happened, how and why" (Didur, 2006, p. 9). Another significant way in which the Partition was conceptualized in public memory was through films. In the 1970s post-colonial India, Partition violence and

migrations became a central theme in a number of cinematic productions⁸ (Daiya, 2011, 89).

In the last two decades however, a growing number of scholars⁹ have reopened the debate on what constitutes as the history “of Partition, of nationhood and of national politics in the subcontinent” (Pandey, 1998, 5). Both Pandey (1998) and Fernandes (2014) cite two major reasons behind such a rethinking of the event: the first refers to the end of the “Nehruvian vision of a modern, secular, welfare state” (Pandey, 1998, 6) in the 1970s. The commitment to socialism and secularism, guided by the progressive ideas of education and democracy, was thwarted by the consolidation of “a right-wing, religious-community based politics” (Pandey, 1998, 6) which was, according to India’s secular intellectuals, much like the politics that succeeded the Partition of 1947. They, therefore, felt compelled to return to Partition history in order to make sense of the present. A second related reason was the escalation of the Hindu right-wing movements which culminated in the 1984 anti-Sikh Riots¹⁰ that were characterized by a violence that was remarkably similar to the violence during Partition. Yet again, the horrific acts of sexually brandishing women and forcing them to parade naked “showed that partition and partition-like violence were not something to be neatly contained or containable in the past” (Fernandes, 2014, 46). This, along with other similar acts of communal violence, such as the anti-Muslim carnage and riots of 1989¹¹ and 1992¹², shocked the

⁸ Other Hindi films about Partition in the early 1950s include Phani Majumdar’s “Andolan (1951), Manmohan Desai’s Chhailia” (1960) and Gulzar’s “Mere Apne” (1971). The most popular among these all, however, was M.L. Anand’s Hindi film “Lahore” – a 1949 melodramatic romance that tackled themes of ethnic violence, women’s abduction and the state’s rescue and recovery agenda (Daiya, 2011, 90)

⁹ Referred to as ‘Partition Studies’ by Leela Fernandes (2014), this field of study includes influential, critical works that were published in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Das, 1995; Bhasin and Menon 1998; Butalia, 2000; Pandey, 2001). Scholars within the field of Partition studies, in a shift away from traditional history, emphasized an examination of “fragmentary evidence such as government documents, memoirs, newspaper articles, interviews with Partition survivors, ethnography, and so on” (George, 2007, 137) in order to rewrite history.

¹⁰ Also known as the 1984 Sikh massacre, this refers to the widespread violence and mass-murder of Sikhs in India after the assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards.

¹¹ This refers to communal violence between Hindus and Muslims fueled by the religious ‘Ramshila’ processions in the Bhagalpur district of Bihar that led to the killing of over 1000 people and resulted in the displacement of 50,000 people (PTI, 2011)

¹² Inter-communal riots followed the demolition of the 16th century Babri mosque in the city of Ayodhya by the members of Hindu fundamentalist organizations BJP and VHP based on the claim that the mosque is actually the birthplace of Lord Rama. Close to 2,000 people died in the ensuing violence (Guha, 2007, 582-598).

“radical intelligentsia” that agreed with the wider public opinion in stating that it was ‘like Partition all over again’ (Pandey, 1998, 6). Historians, therefore, turned to studying the Partition and similar kinds of violence, addressing the “wide chasm between the historians’ apprehension of 1947 and what we might call a more popular, survivors’ account of it” (Pandey, 1998, 6) or, as Pandey further explains, the gap between the ‘official’ history of Partition and how people remembered it. Pandey, prominent among such Partition Studies scholars, too argues that while nationalist historiography conceptualizes ‘Partition’ as a mere constitutional and political rearrangement of the Indian sub-continent that is separate from the ‘violence’ that ensued, survivors’ accounts reveal how the drawing of borders reconstituted the trajectory of their lives, communities and histories (Pandey, 1998, 7). The official or “top-down history” (Fernandes, 2014, 46) of Partition, in focusing solely on the political causes and national significance of independence, erases the traumatic experiences of millions of survivors (Fernandes, 2014, 46), especially for minorities such as women, children and Dalits. Compelled by the gaps in official Partition history, Partition scholars, including Uravshi Butalia (2000), Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon (1998) thus took it upon themselves to attempt and rewrite history from the margins.

As pioneers of publishing ‘activism’ in 1980s India, Ritu Menon co-founded ‘Kali for Women’, India’s first feminist publishing house, with Urvashi Butalia in 1984. Collaborating with feminist book fairs and publishers globally as well as locally, Menon and Butalia were interested in publishing books that grew out of India’s feminist movement of the time, addressing issues of “violence, dowry, deaths, media images, rape, safe contraception, the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), identity politics, the environment and feminism itself” (Menon, 2011, 219). As Menon (2011) delineates in her book *Making a Difference: Memoirs from the Women’s Movement in India*, as a feminist publisher at ‘Kali’, she believed that “research followed activism” (219). Both Menon and Butalia therefore focused on publishing women authors, particularly feminists and activists¹³, who took up important debates, as outlined above, and “moved them forward” (219) through research and writing. With emphasis on “introducing and analyzing issues from a gender perspective” (219), ‘Kali’ broadened its publishing scope to include authors that wrote on “protracted conflict and militarization, ethnic and communal violence, deepening poverty,

¹³ These including pioneering Indian women scholars such as Romila Thapar, Vandana Shiva, Devaki Jain, Kamla Bhasin, Kumkum Sangari and Uma Chakravati among others.

food security, terrorism and fundamentalism, state violence against women” (219) – themes that dominated the political and social landscape of the time.

Further referring to her collaborative writing and oral history work on the Partition with Kamla Bhasin, Menon states that “just like the personal/political twinning of the women’s movement and women’s studies” (Menon, 2011, 221), for her, both writing and publishing are inseparable and closely linked to each other. Therefore, her position as a researcher is firmly grounded in the notion that women’s writing can be used as a form of feminist resistance, especially in the context of the political turmoil of 1980s India. As a co-founder of ‘Kali’, academic and activist Urvashi Butalia, too followed a similar approach to her work – one governed by “the guiding principle that feminist knowledge production acts as a tool of political change” (Arora, 2014, 78). In a candid interview with Butalia, Anupama Arora has argued that Butalia’s career since the 1980s “provides a capsule for the feminist movement in India and its evolving emphases and challenges— from protests over dowry, sati, and custodial rape to the rise of women’s involvement in the Hindu right and other ethnic nationalist movements, as well as new articulations of ‘the woman question’ within the context of globalization in contemporary India” (Arora, 2014, 78-79). Indeed, Butalia’s work as both a writer and researcher, ranging from oral history interviews with women in Kashmir¹⁴ to ground-breaking research on sexual violence and impunity in India,¹⁵ provides rich, nuanced insight into the relationship between the ‘Indian woman’, the nation-state and religious communities. Currently, as the founder and director of feminist publishing house Zubaan (founded in 2003 after Butalia and Menon split up ‘Kali’ to work on their separate publishing endeavours), Butalia remains committed to her project of building a vast body of knowledge on gender and human rights in India (Arora, 2014, 79).

1.2. Framework of Analysis

My research follows a two-fold framework of analysis as outlined in this section. It takes a feminist approach in arguing that the reflexive practice of oral history challenges the hierarchical and masculinist nature of the discipline of history. Secondly, it is

¹⁴ Published as a book titled *Speaking Peace: Women’s Voices from Kashmir* (2002).

¹⁵ Published as a book titled *Breaching the Citadel: The India Papers I* (2019).

informed by the methodology of feminist oral history which is grounded in the principles of sharing authority and a collaborative co-production of knowledge.

1.2.1. Challenging hierarchical forms of knowledge

In their research on oral history and the co-production of knowledge at the University of Huddersfield, oral historians Pente, Ward and Brown (2015) have described History as a discipline primarily “resting on individual research, traditionally in archives and libraries, where demands for quiet or silence further preclude collaborative working” (33). Feminist historians (Kelly, 1994; Scott, 1998) have gone a step further and pointed to the masculine nature of historical knowledge that is written by and about men, either misrepresenting or excluding women from significant events from the past. In the early 1960s and 70s, an increasing awareness of the restrictive and masculinist nature of History gave way to a number of radical initiatives that sought to democratize the discipline. Marginalized groups such as those involved in workers’ and women’s movements mobilized to produce a ‘history from the below’. This was evident in the works of oral, labor and women’s historians who collaborated across the boundaries between academic scholarship and community-based initiatives to rewrite their histories and reach out to those who lay outside the elitist circles of universities (Pente et. al., 2015, 34). Oral history was seen as a method of challenging and reconfiguring authority.

For feminists then, oral histories became a significant way to research women. According to Judith Wittner, who interviewed women for the Washington Women's Heritage Project exhibit, by closely looking at women’s lived experiences we can critique existing knowledge by falsifying prior patriarchal assumptions about them (Anderson, Armitage, Jack and Wittner, 1987, 119). Indeed, as feminist oral historians Anderson et. al. (1987) have pointed out, women’s experiences and realities are distinct and systematically different from men’s in crucial ways. They argued at the time that “documenting” and assembling these accounts is important for feminist scholars in order to fill the large gaps in existing knowledge about women. Further, their point was that such a reconstruction of knowledge is important because women’s voices are not simply missing due to oversight but have been systematically “suppressed, trivialized, ignored, or reduced to the status of gossip and folk wisdom by dominant research traditions institutionalized in academic settings and in scientific disciplines” (Anderson et. al., 1987, 106). As also mentioned above, a critical analysis of historical knowledge reveals that it

is informed by masculinist biases of objectivity, universal relevance and truth. Pervasive male views in society's dominant ideologies also distort and make women's activities and lives invisible to both women and men. For instance, housework is not considered real work due to the assumption that it supposedly doesn't contribute to the overall growth of the economy, though it in fact is essential to the social reproduction of the workforce (Delphy, 1977). Feminist oral historians, therefore, insist that documenting and studying women's perspectives, truths and realities raises methodological and theoretical issues which are significant if women are to be returned to the discipline of History and history is to be returned to women (Anderson et. al., 1987, 106).

One of the pioneers of feminist oral history, Sherna Gluck (1977), has described women's oral history as a "feminist encounter" that, by rooting and validating women's experiences, provides them with a historical continuity that has been denied to them in traditional historical accounts. It is important to recognize, however, that, as Nan Alamilla Boyd has pointed out in her article 'Decentering and Decolonizing in feminist oral history' (2018), oral knowledge transmission practices such as *yarning*¹⁶ have existed for thousands of years within Indigenous communities. While western feminists conceptualized "oral history" as a new field that emerged in the wake of second wave feminism and anti-colonial movements, this thesis identifies the contemporary practice of feminist oral history as "a revival or adaption of Indigenous practices rather than an innovative, new practice" (Boyd, 2018, 151). Further, while Indigenous practices of storytelling such as *yarning* are distinct from the academic discipline of feminist oral history, as Anderson, Hamilton and Barker (2018) have noted, they share some commonalities. For instance, both emphasize a "narrative shared between people in an intimate environment and the protocols of trust, reciprocity, and respect" (196). Women's oral history, therefore, is guided by a similar principle of the sharing of stories embedded in relationships of community, friendship and mutual trust. Further, as Fobear (2016) has written, "oral history is not a neutral methodology" (66) and oral history projects have often fetishized the voices of its narrators, turning them into helpless, one-dimensional victims with no agency. Similarly, oral history projects can also 'silence' individuals by failing to recognize their presence and agency in the research. Therefore, it is important

¹⁶ Anderson, Hamilton and Barker (2018) define 'yarning' as a form of storytelling, narrative or "Indigenous style of conversation" particularly practiced by women and children within Australian indigenous cultures. It is a "process of making meaning, communicating and passing on history and knowledge," and "a special way of relating and connecting with . . . culture" (196).

for such research to be rooted in knowledge frameworks of civil rights, intersectionality, decolonization of knowledge, feminism and Indigenous rights. It is, therefore, this idea of rewriting history by shifting away from hierarchal, masculine practices to those based in collaboration, cooperation and co-production, which are not new but rather have increasingly been acknowledged as principles of Indigenous and other peoples' knowledge, that forms the basis of the second component of my framework of analysis as outlined below.

1.2.2. Feminist Oral History and Community-based Collaborative Co-production of Knowledge

The complexities of using oral history to document women's voices were recognized early on within the field of feminist oral history. It was agreed upon by scholars that the "oral history interview was an imperfect method of surfacing women's voices and accessing women's subjectivity for a number of reasons" (Abrams, 2010, 71). First, the interview itself was seen as hierarchical and 'depersonalized' in that it was supposed to be objective and required a respectable detachment of the researcher from the researched. But as feminist oral historians Anderson and Jack (1991) pointed out, women often talk about themselves "as they think they are perceived by others" (17), i.e. through the dominant ideological lens which also shapes their worldview and sense of self. It was, therefore, argued that from the perspective of a feminist scholarship, oral history needs to be more than a mere exercise in gathering accounts from informants (Anderson et. al., 1987, 108). For women to honestly talk about their experiences, there was a need to create an interview environment that minimized the power imbalance between the interviewer and the interview in order to allow for free expression (Abrams, 2010, 72). The strategies proposed by feminists for doing so included: "treating the interview as a conversation or shared experience, adapting linguistic patterns to the performance of the narrator, dressing differently, allowing respondents to interrogate the interviewer and allowing respondents to influence the research questions and ultimately take some responsibility for the project" (Abrams, 2010, 73). By the 1980s, there was consensus among oral historians across disciplines on the importance of such reflexive research practices, and they were seen as necessary to conduct research with people (Abrams, 2010, 55).

A second area of concern was the analytical challenge of interpreting memory narratives that are widely subjective in their construction (Abrams, 2010, 55). A massive challenge was to decide what kind of theoretical conclusions to draw from testimonies collected across a range of situations (Anderson et. al., 1987, 108). Oral historians thus drew from a number of “new theories and conceptual frameworks developed in other disciplinary contexts: literature, linguistics and psychoanalysis as well as anthropology” (Abrams, 2010, 55). By the 1990s, subjectivity on part of the interviewee was seen as a positive outcome of the oral history process. For feminist oral historians, self-reflection by the interviewer on their subjective views, based on class and gender for instance, was intrinsic to the process of co-constructing a narrative: what they deemed as appropriate questions, interjections and responses to the interviewee governed the way in which authority was shared. This notion of a “shared authority”¹⁷ was first introduced by oral historian Michael Frisch in 1990 to argue that because oral histories are an outcome of the shared agency of the interviewer and the interviewee, they should also share authority over the oral history interview. For the researcher, this involves relinquishing control over the outcome of historical inquiry and working in collaboration with their research participants to make interpretive decisions. According to Srigley, Zembrzycki and Iacovetta in their book *Beyond Women’s Words* (2018), the practice of sharing authority, an extension of shared authority, where the “collaborative relationship of the interview is extended outward to subsequent stages in the research process” (Sheftel and Zembrzycki, 2013, i) was quickly adopted by feminist oral historians. Sharing authority goes a step further in arguing for a co-production of research that involves “working ‘with’ communities and offering communities greater control over the research process and providing opportunities to learn and reflect from their experience” (Pente et. al., 2015, 40). This means that not only do research participants shape and guide the research agenda, they also authorize what gets published (for this thesis’ analysis, it is important to emphasize this means digitally or otherwise).

¹⁷ Used by Frisch (1990) to describe the “dialogical nature of the oral history” (Pente and Ward, 2015, 34). He explained that “The interpretive and meaning-making process... [is] shared *by definition* [in oral history]—it is inherent in the dialogic nature of an interview, and in how audiences receive and respond to exhibitions and public history interchanges in general (Frisch, 2011, 127). In theory, ‘shared authority’ allows the narrators to shape the trajectory of the research project. However, as Pente and Ward (2015) have pointed out, it’s a somewhat limited idea because it only applies to the process of creating oral histories, it does not usually extend into interpretations and outputs.

According to Anderson and Jack (1991), such a co-production of knowledge where the oral history interview is structured by the narrator instead of the researcher allows women to express their unique, individual experiences differentiated by intersections of class, race, and ethnicity (20). The interviewer's role here is to nurture and preserve this reflexive space by refraining from imposing their own expectations on the interview encounter (20). In this way, co-creation of oral histories allows researchers to listen to women deeply. Another practice that relies on deep listening is storytelling. As Margaret Kovach (Plains Cree and Saulteaux) (2010), in her work on indigenous methodologies and Parin Dossa (2009), in her work with Iranian women immigrants in Canada, have revealed, storytelling allows for a relationship-based approach governed by a sense of trust and responsibility so that a story can emerge (Kovach, 2010, 97). With emphasis on working from a frame of friendship, storytelling gives way to contextualized knowledge that captures the realities of the everyday lives of its narrators (Dossa, 2009, 27) and allows for an insight into how they perceive the world.

The feminist practice of oral history therefore, by incorporating the research practices of reflexivity and sharing authority, as well as displaying a commitment to co-producing knowledge in a framework embedded in community, presents an alternative methodology that challenges the hierarchical discipline of History. It is this approach to oral history that informs my comparative analysis of the feminist oral history projects *The Other Side of Silence* (2000) and *Borders and Boundaries* (1998) with the "1947 Partition Archive".

1.3. Methodology

1.3.1. Research Journey

In outlining my research journey, I believe that it is important to point out that my research is firmly rooted in my own position as a feminist of my generation, for whom, "to be a feminist is to recognize that, apart from gender-based injustice, there are multiple structural inequalities that underlie the social order, and to believe that change is possible, and to work for it at whichever level possible" (Menon, 2012, ix). It is also important to acknowledge that my ability to even shape and recognize my own positionality, must, in part, be attributed to my privileged position – as a middle-class English educated young woman – who had access to a number of resources and

opportunities. However, my position as a feminist is also shaped by my personal circumstances growing up, especially in a typically conservative and patriarchal Hindu household with significant familial pressure to fit into a certain narrative of “marriage” and “housework”. My commitment to the feminist movement was only reinforced in resisting these dominant patriarchal norms that forcefully assign women roles of “wives” and “mothers” by choosing to further my education, and hence, thwart the traditionally enshrined private-public dichotomy.

Going on to study Political Science, I further became interested in questions of the gendered nature of violence against women, especially in the Indian context. While I recognized that it was not only necessary but unavoidable to engage with other western feminisms (and the idea of a “global” feminist movement), at the same time, I also understood that feminist politics in India was vastly different and organized by categories of caste, class, religion and the institutions of marriage and family.

As I began to interrogate the history of violence against women in India, the connection between communal and religious ideologies, the paternalistic nature of the family and the policing of the state became clear – especially in the context of the Partition, and subsequently, the Sikh riots of 1984. As Nivedita Das (2012), too, has pointed out, gendered modes of power operate across multiple avenues – with the state, the family and the religious communities co-opting ways in which to control women ranging the division of labour within families to the policing of women’s bodies at the hands of the family and the state.

It was within this framework of the intersectional and postcolonial feminist movement in India that I intended to formulate my thesis research, the seeds for which were planted when I took my first graduate class at Simon Fraser University. For the final paper that I wrote for the class, I was interested in examining what we know about women within Partition history. Some questions that guided my research were: how did Partition affect women’s lives? What level of control did they have on their lives? Were they passive victims in the face of violence or did they possess agency?

As also mentioned in the previous section, until the 1990s, women and other minorities were systematically excluded from official Partition histories that primarily focused on the political and constitutional events of the time. It was only later in the decade that, due to a resurgence in communal violence that the secular intelligentsia of the country, including subaltern and feminist scholars began to interrogate Partition

violence through a social and gendered lens. This led to the creation of a new scholarship where historiographers, in focusing their attention to the exploration of ‘the particular’ instead of ‘the general’, attempted to “disrupt the state’s universalizing and hegemonic historical narratives” (Didur, 2006, p. 42) about the Partition. In addition to academic research, a number of literary narratives about the Partition emerged, containing nuanced representations of ‘everyday’ life at the height of Partition violence. The objective of such work, according to Didur, was to present “alternative perspectives to that of the state’s central archive” (p. 42). Examples of such work include regional literary writings on Partition (Manto’s *Woman in the Red Coat* and *The Return* and Kushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* (1956)) and works by diaspora authors (Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of the Day* (1980), Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980) and Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* (1991)).

However, a sustained analysis of ordinary women’s experiences was missing until the late 1990s when women Partition scholars, prominent among them Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, (1998) Urvashi Butalia (2000) and Veena Das (2006), decided to travel throughout the country, sometimes even to the other side of the border to Pakistan, in order to capture women’s realities of Partition history. As I dived into the work of these scholars, I became increasingly interested in the ways in which they recovered stories, their own experiences of interviewing women and the actual narratives they listened to – accounts of the Partition that differed vastly from the superficial and factual history of India’s independence that I had learned of growing up in the early 2000s. I was struck by how much I didn’t know – the immensity of the violence and the extent of displacement and resettlement that followed.

In the second year of my Master’s program, I took a class in Feminist Theory where I became interested in a feminist approach to history that challenged the traditional discipline of History which is written by, for and about men. In only documenting matters of war, science and politics, mainstream History writing excluded women’s lives and the activities they performed, labelling relegating them as insignificant and unworthy of being recorded (Kelly 1984; Scott 1988). Feminist historians, in particular, challenged the so-called universalist discipline of History and demanded that it be re-written to incorporate women and their lived experiences. Reflecting on my knowledge of both the Partition and women’s history, it occurred to me that by speaking to women and listening to their experiences of the Partition, Butalia, Bhasin and Menon

had done precisely what feminist historians set out to achieve— they had rewritten Partition history from the perspective of women; and as Butalia (2000) pressingly writes in her book, oral history had been an indispensable tool to do so. Increasingly, I became more interested in learning more about oral history’s use in bringing marginalized voices to the forefront, especially in India. Turning to feminist oral history, I was interested in learning more about how researchers worked with women, the relationships they formed, the methodologies and research practices they used and the stories they learned about. However, at a certain point in my research, I became aware of the limitations embedded within the methodology (as also outlined in Chapters 2 and 3) – such as questions of power imbalance, the transactional nature of an interview exchange and the threat of harm to research participants. I realized that in order to really understand how researchers can learn from their participants and create knowledge that is shared, I had to adopt an interdisciplinary framework and venture beyond feminist oral history. I examined approaches to oral accounts and ‘testimony’ within other disciplines such as anthropology and sociology and further turned to other methodological approaches that employed ‘the oral’ such as life story and storytelling (as also described in detail in Chapter 3). For my thesis research then, I distilled a critical framework through my genealogy and arrived at certain key principles of reflexivity, sharing authority, friendship, deep listening, collaboration and co-production of knowledge through which to analyze the oral history works by Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000).

Several times during my research, I came across oral historians discussing the relatively new and innovative field of “digital” oral history and its potential to reach global audiences. Interested in learning more digital oral history projects in India, I continued to dig deeper. It was during this research that I stumbled across the “1947 Partition Archive” funded through crowdsourcing and housed by the Stanford University Library. At first, I was struck by the scale of the project. Having amassed close to 8,000 testimonies of Partition survivors, the “Archive’s” work cut across languages, communities and continents. However, upon closer inspection, I was surprised to discover how little the “Archive” revealed about its research. The opaqueness of the whole endeavor was unsettling – while the website insists on the urgency of collecting stories, it fails to explain its research agenda and principles or even discuss the social and political context within which these survivors are telling their stories. With no reflection whatsoever on its research methodology and motivations or who its

interviewers are, the focus of the “Archive” seemed to be intent on gathering as many testimonies as possible. As Partition scholar Ravinder Kaur (2016) has too mentioned in her piece for the online news website the Wire, the “Archive” attempts to create a distinctly apolitical, uniform narrative of the Partition by isolating it from the political, social and communal disturbances of the time.

Having spent a year learning about the Partition and the feminist practice of oral history, this thesis was the outcome of my research journey. I decided I wanted to do a comparative analysis of both the projects – feminist oral histories and the depoliticized “Archive” – in order to understand the varying ways in which knowledge is produced, by whom and for what purposes. Here, I want to highlight the reason behind my decision to do a comparative analysis as opposed to an interview-based study with Partition survivors (a number of which already exist). In doing this research, I was guided by the objective of, as also mentioned earlier, understanding the development of feminist oral history and placing it within the larger framework of storytelling, reflexivity, collaboration and co-production that I developed through my genealogy. I then wanted to apply this framework to my comparative analysis of the two case studies of Partition survivors – feminist oral histories and the “1947 Partition Archive”. I believe that this exercise of thoroughly and closely examining literature and case studies on oral history literature, including material on digital oral history (such as Steven High’s Montreal Life Stories), prepares me for a larger, future study that includes fieldwork and interviewing women survivors of political violence (see: Conclusion).

1.3.2. Comparative Analysis

For my research, I conducted a qualitative analysis of two sets of material – 1. feminist oral history texts by Indian feminists Kamala Bhasin and Ritu Menon (*Borders and Boundaries*, 1998) and Urvashi Butalia (*The Other Side of Silence*, 2000); 2. The “1947 Partition Archive” including its online setup, interviews, oral history documents and the mandatory online workshop. In order to compare the two sets of material, I have drawn on a feminist framework of analysis to argue that the oral histories by Bhasin, Menon and Butalia, in creating a feminist historiography of the Partition, not only challenge the existing, hierarchical, masculine and nationalist historical accounts on the division of the Indian sub-continent, but also follow the feminist practice of reflexive, community-based co-production of knowledge from the margins. Such an approach

allows researchers to bring forth voices that have been historically 'silenced' and challenge the pre-existing dominant ideologies and knowledge about marginalized populations. Further, in my analysis of the "1947 Partition Archive", I contrast it with Steven High's 2014 Montreal Life Stories – a community-based oral history project that documented the stories of Montrealers displaced by war, violence, genocide and other such violations of human rights. I examine the latter's infrastructure, research methodologies and practices, and underlying theoretical assumptions to illustrate how, in comparison to the "1947 Partition Archive", High's digital archive aligns with the principles of a collaborative, community-based feminist oral history methodology.

As also mentioned earlier, the very discipline of Partition Studies emerged with the need¹⁸ to 'remember' Partition as it resides in popular memory. Its objective was to not only question the existing uniform political and institutional narrative on Partition, but also reveal ordinary people's stories that had been erased by the state or as stated earlier, uncover the voices of populations that have been historically silenced by those in power. As feminists and scholars within the field, Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) in piecing together women's experiences of the event and arguing for their inclusion in history, challenged the existing 'official' histories of Partition. As also outlined above, in joining the leagues of "the classic anti-colonial women's oral history projects and texts" (Srigley et. al., 2018, 16) in the Indian sub-continent, these activists and academics insisted on Partition's historicity and revealed its entanglement with unequal relations of power based on gender, religion, class and caste, as well as illustrating its connections with present day social and political structures and practices. This is significant because, as also stated earlier, the recurrence of Partition-like violence in the past decades shows the inherently political and contentious nature of violence – how at times of heightened communal tension, otherwise decent people willfully engage in acts of abject brutality, the police becomes apathetic or even complicit, and violence earns itself political patronage embedded in vested interests.

My thesis, therefore, examines the methodology used by Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) to establish that in challenging existing forms of masculinist and nationalist knowledge, they follow a feminist framework marked by friendship,

¹⁸ As the "1947 Partition Archive" argues on their website, in the last decade, there has been an increased urgency in documenting Partition memories, primarily due to the old age of the survivors which has resulted in the creation of museums and oral narrative archives.

reflexivity, shared authority and collaboration in order to co-produce knowledge with the participants of their research. In contrast, the “1947 Partition Archive”, committed to the goal of collecting as many testimonies as possible, pays little attention to sharing authority with its narrators in co-producing knowledge or allowing its interviewers to be reflexive about their oral history experiences. Due to its poorly developed research methodology and lack of ethical guidelines, as I argue in this thesis, the “Archive” mass produces narratives that are uniform and isolated from their socio-political contexts.

1.4. Structure of Thesis

The second chapter of my thesis examines feminist scholarship that establishes how women have been marginalized within the discipline of History, which has predominantly been written by and about men; and that, in order to write a “her-story”, historians need to consider ‘gender’ as a category of historical analysis (Scott, 1988) (Kelly, 1984). It further draws on feminist theorist Mary Maynard (1994) to outline the recurrent themes within what comprises a “feminist” methodology and illustrates how the feminist oral histories by Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) fit within this “feminist” framework. The final section of this chapter gives a genealogical overview of how feminist oral history has evolved since the 1960s, including critiques by Etter-Lewis (1991) and Ang (2003), illustrating how contemporary feminist oral historians recognize the importance of adopting an intersectional approach in doing feminist oral history.

The third chapter of my thesis closely analyzes the feminist oral histories of Partition conducted by Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000). As also outlined in Section 1.3.1 of my thesis, while my analysis draws on feminist researchers and oral historians to argue the importance of reflexivity and sharing authority in research, I adopt an interdisciplinary approach to develop a framework of analysis that identifies key principles of storytelling, deep listening, friendship, collaboration and co-production of knowledge in order to analyze the works of Bhasin, Menon and Butalia. The objective of this chapter is to illustrate how these authors, committed to the slow and intimate practice of oral history, spend over ten years developing and nurturing friendships with their participants, as well as painstakingly contextualizing testimonies by piecing together “fragments” of information on India’s Partition and contrast it with the speedy and transactional nature of the “memories” collected by the “1947 Partition Archive”.

The fourth chapter of my thesis examines the “1947 Partition Archive” – a digital archive of interviews with Partition survivors, housed in Stanford University’s Library. Here, the methodology of the “Archive” is in part shaped by the use of digital technologies and raises issues identified in debates among feminist oral historians about these technologies’ impact on the practice of oral history. Despite the increasing concerns about issues of open access, confidentiality and increased vulnerability of testimonies, oral historians often fail to engage meaningfully with these questions in using the ‘digital’ and its tools to create and share testimonies. This is all too similar to the research model of the Stanford-backed “1947 Partition Archive” whose main objective, as evident from the map on its homepage that gives a visual image of the number of testimonies collected from each part of the country, is to amass as many testimonies as possible. With little space for ethical considerations or self-reflection¹⁹ by the interviewers, the focus of the “Archive” seems to be entirely on maximizing its number of viewers. Drawing on Linden’s (1993), Kushner’s (2006) and Greenspan’s and Bolkosky’s (2006) ideas of mass production and commercialization of testimonies, I argue that by amassing hundreds of individuated personal testimonies, the “Archive” not only commodifies survivors’ memories but also fails to meaningfully engage with the complexities of Partition politics.

1.5. Scope of the Study

In setting the scope for this study, I was guided by my interest in examining how, while both projects – feminist oral histories and the “Archive” – were governed by a similar goal of documenting stories and experiences, their methods varied vastly. My research, therefore, is an analysis of the methodologies used by both feminist oral historians and the “Archive” for talking and listening to women survivors of India’s Partition. In choosing to analytically compare the two projects, instead of conducting another study with Partition survivors, I wanted to examine how their different methodological approaches produced different kinds of knowledge – while one emerges from the margins, engaged in conversation with the political and institutional climate of the time; the other remains entirely apolitical and creates a spectacle of Partition trauma by enshrining it as a “unique” kind of violence (Kaur, 2016).

¹⁹ As I have also elaborated in Chapter 4, the “1947 Partition Archive” offers a very limited space to the interviewers to talk about their own experience of doing oral history.

While Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) were the first to make public women's experiences of the Partition, it is important to note the limitations of their work, and consequently, of this study. All three authors have acknowledged that their investigation is limited to northern India, particularly the state of Punjab. They argue that they neither had the resources nor the linguistic skills to study the impact of the Partition along the eastern border of India (where West Bengal shared boundaries with then East Pakistan and now Bangladesh). They both agree that a sustained analysis of Partition near the western border would comprise a study on its own – one that scholars such as Bagchi & Dasgupta (2003) and Gargi Chakravarty (2005) conducted in the early 2000s. It is also important to note that with the exception of a few of their participants such as social worker Begum Anis Kidwai, all of their narrators were predominantly Hindu and Sikh women. While they acknowledge that their own regional, religious and linguistic backgrounds played a significant role in the women they contacted and eventually, interviewed for their respective research projects, both authors missed the opportunity to adequately represent the problems, concerns and issues faced by Muslim women who were caught in Partition violence. Their voices, which would have given a more complex understanding of the Partition and offered different perspectives and views than the Hindu participants, were excluded. As a north Indian Hindu woman who speaks Hindi, much like the authors being investigated in this thesis, I believe it is important for me to also recognize how my own linguistic and regional bias shaped and consequently, narrowed the scope of this research as I was primarily focussed on examining feminist oral histories by Hindu authors done with Hindu and Sikh women in the languages of Hindi and Punjabi. While there is much to learn from such an approach, as I have also indicated in my conclusion, examining oral histories of Muslim women would allow for a more rich, nuanced and heterogenous study of the varying ways in which women experienced Partition based on their religious affiliations.

In picking the second case study for my research, the “1947 Partition Archive”, which was established recently in the year 2010, I was not only interested in questions of how knowledge production and dissemination changes within the ‘digital’, but also the social and political nature of such knowledge. This becomes particularly significant in the context of the current crisis of democracy in India where any challenge to authority is treated as a punishable offence (Bhargava, 2019). With a right-wing Hindu nationalist government in place since 2014, the country has witnessed a marked escalation in communal tension, violence and hate-crimes (Gowen and Sharma, 2018). Muslims are

being prosecuted under the pretext of maintaining a Hindu religious and national identity, a recent example of which is the long-drawn conflict in the disputed state of Kashmir which is, as of now, heavily militarized and closed off from the world (Zia, 2019). In a time marked by political and communal tensions, the “Archive”, in failing to contextualize its testimonies adequately, steers clear of engaging in difficult conversations about the government’s role in instigating violence and its failure to deal with communal strife, a situation comparable to present day India. While Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) draw a connection between Partition violence and events that transpired under similar circumstances, the “Archive’s” documentation of Partition testimonies remains distinctly depoliticized. As an Indian woman who grew up in the suburbs of New Delhi, a city infamous for its abject hostility towards women, I believe that any project that seeks to listen to women’s experiences of violence needs to be guided by the understanding that violence, as deeply communal and gendered as was witnessed during the Partition, does not exist in a vacuum in the past but rather, is reflective of a larger discourse that continues to inform women’s everyday lives. By presenting a uniform, apolitical narrative of the Partition, the “Archive” does a disservice to people whose lives were forever altered by the catastrophe of 1947.

This thesis is based on these concerns of what gets recorded and published and what gets left out that I have shaped the bounds of my research. This chapter contextualizes my investigation of women’s narratives of the Partition, outlines the framework of analysis and the methodology used and demarcates the scope of this study. In the next chapter, I lay down the guiding theoretical principles of my research by establishing that oral history itself is a feminist methodology and arguing that the women’s histories produced by Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) indeed follow a feminist framework of research.

Chapter 2.

Oral History as a Feminist Methodology

The recognition of Oral History as a feminist methodology emerged with the knowledge that women's lives have been obscured and excluded from traditional accounts of historical events. This idea was accompanied with the realization that oral history could be used as tool to incorporate women in history, questioning the prevalent ideas of what is socially, politically and economically important in a society which functions to marginalize women's lives. The potential themes addressed by oral history: "the possibility of putting women's voices at the center of history and highlighting gender as a category of analysis; and the prospect that women interviewed will shape the research agenda by articulating what is of importance to them" (Sangster, 1994, 87) are all instrumental in challenging the "dominant ethos" (1994, 87) of the discipline of History. Sangster argues that oral history is also a methodology "directly informed by interdisciplinary feminist debates...about research objectives, questions, and the use of the interview material" (1994, 87).

This chapter begins with a discussion on the importance of using gender as a category of historical analysis in rewriting women's history by drawing on feminist historians Joan Scott (1988) and Joan Kelly (1984). The following section of the chapter relies on Mary Maynard (1994) to outline the tenets of a "feminist" methodology and examines how feminist oral history fits within this framework. It is important to note here, as also mentioned in the Introduction, while I began my research focusing primarily on women's history and the practice of feminist oral history, I was soon encountered with the limitations inherent in the positivist nature of research done by early feminist oral historians. Therefore, while my research engages with their theories and analyses, it aims to further broaden its scope by examining the use of oral accounts within disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, and research done in a number of interdisciplinary contexts such as with postcolonial feminism and Indigenous knowledge. The next section of this chapter follows that genealogy and outlines the debates that have spurred the evolution of oral history as a feminist methodology, tracing its development from the 1960s to the present decade. It draws on postcolonial and non-western feminists such as Ang (2003) and Etter-Lewis (1991) to illustrate the shift within

feminist oral history from positivist frameworks of western feminism to a recognition of the heterogeneity of how women experience marginalization across numerous contexts of class, caste, race and economic status. The purpose of this chapter is to delineate the intersectional feminist framework in which my comparative analysis of Bhasin and Menon (*Borders and Boundaries*, 1998) and Butalia's (*The Other Side of Silence*, 2000) work with the "1947 Partition Archive" is grounded.

2.1. Gender as a category of historical analysis

Feminist historians in the 1980s have argued that men have authorized what constitutes as "history", deeming matters of war, politics, governments and science as worthy of documenting, and excluding women from such epochal events in time. Even when women were recognized in history, it was as notable exceptions. The everyday lives of ordinary women were completely obscured from History (Kelly, 1984).

Prominent among these feminist historians, Joan Kelly (1984) argued that "in redressing this neglect, women's history recognized from the start that what we call compensatory history is not enough" (2). Women's history then has a dual goal: "to restore women to history and to restore our history to women" (1). According to Kelly (1984), when women are understood as equal counterparts to men within humanity, an observable shift occurs in the way history is organized. Elaborating further, she states that when a feminist theorization of history focuses on "women's status" or the roles and positions women hold in society in comparison to men, what is revealed is "a fairly regular pattern of relative loss of status for women" in established periods of "so-called progressive change" (2). Feminist historiography then serves to disrupt widely accepted evaluations of history. Giving the example of how liberal historiography falsely claims that men and women shared the same level of progress during the renaissance when in reality, women faced numerous hurdles, Kelly (1984) establishes that a feminist rendering of history "has disabused us of the notion that the history of women is the same as the history of men, and that significant turning points in history have the same impact for one sex as the other" (3).

In the late 1980s, feminist historian Joan Scott (1988) held that if we are to argue that women's everyday experiences are vastly different from those of men, we need to theorize women as "historical subjects" in their own right in order to write a "her-story" (18) where the focus is on the oft-marginalized experiences of women and the role of

female agency in the construction of history. The creation of “her-story” involved a departure from the way traditional history was written to offer “a new narrative, different periodization and different causes” (Scott, 1988, 19) with the ultimate goal of unveiling how ordinary women lived their lives, and to discover how their actions and behaviors were motivated by “the female or feminist consciousness” (19). The emphasis in this approach is exclusively on female agency and on the causal role women play in their own histories, with focus on “the qualities of women’s experiences that sharply distinguish it from men’s experience” (Scott, 1988, 20).

Further, feminists in the 1980s argued that the periodization of women’s history is relational in so far as it relates the history of women to that of men which means that in evaluating the major structural changes in society, it is essential to consider their effects upon women as distinct from men. In writing women’s history then, these feminists established that the relevant topics should include women’s unique actions, ideas and self-expression which are articulated and interpreted “within the terms of the female sphere” (Scott, 1988, 20), including an examination of women’s “personal experience, familial and domestic structures, collective (female) reinterpretations of social definitions of women’s role, and networks of female friendship that provided emotional as well as physical sustenance” (20). Likewise, according to Anderson et. al. (1987), oral history is an important methodology within feminist historiography that can be employed to achieve these feminist objectives by integrating “the previously overlooked lives, activities, and feelings of women into our understanding of the past and of the present” (p. 104). They claimed that when women voice their own experiences and perspectives, “hidden realities” (p. 104) are unveiled that pose a challenge to the legitimacy of official accounts and established theories. Thus, by conducting oral histories with women about so-called “private” subjects of reproduction, child rearing and sexuality, they held that feminist oral historians will be able to explore how women experience these realities instead of learning what “experts” think about women.

The “her-story” approach has had an immense impact on historical scholarship. In recognizing the lives and roles women played in the past, it refutes the ideological message in conventional history that “women had no history, no significant place in the stories of the past” (Scott, 1988, 20). It also repudiates the historical dichotomies of

'private' and 'public'²⁰ by asserting that ““personal subjective experience” matters as much as “public and political activities,” indeed that the former influence the latter” (20). Further, it also demonstrates the significance of conceptualizing not just gender, but also, as I discuss below, sex in historical terms (20), establishing not only the importance of narratives about women but also how gender difference plays into conceptualizing and organizing social life.

Joan Kelly (1984) was among the first scholars to argue for “sex” as a fundamental category in analyzing the social order, citing it as crucial as class and race when it comes to studying social and political life.²¹ She argued that in re-examining history, we need to evaluate the economic, political and cultural “advances” made in certain periods, from which women have been excluded, in order to find the reasons for the historic separation of the two sexes (4). Reassessing History’s complex periodization reveals two things: “one that women do form a distinctive social group and second that the invisibility of this group in traditional history is not to be ascribed to female nature” (4). Arising from a feminist consciousness, these notions “effect another related change in the conceptual foundations of history by introducing sex as a category of social thought” (4). Joan Scott (1988), however, goes a step further in arguing for “gender” instead of “sex” as an important analytical tool if we want investigate women. For her:

“the term gender suggests that relations between the sexes are a primary aspect of social organization; that the terms of male and female identities are in large part culturally determined (not produced by individuals or collectivities entirely on their own); and that differences between the sexes constitute and are constituted by hierarchical social structures” (Scott, 1988, 25).

Scott (1988) further argues that the study of gender cannot be detached from the study of politics. Thwarting the distinction between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ realms, she insists that “the private sphere is a public creation” (24) because all aspects of life, including public discourse, are inevitably shaped by political institutions and ideas. Thus,

²⁰ “Public/private” refers to the historical dichotomy that arises from the association of masculinity with the public (i.e. men belong ‘outside’ of the home in order to provide for their family) and of femininity with the private (i.e. women belong ‘inside’ the home as caretakers of the husband and the children) (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004).

²¹ Kelly’s (1984) articulates “sex” as the “universally distinguishing feature of all women” (6) and claims that women are a category in themselves. She irons over differences of caste, class, race and ethnicity to state that “we are a sex, and categorization by gender no longer implies a mothering role and subordination to men, except as social role and relation recognized as such, as socially constructed and socially imposed” (6).

even the “non-actors” (24), or those who are excluded from participating in what mainstream society identifies as “politics”, are not only defined by the concurrent politics, but also act according to the rules established in political realms. Hence, even those missing from official historical records, nonetheless were a part of the making of public and political history. It is essential then, for historians, to think about gender historically when examining the ways in which laws and policies are created and implemented as doing so implies a “social rather than a biological or characterological explanation for the different behaviors and the unequal conditions of men and women” (24). Such an approach would, according to Scott (1988), “end...seeming dichotomies...state and family, public and private, work and sexuality” (26), allowing feminist historians to question the interconnections among the different realms of life and social organization – both private and public. She further argues that “with this notion of politics, one could offer a critique of history that characterized it not simply as an incomplete record of the past, but as a participant in the production of knowledge that legitimized the exclusion or subordination of women” (26). Bhasin and Menon (1998) embody this principle in their oral history project, examining how women with little agency in the political sphere were shaped by the Partition that politically transformed the entire subcontinent, “and how their [accounts of their] experience of it enables a critique of political history and the means of writing it differently” (16).

In the 1980s, within feminist historiography, ‘gender’ and ‘politics’, in contrast to the mainstream articulation of these terms, were in fact considered “antithetical neither to one another nor to recovery of the female subject” (Scott, 1988, 26); and by treating gender as a category of historical analysis, feminist claimed that we can “challenge the accuracy of fixed binary distinctions between men and women in the past and present, and expose the very political nature of a history written in those terms” (26-27). Rearticulating gender as a political issue and making it the departing point for historical analysis, Scott (1988) argued that women’s history had the radical potential to rewrite history altogether by focusing “on women’s experiences and analyze the ways in which politics construct gender and gender constructs politics” (27). Feminist historiography then, moving beyond the practice of simply valorizing “great” women (as was done in the discipline of History) they argued, could expose the “often silent and hidden operations of gender that are nonetheless present and defining forces in the organization of most societies” (p. 27) by focusing on “real”, “concrete” women and their everyday lives.

Scott (1988) further argued that a study of women's history not only should involve the addition of new subject matter, but "a critical re-examination of the premises and standards of existing scholarly work" (29); and such a methodology which needs to involve redefining and expanding traditional notions of history to include women's subjective experience and their political and public activities, would mean the creation of a new history. Scott claimed that the manner in which this new history would both include and account for women's experiences would in turn rely on the extent to which 'gender', defined "as a way of referring to the social organization of the relationship between the sexes" (Scott, 1988, 28) by feminists, could be developed into an analytic category.

In late 1980s, as Scott (1988) writes, the attempts made by historians to theorize about gender "remained within traditional social scientific frameworks" (32), where knowledge about women was either generated necessarily only in relation to men, or in relation to systems of relationships involving the sexes such as families and children without questioning why these relationships are constructed, how they work and how they change. While feminist historians, prior to the 1980s, employed a variety of approaches to the analysis of gender, including a Marxist approach to the psychoanalytical investigation of production and reproduction of gendered identity, a concern with theorizing gender as an analytic category emerged only in the late twentieth century (Scott, 1988, 32-33). In her own analysis, Scott (1988) rejects the historical binary opposition of 'male' and 'female' in order to conceptualize "gender" as "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes" and as "a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (42). She further outlines gender as involving four interrelated elements: to begin with, gender is defined by "culturally available symbols that evoke multiple (and contradictory) representations" (43). These include socially constructed myths of "light and dark", "innocence and corruption" (43) which serve to reinforce the gender binary. For feminist historians working with gender as an analytic category, the question to explore then was – which ideological representations are invoked, how, and in what contexts?

The second element referred to "normative concepts that set forth interpretations of the meanings of the symbols, that attempt to limit and contain their metaphoric possibilities" (Scott, 1988, 43). These normative concepts are legitimized by religious, educational, scientific, legal, and political doctrines and institutions, further strengthening

the fixed binary opposition, and unmistakably asserting the meaning of male and female, masculine and feminine. Of these, “the position that emerges as dominant however, is stated as the only possible one” (43). Further, these normative positions are treated as a “product of social consensus rather than of conflict” (43) and determine how history is written.

Following this, the objective of feminist writing of history in this period was to interrupt the belief that gender binary was fixed and permanent and instead aimed to explore “the debate or repression” (Scott, 1988, 43) behind such notions. Since such an analysis requires studying gender relationships in tandem with political and social institutions, Scott (1988) argued that “gender is then constructed through institutions of kinship, economy and polity” (44). As I discuss in the next chapter, this has been particularly evident in Partition oral histories where women’s narratives revealed their complex relationships with the state, family and religious communities. Referring to the Indian state’s Abducted Persons Bill²², Butalia (1993) argues that restoring women back to their kin served two purposes for the state – that of restoring its own legitimacy by safely recovering “what had been lost: prestige, women and perhaps property” (Butalia, 1993, WS-19); and acting as the figure of the patriarch for the families and communities that came to it for help in a time of crisis. What also becomes apparent from Butalia’s (1993) argument is that the state, family and religious communities operated under a normative consensus when it came to treating women as the figure upholding their collective ‘honour’ and how the threat of violence loomed over it.²³ For this reason, they presented women as being not only subjected to violence at the hands of the ‘Other’ but made evident that their own families and kin also killed them in the name of ‘martyrdom’ in order to defend their ‘honour’. Further they were also subjected to violence by the state in its efforts to forcefully recover them and their ‘honour’.

²² As explained in the Introduction, The Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Bill was passed in the Indian Parliament on December 15, 1947 to recover abducted Hindu women in Pakistan and Muslim women in India. It was arbitrary in the sense that it defined abducted persons as ‘a male child under the age of 16 years or a female of whatever age’; and gave unlimited powers and absolute authority to the tribunal responsible for recovery with no legal mechanisms to question its decisions (Butalia, 1993, WS-4).

²³ As discussed in detail in the next chapter, women were the prime targets of violence by the men of the ‘Other’ community because assaulting, raping and murdering women meant violating their ‘honour’, and by default, the ‘honor’ of the religious community they belonged to.

In outlining the fourth element, Scott (1988) argued that gender is a “subjective identity” (44), implying that historians need to investigate the various ways in which “gender identities are substantively constructed and relate their findings to a range of activities, social organisations, and historically specific cultural representations” (44). In the case of Partition for instance, the oral testimonies collected by Bhasin and Menon (1998) revealed how women were viewed and situated within the Indian public sphere. The bursting forth of widespread sexual violence and mutilation against women in the face of communal conflict was seen as a symbolic manifestation of familiar, everyday forms of violence that women were subjected to, pointing to the “precarious position of women in the patriarchal arrangement of society” (Chakraborty, 2014, 44).

Scott (1988) further theorized gender in the second part of her definition, stating its function as the “primary way of signifying relationships of power” (44). She defined it as the primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated. Here, referring to French sociologist Bourdieu, she talks about his reference to “biological differences” notably in the “division of the labour of procreation and reproduction” (45) as “the best founded of collective illusions” (45). Thus, according to her, “the extent to which these references establish differential distributions of power, gender becomes implicated in the conception and construction of power itself” (45). Scott (1988) therefore concluded that gender and power are linked, and gender plays a crucial role in the organization of equality and inequality. As I also elaborate in the next chapter, this is made explicitly visible in the oral histories of Partition survivors where the inhumane treatment of women reveal how power was held by men in all forms; and by attaching notions of ‘chastity’, ‘purity’ and honour to women’s bodies, the family, community and the state operated in a patriarchal nexus to police, regulate and restrict the agency of women, both in their private and public lives. As also evidenced by Bhasin and Menon (1998), when historians explore the ways in which the concept of gender legitimizes and constructs social relationships, they develop an insight into the particular and contextually specific ways in which “politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics” (Scott, 1988, 46). Feminist oral history then, in challenging the dominant ideologies shaping women’s worlds; and allowing us to listen to women’s words, is essential in helping us understand how women comprehended, negotiated and sometimes challenged these dominant ideals (Sangster, 1994).

It is also important to note that “changes in gender relationships can be set off by views of the needs of the state” (Scott, 1988, 46). Scott (1988) gives the example of authoritarian regimes and their control of women arguing that “emergent rulers have legitimized domination, strength, central authority, and ruling power as masculine (enemies, outsiders, subversives, weakness as feminine) and made that code literal in laws that put women in their place” (47). The central motivation behind this kind of oppression can only be understood by looking at the state machinery’s role in constructing and consolidating its power by forming policies that are grounded in sexual difference and domination of women in a clear assertion of the state’s control on female bodies. Butalia, in her article, ‘Community, state and gender: on women’s agency during partition’ (1993) criticized the Indian and Pakistani state’s involvement in the recovery process of abducted women on both sides of the border. She theorizes that during Partition, in their failure to protect women, men experienced an “emasculatation of their own agency” (Butalia, 1993, WS-19) which compelled them to hand this task of defending ‘their women’ to “the state, the new patriarch, the new super, the new national, family” (Butalia, 1993, WS-19). Since women were viewed as representatives of national dignity, their abduction and conversion were a direct challenge to the country’s honour and was the impetus for the state to “recover ‘their’ women, if not land”²⁴ (Bhasin & Menon, 1998, 116). Thus, India was seen as the “parent-protector, safeguarding not only her women but, by extension, the inviolate family, the sanctity of the community, and ultimately, the integrity of the whole nation” (Butalia, 1993, WS-8), giving it the impetus to pass “The Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Bill”, robbing women of all control over their own bodies and reproductive agency. In their investigation, Bhasin and Menon (1998) revealed how during the recovery process, child-bearing women, regardless of their disagreement, were given a full state-mandated medical check-up – a euphemism for illegal abortions – before being handed over to their ‘original’ family or kin. Further, women whose children were born in Pakistan after Partition were ordered to leave them behind on the pretext that Hindu women bearing Muslim children and Muslim women bearing Hindu children would never be accepted in their respective families and communities.

²⁴ This refers to the dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir parts of which lie in both the countries.

In her outline of a feminist methodology, Scott (1988) further stated that “massive political upheavals that throw old orders into chaos and bring new ones into being may revise the terms (and so the organization) of gender in the search for new forms of legitimation” (49). This could mean changing patterns of employment and new arenas participation for women, especially in the public sphere. At the same time however, straying away from traditional gender roles is only encouraged to the extent that it benefits male interests. Further, it may also give way to additional state policing in the form of policies that seek to “safeguard” and highlight the significance of women’s reproductive capacity and notions of motherhood. For instance, oral histories from West Bengal reveal that India’s Partition on the eastern border (leading to the formation of East Pakistan) had a different outcome altogether. The Communist Party of India took over the city of Calcutta in West Bengal, transforming it from a metropolis for cultured upper-class men to an arena of leftist advocacy (Guha-Choudhury, 2009). Here, middle-class women, in protesting the Partition, were compelled to “come out of the private domain of domesticity and child rearing to take up significant public duties” (Guha-Choudhury, 2009, 66). In this case, the Partition was central to the liberation of Bengali women who, in becoming the providers of their families, came to be seen as “a symbol of female emancipation” (66). There was a rise “in employment of (migrant) women in mills and factories and in administrative and miscellaneous services” (66); and eventually, as women’s contact with the outside world gradually increased, “the houses in Calcutta became susceptible to the mobilisation of women into the political, economic, social and communal spheres” (67). Women increasingly took up more active roles in the economic, political and social arenas; and organised and participated in rallies and protests, demanding “the right to rehabilitation, compensation, employment and franchise” (68). However, this ‘emancipation’ was limited in the sense that it only benefitted the upper-class ‘bhadralok’ women. In addition, while women gained employment and participated in activism, it was either to fulfill positions abandoned by men or to provide support to the larger political efforts heralded by the men in their communities.

What becomes clear from the above analysis, as aptly phrased by Joan Scott (1988), is that “political history has, in a sense, been enacted on the field of gender. It is a field that seems fixed yet whose meaning is contested and in flux” (49). Gender, therefore, not only refers to but also produces the male/female binary; and it continues to remain one of the persistent orientations through which “political power has been

conceived, legitimated, and criticized” (48). In this manner, therefore, the binary opposition and the social process of gender relationships both come to define the meaning of “power” itself; and “to question or alter any aspect threatens the entire system” (49).

2.2. A “Feminist” Methodology

While there is a general consensus amongst feminists on the existence of a distinctive feminist mode of enquiry, no such agreement exists when it comes to what this might mean or involve (Maynard, 1994). The notion that “feminism has a method of conducting social research which is specific to it” (Maynard, 1994, 11) was introduced in the early stages of second wave feminist scholarship and is still widely held. The central arguments that emerged from the debates about the feminist methodology critiqued what were perceived to be “the dominant modes of doing research which were regarded as inhibiting a sociological understanding of women’s experiences” (Maynard, 1994, 11) and instead championed a qualitative approach to understanding women’s experiences over quantitative methods of enquiry. This was based on the assumption that quantitative methods were ‘masculine’ forms of knowledge preoccupied with “a value-free” form of collecting data and measuring “‘objective’ social facts” by a researcher who was impartial and detached. In contrast, qualitative methods focused more on the “subjective experiences and meanings of those being researched” (Maynard, 1994, 11), making them appropriate for feminists in terms of the knowledge they wanted to produce. Drawing on critiques by phenomenological sociologists, feminists have argued that research methods such as questionnaires and surveys produce “atomistic ‘facts and figures” (Maynard, 1994, 11), abstracting a tiny part of people’s experiences for analysis, and consequently, distorting the reality of their respective lives. Feminists have also argued that methods that use pre-coded categories are based on the assumption that the researcher possesses prior knowledge about the object/subject of study and therefore, such methods can only assess the extent, distribution or intensity of that which is already being investigated; they are thus “neither exploratory nor investigatory” (Maynard, 1994, 11) and are insufficient when it comes to examining the complexity of women and their lives from their perspectives.

Because these methodological analyses were being done in the 1970s, when feminist ‘methodology’ was still developing, and women’s experiences were largely

invisible, “feminists emphasized the importance of listening to, recording and understanding women’s own descriptions and accounts” (Maynard, 1994, 12). Further, as Maynard (1994) points out, it was assumed that “only qualitative methods...could really count in feminist terms and generate useful knowledge” (13) and they developed into a benchmark of sorts against which all feminist research came to be measured and judged. This tendency to equate feminist research with the qualitative approach, according to Maynard, has persisted largely due to the prevalent belief of associating the doctrine of positivism with quantitative and empirical methods. However, citing Catherine Marsh (1979), Maynard (1994) argues that when it comes to crude data collection, methods such as surveys are not the problem, rather poor research or “naïve quantification” (13) is. Further, she argued that by rejecting quantification, feminists were likely to overlook significant numerical data that would help enhance an understanding of women’s larger experiences such as those associated with income and paid work.

An alternative way to do feminist research then, she claimed, was the use of “multiple methods... in a complimentary rather than a competitive way” (Maynard, 1994, 14). In their oral history projects, Bhasin and Menon (*Borders and Boundaries*, 1998) and Butalia (*The Other Side of Silence*, 2000), follow a similar multi-method feminist framework to research India’s 1947 Partition from the standpoint of women, who, despite surviving gross forms of institutional and communal violence in the aftermath of independence, only figured as victims and casualties in official histories. As feminist historians, they used a “combination of commentary and analysis, narrative and testimony...to counterpoint documented history with personal testimony; to present different versions constructed from a variety of source material” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 17). This involved an analysis of a multitude of data ranging from detailed personal interviews with women survivors to an examination of government reports and records, newspapers, legal documents and parliamentary debates; along with a study of other diverse material such as memoirs, autobiographies, letters, diaries and audio-tapes in order to allow a number of women’s voices to emerge – which were at times challenging, and at times approving. And at other times, they questioned historical “facts”, thus gaining control of their own narratives and compelling the reader to interpret the text through their gendered lenses.

In identifying the key elements of research that can be defined as “feminist”, Maynard cited Liz Kelly (1988) who argues that what distinguishes feminist research

from other forms of research is “the questions we have asked, the way we locate ourselves within our questions, and the purpose of our work” (Kelly, 1988, cited in Maynard, 1994, 15). Maynard further argued that a “theoretical perspective, acknowledging the pervasive influence of gender divisions on social life” (Maynard, 1994, 15) is central to the study of women. However, she also pointed out that researchers might employ this idea differently depending on the focus of their given research – and each of these approaches will ask different questions and produce different kinds of knowledge. Further, it is important to note that the focus on women in feminist research could mean a number of things – it could involve being concerned with women alone or understanding women’s perspective of their experiences in a male world, or studying gender in relation to other forms of oppression such as race and class.

Another characteristic of feminist research in the late 1980s was how feminists modified existing techniques to fit the gender-conscious agenda and politics of feminism. For instance, in this period those using qualitative methods such as interviewing, were “exhorted by [conventional] textbook guidelines to be emotionally detached, calculating and in control of collection of data” (Maynard, 1994, 15) where the research ‘subjects’ were seen as passive sources of information. Feminists, in using qualitative interviewing methods, have rejected the hierarchical power relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, and have instead argued for the importance of a non-exploitative relationship between the two, marked by a “genuine rather an instrumental rapport between them” (Maynard, 1994, 16). While Maynard suggested that one way to work around this could involve the researcher critically examining, reflecting and exploring their research process to “demonstrate the assumptions about gender relations which are built into a specific project” (Maynard, 1994, 16), she did not account for power imbalances of class, caste, race and ethnicity that are inherent in the interview encounter.

According to Maynard, a third distinction that feminist research practice involved was “its insistence on its political nature and potential to bring about change in women’s lives” (Maynard, 1994, 16) and that it should be designed with the aim of “producing knowledge which would transform patriarchy” (16-17). Maynard suggested that this could be done either by making the research or the knowledge produced accessible to equip the research participants with the tools and authority they needed; or even within

the research process – by making the social issues affecting their lives visible or by allowing the participants to reflect on and share their experiences in a safe space, which was also referred to as ‘consciousness raising’. However, this again gives way to a slippery slope where a research project might not necessarily have positive outcomes for the participants; and is based on the presumption that research would necessarily benefit them. It might be possible “for participants in a study to have their consciousness raised without the corresponding channels for action being available” (Maynard, 1994, 17) or may lead participants to experience personal consequences such as trauma when dealing with sensitive issues. While Maynard points out these issues, she does not suggest what feminist oral historians can do to minimize harm to their participants. However, as I discuss in the next chapter, it is imperative that researchers take adequate precautionary measures and ensure, for instance, that appropriate resources are available for the participants.

In terms of epistemology, the feminist approach in this period was guided by the questions – “who knows what, about whom, and how is this knowledge legitimized?” (Maynard, 1994, 18). According to Maynard (1994), historically, men have had the power to produce their own worldview as forms of knowledge and “truth”, also referred to as the “male epistemological stance” by MacKinnon (23-4). In the early 1980s, MacKinnon (1982) further argued that while “objectivity and science represent supposedly neutral positions, they are, in fact, gendered and partial” (Mackinnon, 1982 cited in Maynard, 1994, 23-4). Feminists in this period argued that feminist research then not only challenged this bias, but also critiqued the so-called “generality, disinterestedness and universality of male accounts” (Maynard, 1994, 18) viewed as superior to the subjectivity associated with women’s accounts. It was this concern regarding the invisibility of women in the writing of mainstream histories that compelled feminist historians and activists to “place women in the historical record, to listen to women’s own voices and to use oral history as a tool for feminist research” (Abrams, 2010, 156). By the late 1980s, as a methodology, feminist oral history forged a link between women’s past experiences and present lives, allowing feminist historians to make sense of women’s lives based on a “knowledge and understanding of the oppressions of the past” (Abrams, 2010, 157). A key principle guiding this exercise was that women shared common experiences by the virtue of being *women* – and oral history as a methodology was seen as a method to “illuminate this commonality as a means of informing the development of a shared female/feminist consciousness” (Abrams, 2010, 157) leading to a transformation in the

way we write history and imagine the political world. Oral history was thus seen as “empowering” women by producing a history created by women and shaped by their shared experiences that challenges the ideologies and absence of women within mainstream history.

Based on her analysis, Maynard (1994) concluded that though there is no one specific model of feminist research, there are clear recurrent themes within the feminist research process, such as the emphasis on women’s experiences, ethical concerns regarding participants and the role of the researcher in a study; and the ways these themes are treated, combined and informed by “feminist theorizing about gender and feminist politics” (21). This, she argued, made it possible to recognize specific feminist research practices and epistemological positions. Oral history then, can only fit within this framework and be classified as a feminist methodology if it is used systematically in specific feminist ways with guiding the practice of doing oral history (Geiger, 1990, 170).

According to Geiger (1990), writing in the early 1990s, such feminist objectives included a presupposition of gender as a central analytical concept (as also pointed out by Scott (1988) and Kelly (1984)); a problematic that emerged from studying women as members and creators of “historically and situationally specific economic, social, cultural, national, and racial/ethnic realities” (170); a challenge to androcentric assumptions about what is constituted as history by creating “a new knowledge base for understanding women's lives and the gendered elements of the broader social world” (170); and an acceptance of “women's own interpretations of their identities, their experiences, and social worlds as containing and reflecting important truths” (170). In this period, feminist historians argued that as a methodology, feminist oral history is congruent with these objectives. By looking at social life through women’s vantage point, the practice of oral history, according to Judith Wittner (Anderson et. al., 1987) shows us “that we must change our theories of society to incorporate the activities and perspectives of women” (119). She, moreover, argued that in placing individual women and their experiences in specific social and historical contexts, oral history demonstrates “how women' s actions and consciousness contribute to the structuring of social institutions” (119). Further, by allowing us to build a relationship with women, Sangster argues that it allowed us to learn about their invisible and neglected experiences and understand how dominant ideologies shape women’s worldviews, in their own words (Sangster, 1994).

2.3. Feminist Oral History: An Overview

Since its inception in the 1960s, feminist oral history has noted the absence and misrepresentation of women in written history and has emphasized the importance of retrieving their accounts through oral sources (Bhasin & Menon, 1998, 14). Since “women have used speech much more widely than the written word” (14), oral historians have discovered that interviews and testimonies are instrumental in surfacing the hidden histories of women. Oral testimonies allow researchers to “capture the quality of women’s lives” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 14) by not only allowing them to archive experiences that would have been dismissed by mainstream history, but also to evaluate “the issues as they appeared to the actors at the time, and set their responses...against the backdrop of that understanding” (14). For feminists then, oral history has the very real potential of exploring and documenting the social experience of women and as “both “compensatory” and “supplementary” women’s history” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 14). Within western feminist scholarship, oral history as a methodology²⁵ allowed for production of knowledge from the standpoint of women in predominantly ‘masculine’ areas such as paid work and education. It also led to the creation of new fields of research that were women-centric such as childbirth, sexuality and women being subjected to violence. The guiding principle behind this kind of exploratory work was that “feminist research must begin with an open-ended exploration of women’s experiences, since only from that vantage point is it possible to see how their world is organized and the extent to which it differs from that of men” (Maynard, 1994, 12).

By the late 1970s however, feminist oral historians had begun challenging oral history for its refusal to acknowledge the main insights that grew out of the women’s liberation movement, “most importantly that the personal is political, and the feminist conviction that women’s experiences were inherently valuable and unique” (Fobear, 2016, 63). For feminist oral historians, the oral history process was seen as a “shared gendered experience” (Gluck 2008) between the women researchers and their subjects. Feminist ethnographers argued that female researchers possess a deeper understanding and enhanced access to “the subtle frameworks of social communication

²⁵ Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai, editors of *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (1991), were among the first feminist historians to use oral history as a tool to question the invisibility of women in the writing of history in their respective countries – United States for Gluck and Brazil for Patai.

that women use to narrate their stories” (Fobear, 2016, 63). It was, therefore, presumed that by being ‘women’ themselves, researchers would be able to overcome structural barriers that might limit the voices of their female participants. The feminist oral historian and her participant were understood as a ‘team’ that worked in partnership to amplify the previously silenced voices of women. Women’s experiences were considered “social facts” that were detached from the research process and collected by researchers in order to make or support an argument (Gluck, 2008).

As I have also discussed in the overview of my research methodology in the Introduction, feminist oral historians, in the late 1970s were quick to point out the positivist nature of such an approach and noted that the oral history interview was not necessarily an equal relationship (Abrams 2010, 163). Feminist historian Ann Oakley therefore advocated that oral historians not only focus on the “data” or the interview material itself but also on how they communicate with their research participants (Patai 1991). She argued that by doing so, the researcher can transform the relationship between the oral historian and the narrator from that of an objective, one-sided interview to “an interactive dialogue designed to promote trust, friendship, and community” (Gluck 2008, 118 cited in Fobear, 2016). Feminist oral historians, in adopting such an approach, rejected the hierarchical power relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, and instead argued for the importance of a non-exploitative relationship between the two, marked by a “genuine rather an instrumental rapport between them” (Maynard, 1994, 16).

With the advent of the 1980s, the claims of early feminist oral historians on “accessibility, empowerment, universality, and equality” in women’s oral history were further challenged with the emergence of a new wave of Latina, black, Indigenous and Asian feminists (Fobear, 2016, 63). As Len Ang (2003) has outlined, the initial assumptions made by early feminist researchers about all women being part of a “universal sisterhood” that cuts across the divides of race and class, were criticized by non-western, differently abled, working class and queer feminists for being elitist and ethnocentric. Building on the intersectional models of oppression developed by black feminists, postcolonial feminists too argued that oppression and power operate across the layers of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, religion, class and caste (Parameswaran, 2008, 410). It was further argued that the normative assumption of women as universally being “western, white, heterosexual, middle-class, and

cisgendered” (Fobear, 2016, 63) was false and marginalized women who did not fit into this mould. By the late 1980s, it could no longer be assumed that all women experienced marginalization homogenously based on their ‘gender’ alone, rather it was argued to be “be relational and intersectional in regard to an individual’s experience in their daily lives as well as their position in the research process” (Fobear, 2016, 63). Further, as Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis (1991) has argued, non-western feminists also brought into question white feminists’ focus on the “narrative self as the center of the universe” and the notion that the individual held primacy over the community or the group which is “not only normalizing but silencing racialized women’s subjectivity, experiences, and positionality” (Fobear, 2016, 63). At the same time, ethnographers also began to confront the positivist notions of “truth, representation, colonialism, and power” (Uchendu, 2016, 2) in research. New insights into alternative perspectives to positivist science came from poststructuralist, postmodernist and feminist discourses that called for the need for increased reflexivity in order to decolonize the process of knowledge production (Uchendu, 2016, 3). By the late 1980s, therefore, feminist oral history shifted away from the position of women doing history “with, about, and for women” to emphasis on developing feminist practices that would challenge the power imbalance in the research process without losing sight of the feminist goal of listening to and analyzing the oral histories of marginalized populations (Gluck 2008, 128). There was a marked shift in feminist oral historians’ focus on women as subjects of history and they adopted a reflective lens in their analysis (Bornat and Diamond 2007, 27). Emphasis shifted away from the shared goal of collecting women’s narratives to developing an understanding of how “collaboration in the research is a dynamic process” (Fobear, 2016, 64). This not only required the researcher to position herself within the research but also conceptualize the oral history interview as a ‘mutual exchange’ or ‘shared conversation’ that is “shaped by the narrator and the interviewer’s cultural understandings, desires, and positionings” (Kratz 2001 cited in Fobear, 2016, 64).

As I also argue in the next chapter, the researcher cannot be considered an ‘objective’ or ‘neutral’ party in the interview process since both the narrator and the interviewer are subjective forces that shape the outcome of the oral history. The subjective relationship between the researcher and the participant is shaped by the age, gender, sexuality, race and class background of both parties and the structural position occupied by them in the interview process and wider society. These factors not only shape their interactions but also how the researcher analyzes and interprets the oral

history interview (Yow 1999). Further, as Sangster argues, reflexivity not only means an acknowledgement of the researcher's and narrator's relative positionalities, but also recognizing that the oral history is a "historical document" created by the shared agency of both the interviewer and the interviewee (Sangster (1991, 11) cited in Fobear, 2016, 64).

Building on the methodological shift of the 1980s, feminist oral historians have continued to consistently reflect upon their theoretical positions and methodological practices since the 1990s (Scanlon 1993). As also discussed in the next chapter, feminist oral historians have increasingly emphasized the exploitative potential of oral history given the intimate nature of the oral history relationship (Yow, 1995). Therefore, the development of alternative and empowering research practices is still a pressing need (Fobear, 2016). Oral historians too insist on the need for co-producing knowledge with the participants and sharing authority throughout the research process (Frisch, 1990) (High, 2014). However, as Sangster (1994) has noted, since oral histories are ultimately shaped by the researcher's authoritative interpretations and her personal objectives of publishing the research, any collaboration between the narrator and the oral historian is rooted in this power imbalance. Feminist oral historians are increasingly engaging in debates such as these on the nature of oral history, especially in informal contexts, also referred to "corridor talk" by Yow (1997), that allows researchers to debrief and discuss the nuances of their work in a community-based space. As further illustrated in the next chapter, engaging in discussions on the nature of their work has urged feminist oral historians to be more reflexive and pay increased attention to their own positionalities within research. Srigley et. al. (2018), in a follow-up anthology to the pioneering 1991 book, *Women's Words*, have argued that ongoing contestations about the ethical issues of working with oral history has encouraged feminist oral historians to continue reworking and developing methodologies and practices that are collaborative, inclusive and intersectional without abandoning their goal of listening to marginalized voices.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter began by outlining the significance of employing gender as a historical category of analysis in listening to and writing about women's experiences. It then shifted focus to the themes outlined by feminist researchers that are consistent

within a “feminist” methodology, illustrating how feminist oral history as a methodology has drawn on these principles, and further examined how the works of Bhasin and Menon and (1998) Butalia (2000) fit within this framework. The final section traced the development of feminist oral history since in the 1960s and outlined the importance of an intersectional approach to doing feminist oral history, drawing on non-western and post-colonial feminists to argue for a methodology that takes into account the layered oppression of women. The next chapter builds on the ongoing debates on the constantly evolving nature of feminist oral history that are outlined in this chapter in order to conduct an in-depth analysis of the oral history research by Butalia (*The Other Side of Silence*, 2000) and Bhasin and Menon (*Borders and Boundaries*, 1998) and examines their use of feminist oral history practices, including sharing authority, reflexivity, collaboration and community-based co-production of knowledge.

Chapter 3.

Analysis of Feminist Oral History Texts

In her book, the *Other Side of Silence* (2000), feminist activist and academic Urvashi Butalia has estimated that about 75,000 women are presumed to have been abducted and raped by men of different (or sometimes their own) religions during Partition violence. Despite being subjected to large-scale, targeted and sexual violence, women are treated just as numbers and casualties within the historical accounts of the Partition. In their book *Borders and Boundaries* (1998), feminists and academics Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon have attempted to articulate India's Partition from the standpoint of women as subjects rather than just statistics. While the "story" of 1947 is one of independence and freedom, it is also "a gendered narrative of displacement and dispossession" (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 9). It was a cataclysmic event marked not only by widespread communal violence but also the realignment of family, community and national identities. However, despite its gendered nature, as Bhasin and Menon (1998) state, there had been no feminist historiography of the Partition up until the late 1990s when feminist scholars like themselves initiated women-centric projects. Even when women historians have attempted to write about the catastrophe, it has been from "within the parameters of the discipline, and still well within the political frame" (9). Butalia (2000) made a similar discovery when she began her research by assessing the pre-existing written material on Partition. The history of Partition was limited to the political developments that had led up to it. Other aspects – what happened to the millions of people who lived through this time or the 'human dimension' of this history – were accorded a lesser status and discarded to the sidelines (Butalia, 2000, 6). Because these experiences couldn't be captured just factually, they found no place in conventional histories. The omission of women, as minorities, showed how official history did not consider them 'valuable'; and even when they were written about, their history was viewed as supplementary to male action, with little to no attempt at examining them as individual actors with agency (Butalia, 2000, 6).

In response, Bhasin and Menon (1998) began their project with a single question – "how do we embark on a feminist reading of the Partition?" (11) Beginning a ten-year long project to write an "alternative history", they debated the problems of locating

sources and asking the “right” questions; unraveling women’s experiences and encounters with violence and displacement, approaching notions of “identity, country and religion, of the intersection of community, state and gender” (11) and evaluating the state’s responsibility to women refugees, as promised by the government in its policies and programmes. Most importantly, they asked themselves, “how do we, as feminists, concerned with the issues of identity politics, unravel the complex relationship of a post-colonial state with religious communities in the aftermath of convulsive communal conflict?” (11). It is the following guiding principle that informs both oral history projects examined in this chapter: positioning of women’s voices at the center of the political and constitutional debates that accompanied India’s Partition.

In order to understand how this was achieved by Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000), this chapter closely examines the research methodologies used in their work in order to argue that, in using the participatory practices of storytelling, deep-listening, reflexivity and sharing authority, all three authors adhere to the feminist framework of oral history, resulting in the creation of collaboratively co-produced knowledge. As also discussed in the Introduction, in order to develop the analytic framework that I have used to examine Bhasin and Menon’s (1998) and Butalia’s (2000) research, I have drawn on not just oral histories but a number of interdisciplinary projects ranging from anthropology to life stories to storytelling in order to identify the distinct ways in which researchers work with ‘testimony’ by employing the aforementioned research practices. A common element in the research practices of all these projects is their emphasis on co-producing knowledge *with* the research participants as opposed to producing knowledge *on* them. They insist on not only sharing authority with their narrators at all stages of the research, but also emphasize the importance of reflecting on their own research processes and biases. Further, their research follows a relationship-based approach where emphasis is on working through an ethic of ‘friendship’ as opposed to a researcher-subject relationship. Research practices of storytelling and deep listening are used, and interpretive authority is shared with narrators.

Likewise, in this chapter, I illustrate how Bhasin and Menon (1998), and Butalia (2000) have adopted a similar reflexive approach to their research – they treat interview encounters like conversations where narrators decided which questions they wanted to answer and the subsequent course of the conversation. All three scholars have

mentioned several instances where they went on to form close friendships with a number of women they interviewed, sometimes living with them over weeks and months. They also repeatedly acknowledge their own position of power as researchers and work from that understanding to privilege women's voices. This chapter then, outlines how, in adopting a collaborative, reflexive framework rooted in the ideas of community-based co-production of knowledge in their research, Bhasin, Menon and Butalia place women at the center of their analysis in order to develop a feminist historiography of the Partition.

3.1. Why Rewrite Partition History?

At the outset of their project, Bhasin and Menon (1998) knew that the so-called 'official' records of the Partition were unlikely to have the kind of information they sought. "It is not that women are altogether absent from Partition histories or even from official records; it is just that they figure in the same way as they have always figured in history: as objects of study, rather than as subjects" (11). While some reports of violence against women can be located in select official documents, women have been made largely invisible in the established history of the Partition. Women's experiences of Partition have not only lacked a proper examination, but from the start, they weren't assigned any historical value. This has resulted in a one-sided historical account of the Partition: one that lacks a critical measure of its impact on "men and women, on relations between them, and between gender and social and historical processes" (11).

Butalia (2000) has also pointed to the "generality" of Partition wherein it exists publicly in history books but, at the same, it also "exists privately in the stories told and retold inside so many households in India and Pakistan" (4), recalling her own childhood stories that her father told her of fleeing Lahore (now in Pakistan) to arrive in India. Butalia further draws a parallel between the communal violence of Partition and the 1984 riots that happened in Delhi after Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, was assassinated by her Sikh security guards. She discovered that often, her elderly interviewees who had arrived in Delhi in 1947 as refugees would recall the terror of the Partition. They would tell her, "we didn't think it could happen to us in our own country... This is like Partition again" (4). In the aftermath of the 1984 violence, Butalia realized that the stories of Partition were not a remote, isolated event in the past: "I began to realize that Partition was not, even in my family, a closed chapter of history – that its simple, brutal political geography infused and divided us still" (5). The divisions

were evident in everyday life and it took the events of 1984 for Butalia to understand how “ever-present Partition was” (5) in the lives of ordinary people. While the official, political history indicated that Partition was now a thing of the past, the reality was pointedly different: Partitions could be seen everywhere, in the form of “communal tension, religious fundamentalism, continuing divisions on the basis of religion” (6). As also reiterated by Fernandes (2014) and Pandey (1998), religious and communal riots saw a marked rise in the 1980s and 1990s. In Delhi, Sikhs were being targeted; in Bihar, Muslims were killed in one of the worst communal riots in 1989; in 1991, Babri Mosque was destroyed by frenzied Hindu mobs (openly supported by political parties such as BJP, RSS and Shiv Sena), and later thousands of Muslims were targeted across Indian cities of Ahmedabad and Bombay (Fernandes, 2014). As Butalia (2000) observed, “in each of these instances, Partition stories and memories were used selectively by the aggressors” (6) to instigate violence; for instance, militant Hindus provoked and mobilized people using a false, one-sided argument that Muslims had killed Hindus and raped their women during the Partition, and thus deserved to die (Butalia, 2000).

This continued omnipresence of Partition seemed to emphasize the fact that it couldn't be forgotten very easily: “its deep, personal meanings, its profound sense of rupture, the differences it engendered or strengthened, still lived in so many people's lives” (Butalia, 2000, 7). Yet, the people's rendition of Partition – of families divided, dislocation and trauma, rebuilding of lives and how it shaped individual experiences and journeys of survival – finds very little reflection in official history, despite being vital to our understanding of what really happened. Turning to James Young's (1990) work on Jewish holocaust memories and testimonies, Butalia refers to a question that he posed in his own research, “how can we know the holocaust except through the many ways in which it is handed down to us?” (Young (1990) cited in Butalia, 2000, 8). Young argues that aside from ‘history’, our knowledge of the holocaust comes from “its literary, fictional, historical, political representations” (Young (1990) cited in Butalia, 2000, 88), and through people's testimonies and reflections because how people remember history is just as important as the actual historical event. Similarly, Butalia argues, the impact of Partition too is shaped through memories – individual and collective, familial and historical – in the form of testimonies, memoirs, and fiction, revealing its effect on the everyday lives of ordinary people.

In their book, Bhasin and Menon (1998) also emphasized the need of a different sort of telling of Partition, one that would reveal different truths. Drawing on pre-existing attempts at producing an alternative history of the Partition, they acknowledge the importance of “literary, autobiographical, oral historical and fragmentary material” (8), calling the “fragment” marginal, particular and as presenting history from the below. Such fragmentary materials are useful in providing “insights into how histories are made and what gets inscribed” (8), as well as allow us to perform an alternative reading of the so-called master narrative. Diverting from a chronological or political recounting of Partition, Butalia (2000), too, became interested in the “fragments” or “the stories of the smaller, often invisible, players: ordinary people, women, children, scheduled castes” (9) through interviews and oral narratives. In the case of Partition, such a re-construction of history is useful in not only challenging “the rhetoric of nationalism” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 8) but also enables a rewriting of the master narrative where the “myriad individual and collective histories that simultaneously run parallel to official accounts of historic events” (8) can be also be documented.

Further, the oral histories collected by Bhasin, Menon and Butalia are guided by the objective of contextualizing the relationships women had with religious communities, the state, their own families and other women. The analysis brings to the fore the realities of forced migration, abduction and the religious conversion of women; and how the state and its apparatus, the family and overzealous religious communities operated together to secure these women to their “rightful” countries. While on the one hand, these testimonies illustrate the complexities of the state’s rehabilitation work, especially with regards to mass widowhood and the state’s subsequent intervention; on the other hand, they also illustrate how Partition was an emancipatory experience for numerous women, releasing them into the workforce, even aided by the state’s protectionist policies in some cases. However, what these narratives ultimately reveal is how women’s sexuality was at the center of the debates on “national duty, honor, identity and citizenship in a secular and democratic India” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 20). An analysis of the nature and extent of the violence to which women were subjected in the midst of a communal conflict, highlights “an overarching patriarchal consensus that emerges on how to dispose of the troublesome question of women's sexuality” (20). In the light of this patriarchal consensus that shapes women’s relationship with the community, family and the state, feminists continue to ask questions about “women's asymmetrical relationship to nationality and citizenship” (20) and their treatment as

second-class citizens in any renegotiation of identities, ethnic or communal (20). Bhasin and Menon (1998) argue that all issues pertaining to class, caste and community and how these categories interact with the wider social, political and economic forces is intrinsically linked with the issue of gendered identities.

Therefore, looking at history through a new lens – one that “that locates women at the intersection of these forces rather than at the periphery” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 21) – shatters the idea that these identities are fixed and rigid. Rather, the research done by Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) shows “the presence, absence and precise location of women turns out to be one of the crucial elements that throws these “fixed” identities into disarray and confusion” (21). The rewriting of women’s histories thus forces us to re-examine the age-old notions and myths of shame and honor that are attached to ideals of nation, community, religion and gender, interrogating, in the process, not only the history we know, but how we know it.

3.2. Complexities with doing Oral History

Both Bhasin and Menon (1998), and Butalia (2000), agree that historically, women have used the spoken word more than the written word, making interviews and testimonies exceedingly valuable. Oral history, therefore, can be effective in capturing the quality of women’s lives and understanding their experiences, which have been typically obscured in mainstream history. As Butalia (2000) has written, “looking at women’s narratives and testimonies, and placing them alongside, or indeed against, the official discourses of history, has offered feminist historians a new and different way of looking at history” (16). Through such a reorientation of the historical lens therefore, a new perspective on history is made visible.

Despite its immense potential however, all three authors are deeply aware of the problematic and deeply contested nature of oral history as a methodology. Acknowledging the separation of “subject and object, interviewer and interviewee, thought and feeling, the political and the personal” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 15) within oral history, they argue that feminists have rejected objective, hierarchical interviews and instead advocate a methodology of mutual support and empathy. They are also concerned about questions of “class privilege” and inequality between the researcher and the narrator; as well as the ethical implications of collecting and using personal narratives for research (1998, 16). Feminist oral historian Joan Sangster (1994) has

referred to the work of Judith Stacey (1988), who echoes these sentiments by pointing out that “feminist research is inevitably enmeshed in unequal, intrusive and potentially exploitative relationships” as the researcher occupies a position of authority over her ‘subjects’ who have little to no control on the final product (Sangster, 1994, 11). Butalia (2000), and Bhasin and Menon (1998) also address questions of authority, offering in-depth discussion about speaking on someone else’s behalf, representing and interpreting their narratives, and the dilemma of authorship.

While their projects sought to make women visible in the experience of Partition in an attempt to equalize history, they are inevitably embedded in the potentially exploitative process of women exposing their personal lives for research. Butalia (2000) acknowledges the “one-sided” nature of the oral history interview detailing that how, in interview situations, where memories were too traumatic and individuals were unable to put them into words, the inherent power imbalance became all too visible. She writes, “for the most part I watched, listened, recorded while people laid their lives bare” (18). Here, the interviewer-interviewee relationship inevitably reproduces the ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy, creating hierarchies and inequalities between the researcher and the participant. Bhasin and Menon (1998) agree to having encountered similar problems at all stages of their research; however, for them, it was particularly difficult to justify to their participants the efficacy of such work decades after the event of Partition (17). Feminist historian Joan Sangster (1994) has argued that the oral history interview is a “historical document” that is produced collaboratively by both the interviewer and the interviewee; and it is imperative for authors to acknowledge how their “culture, class position and political worldview” (10-11) shapes the oral history outcome. Likewise, by bringing up questions of authorship, power imbalance in research and reflecting on the inadequacies of their own work, Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) illustrate how their positionalities impact their respective works, and thus, treat oral history as a collaborative endeavor. For them, women are always at the center; they shape the narrative of the book and create the basis of the analysis where their testimonies are juxtaposed against official histories.

Approaching this work through the lens of feminist historiography, Butalia (2000) also argues that “women, their histories, and the methodologies they have created” (17) lie at the heart of her book. According to her, “whatever its limitations, the oral narrative offers a different way of looking at history, a different perspective” (10). It allows us to

see history as people experienced it, moving beyond the rigid constructions of official history. In order to understand the Partition, a tragedy so public and all-encompassing, we need to look at “how people remember it” (Butalia, 2000, 10). Referring to Young (1990), she echoes his claim that “whatever “fictions” that emerge from the survivors’ accounts are not deviations from the “truth” but are part of the truth in any particular version” (Young (1990) cited in Butalia, 2000, 10). The act of remembering and what survivors choose to recount are in themselves valuable forms of expression that gives the researcher an insight into their everyday lives. Butalia’s aim then is to examine memories for themselves – even if they shift, change and may be unreliable.

The critical question for feminist oral historians interviewing women then, as outlined by Anderson, Armitage, Jack and Wittner (1987) is: “whose story is the woman asked to tell, who interprets it, and in what contexts?” (112). They argue that the interviewee’s narrative is an outcome of the interview process including their interaction with the researcher – which implies that the researcher’s own ideas and biases affect what the interviewee says. This gives way to a contentious question: “is it the woman’s understanding of her own experience that is sought, or is the researcher structuring the interview so that the subject tells a story that conforms to the researcher’s orientation?” (112).

Due to the intimate nature of a one-on-one relationship between the researcher and “the researched,” humanists and feminist scholars have emphasized the possibility of exploitation of the research participants in the interview encounter (Yow, 1995, 53). They demand that researchers be mindful and aware of the political nature and context of the research relationship and take into account differences of gender, class, race, status and culture. They are joined by oral historians who agree that knowledge needs to be co-produced with the research participants and authority needs to be shared (Frisch, 1990; High, 2014). In such a co-production of knowledge, “the stance that there is a researcher and there is a [“researched”] subject is replaced by the conviction that two people, each bringing a different kind of knowledge to the interview, share equally in a process of discovery” (Yow, 1995, 53). In her own work, Butalia (2000) underlines the necessity of a such a collaborative relationship, by arguing that while probing “the silence” is important, so are the questions of “how it is probed, who poses the questions and when, and indeed who takes the responsibility for what the silence unleashes” (42). In recounting a friend’s mother’s story, who, after years of silence, finally spoke about

the Partition to a persuasive researcher, Butalia (2000) writes that “for weeks after she had done so, she was unable to sleep, remembering the pain and anguish of the time. The researcher who had prompted her to speak was by then elsewhere, perhaps involved in another interview” (42). Therefore, oral history is not simply an exercise in collecting testimony or what some researchers may problematically assume is a means of ‘catharsis’ for the participants. Rather, it is a shared endeavor between the researcher and the research participant, and as Butalia (2000) highlights, the outcome of an oral history interview is unpredictable, depending on who asks the questions and in what capacity.

However, created for public consumption and controlled by the researcher, the nature of the oral history interview that is ultimately determined by the researcher’s authoritative interpretations and drafted for publication, makes any true collaboration a utopian goal (Sangster, 1994, 14). As Butalia (2000) has argued, “the exploration of memory can never be separated from the ethics of such exploration, both for oneself as a researcher, and for the subject one is researching” (289). Any exploration of memories and people’s narratives, as done by Bhasin, Menon and Butalia, demands that researchers are “constantly being faced with the questions of its ethicality” (Butalia, 2000, 289). The researcher, therefore, must impose her own “silences” in order to create space for those whose stories are being narrated (Butalia, 2000). This entails not only ensuring that the researcher’s opinions don’t eclipse the voices of the women, but also placing women’s narratives at the centre her analysis.

Further, I believe that it is important to note the methodological constraints of working with oral testimonies. While an interview exchange, by its nature is a transactional encounter that might benefit one stakeholder more than it does the other, debates and contestations by researchers about the nature of working with ‘memory’ and ‘testimony’ have only served to create spaces for researchers – be it feminist oral historians, anthropologists or ethnographers – to engage in conversations about the ethical issues of doing oral history. Debates on the nature of oral history, as also discussed in the last chapter, have motivated oral historians, feminists and ethnographers to engage in what Yow (1997) has referred to as “corridor talk” (55) – a reflexive, community space for researchers to share their methodologies, interviewing experiences and the difficulties they faced. While it is impossible to formulate a oral history methodology that is free of power quandaries, perhaps, as Sangster (1994)

argues, what is important is not to answer these questions but be aware of them: “we need to continually analyze the interview as an interactive process, examine the context of the interview, especially inherent power imbalances, and always evaluate our own ethical obligations as feminists to the women we interview” (13). Further, as Srigley et. al. (2018) have argued, in *Beyond Women’s Words* – a collection of essays dedicated to the feminist practice of oral history – criticisms about the nature of their work has not dissuaded feminists from pursuing oral history, rather it has compelled them to modify their “earlier exaggerated, even utopian, claims about oral history’s capacity to produce egalitarian and emancipatory scholarship” (8) but without them losing sight of their goals. While they no longer believe that their objectives and methods are entirely unproblematic, “the continuing act of recording women’s stories while seeking to explicate the cultural meanings of their memories” (8) has led to the creation of a nuanced and diverse body of work on women and others on the margins of society. Instead of attempting to define a perfect way of doing “feminist oral history”, they emphasize the need for researchers reflect and revise their practices without abandoning the goal of working with marginalized communities to challenge their erasure from official histories and create accounts that foreground their everyday experiences.

3.3. Storytelling and the Creation of Contextualized Knowledge

Indigenous scholars have a long history of raising important questions about knowledge production such as “who is entitled to create meanings about the world; how some meanings and not others are accorded the status of knowledge; and how race, gender and class factor into these entitlements” (Strega and Brown, 2016, 1). According to Indigenous researcher Margaret Kovach (2010), “stories remind us of who we are and of our belonging” (94), containing within them essential knowledge and the ability to signify relationships. Oral stories are connected to the world and attached to the teller – and therefore, must be recounted relationally. They tie us “with our past and provide a basis for continuity with future generations” (Kovach, 2010, 94). Kovach argues that narrative is the primary device of passing knowledge within tribal traditions largely because it suits the “fluidity and interpretative nature of ancestral ways of knowing” (94).

She affirms story as both a method and as container of personal meaning and states that, in a way, these oral narratives function as intergenerational transfers of knowledge.

Kovach (2010) further writes that storytelling is also evident in qualitative methodologies that value contextualized knowledge, including feminist methodologies, autoethnography, phenomenology, and narrative inquiry – all of which employ practices of life history²⁶ and oral history. However, story, as a method, is used differently in different cultures; its full potential can only be realized when the “underlying epistemological assumptions that motivate its use” (Kovach, 2010, 97) are also taken into account. Indigenous use of storytelling is informed by the notion that “sharing a story in research situates it within a collective memory” (97). In the settler nation-state of Canada, Indigenous storytelling also acts as a form of resistance against colonization and presents a counter-narrative to the so-called “official” and documented Canadian history of Indigenous people. As Indigenous scholar Robina Anne Thomas (Lyackson First Nation) puts it, “telling these stories is a form of resistance to colonization... these stories simply must be told, because they confirm our belief in our stories, our histories, and our Ta’t Mustimuxw (ancestors)” (Thomas in Strega and Brown, 2016, 183).

As the Stree Shakti Sanghatana (1989) points out, in collecting testimonies of women involved in the peasant struggle of Telengana²⁷:

“Though women have traditionally been marginalized in written cultures, they have always told stories and sung songs. These are often stories or songs that uphold the norms of a culture and serve to maintain the hold of its ideology. But they are also stories of those who resisted power and fought injustice” (28).

In Indigenous communities in India, women have traditionally passed down knowledge and expertise, orally to their daughters including skills of resistance, survival and maintaining a robust physical and mental health, especially in times of crises. These stories which are not communicated through the “the more public modes of patriarchal cultures”, form a parallel culture of teaching and learning that is “intimate, personalized,

²⁶ Life story or life history refers to the story that a person tells about the life they have lived. According to Kovach (2010), it is “associated with a study of the totality of a person’s life” (96). Atkinson (1998) further adds that a life history narration usually involves “highlighting the most important aspects” (8) of one’s life.

²⁷ The Telengana peasant uprising (1946-1951), spanning over 4,000 villages, was initiated by the Telengana region’s bonded labor against its feudal, land-owning class. Nearly 27,000 to 40,000 people died in the rebellion violence (Thomson, 2013).

practical” (Sangathana, 1998, 28), giving way to an alternate pedagogy that resists their shared oppression.

In her oral history project with the women survivors of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy²⁸ in India, Suroopa Mukherjee (2010) writes that the “the oral component in oral history makes it an ancient tool for exploring myths, songs, folklore, and stories that have passed down through word of mouth, from one age to another, across different cultures and geographical locations” (5-6). In the present day, oral storytelling has been indispensable in recording witnessed accounts of historical importance, especially to bring to light the experiences of working classes and women, among other marginalized groups (Mukherjee, 2010, 6). In her book, Mukherjee employs oral history to examine the experiences of the specific social group of women survivors of this industrial disaster who were “twice victimized by their positions of marginality in a traditional society undergoing social/economic/political upheaval that accompanied the spread of corporate power in a globalized world” (6). Like the Indigenous use of the oral tradition of storytelling, she asserts that her use of storytelling not only highlights the importance of experiential knowledge, but also births a scholarship that serves to deconstruct corporate and bureaucratic powers by revealing their oppressive nature and strives “at the grassroots level to bring knowledge within people’s grasp” (6).

Embarking on a similar endeavor of learning stories embedded in the context of women’s lives and their meanings rather than objectively collecting interviews, Butalia (2000), and Bhasin and Menon (1998) began their research with the women from their families. For Butalia (2000), this served as a starting point of her work. She travelled to Lahore, Pakistan in 1987 in order to talk to her maternal uncle who had converted into a Muslim and stayed behind in Pakistan during Partition, while Butalia’s mother, conflicted and hurt at her brother’s refusal to join her, travelled to the other side of the border (33). Writing about the animosity between her mother and uncle, Butalia (2000) states,

“...closer to 1947 than not, my family heard unconfirmed reports that my grandmother had died. But no one really knew why. The sense of deep loss, of family, mother, home gave way to bitterness and resentment, and finally to indifference. Perhaps it was this last that communicated itself to us when, as children, we listened to stories of Partition and family’s history” (34).

²⁸ The ‘Bhopal gas tragedy’ refers to a deadly gas leak in the UCIL pesticide plant in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh on in December 1984, exposing over 500,000 people to methyl isocyanate gas and resulting in the death of an estimated 16,000 people (Eckerman, 2005).

Butalia's (2000) investigation of the Partition caused her mother and uncle to reunite after forty years of separation. It is within this larger narrative of her own familial loss and suffering, that Butalia's exploration of the Partition stories is embedded. However, as all three authors have acknowledged, coming from privileged caste and class backgrounds, their families didn't experience the kind of violence and destitution that millions of others did. Therefore, it became imperative to expand the scope of their research beyond their families. Punjab, being the main site of staggering violence and death, and consequent rehabilitation and recovery schemes, became the focus of research for both projects. The state was also home to the majority of destitute women living in ashrams and rehabilitation centers, spread across its various cities.

However, forty years after the Partition, when Bhasin and Menon (1998) ventured to different cities for their research, there were no longer identifiable "communities" of displaced or "recovered" women due to their resettlement over the years. Mentioning the baffled responses they received when they inquired about women survivors of Partition, Bhasin and Menon (1998) reported that people often responded with, "Partition? What do you want to talk about that for? Anyway, it's too late – they're all dead" (13). The fact that not only were these women hard to locate but there were no existing records of their testimonies points to a pervading silencing of women's experiences. Anderson and Jack (1991) have referred to this as the 'muted channel of women's subjectivity' arguing that such a prolonged subjugation of women's 'honest' voices is a direct result of their narratives failing to meet the dominant expectations of accepted female behavior (Anderson and Jack (1991) cited in Abrams, 2010, 72), and thus being silenced, much like the displaced women of Partition.

Bhasin and Menon (1998), however, eventually managed to locate "communities of sorts of women, in ashrams or homes" (13) in East Punjab where the first of the refugee camps were set up. In addition to the oral testimonies that women in refuges and ashrams in the states of Punjab and Haryana shared with them, "the very few firsthand accounts and memoirs by women social workers" (12) who were involved in rehabilitation of women Partition survivors made up the most useful material in their reconstruction of Partition history. For Butalia (2000), due to her involvement in a film on Partition with BBC's Channel 4 in Britain, it became much easier to identify potential women she could approach. Soon, she realized that almost everywhere she turned, there was a story to be listened to. In this way, she started collecting stories, moving

from person to person, and in turn, “deviating the whole process from the way in which regular, disciplinary history is written” (13) which usually involves research through archives or systematic sampling of effected populations. For instance, early on, she decided against adopting a fixed questionnaire or choosing a ‘sample’ of people based on their location or class (17). Instead of trying to curate a system or a pattern, a ‘perfect’ peoples’ history, she would simply ask her participants “to talk about that time in their lives, and let the conversation take its own course, to flow in whichever direction seemed appropriate” (17). For Bhasin and Menon (1998) too, “interviews” turned into long conversations and story-telling sessions, extending to reminiscences, where their questions were treated as interjections that the women sometimes choose to address, and other times talked over. Sometimes, these questions would crop up again, under different pretexts, opening up more vistas for further conversation. However, when the narrators exhibited genuine reluctance to talk about an issue, Bhasin and Menon (1998) refrained from pressing.

According to Kovach (2010), storytelling as a form of knowledge production means “honoring ‘the talk’” (99) through conversations, interviews and research/sharing circles. Bhasin and Menon (1998), too, adopted a similar approach of interviewing women. They write the following about their research participants:

“We travelled to different cities to meet them; we lived with them, we went back to them, sometimes once or twice, sometimes more often. They became friends, occasionally they would write and ask what we were doing with all this material, that they had remembered something else, and had we been able to contact so-and-so yet?” (13)

A similar storytelling methodology is adopted by Robina Ann Thomas (2016) in her research with the survivors of Kuper Island Residential School in the settler nation-state of Canada.²⁹ Much like Bhasin and Menon (1998), for Thomas (2016), such an approach emphasized the deeply personal nature of the interview exchange and focused on the researcher being available and listening when the narrators were prepared to share their accounts (Brown and Strega, 2016, 247). Arguing the need for

²⁹ Established after 1880, the Indian residential school system comprised of government sponsored religious schools that were established with the purpose of assimilating Indigenous children into the dominant “Canadian” culture by forcefully removing them from their homes and systematically erasing their heritage, ancestral languages and culture (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

ensuring the authenticity³⁰ of the research, Thomas believes that it is important to have a fluid relationship with research participants – which she attributes to the process of storytelling (Brown and Strega, 2016, 187). Just like Bhasin and Menon (1998), she conducted multiple dialogic³¹ storytelling sessions where conversations took place over coffee or tea, in locations picked by the storytellers themselves. As she writes, “I strongly believe that the flexible and personal nature of my research supported the storytelling during their (participants’) process of sharing,” (Brown and Strega, 2016, 189) as it made them feel safe enough to share personal details about their lives. This shows how both the interviewer and the interviewee were on a “holistic journey” as opposed to a ‘smash and grab’³² approach to seeking knowledge (Kovach, 2010, 99).

Bhasin and Menon (1998), further, in order to understand the context within which women Partition survivors led their everyday lives, were also interested in information about the ashrams and rehabilitation centers, as well as the other widowed women who lived there, especially whose families couldn’t be traced. They travelled widely across various Indian states from Jammu to Bombay, without a fixed plan, speaking to women, but also to men, social workers and doctors. In order to create knowledge that was contextualized, they scoured through all kinds of disaggregated data, memoranda, reports, official statements, and government documents – to locate women’s stories in these records (13). The intention behind this was not to verify the women said, but rather to “locate their stories in a political and social context, to juxtapose the official version with the unofficial notes” (15). Guided by a two-fold goal, Bhasin and Menon (1998) were interested in examining how women’s lives were shaped by the Partition “and how their experience of it enables a critique of political history and the means of writing it differently” (16). A second objective was to look at the event through first-hand witness accounts and life-stories in order to put together a gendered social history of the Partition (16). Therefore, by deeply listening to women’s stories and

³⁰ For Thomas (2016), being “authentic” entailed the following concern: “how I could tell someone else’s story when I was the researcher (both the listener and the writer). How could I ensure that it was their story in their words, not mine?” (246)

³¹ Thomas refers to Cruikshank (1998) in describing how, in a ‘dialogue’, as opposed to a formal interview, one can see clearly “that meaning is not fixed, that it must be studied in practice—in the small interactions of everyday life” (Cruikshank, 1998, 41).

³² Kovach refers to Martin and Frost (1996) here who describe a ‘smash and grab’ approach as superficial short-term interview-based qualitative research that fails to ‘penetrate the front’ of the research participants.

placing them within the wider social and political forces of the time, Bhasin and Menon (1998), like Dossa (2004), aimed to “capture the lived reality of the speakers while simultaneously understanding how systems of domination and unequal power relations shaped this reality” (Dossa, 2004, 5). Further, in doing so, they recognized women as producers of knowledge; and gained a rare insight into the ways in which socio-economic forces have been implicated in their suffering, and how they asserted their agency in the face repression and violence from the state, family and religious communities.

In attempting to contextualize women’s testimonies in the political and social climate of the time, a particular challenge that Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) faced was that of creating a narrative. Debating whether or not they should simply reproduce what the women said in their own words, they realized that without context or commentary, “such a presentation might leave their testimonies as defenseless as the women themselves, open to skepticism, dismissal, disbelief; to charges of exaggeration and nostalgia, not to be trusted” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 14). Butalia (2000) faced a similar dilemma in narrativizing her work; and searched for the right way to mesh her interpretations and thoughts with the testimonies (14). In the end, all the three authors decided to “use a combination of commentary and analysis, narrative and testimony” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 18) that enabled them to counter “official” history with personal testimonies and to present a nuanced re-construction of history from a variety of material including, as discussed above, “in-depth interviews, government reports and records; private papers, memoirs, autobiographies; letters, diaries, audio-tapes; parliamentary debates; and legal documents” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 18). Such a juxtaposition of documented history and personal stories forces a re-examination of what Bhasin and Menon (1998), referring to James Young’s (1990) work, call the “activity of telling history itself” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 18), and highlights the fact that historical sources are not necessarily legitimized by their provable factuality. The knowledge gained from the act of witnessing is not just factual, rather “it is imbued with an experience of historical events and with the profound understanding that their meaning can never be settled” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 19).

Another problem that the authors encountered in narrativizing the testimonies was a lack of sequence in the interviews and the erratic ordering of events in the narrations. Reflecting on their own process of working with human testimony, Bhasin

and Menon (1998) write that it was “impossible and undesirable, both, to compress lives between the covers of a book” but “in what way could we mark the "beginning" or "end" of the women's stories?” (8) They recognized this haphazard nature of the testimonies as “a feature of recalling traumatic experience” (8) to which Butalia (2000) adds that work such as hers is then representative of the research process itself – as being temporal, fluid and unstructured (Butalia, 2000, 15). In her own challenges with narrativizing the interviews, she decided to refrain from the impossible task of presenting the interviews in some “pure”, unmediated form, arguing that her involvement as a researcher was too deep to make any pretense of objectivity. Yet, she keeps in mind her own positionality as a researcher and author – a position that allowed her to make authoritative decisions and prioritize her own interpretations (Butalia, 2000, 15-16). Both Menon and Bhasin (1998), and Butalia (2000), agree that working with memory is never simple or unproblematic as it can never be pure or unmediated. As Bhasin and Menon (1998) write, “so much depends on who remembers, when, with whom, indeed to whom, and how” (8) but the way people choose to remember a historical event is as important as the facts of that history itself since “they too are interpretations, as remembered or recorded by one individual or another” (8).

Elaborating on the ways in which people recount memories, Bhasin and Menon (1998) further argue that while, for most of the women they interviewed, remembering was important, just as important was “*remembering to others*, having someone listen to their stories and feel that their experience was of value” (18). As witnesses, listeners and ultimately, researchers, all they could then do was listen. In her own work, Parin Dossa (2009) has written about the liberating experience of storytelling. Calling it as “one venue through which a person can express herself in her own terms and reconstruct her life/her-story in the act of telling” (92-93), she argues that the act of storytelling presumes an audience, lending validation to people’s retelling of their experiences. This act of reaching out and telling their stories, restores a sense of agency among the survivors – allowing them to not only actively participate in the world, but also giving them a chance to reconstitute events, “so that they are reworked ‘both in dialogue with others and within one’s own imagination’” (Jackson, 2006 cited in Dossa, 2009, 28). Quoting Jackson (2006), Dossa (2009) further states that – “there is no denying that storytelling gives us a sense that though we do not exactly determine the course of our lives, we at least have a hand in defining their meaning” (Jackson, 2006 cited in Dossa, 2009, 28). The urgency and desire to speak one’s stories is greater when individuals are violently uprooted from

their communities and are denied social existence. Therefore, not only does storytelling restore a sense of agency and purpose, it illustrates to survivors how they're connected to others through their stories (Dossa, 2009, 28).

Despite the potential of storytelling, however, one of the observations that Butalia (2000) made while interviewing women was the women's initial reluctance to remember and speak. Butalia attributed this silence to the horrific nature of the events that unfolded post-Partition. More broadly, the silence suggested the varied reasons why people didn't wish to remember the Partition publicly – and for Butalia, it became another way in which we can understand Partition – in people's reluctance to remember it (8). Writing about a similar conundrum, the Stree Shakti Sangathana (1989) state that, in conducting their oral histories, and often coming across silences, they were reminded of the fact that speaking from below requires courage. They write, “the women we interviewed were opening doors on their private lives, often drawing on areas of experience that had never been exposed to scrutiny before. And in doing so they were challenging centuries of silence” (27). Therefore, it is imperative that we listen deeply to the silences, pauses and even the incoherence; the questions that are avoided and the answers that are repeated obsessively (Sangathana, 1989, 27). These insights can therefore offer a radical departure from mainstream public narratives of the society and into a new understanding of how men and women co-exist in a deeply patriarchal society.

3.4. Interviewing and Deep Listening

Dossa (2009) has argued that storytelling is a potential way to engage with narrators as active agents (as opposed to passive subjects), recognizing its capacity, as a methodology, for doing grassroots research. However, she warns that it is important to ensure that it remains a tool in the hands of communities who need it, as opposed to being “appropriated by dominant groups” (25), giving the example of how the Canadian government refuses to grant asylum to displaced women until they declare themselves as “oppressed by their communities and families” (25). Unless their stories serve the “dominant imperialist and patriarchal interests” (25), women's narratives remain obscured. Storytelling can thus also be instrumental in directing our attention “away from an analysis of power and domination that focuses exclusively on the victimization of socially oppressed groups” (Dossa, 2009, 27). Reflecting on her own work, Butalia (2000) also reiterates that it is the “smaller actors” that she is interested in, arguing that

her purpose is not to question or add to the legitimacy of the institutional narrative on Partition but to question the 'adequacy' of such facts and uncover the stories that hide underneath them (74).

Reflecting on the difficulties that women must have faced when telling their stories, Butalia (2000) writes – “To whom would they have spoken? Who would’ve listened?” (101). Even in her own questioning, she realized, that something she hadn’t accounted for was that in order to listen to women, she had to “pose different questions, to talk in different situations, and to be prepared to do the most important of things, to listen: to their speech, their silences, the half-said things, the nuances” (101). A significant aspect of the storytelling process is reading beyond the silences in order to recover obscured knowledge. Citing Geyla Frank (2000), Dossa (2009) argues that “if stories are listened to in an appropriate way they have the potential to effect social change” (Dossa, 2009, 18) because when readers interact with these stories and their various interpretations, they create new meanings that may resonate with and impact others in the readers’ own local or even dominant culture. Arguing that her work is, in a way, an interpretation and reinterpretation of the past – a reworking of “what has already happened, to give current events meaning” (Butalia, 2000, 74), Butalia (2000) echoes Dossa’s (2009) claim about how people create new meanings from the stories they hear. She argues that behind these narratives of the Partition are real flesh-and-blood human beings whose stories reveal the multi-layered histories of their pain, trauma, loss and regret. As Butalia (2000) succinctly puts it: “For me, in my study of Partition, it is the people I spoke to who are an integral part of the history of Partition. In many ways, it is they whose lives are the history of Partition” (75). For Bhasin and Menon (1998) too, while not all the stories they collected were all that different from each other, “what is different is how events have been grasped, how they are remembered; how they have been understood or misunderstood; how each woman assimilated her experience” (19). All of the stories, therefore, of widowhood, destitution, rehabilitation and unexpected liberation, form a part of an alternative narrative and thus, history.

3.4.1. Listening to Women/Gendered Narratives

In her article ‘*Decentering and decolonizing feminist oral history*,’ Nan Alamilla Boyd (2018), has argued that “...interpersonal communication through storytelling, witnessing, and testifying are methods of survival rather than mechanisms for the

production of data” (151). This became manifest in the prolonged interviews conducted by Bhasin and Menon (1998) with both survivors of Partition violence and displacement, and the social workers³³ who aided in the former’s rehabilitation. These interviews revealed a shocking truth: that women had been subjected to violence not only by the men of the “other” community, as was the dominant belief, but also by the men in their own families.

At the height of Partition violence, women of one religious community became targets of sexual assault at the hands of the “other” in an assertion of the latter’s religious identity and subsequent humiliation of the former’s religion. Women’s testimonies reveal the exuberance with which men inflicted a form of communal violence on women that was distinctly sexual and ruthless, involving all sorts of public humiliation ranging from being stripped to being paraded naked in marketplaces and places of worship. In being subjected to acts such as mutilation, disfiguration, rape and amputation of reproductive organs, women were reduced to mere objects or rather, “male constructions of their own honor” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 43). Their bodies became territories to be “conquered, claimed or marked by the assailant” (43) and their defilement was seen an attack on the collective “manhood” of the respective community that needed to be avenged. Both communities thus became preoccupied with safeguarding women’s sexuality and by extension, their “honor” and subsequently, the community’s honor. This manifested itself in a horrifying kind of violence: of men killing their own wives, mothers and daughters or forcing them to commit suicide if they had been deemed “violated” by the ‘Other’.

Expressing their disbelief at the prospect of familial violence, Bhasin and Menon (1998) write, “... we were unprepared for what we heard from the women themselves about how many of them had been forced to die – at the hands of men in their own families, or by their own hands” (45). Their interviews with women also revealed how many other women had killed themselves, while their husbands, sons and fathers “recounted with pride how their women ‘preferred to commit suicide’” (45) over a dishonorable death. Reflecting on their interviews with women who survived attempts of

³³ As also outlined in section 3.7 of this thesis, state-employed social workers worked in recovery camps, rehabilitation centers and women’s service centers to assist women survivors in the process of resettlement by offering support in different forms including emotional guidance, childcare assistance and access to employment opportunities (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 193).

murder by their own families, Bhasin and Menon (1998) realized that nearly all of the women had accepted their fate, and perhaps due to ingrained notions of shame and honor, preferred a “real” and “respectable” death over the symbolic death of being forced to convert and marry into another religion. Refusing to accept these forced deaths of women as “suicides” in their analysis, however, Bhasin’s and Menon (1998) reject the dominant male-centric narrative of women exercising agency when “choosing” to kill themselves in order to safeguard their community’s honor.

In listening to the narratives of the survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia³⁴, oral historian Theresa de Langis (2018) also discovered that if interpreted in the context of survivors’ lives, women’s testimonies “revealed a “counter narrative” reverberating in the cracks of a dominant master narrative that excluded them” (164). She argues that recognizing and acknowledging women’s voices provides a more accurate and inclusive account of the atrocities committed largely because “memory in mass atrocity is rigidly controlled, and memory of sexual violence deeply suppressed” (166), and hence, keeping alive the memories of this kind of violence is an act of radical resistance and a form of tribute. Likewise, by speaking to women who survived assault and murder at the hands of their own families, Bhasin and Menon’s (1998) interviews have been instrumental in creating such a counter-narrative. One such interview was with Taran, a Sikh woman survivor of the communal violence with whom they stayed for days – who read them stories and poems, sang and cooked for them. She recounted her experience of the day when her village was captured by Muslim men hellbent on all killing all Hindus:

“I loved life, I was in love with it. And I saw death staring me in the face. Just a few days earlier there had been a wedding in the family and we all had new clothes made. I started wearing a new suit every day, along with all the jewelry. I would dress up and call my friends over. I was going to die anyway, what difference did it make?” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 47).

Submitting to her fate, Taran was ready to embrace death. In her interview, she further revealed:

“we formed committees which met and discussed what to do...one day they were talking about what to do with all the young girls in the community.

³⁴ Khmer Rouge regime refers to the “totalitarian regime of Democratic Kampuchea” that controlled Cambodia between 1975 to 1979. According to Theresa de Langis, about two million people perished due to the slave-like conditions under state policies that robbed people of basic human rights (Theresa de Langis in Srigley et. al., 2018, 156).

We...overheard them saying that all of us should be locked up in a room and burnt alive” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 47).

Here it is important to note, as discussed above, how oral historians Anderson et. al. (1987) insist that in order to learn from women’s stories, it is critical that we “learn to listen in a new way” (115). They argue that it is essential to listen with an awareness that “women’s self- reflection is not just a private, subjective act” (115); and the ideas and categories that we use to reflect on ourselves come from the cultural context we live in, one that has historically controlled and debased women’s everyday lives. Going back to Taran’s account, it becomes clear that due to patriarchal notions of women’s bodies being enshrined as sites of “honor” that either needed to be preserved or destroyed, women felt compelled to take their own lives.³⁵ By listening to women, we can unfold the layers of meaning that inform how they think about events and how social forces impact and shape their actions (Anderson and Jack, 1991, 140). In the context of communal violence therefore, such as that witnessed during the Partition, according to Theresa de Langis (2018), “the process of (re)claiming private memory through public story, whereby the narrator controls and owns the story, is politically powerful as well as personally recuperative and transformative” (166). Feminist oral histories can thus open up the space for women to voice their trauma and talk back to the conditions of their oppression, but only if they are also heard.

Another example from Bhasin and Menon’s (1998) work that illustrates their commitment to actually listening to women was evident in their interview with the Khatri family. Iqbal, the only surviving male of the family whose women members were forced to kill themselves by either swallowing poison or jumping off a bridge at the height of Partition violence, gave his testimony to Bhasin and Menon (1998) and was adamant in acknowledging the ‘passive’ role that men had played in women’s deaths. While he kept on repeating that the women in his family chose to commit suicide in the face of danger, at the same time, he also added, “naturally, if we [the men] were going to be killed who would protect them? They had no choice” (1998, 51). What is interesting to note is that his wife interjected, saying, “they [men] must have encouraged them, after all, what could ladies do in this situation? They must have persuaded them, what could the

³⁵ As both Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) speculate, whether or not women made the decision to kill themselves on their own terms is unclear. Often, they were not even asked – the decision was made for them by the male family members and they had to agree in order to preserve the family’s ‘honor’. They insist that this form of indirect coercion cannot be labelled as “exercising agency” on the part of the women.

women do?” (1998, 51). According to feminist oral historian Dana Jack, women tend to socialize their feelings, judging and policing not only how they act but also how they think and feel (Anderson et. al., 1987, 116). They downplay their experiences that do not conform to what is publicly presented as significant in mainstream history (Abrams, 2010, 71) but an exercise in conversing and listening deeply, as illustrated above, can reveal how women actually think and feel.

Butalia (2000) heard similar stories from survivors of the infamous incident of Thoa Khalsa, a village in Punjab where 90 women drowned themselves by jumping into a well in 1947, when their village was attacked by a mob of Muslim men (155). Butalia spoke to Basant Kaur, one of the women who had jumped into the well but failed to drown because it was full of bodies. In her emotionally charged narration of the days that led up to the incident and the weeks that followed, Basant Kaur delineated how her own husband killed his daughter, niece, sister and a grandson “so that they would not fall into the hands of Musalmaans” (Butalia, 2000, 157). Kaur further added,

“Many girls were killed. Then Mata Lajjawanti (the village matriarch), she had a well near her house, in a sort of garden. Then all of us jumped into that, some hundred...eighty-four...girls and boys... I also went in, I took my two children, and then we jumped in” (Butalia, 2000, 158).

Talking to Basant Kaur’s son, Bir Bahadur Singh, Butalia (2000) discovered that he, too, had witnessed the incident but, in his narration, women jumped into the well to take their own lives rather than let their ‘honor’ be put to test. As also observed by Bhasin and Menon (1998), while women’s testimonies were marked with fear and sorrow, descriptions of male survivors tended to re-emphasize the ‘heroic’ and ‘valorous’ aspects of these tragic deaths. Bir Bahadur proudly declared “... if the women of our family had not been killed, and those who jumped into the well had not taken their own lives, the ones who were left alive would not have been alive today” (Butalia, 2000, 166). Listening to him, Butalia (2000) writes how she is struck by the absurd combination of pride, grief and sense of loss with which he describes the circumstances in which women died. His narration highlights the “noble” strength of the men of the village who made the painful decision of turning their women into martyrs before they could be abducted. In Bir Bahadur’s statements there “is no sense of censure, no questioning of logic that makes men kill people of their own families” (174); rather, he saw himself and these fellow men as “helpless” instruments of God’s will (174). Due to the dominant masculine narrative that came to define these events, the women who were killed by their families were labelled ‘martyrs’. Even now, these stories of ‘suicide’ are treated as

legends and used as examples of bravery, manliness and heroism of the Sikh race (Butalia, 2000, 165).

The above interviews conducted by Bhasin, Menon and Butalia reveal an important detail: how “the gendered nature of the experience of violence engendered its telling in specific ways” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 55). While the trauma was difficult to articulate for both men and women, Bhasin and Menon (1998) noted an “element of detachment” in the way men talked about violence, resorting to “the heroic mode” where killing a woman in name of protection was elevated to the level of a “supreme and glorious sacrifice” (55). For men, the narration of violence was formal, organized, boastful at times and matter-of-fact, easily fitting into the “master narrative” of collective male consensus on the events of the Partition. For women on the other hand, who “were not only objects of, but also witnesses to, violence” (55), the telling was pained, at times hesitant, but provided a unique insight into their lived experience that challenged the “normalizing discourse of the men” (56). The research of these three feminists shows us how oral interviews, therefore, allow us to listen to the individual “meanings of a language that both men and women use but which each translates differently” (Anderson et. al., 1987, 114). For women, when a personal experience is at odds with the dominant “cultural myths and values” concerning how a woman is “supposed” to think and feel, their thoughts and experiences are riddled with self-doubt and hesitation. However, examining closely their language and the meanings they assign to words can help us understand how they actively adapt to the circumstances in which they live (114).

Butalia (2000) further points out that since most of the interviews were conducted with family present, women were seldom alone when they spoke to the interviewers. In joint interviews, like the ones described above, it was the men who spoke. Often, if and when addressed directly, women would yield to men. Speaking to both men and women in such settings, Butalia (2000) realized that “voices themselves are differentiated...they have a hierarchy” (280) within which what men think is prized over the thoughts and experiences of women. For women survivors of the Partition then, to present their own side of the story, despite interruptions from men, also indicates one way to exercise their agency, by not only sharing their lived experiences but also challenging the so-called family narrative of “sacrifice” and “courage. It exposes men’s absurd celebration of “suicide” and consequently, disrupts the so-called master narrative that normalizes and accepts women’s’ deaths as an “inevitable” result of violence and chaos.

According to Dossa (2004), “stories are social” (19) in the sense that they show how people are ultimately interconnected which means stories about a person can be reflective of the community’s struggle. A carefully contextualized analysis of historical and communal violence, as done by Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000), “may enable us to gain some insight into the more mundane violence and abuse that form the part of everyday experience of many women” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 40), especially in India. The sudden manifestation of Partition violence in a time marked by communal tension points to the otherwise hidden familiar forms of sexual violence that remind us of the place occupied by women in a patriarchal society. Stories and narratives therefore, as Dossa (2004) writes, “have the potential to effect social change provided they form part of the larger political, social, historical, cultural and literary landscapes of societies” (20).

3.5. Collaboration, Co-Production and Sharing Authority

In her book, *Oral History Theory*, Lynn Abrams (2010) has written about the increased attention on the interview relationship in recent years as also pointed out in the previous section. Oral historians have “accepted that oral history is a collaborative endeavor, the result of a relationship between interviewer and interviewee” (10) marking the collision of two worlds and subjectivities. This interplay of subjectivities, determined by their respective backgrounds of class, gender, age and ethnicity, shapes not only the interview process, but the way the respondent narrates their story.

Referring to Portelli (1997), Abrams (2010) describes the interview “as a ‘deep exchange’ that occurs on a number of levels. It is...give and take, collaborative and often cooperative, involving information-sharing and autobiographical reminiscence, facts and feelings” (Abrams, 2010, 10). Oral historians, therefore, work in collaboration with the narrators to present a story from both sides of the interview encounter. Articulated as the “the co-production of historical knowledge” by Pente, Brown and Ward (2015, 32), this methodology allows for a “deeper comprehension of people’s self-identities by encouraging a diverse range of people to participate in the research process” (32). Practiced in numerous social and health sciences disciplines, it is “research *with* rather than *on* people” (33).

A central component of co-producing knowledge in an interview is integrating the notion of ‘shared authority’ (as also mentioned in the last chapter), a phrase that was

coined by oral historian Michael Frisch in 1990 to describe “the dialogical nature of the oral history interview, addressing the issue of authorship of historical stories” (Pente et. al., 2015, 36). In outlining what a ‘shared authority’ means, he states that the interpretive and meaning-making process of creating oral histories is a shared endeavor inherent in the very “dialogic nature of an interview, and in how audiences receive and respond to exhibitions and public history interchanges in general” (Frisch, 2011, 127). Recognizing narrators as producers of knowledge allows them to shape the research agenda and strives to mitigate and challenge power structures and endemic inequalities in the interview process (Pente et. al., 2015, 36). Co-production of historical knowledge, primarily in a partnership between academically trained historians and public groups or individuals, brings together experience and emotion that is borne out of expertise, to undertake research. It involves an ‘active’ engagement by both the interviewer and the interviewee at the stages of analysis, interpretation and even in designing the research project (Pente et. al., 2015, 36). Therefore, “co-production in research aims to put principles of empowerment into practice, working ‘with’ communities and offering communities greater control over the research process and providing opportunities to learn and reflect from their experience” (Pente et. al., 2015, 37).

Butalia’s (2000) interview with Damyanti Sehgal, a former social worker tasked with rehabilitating women, whom she first met in 1989, was such a product of a unique collaboration and sharing of authority between the two parties. Reluctant at first, Damyanti, like most women asked to talk about her personal experiences, argued “Why do you want to talk to me?...I’ve nothing to say. Just foolish stories here and there” (Butalia, 2000, 87); but, upon Butalia's insistence, Damyanti relented. However, in an odd departure from other women Butalia had interviewed before, Damyanti insisted that the interviews take place in the author’s home. Reflecting on this odd request, Butalia (2000) wrote:

“normally, we had tried as far as possible to meet people in environments they were comfortable in and much of the time, these happened to be their homes. Later I realized that Damyanti’s insistence on meeting in my house came from an essential sense of homelessness that had stayed with her since Partition, such that there wasn’t any home that she could call he own” (87).

Conducted over many sessions that spanned over several months, interviews with Damyanti, more than often turned into collective conversations as family members who were present during the interview, pitched in. Calling it one of the most important

interviews she did, Butalia (2000) fondly recounts how she and Damyanti became friends over the months. “She insisted we call her Danti and said we could add ‘masi’ or ‘auntie,’” (89) writes Butalia. For feminist oral historians, the interview-interviewee relationship is a contentious and oft-debated issue (Abrams, 2010; Sangster, 1994), especially due to concerns of the power imbalance that marks such an encounter. One way to navigate such research, according to oral historian Lisa Tillmann-Healy in her article ‘*Friendship as Method*’ (2003), is using a genuine methodology of ‘friendship’ to speak to narrators:

“...friendship and fieldwork are similar endeavors. Both involve being in the world with others. To friendship and fieldwork communities, we must gain entrée. We negotiate roles (e.g., student, confidant, and advocate), shifting from one to another as the relational context warrants. We navigate membership, participating, observing, and observing our participation” (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, 732).

Researching with the ethics and practices of friendship entails building and sustaining friendship through conversation, consistent involvement, compassion and vulnerability while employing traditional forms of data-gathering (such as ethnography and interviewing). It also demands that research occur at the “natural pace of friendship” i.e. marked by a prolonged and sustained relationship with the participants; and is situated in the “natural contexts of friendship” (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, 735). Calling it a certain level of “investment” in the lives of the participants, Tillmann-Healy (2003) argues that friendship as a method requires a “radical reciprocity, a move from studying “them” to studying *us*” (735) with the ultimate objective of scholars, using their skills and position, to transform and uplift the communities that they are working with. It requires researchers to employ an ethic of friendship in their work, and “a stance of hope, caring, justice, even love” (735). As evident from her writing, Butalia’s (2000) prolonged and sustained involvement in Damyanti’s life, not just as a researcher but as a friend and a confidante, followed a similar framework of friendship guided by shared trust, empathy and mutual regard.

However, while in theory, friendship as a methodology appears to fall in line with the reflexive principles of collaboration, co-creation and sharing authority, in practice, the interviewee-interviewee relationship is, ultimately, not an equal one. Calling such a relationship ‘a quasi-friendship’, historian Miriam Zukas (1993) admits to her ambiguous feelings about being referred to as a ‘friend’ by her participants, worrying if they told her things that they would only tell a close friend (78). Canadian historian Joy Parr (2010)

further argues that while a friendship may develop after the research project is over, in the duration of her research, the researcher “wants to get something from the narrator to further a purpose outside the relationship, and therefore this is not a disinterested friendship” (57-58). As a researcher, she feels obligated to indicate to her participants that their “professional relationship” will end once the research is completed (Parr, 2010, 58). For Sitzia (2003), too, an oral history interview is inevitably shaped by the researcher’s engagement in an unequal relationship with the main purpose of obtaining other people’s memories for their own use (Sitzia, 2003, 168). The researcher ultimately benefits from the use of the material acquired through oral history and if the subject does experience some sort of catharsis, it is a happy but intended outcome (Sitzia, 2003, 188).

Tillmann-Healy (2003), too, concedes stating that there is always potential for colonization and exploitation due to the inherent power imbalance between the researcher and the research participant (744). Nevertheless, she insists that “any study involving human “subjects” can incorporate some aspect of friendship as method” (745). By employing ‘an ethic of friendship’, we can ensure a degree of “sustained immersion in participants’ lives” (745) by listening to their fears and concerns and responding passionately. For her, as for Butalia (2000), and Menon and Bhasin (1998), adopting a stance of friendship in research means something as simple as “turning off the tape recorder and cooking dinner with participants; investing more of ourselves in their emotional, relational, and political welfare; and inviting respondents further into our lives” (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, 746).

Talking to Damyanti, Butalia (2000) learned that as a survivor of Partition, Damyanti slowly became involved in social work – rescuing, rehabilitating and recovering abducted and raped women in Pakistan. Often recovering women against their will³⁶, Damyanti describes a “tension between herself as a social worker, servant...of the newly formed nation-state – and in a broader sense, an instrument of her private God, her thakur – and herself as a woman who feels for other women” (88). Thus, like many women who rebelled against the government, for Damyanti, who was stranded without her family for months, until she was pulled into social work by her aunt

³⁶ As also mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, in numerous cases, abducted women had remarried and adjusted to their lives within their new families yet, as part of the recovery operation, they were uprooted and ‘restored’ to their rightful kin by social workers working as agents of the Indian state.

(herself a social worker), her work became her own private rebellion. For this reason, her story becomes doubly significant – while Partition pushed women into the workforce, and liberated some women from the drudgery of the household, in some cases, entire families came to rely on the labour of women whose own dreams and aspirations were pushed aside (89). Drawn into all kinds of work, these women became the backbone of reconstructing and building broken homes. Damyanti was one such woman. As her testimony reveals, “the ‘very’ rejection by her family, the very real fact of her aloneness, allowed her to move into the public world and make something of her life” (90). Akin to many other women, it provided her an opportunity to enter the public sphere in an unprecedented way.

Kovach (2016), in reflecting on her own research, also writes about the deep responsibility that comes with requesting an oral history of a participant, highlighting the importance of ensuring that the story that is being shared would be treated with “the respect it deserves in the acknowledgement of the relationship from which it emerges” (97). According to her, all Indigenous inquiry and stories are grounded in a relationship-based approach and for a story to emerge, there must be trust between researcher and the research participant. For this reason, pre-existing relationships can be necessary for sharing of stories. Such a relationship is, perhaps, what led Damyanti to confide in Butalia (2000), experiences that she had been holding onto for years. She told Butalia that “it was the first time she was actually talking about all she had been through, the first time, she said, that nobody had *asked* her, the first time she was remembering with and to someone” (90). At one point, Damyanti’s niece, Kamla, asked her why she had never shared these stories before, to which she replied – “You don’t know, Kamla, you don’t know anything because you were in England...” (95). Butalia found this astounding – that despite being in close proximity of family, Damyanti had chosen to live much of her life alone. Increasingly, Butalia realized that when Damyanti narrated stories of abducted women, talking of how they had “basically been rendered alone by history” (90), she was in a way, describing her own life.

In her oral history research with parents of students involved in the 1999 Columbine High School shooting in the United States, Carolyn Mears (2008) writes that by allowing individuals to voice their personal memories, a listener can aid them in validating their experience: “Listening is such a simple act. It requires us to be present, and that takes practice, but we don’t have to do anything else... whatever life we have

experienced, if we can tell our story to someone who listens, we find it easier to deal with our circumstances” (164). Mears further elaborates that while oral history as part of academic research should never be considered therapy or a substitute to it, at the same time, “*telling one’s story* is an empowering experience that potentially restores a sense of continuity and wholeness” (Mears, 2008, 169). Perhaps, this is what Damyanti found in her interview with Butalia – not just a willing listener, but also someone, who shared her cultural values and experiences; someone whose family had also been torn apart by Partition just as Damyanti’s.

Another reason why Damyanti’s testimony is significant is that she spent years working in the Indian state’s recovery and relief operations – often accompanying hostile Pakistani policemen to locate abducted women. Her interviews reveal more about the everyday lives of these women and inner workings of the government’s rehabilitation operation than any other written document (Butalia, 2000, 91). Further, Damyanti’s retelling of the anguish abducted women went through becomes doubly significant in the face of the enormously difficult task of locating the women who were abducted and recovered, forty years after Partition (Butalia, 2000, 91).

A similar testimony of loneliness and bittersweet liberation is that of Bibi Inder Kaur, who, after migrating across multiple cities post Partition, came to settle in Delhi and attended the first women’s college in Delhi University (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 221). From a conservative home where women stayed within the realms of the private sphere, “she seized the opportunity that presented itself to her, welcoming the changed circumstances that now allowed her to pursue the studies she had to interrupt in Karachi” (221). Despite constant objections from her husband who eventually abandoned her, she was determined to create a new life for herself, and gradually gained her autonomy. She told Bhasin and Menon (1998):

“When I said I wanted to do my M.A., my husband had a big fight with me. I felt, B.A. is a big achievement, but I want to do an M.A. now. He was furious...I revolted and got admitted into a regular college against his wishes. I got a scholarship as a refugee and studied in Delhi University. Tolerance beyond a limit is wrong – after a point you must revolt” (213-214).

After completing her education, she continued to grow professionally, and went on to become a university principal in Amritsar. With an active career until the age of 75, Bhasin and Menon (1998) observed that her home in Amritsar, where they stayed while interviewing her, “radiated calm and was filled with...peace” (221). Proud of her

achievements, Bibi Inder proclaims, “we had to struggle but for me there were opportunities. Because I got out of the house my daughters benefitted. They became confident and flourished” (221). Pamela Sugiman (2004), in her research with Japanese Canadian women, discovered that “as the women told a story of the past, they also presented an image of themselves in the present” (76). Sharing aspects of their suffering selectively, “while they wanted their pain to be acknowledged, they also did not wish to reduce themselves to the status of victims” (76). Official narratives of Partition violence and dislocation have largely obscured the liberatory paths that it also presented for countless women and reduced them to passive victims of violence. These testimonies by Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) aptly illustrate how women view themselves – as survivors instead of victims; and how survival was instrumental for women in gaining independence, self-respect and dignity.

3.6. Reflexivity

In the introduction to her book *‘Oral History Off the Record’*, Zembrzycki (2013) writes that while oral historians are very good at presenting powerful stories about their experience with participants, a telling of the circumstances in which these conversations take place rarely appear in their work. She calls this “unfortunate” especially because oral history projects rely heavily on the kinds of relationships that the interviewers form with their narrators (131). For Kovach (2010) too, the process of co-creating knowledge not only means hearing the other person’s narrative but also allowing the researcher to express their “inward knowing” (100) by reflecting on the research process; especially, in Indigenous research, sharing one’s own story and experiences is a vital aspect of co-creating knowledge – “our identity factor, becomes integral to interpreting our research,” writes Kovach (2010, 100).

In the oral history context too, researchers, typically feminists, are increasingly opening up about their personal viewpoints and reflections from the field (Thompson, 2017, 209). In fact, as early as two decades ago Penny Summerfield (1998) wrote, “it is thus necessary to encompass within oral history analysis and interpretation, not only the voice that speaks for itself, but also the voices that speak to it” (15). Since both the interviewer and the narrator participate in the creation of the oral history story; there can be no pretense at neutrality or objectivity on the part of the researcher (Abrams, 2010, 54). In her own work with Partition survivors, Butalia (2000) has spent a considerable

amount of time reflecting on her own positionality in the oral history process. Stating that her presence, as an author and an interpreter, is quite visible – “almost too visible” (15) throughout the book, Butalia writes, “I have always had a deep suspicion of histories that are written as if the author were but a mere vehicle” (15). She argues that the absence of ‘I’ in such histories helps establish distance and create an illusion of objectivity and consequently, “factuality”. Butalia declares it impossible to write peoples’ histories of Partition ‘objectively’. Refusing to detach herself from this work of many years, she calls her involvement “intense, emotional, political and academic” (16). Discussing her “obsession” with her work of many years, she does acknowledge that the “lack of what is known as objectivity” (16) troubled her enormously. It took her years to accept the fact that, due to her close allegiance with the Partition, the book is also a ‘personal history’ and takes into account how her personal, emotional and political entanglements shape the narrative of the book (Butalia, 2000, 16).

Dossa (2009) and Mukherjee (2016), in a similar exercise in reflexivity, have also made insightful self-reflections about their work. For Dossa (2004), it was important to first identify herself as a researcher and interrogate her own motivations and positionality in the research process so as to locate “the agency of the anthropologist within the same frame as the agency of the others” (Moore, 2000 cited in Dossa, 2004, 15) in order to depart from earlier forms of social engagement in which anthropologists spoke on behalf of their participants. Following this, Dossa (2004) attempts to contextualize the research within her own personal and cultural background. Born in colonial Uganda into a Shi’a Muslim family with ancestral links to India, Dossa immigrated to Canada in the 1970s. Growing up in the colonial system that dominated East Africa in the 1960s, Dossa was robbed of her right to learn her native languages of Gujerati, Arabic and Farsi and the language of her ‘host country’ Swahili, as all other heritages and languages other than English were marginalized (15-16). Her own work is rooted in this “loss and suppression of rich heritages” (17) due to the dominance of a prevalent colonial political discourse. Emerging from this experience, Dossa chose “women’s stories on displacement and mental health as a medium to articulate the contours” (17) of the alternative epistemology that she was trying to use in her research.

Theresa de Langis (2018) too, in her research with survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime, acknowledges how her positionality as a white foreign professor in Cambodia affected the way in which women treated her with deference (163). In a moment of self-

reflection in her writing, she asks, “was I not also wielding power over agonizing memories of sexual crimes that had been repressed for more than three decades?” (158). However, informed by feminism, both as a means of inquiry and as a social movement, her process “intentionally sought to produce a countervailing voice to the discussion—and denial—surrounding sexual violence under the Khmer Rouge regime” (158). She attended specialized trainings, learning about the obligations involved in collecting stories of atrocity and trauma (158); and ensured that all the narrators were introduced to her through a local organization so that the participants had “a safety net of support beyond the interview itself” (161). Most importantly, she learned to “relinquish control of the research scene” and allowed the interviews to turn into an “an intergenerational dialogue between the project’s young Khmer assistants and the narrator” (163).

Reflecting on her own process of collecting testimonies, Butalia (2000), too acknowledges that writing from a feminist perspective, she was aware “of the need to fold back several layers of history before one can begin to arrive at a different, more complex ‘truth’” (100). Guided by the naïve assumption, however, that as a woman and a feminist, she would simply set out to ‘find’ women in Partition in an attempt to make them visible, thus ‘completing’ an incomplete picture; she soon realized that there is no complete picture. She writes, “each time, retrospectively, the picture changes: who you are, where you come from, when you’re talking to, when you talk to them, where you talk to them, what do you listen to, what they choose to tell you... all of these affect the picture you draw” (100).

Feminist Terese de Lauretis, too, has argued that subjectivity is never fixed (De Lauretis cited in Abrams, 2010, 55). Rather, “it is ‘interpreted or reconstructed by each of us within the horizon of meanings and knowledges available in the culture at given historical moments” (Abrams, 2010, 55). For oral historians, this means that interviewees continuously draw on different ideas and meanings in order to construct a narrative in the context of the interview – and this ‘subjectivity’ may shift and change depending on the direction in which the interview goes. The starting point in exploring subjectivity for a historian is therefore an awareness of their own subject position and neutrality, or lack thereof. This means “being reflexive about oneself as a researcher: being actively aware of and reflecting upon one’s own presence in the research process” (Abrams, 2010, 55). In a similar exercise, Butalia (2000) acknowledges that a “major lacuna” (17) in her work

is its one-sided nature. Hailing from Punjab with a family history of Partition, and being fluent in the local language of Punjabi, she acknowledges her vested interests in the research as she only examines the Partition experiences on the western border of India, excluding Bengal and Pakistan from her work (17). Additionally, she also admits that her “being middle class, a woman, a Punjabi, perhaps half a Sikh” (36) influenced the way people responded to her, possibly more willing to talk to her than someone who didn’t have a similar background.

In further self-reflection regarding the ethics of using women’s testimonies, Butalia (2000) questions, “... is it fair to make these interviews public if they relate (as mine do) to only one side of the story? Doesn’t that sort of material lend itself to misuse by one side or another?” (36) This question became intrinsic to her research, especially because it was nearly impossible to travel to Pakistan and conduct interviews³⁷, thus, resulting in a one-sided narration of the Partition. In the light of this, she simultaneously asks and answers her own question: “Ought I have to given up this work? There are no easy answers... I had to simply go on with it. I could not abandon it” (37). Speaking from her own familial history of the Partition, Butalia writes that for a number of historians like herself, “death, displacement, dislocation, loss of home and family” (275) formed a big part of their lives and the violence of 1984 served as a watershed for many historians:

“Partition came back to revisit many who had been mere spectators and others who had been victims and participants” (276), opening up the space for stories to emerge and in turn, compelling historians to re-examine the history of Partition. Deeply rooted in present-day concerns, such a re-examination saw historians speak to survivors and gather testimonies; and while for a number of them, it was still painful to recall such a traumatic time in their lives, “there were others who wanted their stories to be recorded, they felt that for them the time had come to do so” (276).

Yet working with memory and ‘recovering’ voices is not unproblematic, and as Butalia (2000) argues, “when the history of these (hidden) voices is written...it is almost always written by ‘others’” (279). Acknowledging her own bias in the writing process, she states: “I am deeply aware that my representations of the experiences of women, children and scheduled castes of Partition are, after all, my representations, selectively illuminated by my concerns and priorities” (279). As also mentioned earlier, this book came to hold deep personal meaning for Butalia; and in a way, presents a ‘different’ kind

³⁷ Here, Butalia refers to the difficulty of getting a visa to travel to Pakistan as an Indian citizen, especially amidst the political tensions between the two countries after the Partition.

of voice: one that belongs to her and interprets and remembers Partition in dialogue with countless other voices.

In addressing a question that Butalia (2000) came across time and again while talking to women, the question of “why rake all this up again?” (282), Butalia agrees with writer and Partition refugee Krishna Sobti’s claim that Partition is “difficult to forget but dangerous to remember” (283), but she also argues that, “while it may be dangerous to remember, it is also essential to do so” (283). For her, unveiling memories and remembering are essential to at least begin the process of resolving and confronting Partition, to come to terms with its impact on the lives of those who lived in the sub-continent. At the same time, however, she warns, “I believe too that we must approach this kind of exploration with caution: there are instances where silence is more important than speech, times at which it is invasive to force speech” (283). She is deeply aware of the fact that the exploration of memories cannot be detached from the ethics of such an exploration both for the researcher and the research participant. While she stresses the importance of exploring Partition memories, it cannot be done without the researcher constantly self-reflecting and facing questions of ethicality – as she has done, in her own work (283). As Olson and Shopes (1991) have also written in their research reflections, while oral history interviews allow for a unique relationship marked by friendship and collaboration, “it is important not to be seduced by this sense of mutuality and so avoid a critical evaluation of the interview process” (196). As knowledge that is co-created by both the interviewer and the interviewee, a complete, properly contextualized oral history requires critical self-reflection on the researcher’s part.

3.7. Women’s Subjectivities and Interpretation

Post-partition, the real work of rehabilitating women³⁸ fell to women; ranging from social workers who worked for the government to scores of volunteers who worked in “camps, in homes, in seva sadans and women’s service centers as doctors, teachers, trainers, wardens, camp commandants, counselors and companions” (Bhasin and

³⁸ Social workers were not only involved in recovery operations, but also played a significant role in the “rehabilitation” of unattached women who lived in recovery centers, ashrams and women’s services centers. They arranged their marriages to help “settle” them down (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 192), organized training and educational opportunities for those “who showed an aptitude for learning” (192), offered childcare services for women who worked and provided emotional support to “those who were more traumatized than others by their experience” (193).

Menon, 1998, 169). Partition created a whole cadre of women workers who came from predominantly urban, middle and upper middle-class backgrounds, often formally educated and belonged to a privileged social and economic stratum of the society (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 191). Since majority of the records related to the ashrams for unattached women³⁹ have either been lost or destroyed, social workers' detailed accounts on the actual process of rehabilitation are invaluable, illuminating some part of the process of social work (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 184).

Talking to these social workers, Bhasin, Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) realized that women social workers functioned very much within "patriarchal structures" of the society, often displaying "rather patriarchal attitudes and were influenced by urban middle-class conceptions of socially appropriate roles for women and men" (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 111). This raises a dilemma of interpretation – how are their roles to be understood? Did the women social workers really work for women – or for the patriarchal state?

One such confounding testimony was that of Krishna Thapa, a prominent social worker who recovered women for several years. Talking about the perils of "guarding" women living in Ashrams, she said,

"they (the women) would make friends with the policemen outside the Ashram and we wouldn't come to know!...But we were responsible for them, after all – tomorrow their families would come to claim them and they would be nowhere. Then we would be blamed for leading them astray, for taking money from suitors and marrying them off to the first man who came along" (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 180).

While underlying Thapar's preoccupation with getting her "girls" married, was a concern that these women might be exploited by being drawn into prostitution or be lured by men who thought of them as "available" for casual relationships, her "policing" of women followed suit with the state's overarching agenda of safeguarding women's honor.

In a similar account, another social worker, Begum Anis Kidwai, in her own book about recovery work (titled *In the Shadow of Freedom* published in 1949), "makes a moralistic distinction between those women who are generally abducted and those "who were by nature inclined towards irresponsible fun" implying that once women have had

³⁹ Unattached women refer to "abducted" women who were "recovered" by social workers but were not claimed by families.

the opportunity to live “freely”, they had no desire to return to a life of “decency and control” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 195). On the issue of women who gave birth while on the other side of the border, social workers often “worried about the future of these girls”, wondering “who will marry them?” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 84), falling back into the trap of age-old patriarchal constructs.

The testimony of another social worker, Kamlaben also reveals how social workers were ultimately operating as instruments of the state:

“...these woman – it was not a question of Hindu or Muslim, it was more a question of where they belonged. We had to return these girls to their people, whether they were Hindu or Muslim, they had to be given back to their parents, sons, and other relations...for these lakhs of village women security lies in the fact that they belong to a community, that they are with their husbands...if she goes to the country which is stipulated for her, she will at least have the protection of her government” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 88).

Here again, Kamlaben agrees with and reiterates the state’s agenda of restoring women to their rightful place, thus, robbing them of agency in deciding where they wanted to be located.

Quoting Dorothy Smith (1997), Sangster (1994) states that the “the standpoint of the interviewee should be the starting point for a feminist inquiry” (Sangster, 1994, 70), taking into account the realities of the interviewee’s relations with others: “her working, her thinking, feeling, everyday life experiences” (Sangster, 1994, 70). Linda Shopes (2018) has also argued that “social interaction, performed through language” (27) or intersubjectivity – is a continuous process of identity formation; consequently, “[t]he self in narrative becomes not an essence to be uncovered but a matter of narrative positioning in a specific context for a particular end” (27). Interpretive differences between the researcher and the narrator, therefore, are not simply a problem to be solved but fundamental to the active process of talking (27). Echoing these claims, Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000), therefore, try and interpret the actions of the social workers within the social and political circumstances of the time in which they operated. Yet while they acted as dutiful servants of the state in some cases, social workers, nonetheless, responded to women as women and often assisted in subverting the state’s agenda (Butalia, 2000, 111). Ultimately, they acted within their own frame of context – their interventions were an attempt to free women from their destitution by ensuring economic sufficiency and restoring women to a status of “social acceptability” by imposing restrictions on their sexuality and mobility (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 171).

While the enormity of the task of restoration and rehabilitation in a post-partition India does not excuse the workers from the responsibility of their actions of helping the Indian state in violently recovering women, at the same time, as Bhasin and Menon (1998) argue, “it would be unfair to judge them only from the perspective of today, a perspective that might discount their very real attempts at anchoring the women in their charge in a community of, and for women, one that they hoped would ease their transition to well-being” (192).

Given the complexity of women’s subjectivity then, how do we understand the commitment to treating women as subjects of their experiences? Chase and Bell (1994) argue that we need to emphasize women as narrators of their experiences as opposed to thinking of them as passive subjects: “by conceiving women as narrators, we treat them as active subjects in the telling and interpreting of their stories, even when the narrative itself includes experiences of subjection” (Chase and Bell, 1994, 79). Krishna Thapar’s zeal in getting women married honorably and Kamlaben’s insistence on restoring women to their rightful places in order to secure their futures indicate “how women’s agency is situated in a contradictory way, as both complicit and transgressive, in patriarchal structures” (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 199). While they may subscribe to an overarching ideology of patriarchy, as women who were most familiar with the ground reality, they understood the suffering of other women in their care and were able to challenge this ideology when required. As Bhasin and Menon (1998) add, it is difficult to make any decisive conclusions about the motives of social workers because their agency can only be understood in the particular contexts in which it existed (199).

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter drew on oral historians, anthropologists, ethnographers and postcolonial feminists and Indigenous scholars to illustrate the importance of research that is marked by: reflexivity on the part of researchers, the practices of storytelling and deep listening, sharing authority and collaboration in order to co-produce knowledge that challenges existing dominant narratives. In particular the chapter used these works to analyze the research of Indian feminists Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin (1998) and Urvashi Butalia (2000) who used oral histories along with other forms of research to generate knowledge with and from the perspective of women survivors of Partition. It

also highlights the challenges of mitigating the inherent power imbalance in an interview encounter and of collaborating with narrators throughout the oral history process.

The chapter argued that in their collection, presentation and interpretation of oral histories with women survivors of India's Partition, Bhasin, Menon and Butalia used an overarching feminist framework governed by the use of reflexive research practices of self-reflection, storytelling, listening, collaborating and sharing authority. By placing women's subjectivities, agency and experiences at the center of their analysis, they revealed the inherently gendered nature of the violence, displacement and subsequent rehabilitation that occurred in post-Partition India. The next chapter looks at digital oral history and examines the "1947 Partition Archive", a digital repository of oral history narratives collected by citizen-historians around the world. The objective is to contrast the feminist oral histories conducted by feminist publishers and activists Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) with the online memorialization of Partition memories as done by the "1947 Partition Archive".

Chapter 4.

Digital Oral History and the “1947 Partition Archive”

This chapter critically examines the “1947 Partition Archive”, an online collection of testimonies of Partition survivors that is housed by the Stanford University Library and supported entirely through crowdsourcing and “trust-funds” rather than university funding or research grants (The 1947 Partition Archive, n.d.). In this chapter, I argue how the ‘apolitical’ “Archive”, focused entirely on amassing as many personal testimonies as possible, fails to engage with the complexities of Partition politics, and instead presents a passive narrative of survivors’ experiences, detached from the larger socio-political context of the time. It offers little to no space for ethical considerations and fails to include its narrators in the co-production of knowledge.

Further, in order to illustrate that digital technologies can produce research that is “by, for and about” the research participants, the last section of the chapter contrasts the “1947 Partition Archive’s” research methodology with oral historian Steven High’s (2014) ‘Montreal Life Stories’⁴⁰ as a parallel counterproject to highlight the latter’s adherence to the principles of collaboration, co-production and sharing authority.

The chapter begins, though, by examining the practice of digital oral history and archiving, as well as current debates on digital infrastructure and political economy, the digital divide and the politics of technology since the “1947 Partition Archive”, as well as “Montreal Life Stories”, rely on digital technologies.

4.1. Context

Over the last two decades, new technologies in the growing digital landscape have opened up a wide range of possibilities for listening to stories, curating narratives, and presenting and disseminating them in the form of audio and video interviews (Boyd and Larson, 2014, 5). Through media outlets like Soundcloud and YouTube, oral histories can now be freely distributed and accessed instantaneously by global audiences (4). Housed in digital archives and libraries supported by repository and

⁴⁰ Refers to oral historian Steve High’s 2014 community-based oral history project that documented the stories of Montrealers displaced by war, violence, genocide and other such violations of human rights.

content management systems, they can be accessed by both scholars and general public (4). Further, due to extensive networked information and data, users and researchers can also connect oral histories to other relevant resources such as existing online archives and libraries in order to draw more meaningful and nuanced conclusions (5).

Drawing on the work of oral historian Steven High (2010), Margo Shea (2018) outlines the collaborative potential of new media, arguing that it can bring together different stakeholders including historians, colleagues and participants into greater contact with each other, even after the actual interview, in order to ensure commitment to participatory and democratic processes (Shea, 2018, 286). She further states that oral historian Michael Frisch (2006), too, has emphasized how, digital platforms have made it impossible to make a distinction between “text, photos, drawings, models, music, speech and visual information” (Shea, 2018, 286) since all such media is now encompassed within the realm of “digital information” that can not only be accessed in multiple ways, but also be easily searched, extracted, organized and integrated. Such a massive change in the technological environment has created opportunities for oral historians to further engage with audio and video materials even after the interview is over – researchers can re-play, annotate, analyze, select and even export clips and passages to create a narrative (Shea, 2018, 286). According to Frisch (2010) then, the internet has been instrumental in restoring the “orality” to oral history by making it easy to upload audio and video files to the web so that people can listen more attentively.

However, despite the sustained optimism about the revolutionary potential of the digital, several scholars (Boyd & Larson, 2014; Perks & Thomson, 2016; Sheftel and Zembrzycki, 2017; Larson, 2018) have pointed to the potential problems of working with its new technologies such as the rapid obsolescence of hardware and software with the rapid changes in digital infrastructure, ethical issues of access to personal accounts made by vulnerable individuals and problems of increased access to sensitive material. Further, because digital spaces such as electronic archives have enhanced speed, mobility and access to diverse cultures, concerns have also been raised not just about confidentiality, but also issues of intellectual property rights, ownership, censorship and democratic access (Perks and Thomson, 2016, 447). For instance, in their survey of US-based digital platforms working with oral testimonies, Larson (2001) and Brewster (2000) discovered that most websites lacked adequate online rights statements and site user

agreements, and failed to answer important questions of copyright and clearance (Perks and Thomson, 2016, 447).

Such concerns have led to numerous debates among oral historians, compelling them to reflect on their own motivations, research processes and authority in the digital realm. As oral historians Perks and Thomson (2016) have aptly summarized

“while oral history can play a major role in telling us more about our past and democratizing the study of history, it also encourages us to consider our own motives as collectors, curators and creators, and reflect on how we shape the evidence as it is interpreted, selected, shaped, shared, presented and ‘consumed’” (450).

According to them, oral historians are increasingly entering into debates about how global online access can be a double-edged sword in widening readership on one hand, and yet transforming the very nature of the ‘interview’ (447), as I also discuss below. Thomson (2007) has further argues that “the medium is part of the message” (50). This means that developing digital technologies, as Shea (2018) frames it, has the potential to transform the “ways in which people remember and narrate their lives” (286). Thomson (2007) further argues that over time, these technologies will also change how oral historians articulate what qualifies as memory and personal narrative, and the subsequent process of sharing and collecting life stories.

At the same time, however, as Sheftel and Zembryzcki (2017) have argued, that “while the field of oral history is full of promise about the digital revolution...there is relatively little critique of that promise” (95). Given that the technological landscape or the internet is masculinist, uncritical and overwhelmingly male-dominated (Larson, 2018), it becomes doubly important for feminist historians to engage in ethical questions of putting women’s testimonies online, open to public scrutiny (Larson, 2018, 298). These debates are further shaped by the concern that historically, “women’s words have...been silenced/ignored, interpreted/misinterpreted, appropriated/misappropriated, and otherwise mediated” (Larson, 2018, 298). Feminist scholars then ask two contradictory questions. How can digital technology be used to inform their theories, methods and research practices? And, at the same time, how does digital technology imitate the systems of domination that have historically marginalized and excluded women? (Sheftel, 2018, 279).

Informed by these questions, the section below examines some of the technological, methodological and ethical debates related to digital oral history, followed

by an analysis of the Stanford supported “1947 Partition Archive” in the context of these ongoing debates.

4.2. Digital Infrastructure and Issues of Access

Important questions regarding the ethics of doing oral history cannot be detached from the advanced digital infrastructure and the political economy within which such work is created and disseminated. While testimonies can be a powerful form of protest and even cathartic for its speakers and listeners, especially in the face of atrocities and trauma, Patterson (2013), in her own research on the production of testimony in South Africa, insists on the need of examining the political economy of such work. Giving the example of journalists, researchers and authors who have written and published extensively about the former apartheid state of South Africa, she calls such an unequal exchange of stories of suffering as “the political economy of extraction” (215) in which those working with testimonies benefit disproportionately from capitalizing on others’ stories to advance their own careers. Referring to the innumerable small budget, grassroots oral history projects with Holocaust survivors in an attempt to give them a ‘voice’, Ruth Linden (1993) has also referred to this commodification of memories as ‘remembrance industry’ “because it highlights the inherently politico-economic nature of the work of remembering, documenting, and commemorating” (73).

Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2017) have argued that the digital world is inevitably exploitative – it is grounded in “competitive private industry, which thrives on selling us products and commodifying everything from how we communicate with our loved ones, to how we read the news and absorb information, and even how we make decisions” (109). While the ‘digital’ presents an illusion of being available and open to everyone, often access to tools and resources on the internet means paying money (to buy a smartphone or an e-reader, for example) in order to become part of an elusive circle of “customers” (109). Thus, according to Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2017), putting oral histories online translates to their commodification because it involves practices such as hiring advertisers for publicity, mining data and selling personal information to advertising agencies. Since social media, as an industry, serves to benefit select corporations and individuals, the use of such platforms to disseminate oral histories makes the process all the more problematic. It comes into “conflict with oral history’s commitment to not owning or copyrighting stories and valuing a democratic approach to

collecting and sharing them” (110). Sheftel and Zembrzycki, therefore, caution oral historians to the realities of “tech capitalism” and the need to be aware of the implications of using digital tools in the light of oral history’s progressive ideals of collaboration and democracy.

Another concern is that of the digital divide. As Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2017) have argued, in advocating the potential of digital technologies’ wide-reaching dissemination, what oral historians often fail to realize is that it may end up excluding communities that require it the most (107). Larson (2018), here, emphasizes on the need to highlight that the audiences that are reached online are more limited and privileged than what researchers presume. While feminists strive for democracy and inclusion, a vast number of women, on a global level, do not have an online presence, largely due to lack of access (301). Only 30% of the world’s population can actually access the internet, Larson notes, of which women likely comprise a smaller number which is a fair assumption based on the fact that women tend to be politically and economically disadvantaged (302). Larson (2014) notes, “it is to those populations we have a responsibility when making material available” (161). She therefore urges the need to “recognize that our reach, however good our intentions, is limited” (Larson 2018, 302) which makes it all the more crucial to “get it right and work with women to make sure that their voices are amplified, honored, and appropriately presented” (302).

Zembrzycki (2013) too points to the need for using technology “in an informed manner, as a means to an end and not an end in itself” (99). Referring to the challenges she faced with creating her own website on the Ukrainian community in Sudbury, Canada, she writes:

“Everything that appears on the website had to be intuitive for people of various backgrounds. If those I interviewed, who often had little education, could not understand the content, then what was the point? Everything, from the website address, text, and layout, was discussed at length and tested before any content was uploaded to the Internet” (Zembrzycki, 2013, 105).

Therefore, feminist oral historians, specifically, address the ways in which the gender bias that exists in the realm of digital technology transfers itself into the discipline of oral history, a field that prizes itself for giving space to underrepresented voices. As oral historians steadily move towards integrating the use of digital media into their work, Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2017) insist on the need to be critical and address issues of

representation in order to maintain a commitment to the feminist ethics of collaboration, representation and social justice (110).

The task of digital archiving is further complicated by the cost associated with technology. Oral Historian Sherna Gluck (2014) has pointed to the challenge of rapidly changing technology leading to equipment becoming obsolete, and the added threat of audio and video files becoming corrupt, which thus requires planning and accruing funds in advance. Ultimately, the long-term stability of the digital infrastructure “depends on the availability of resources and/or institutional commitments both to maintain it and to adapt to new technologies” (255). Therefore, while online archiving can be liberating and democratizing, it does not come without ongoing costs, especially that of purchasing new technological hardware and software.

According to Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2017), critical and on-going discussions about digital tools and their use for oral history projects are necessary to maintain the integrity of the field. Since “speed itself is an ethos in the digital world” (112), it contradicts the slow and steady nature of the oral history process that involves a careful exercise in relationship-building, interviewing and analysis. The “hypercapitalist nature of the tech world” (Sheftel and Zembrzycki, 2017, 111) compels and allows digital archives to produce testimonies at a faster pace than their competitors, in turn, commodifying them. As Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2017) have phrased it, “technology seeks to move constantly onward and forget, while oral history wants to remember. And yet, as oral historians, we have increasingly come to need and value technology” (112). Oral historians then face the challenge of finding a way for both oral history and digital technology to co-exist.

A concern related to the issue of digital infrastructure is that of disseminating oral histories online. Feminist scholars (Parr, 2013; Shopes, 2009; Gluck, 2012), while championing the scope of digital oral history, have also advised that it be used like any other new technology – with caution. Both Parr (2013) and Gluck (2013) have emphasized the need to stay critical about the ethics involved with granting unrestricted public access to oral histories, questioning its democratizing and collaborative potential. For Gluck (2013), “unrestricted public access” raises a host of other questions such as “what control we have over dissemination and representation of our narrators voices” (Sheftel and Zembrzycki, 2017, 99) and it requires vigilance on the both the narrator’s and the interviewee’s part considering their exchange would be uploaded on the internet.

Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2017), too, argue that conducting oral histories in the digital context “complicates the building and maintaining of trust” (99), requiring both the interviewers and interviewees to be vigilant about the research process. Further, they’re also critical of tools such as hit and view counters as a way of measuring if, when and how people are engaging with digital oral histories – and if it is being done in a meaningful way, as intended by the researcher (104). They argue that “even if a collection is receiving many hits, we have no way of knowing if someone is switching between a dozen tabs in a browser while playing a life story, if it is a single person or a room full of people doing the listening, or if the interview is playing in the background as listener(s) simultaneously engage in another distracting activity” (104-105).

Oral historian and scholar Steve Cohen (2013) also points to the issue of conveying a rich, historical and cultural narration to a varied audience in the transient world of the internet (161). According to Cohen, most digital archives are not created for popular audiences, rather they are designed with the presumption that audiences will be able to relate to and extract meaning from the oral histories they hear and watch (161). Nevertheless, every visit to the website is counted as a “hit”, giving a false sense of the wide-reaching popularity of the material. Further, as Cohen writes, “the traditionally strict notion of *access*, providing just the archive and the materials, does not account for how the perspectives and history of each visitor, and his/her expectations, influence *access to meaning* and the monumental task of forming new beliefs and acquiring new knowledge” (162). Cohen thus outlines how the traditional ways of measuring audience “engagement” fail to account for the ways in which people, hailing from different backgrounds, assign meaning to the testimonies they listen to. Therefore, it is unclear if visitors are able to make meaningful connections between themselves and the stories they hear.

In their own work, Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2017) have also pondered the dilemma of listening with “slow, thoughtful consideration” (105) in the face of the disposable nature of the internet that is marked by fleeting interactions and distracted multi-tasking. They also bring up the question of the digital literacy of their audience, wondering if researchers can ever find a way to evaluate if audiences are able to meaningfully engage with the archive and its materials or if they spend seconds listening to a clip before scrolling further (105). Cohen (2013) argues for the need to formulate “new ways of accessing oral histories, ways that address the challenge of conveying

meaning to a varied, global audience so that more meaningful measures can be made than hours or web hits” (163). For this, he claims that we need to anticipate why people would value oral histories, listen to them and try and make connections between these stories and their own lives. Using these criteria as the building block for doing oral history histories in the digital age will transform “its purpose, teleology, and even how oral history is appreciated” (163).

Online availability and dissemination of oral histories also means a shift from transcribing to indexing and clipping. According to Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2017), the slow process of transcribing is instrumental in forcing oral historians to listen to the stories for details such as organization of narrative, silences and the use of language as opposed to simply extracting and categorizing information (101). However, the exercise of indexing and clipping, while still requiring researchers to listen closely, also means breaking down interviews into “manageable” clips; and therefore, “transcribing and clipping create different end products” (101). Interviews therefore turn into searchable, piecemeal data; and both oral historians and audiences can extract what they need, thus spending less time examining stories and listening to the meanings that narrators attach to them (101).

Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2017) argue that they’re not advocating against the use of indexing or questioning its usefulness, rather they are interested in addressing the implications of organizing oral history material in a way that reduces the process to simply that of documentation or information extraction. For them, interviews are not merely listened to so that they can be indexed into clips, rather they emphasize the importance of searching for “patterns, connections, silences, and other hard-to-index material” (102) in the interview. Clipping and indexing implies that researchers are primarily interested in compartmentalizing and extracting information instead of examining the subjectivity of the narrator which is typically evident in the entire encounter with the researcher, thus robbing them of the meaning they hold (102). Further, by searching through indexed terms, audiences are able to bypass descriptions and only make certain segments visible which in itself is hierarchical as it isolates information from its context (Gluck, 2014, 254), thus, only giving them a “sense” of the interview.

Therefore, by prioritizing the usability and utility of these stories, such practices fail to account for the complexity of life stories. Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2017) therefore

ask, “how does one index a silence? And how do we take note of repetitions and their meaning?” (103). Further, how can one deconstruct and index the dynamics of the interview process that is often marked by difficult moments, conflicts and inequalities? As Butalia (2000), Menon and Bhasin (1998) too discovered in their oral history projects, life stories are not linear or straightforward, rather they are complex, interconnected and jump back and forth in time; and how and what narrators reveal depends on their relationship with the researcher. While digital tools allow us to handle large amounts of data and make them easily presentable, it is imperative that in using them, oral historians “find space for the slow listening and interpretation that allow...interviews to be complex and difficult to clip or categorize” (Sheftel and Zembrzycki , 2017, 104). “Our challenge is to make our work both fast and slow at the same time” (101), state Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2017), envisioning a future where digital tools will allow researchers to focus on specific segments of the interview but without compromising on their commitment to slow and deep listening.

4.3. The “1947 Partition Archive”: A Cohesive Narrative of Suffering

The “1947 Partition Archive”, as indicated above, is an open access digital repository of oral testimonies collected by volunteers and housed by Stanford University Library. It was first established in 2011 by Dr. Guneeta Singh Bhalla who was inspired to interview Partition survivors after visiting the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum in 2008 (Enjeti, 2016). In the years that followed, she travelled back and forth to India to continue meeting survivors and recording their testimonies. In April 2011, she “registered the 1947 Partition Archive as a non-profit organization with the state of California and procured office space through the UC Berkeley Skydeck Accelerator program” (Enjeti, 2016). With a network of “550 volunteer ‘citizen historians’ who have devoted an estimated 60,000 hours in volunteer labour towards recording stories”, the Archive has a “tiny” paid staff “supported by interns who work tirelessly behind the scenes to support the 110+ Story Scholars who are and have contributed oral histories” (The 1947 Partition Archive, n.d.). Unlike a state sponsored public archive, the “1947 Partition Archive” is a “non-profit, non-governmental” organization supported entirely by “trust-funds” (“Mission”, n.d.), individual grants and donations (Enjeti, 2016). The homepage for the website displays four bright green tabs, giving the viewers donation options ranging from

\$25 to \$500, followed by a blank, grey tab that allows you to pick your own amount to donate (Homepage, the 1947 Partition Archive).

While, the “1947 Partition Archive” has been globally lauded for its humungous effort of collecting, memorializing and exhibiting Partition memories on an international level (Sengupta, 2013), Partition scholar Ravinder Kaur (2016), in her analysis of the “Archive” in her online publication ‘We Best Remember Partition When We Connect the Dots from 1947 to 1984 to 2002’, has pointed to the ‘apolitical’ nature of the testimonies collected and stored by the “Archive”. Singling out the “Archive’s” claim of focusing on the ‘human dimension’ of the Partition, she argues that “there is something deeply unsettling in this increasingly depoliticized notion of human suffering in this memorialization project. And more so when the memorialized past stands in isolation from the present” (Kaur, 2016). Here, she refers to the fact that unlike feminist oral historians who have drawn parallels between the communal violence of Partition and other, similar, religiously motivated forms of violence such as the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, the “Archive’s” documentation of the Partition fails to make these connections. As Kaur (2016) points out, referring to “1947 Partition Archive” and the Partition Museum in Amritsar⁴¹, “partition memorialization now marks it as a *unique* event set apart from other events of communal violence” which, while essential to any mobilization of collective identities, disconnects Partition violence from other such instances of communal violence in postcolonial India, including, as flagged by Kaur (2016), the Sikh riots of 1984, the Godhra incident of 2002⁴² and the violence in Muzzafarnagar in 2013.⁴³ Kushner (2006), in his own research on Holocaust memorialization, has also pointed out how big archives, such as the Spielberg Foundation video archive, distort survivors accounts in order to create a cohesive narrative (288) that are easier to listen to and understand for the audiences. As also stated earlier, this production of uniform narratives leads to the commodification of testimonies.

⁴¹ Established in Amritsar, Punjab in 2016 by Lady Kishwar Desai Trust Punjab in collaboration with the Heritage and Tourism Promotion Board, Government of Punjab. It “endeavors to depict the Partition as it was experienced by the People” (Museum, The Partition Museum) through its collection, archiving and showcasing of Partition artefacts.

⁴² The Godhra incident of 2002 refers to the nation-wide outbreak of violence after a train full of Hindu pilgrims returning from a religious ceremony at the disputed Babri Mosque in Ayodhya was burnt in February 2002. Over a 1000 people died in the riots and 2500 were injured (BBC UK, 2005).

⁴³ This refers to the communal violence between Hindus and Muslims in Muzzafarnagar, Uttar Pradesh that resulted in the death of 62 people (Hindustan Times, 2013).

In the context of the Partition, Kaur (2016) gives two potential reasons behind the “Archive’s” failure to draw connections: first, acknowledging that these incidences of human suffering are inevitably connected would mean “recognizing the inherently political and contentious nature of violence – the political patronage, police complicity, the organized operators on the ground, the otherwise decent people who decide to overlook brutality, and delayed justice in court rooms” (Kaur, 2016). Second, by keeping the narrative ‘apolitical’, the “Archive” steers clear on providing any commentary on the role of the state and its institutions in the Partition violence. Further, by pinning Partition to a point in time that has now passed, it allows us, the viewers, to “collectively project our anger and despair away from the present instances of collective violence” (Kaur, 2016). Such a narrativization of the Partition allows an “objective” public discussion of the chilling mass violence, death and displacement that accompanied it. As Kaur (2016) writes, “Partition has come to occupy a safe zone where horror at mass murders and rapes can be expressed aloud without attracting retaliation.” However, by freezing the horrific violence and trauma in a space in time, the “1947 Partition Archive” does a disservice to the narratives of the survivors, especially since the need to remember and memorialize Partition emerged after the communal violence of 1984 and the subsequent sectarian conflicts that have continued to organize life in India.

4.3.1. Examining the “1947 Partition Archive”

As also outlined in the previous chapter, feminist oral historians, in their work with women, have always emphasized the voices of narrators, highlighting ideas of deep listening and the gendered ways in which women talk about their experiences (Sheftel and Zembrzycki, 2017). For feminist scholars, the precedent to any kind of interviewing work with women requires “the establishing of trust and a willingness to be reflexive about all aspects of the research” (97) – tasks that take patience and hard work. By embedding their research within reflections on the complexities of their own oral history projects, also referred to as “corridor talk”, feminist scholars (as also mentioned in Chapters 1 and 3) have transformed the methodology of feminist oral history. They have compelled readers to critically “contemplate the very real circumstances—uncomfortable and difficult moments, silences, interpretive conflicts, ethics of inequality, and the distance created by political differences—in which stories are told” (Sheftel and Zembrzycki, 2017, 98). By revealing the particularities of interviewing women and what

sharing authority in such a context means, feminist oral historians have strived to adopt “collaborative, democratic and humanistic approaches” (98) in order to mitigate power imbalances by enabling democratic research spaces and forming respectful relationships with their participants. Rooted in an ideology of friendship, the process of conducting interviews, “which often involves many telephone calls, informal meetings, tea breaks, and impromptu dinners” (98) is as important as the end outcome of collecting oral histories. Calling oral history ‘messy’, Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2017) defend the seemingly chaotic nature of the process because it involves human emotions, complex research relationships and multiple subjectivities. It is through this feminist lens, and the principles and practices employed in Steven High’s 2007 “Montreal Life Stories” that I examine the “1947 Partition Archive” in order to explore the bigger question of what implications the digital practice of oral history, marked by indexing, clipping and online sharing, have on oral history’s commitment to engage in a humanistic, sustained and collaborative approach to research.

4.3.2. Collecting Testimonies

An example of a digital archive that aligns with the principles of feminist oral history is the 2007 ‘Montreal Life Stories’ project, headed by oral historian Steven High. A collaborative community-university project, it was formulated by a group of local scholars and community activists who dedicated themselves to the task of collecting and understanding stories of survivors of displacement and forced migration, fleeing from war, genocide and other forms of human rights violations (Sheftel and Zembrzycki, 2010, 163; High, 2014, 6). Utilizing oral history’s potential for educating communities about the reverberating repercussions of large-scale violence, the project relied on life story interviewing and collective storytelling to ask questions of “how large-scale violence is experienced and remembered...when, where, and why are particular stories about mass violence told, and by whom?” (High, 2014, 6-7).

Unlike the “1947 Partition Archive” whose research and interviewing process is neither outlined on the website nor documented in a separate publication, the ‘Montreal Life Stores’ project has been thoroughly analyzed and reflected upon by the researchers that were involved in the project (Sheftel and Zembrzycki, 2010) (High, 2014). As High (2014) explains in his book *Oral History at the Crossroads*, a collection of essays that offer detailed reflections on the methodology and ethics of the ‘Montreal Life Stories’

project, the research initiative followed a humanistic approach committed to reducing the distance between the researcher and the research participant. This was done through the practice of “sharing authority” that went beyond collaboration in the interview to “cultivation of trust, the development of collaborative relationships, and shared decision making” (High, 2017, 10). Stating that it is a process that takes time and patience, High, quotes Linda Shopes (2002) in calling oral history “long-haul” work. Spanning a period of seven years (2005-2012), the ‘Montreal Life Stories’ project followed the CURA (Community–University Research Alliance) model of conducting research enshrined in the principle of knowing with others as opposed to knowing about them. It was aimed at rethinking and challenging the authority of the researcher in making interpretive and publishing decisions (High, 2017, 9). It asks important questions such as: “who is this research for?” (High, 2014, 295) and “who does it benefit?” (296), insisting that collaboration and true partnership needs to be underlined by “reciprocity, mutual benefit, and peer relationships” (295).

In formulating the framework for the ‘Montreal Life Stories’ project, High and his team followed a “humanistic approach” where all of its participants, regardless of their role or prior experience, were trained in life history interviewing and were required to conduct at least one interview (Sheftel and Zembrzycki, 2010, 193). Describing the process in his book, High (2014) writes, “we wanted every team member to share this experience, hearing for her or himself the life stories of refugees in Montreal...we wanted team members to *feel* these stories in their chests” (23). The emphasis, therefore, was on establishing a project-wide methodological foundation of collaboration where everyone had a chance to directly engage with the interviewing process. The training tools, that took eight months to develop, included a comprehensive training manual and a mandatory six-hour course (High, 2014, 267). During the training process, interviewers were encouraged to “build meaningful relationships with their interviewees over multiple sessions” (Sheftel and Zembrzycki, 2010, 194), spending between four to twenty hours with the interviewees. Led and directed primarily by the narrators, the interviews were premised on the notion of collaboration and shared authority – both during the actual interview and within the overall research process. Writing that they were “focused on knowing and learning with, not from, interviewees” (194), Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2010) assert that interviews were designed as spaces where scholars and survivors worked together to understand the holistic life stories of the narrators and how they fit into the larger narrative of the community.

Keeping in mind that the interviews touched upon painful experiences of war, displacement and genocide, the team spent a considerable amount of time in formulating ways to mitigate potential emotional trauma and suffering (High, 2014, 267). A workshop was organized with “fifteen cultural psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, and social workers who specialize in trauma” (268); and a post-workshop. It was agreed that each interviewee⁴⁴ would receive a list of resources along with the copy of consent form. Interviewees were told not to adopt a stance of medical diagnosis but rather work with “an ethic of caring and emotional support” (268). The interview was thus seen as a regenerative tool for the interviewees as opposed to a solution or a magical healing cure. Interviews were also designed to be multi-session to allow for survivors to work through their emotions along with follow-up meetings if needed. This extended interviewing methodology was rooted in the idea of developing a “trusting, collaborative relationship” that is marked by “sustaining conversation” (268) over a period of time.

The project also was also concerned about the mental health of its interviewers, which is why each interviewing team had two people in it, allowing for mutual support and someone to debrief with after the interview (High, 2014, 269). Interviewers were also required to write mandatory written reflections (22) and attend project-wide debriefing sessions where they had the opportunity to discuss and learn from shared experiences (270). All team members had access to each other’s interview reflections, allowing for the formation of a repository of interviewing experiences that future interviewees could refer to (23). However, according to High (2014), what made a substantial difference in generating a sense of solidarity was the existence of a physical space, in particular, the Oral History Centre at Concordia University. Arguing that “nothing replaces face-to-face collaboration” (22), High asserts that the space served as a space for team members to interact with each other, make use of the interviewing studio as well as the recording equipment and facilities, and attend workshops (22).

Turning to the “1947 Partition Archive”, this section will now analyze its research methodology and the extent to which it aligns with the principles of feminist oral history. While the “Archive’s” website does not offer a sustained reflection on its research methodology, training and interview process, the website briefly summarizes what is expected from the interview (“The interview process”, n.d.). The “collection” of

⁴⁴ In his book *Oral History at the Crossroads* (2014), High consistently refers to his narrators and “interviewees” and the oral historians are referred to as “interviewers”.

testimonies by the “1947 Partition Archive”, in contrast to the ‘Montreal Life Stories’ project, relies entirely on volunteers, potentially from anywhere in the world, who self-select the individuals they want to interview. Since the “Archive’s” website only lists one staffed office in Berkeley, California, the only way through which volunteers living in other parts of the world can contact the “Archive” is via the internet. Therefore, unlike the ‘Montreal Life Stories’ project where interviewers had a physical space to meet fellow oral historians and talk about their experiences, the “Archive” offers no such platform for the interviewers to meet each other, debrief and offer feedback and support.

Rather, in order to train its volunteers, the “Archive” offers a mandatory, online two-hour workshop or webinar that anyone can pre-register for (“Collect Stories, n.d.) online, with date and time slots available in Pacific Standard Time. Additionally, the volunteers are provided with the ‘Citizen Historian Training Packet’⁴⁵ – a detailed guide with instructions on collecting stories. Volunteers are also provided with two questionnaires or interview field packets⁴⁶ – separate for those who migrated during the Partition and those who didn’t (“Oral history documents”, n.d.). Other documents include a release form, a post interview questionnaire and an information card that is left with the interviewees (“Oral history documents”, n.d.).⁴⁷ Interviewers are also required to submit a summary of the interview that accompanies the digital copy of their interview exchange. Completing the workshop and reviewing all the documents, especially the training packet, are mandatory steps to qualify as a ‘Citizen Historian’ (The 1947 Partition Archive, n.d.).

In order to understand how the “Archive” recruits and trains its citizen historians, I took the two-hour online training oral history workshop on 28th September, 2019. The following section offers an analysis of the workshop and the ‘Oral History Documents’ available to aspiring citizen historians in order to gain an insight into the “Archive’s” training and interviewing process.

⁴⁵ The ‘Citizen Historian Training Packet’ can be access on the “Archive’s” website at www.1947partitionarchive.org/sites/default/files/Citizen_Historian_training_packet_March_2019.pdf.

⁴⁶ The Interview Field Packet with questionnaire for migrants and The Interview Field Packet with questionnaire for non-migrants can be found on the “Archive’s” website at www.1947partitionarchive.org/Oral_History_Documents.

⁴⁷ The release form, post interview questionnaire and the Archive Information Card can be downloaded from the ‘Oral history documents’ section on the “Archive’s” website at www.1947partitionarchive.org/Oral_History_Documents.

The workshop began with the coordinator, Rumaila, introducing herself as joining the workshop “on behalf of the 1947 Partition Archive” but offered no further information about herself, her educational qualifications or prior training, or her position within the “Archive”. The participants (close to twenty in number) on the Webinar were then asked to briefly introduce themselves and outline why they wanted to record stories. It quickly became clear that majority of the participants were from different parts of India and Pakistan; and were primarily students or individuals wanting to interview their family members who had survived the Partition. We were also informed that our activity was being monitored to ascertain each individual’s level of participation. The seminar began with a brief outline on what it aimed to cover within the two hours: ranging from an introduction to the “Archive” to preparing, setting up and conducting the interview and finally submitting the video files. It should be noted that all of the communication was done in English, even though some of the participants struggled to speak the language. Another notable issue was the lack of instructions on how to use GoToWebinar – an online conference software that was used to conduct the workshop. At least four people had difficulty unmuting themselves to use the mic feature and no prior instructions were given on using the platform.

The workshop coordinator described ‘citizen historians’ as “ordinary people” who are “serious, caring, patient, curious and proactive” individuals. They varied in age, the youngest of them being 13 years old and the oldest being 80. The coordinator seemed to be following a written script in describing the “mission” of the “Archive” which she said was to “document, preserve, share eyewitness accounts of South Asia’s 1947 Partition.” In an attempt to perhaps identify with the workshop participants, the coordinator implied that just like them, the “Archive” is made of “people who are passionate about history” who come “from many countries, backgrounds, religions economic groups and ethnic groups.”

Giving some background information on the extent of Partition violence, both in terms of causalities and scope, the coordinator referred to the historical events of Holocaust and Hiroshima to state that there has been no similar systematic documentation of the Partition until 2010, when the “Archive” started its work. However, this appears to be a gross oversight since several oral history projects with survivors of Partition have been conducted throughout the 1990s and late 2000s, as mentioned in the previous chapter of my thesis. Workshop participants were then redirected to a nine-

part BBC documentary on YouTube and a list of books for further context on the Partition.

While there were some opportunities to ask questions, the coordinator failed to engage with the workshop participants or initiate any discussion/back-and-forth, possibly due to time constraints. For instance, at one point the workshop coordinator asked the attendees the following question: “Why are you doing this? Why do you want to collect stories of people who have witnessed Partition?” which prompted a number of interesting responses. One participant said that they wanted “to understand how art and culture move through oral histories” by doing primary research themselves through the use of oral history methodology. Another respondent said that they came from a “literature background” and were interested in “looking at things from different perspectives” which can be done through oral history as it presents history from people’s point of view as opposed to the dominant narrative. While these responses could have led to rich discussions on people’s own motivations and positionalities in doing oral history, the coordinator simply thanked the attendees for their responses and moved on with the workshop.

Referring to the pre-interview phone call, the workshop coordinator described it as a way to “break the ice”, explain to the interviewees what the process entails, calling it an opportunity to decide on a time and place to meet with the interviewee. For the actual interview, both the workshop coordinator and the training packet further advise the interviewers to “make a human connection” with their interviewees before setting up the camera gear, possibly within the first 15-20 minutes. What such a connection would entail is not elaborated on. Rather, the oral historians are ambiguously urged to “let the person see that you care about him or her” (Citizen Historian Training Packet, 2019). In contrast, reflecting on the ‘Montreal Life Stories’ project, Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2010) emphasize the need to establish trust and build a relationship by meeting their narrators to conduct a pre-interview where they would “explain the project and address the process of informed consent” (196). Using these encounters as an opportunity to sense how their notion of interview as a “shared space” (196) would play out, they used these pre-interviews to find a common ground with the interviewer and clarify any doubts about the consent process. They gave the example of an interviewee who, from prior, possibly negative, experiences of being interviewed, was highly suspicious of their project and the idea of letting strangers into their home. Spending hours with this interviewee, going

over the consent process, both authors questioned their own positionality in the interview process - "Who were we? What credibility did we have? With a well-written consent form in hand, we could guarantee certain ethical behaviors, but not that the interview would be worth their while" (196). Therefore, not only was this a useful exercise in understanding the nature of their own interview process, but it also made them realize just how much they demanded of the interviewee in sharing intimate details of their life over hours of storytelling sessions (198).

Going back to the workshop, a considerable amount of time during the "Archive's" online session was spent on going over the logistics of the interview process. Participants were told to procure their own equipment including a digital video recorder, microphone, tripod, extra batteries, digital still camera, headphones, laptop and extra recording media. Unlike the 'Montreal Life Stories' project that provided its interviewers with a physical studio space, equipment and training (High, 2014), the "Archive" does not provide its citizen historians with any technical assistance or training in acquiring and using technical equipment.

In both the workshop instructions and the packet guidelines (Citizen Historian Training Packet, 2019), there is a noticeable emphasis on capturing high quality footage and sound. Both offer an in-depth discussion about camera angles, light, background and noise-reduction. A point that stood out to me was the insistence on a minimalistic background. 'Citizen historians' were told to be mindful of not including the room or its elements in the portrait photos they captured – these were called "distracting" and dismissed as unnecessary. However, I believe that it would be a disservice to the overall narrative if the participants are isolated from their surroundings. It homogenizes their individual stories, reducing them to the terms of the "Archive's" mass-produced data. The rooms and spaces that the narrators decorate and occupy gives us an insight into their everyday lives and can be instrumental in documenting fuller life stories. According to Larson (2018), while digital and audio dissemination of interviews allows listeners to pick up on visual and verbal cues such as sarcasm and uncertainty that are easily missed in text, there are two aspects of the interview that remain largely undocumented when done digitally: "the specific context of the oral history event itself, which...falls more in the personal than political realm; and the larger cultural context, which tends more to the political" (300). Larson therefore emphasizes the need for sufficiently and richly contextualizing the narratives being presented, also pointing out the problematic

nature of apolitical, non-contextualized stories (2018, 300). Kushner (2006), in his analysis of Jewish holocaust testimonies, gives the example of the investigative work done by the historian Mark Roseman (1996) with the German Jewish survivor Marianne Ellenbogen (Kushner, 2006, 287). Similar to the methodology used by Butalia (2000), and Bhasin and Menon (1998), Roseman places Marianne's testimony alongside "a range of contemporary and later legal sources (diaries, letters, memoirs, records from the resistance and the Nazis, and postwar restitution documents) to reveal the complex layers of memories in the construction of her life story" (Kushner, 2006, 287). This allows for a multi-dimensional, layered and contextualized rewriting of history. However, as seen in the "Archive's" practice of stripping its narratives of context, and as Larson (2018) too, has observed, more than often, in digital oral histories, these details are missing (300).

The workshop coordinator further insisted that interviewers look for "possible B-roll opportunities" which may include a 10-minute footage of the participant "doing something casual", perhaps showcasing a talent or skill such as singing or pottery. Again, it appears that the interview guidelines are geared towards commercialization of these narratives by producing more marketable videos that audiences find entertaining enough to keep on watching. The workshop coordinator specifically asked the participants to refrain from filming anything that doesn't have the interviewee in the frame – so footage of the participant's street for example, or any footage of the interviewer was discouraged. In fact, the interviewers were urged to make themselves "as invisible as possible" both in the actual interview and on any kind of film.

While the "Archive" reiterates that their interview is an "assisted narration" which means that the interviewees must do "90% of the talking" (Citizen Historian Training Packet, 2019), and advises the interviewers to "keep their moral judgements" out of the interview, interviewers are even prohibited from coughing, sneezing and making encouraging sounds to preserve the superior quality of the video footage. Nowhere on the website is there a section for interviewers to reflect on the interview process, or talk about their own experience, hesitations or doubts; nor is there a section for biographies of team members, interns or story scholars. Such a complete erasure of the interviewer's presence from the interview – a shared encounter between the two subjects – takes away from the opportunity for the interviewer to be reflexive and analyze their own motivations and observations, as well as robs the analysis of how their thoughts, ideas,

background and personal views shaped the interview encounter. In contrast, the 'Montreal Life Stories' project, encouraged interviewers to make connections with their interviewees. As Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2010) write, "we revealed details about ourselves organically, as one would in any other budding relationship" (194). Further, often, the interviewer and the interviewee either already knew each other or had a pre-existing relationship in some capacity (72). For them, "this shared history and culture deepened the dialogue, making it possible for some interviewees to tell their very difficult stories for the first time" (72).

Further, both the "1947 Partition Archive's" oral history workshop and the training packet emphasize that interview questions have to be asked in a chronological order in order to conduct a life story with the participant. However, such an approach undermines the overlapping and non-linear nature of life stories, as discussed in the previous chapter. Additionally, the workshop coordinator urged the interviewers to be "objective" and "focus on the strengths" of their interviewee if the conversation takes an emotional turn. She insisted that interviewers should not "deviate from the topic" to make their interviewees feel better but, at the same time, she adds that complimenting the interviewees by saying "that you are very strong" is an acceptable way to keep their "morale" up. Parr (2010) cites anthropologist Liisa Malkki (1997), who worked with Hutu exiles from Rwanda and Burundi, in advising that one should simply listen "without pretensions to being authenticating experts, investigators, or inquisitors who ask hard questions" (7) by adopting "a caring form of vigilance" (7). By redirecting the interviewee to focus on the "positive" when they are narrating a particularly disturbing experience, could not only undermine the severity or be dismissive of their trauma, but also interrupt a potential moment of grieving.

Further, the workshop guidelines also discourage the presence of or any engagement with the participant's family members during the interview. They are not allowed to sit next to the narrator, not even for emotional or moral support. With regards to family members, the training packet outlines the following:

"If there are other observers and people in the room, avoid eye contact with them, as this usually tempts them to speak up and interrupt the interview. It is best to NOT engage anyone other than the interviewee. Make this clear to everyone before the interview" (Citizen Historian Training Packet, 2019, 10).

While this is done to ensure that the focus remains on the interviewee, it is also a missed opportunity to perhaps gain further context and details about the story being told.

As Butalia (2000) stated, Partition was a familial experience for a number of survivors, which is why many of her interviews turned into collective narrations. As Butalia notes in her research (see Chapter 3), interjections made by family members may not only be useful sources of information, but they also offer unique insights into the family dynamic within which the interviewee exists and formulates their views. It also shapes how they remember and recount the past. To detach them from this context is to tell an incomplete story.

Further, as mentioned above, unlike the 'Montreal Life Stories' project, the "Archive" fails to provide any meaningful tools for its citizen historians in terms of debriefing after the interview, especially if the stories shared are particularly intense and deal with heavy subjects. Rather, the workshop coordinator, in urging the participants to remember that "you are not yourself when conducting an interview. You're an agent of history – without bias, without ego", reinforced the patriarchal notion that writing 'History' is an objective exercise (as also discussed in Chapter 1). Interviewers are thus stripped of all subjectivity and presence from the encounter with no opportunity to understand how they influence and impact the interview process. It should also be noted that while interviewees are urged to remain receptive, positive and engaging during the interview, even advised to conduct multiple sessions if required, they are, at the end of the day, 'volunteers' who are neither provided with equipment nor financially remunerated for their work.

4.3.3. Lack of Collaboration

For Larson (2014), in order to win the trust of a community, researchers need to go beyond their own disciplinary needs to "see what the project participants hope to get out of their involvement" (163). She recommends a stance of on-going involvement with the communities being researched by inviting their inputs on the interpretation, presentation and contextualization of the project. The objective is to understand people's desire in the way they would like to be represented – in their own words, design or visual preferences – and what holds meaning for them (163).

With regards to the issue of representation and authority, the "1947 Partition Archive" invites minimal involvement from its interviewees. Referring to the interviewer's involvement in the post-interview process, the oral history workshop coordinator mentioned a fact-checking email that is sent to the interviewers to go over the accuracy

of the material shared. They are not, however, allowed to view the final video or make any suggestions or recommendations before it is uploaded on to the website because, as she mentioned, that would be a “lengthy process”. As also mentioned above, not only does the “Archive” exclude its narrators from the post-interview interpretation process, it also fails to provide them with any counselling resources or other means of support which is especially problematic, in the light of the traumatic nature of the testimony being shared.

On the other hand, the ‘Montreal Life Stories’ project, following Rina Benmayor’s (2008) assertion about digital storytelling’s potential to “integrate critical thought and creative practice” (High, 2014, 203), used the digital mode as a way to share interpretive authority with its research participants. Instead of extracting stories from the interviews and producing them digitally, High (2014) chose to work with the interviewees to select clips that spoke to them. He writes, “after the interview, we ask survivors what story would you like to tell the world? This question forms the starting point of the digital story-making process” (205). Embedded in a framework of community and collaboration, digital storytelling was thus used to position oral history interviews as “a catalyst for public dialogue and political action” (203) by getting the stories “out there”. This gave way to deep and powerful narratives that would potentially resonate with the audience. An example of this was the extended digital story-project titled “Disrupted Childhood”⁴⁸ (High, 2014, 207). The team identified six child survivors from a range of refugee cultural communities who were already involved in the project and decided to present their stories. Each interviewer met with a maximum of two prospective interviewees to go over the initial selection of narratives and was asked to reflect over their process in a presentation (207). While the project birthed some powerful stories, in their critical assessment of the research process⁴⁹, the interviewers revealed that even though

⁴⁸ “Disrupted Childhood” a thirty-minute digital story was created in response to the National Film Board’s invitation to the Montreal Life Stories team to screen an extended digital story on the twentieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The public screening of the digital story saw a huge audience including two of the six child survivors who were interviewed. Both of them were also among the panel of the discussions that followed the screening (High, 2014, 207).

⁴⁹ To reflect more on the process of interviewing and creating the subsequent digital story, the interns who had interviewed the survivors were asked to prepare a workshop for the International Day for Sharing Life Stories on 16 May 2009 to which end they presented a PowerPoint proposal to discuss ideas that would allow them to extend the notion of co-creation of knowledge to subsequent stages of the digital story making process (High, 2014, 207).

interviewees were the tellers of their own stories in the beginning, their authority faded as the story progressed. By the end of the storytelling sessions, they were a “facsimile” (High 2014, 207) of themselves. The interns then recommended conducting workshops after recording the interview to provide a space for “reciprocal ethnography,” whereby interviewees are engaged in the interpretation of their own interviews” (207). The draft digital story could then be replayed for the interviewees and revised as per their suggestions. They also tabled the idea of “shared authority coordinators” (208) to guide each interviewee through the interview process. Therefore, they argued for an increased transparency in the post-production process to enhance the telling of their histories. Following their suggestions, a “framework document” was created to outline this approach to digital story creation (208). However, “because all of this was so time-consuming, the project produced only a limited number of collaboratively produced digital stories” (209). Nevertheless, because the emphasis was on the quality of narratives as opposed to the quantity, the model of the project allowed for an authentic sharing of authority with its narrators.

Kushner (2006), in his own research on Jewish Holocaust testimonies, has articulated the importance of working with “smaller rather than larger numbers of individuals but enabling, through the greater self-reflectivity of those collecting and utilizing the material, the richness of testimony, including its contradictions and mythologies, to come to the fore” (291-292). While life story narratives are seemingly chaotic and ‘messy’, they do justice to the realities of how the Holocaust was experienced on an everyday basis (292). Referring to the increasing commercialization of Holocaust commemoration, he warns against the dangers of presenting “a simplistic morality tale; one devoid of its specific historic context, which particularizes when, where, and who was affected” (292). Much like the distorted documentation of Holocaust narratives, in failing to capture the nuance of individual experiences that hold meaning for their narrators in exchange for a polished, cohesive narrative, the “Archive” gives a misleading representation of the Partition.

4.3.4. Interviewing and Listening

According to psychologist and oral historian Henry Greenspan (2010), “a good interview is a process in which two people work hard to understand the views and experiences of one person: the interviewee” (viii). It is therefore a collaborative space to

which the interviewer "brings questions, training, and some 'distance' [from the memories that are shared] and the interviewee . . . brings life experience and storytelling" (viii). According to High (2014), a dialogic interview between the researcher and the research participant, grounded in partnership and collaboration, can be a unique source of information if both parties involved are committed to understanding the thoughts and experiences of the interviewee (7). It is based on these interpretations of what an "interview" means that I examine two publicly available interviews conducted with women survivors by the "1947 Partition Archive" in this section. My analysis is further informed by the work of feminist oral historians and their emphasis on sharing authority and reflexivity in the interview encounter (as elaborated on in the previous chapter). It also draws from Steven High's (2014) principles of collaborative co-production as outlined by him in the Montreal Life Stories project.

So far, the "Archive" has amassed "8000 memories" across "400+ cities in 12 countries" with the goal of reaching "10,000 families" by next year (Homepage, n.d.). Of these testimonies, 50 interviews are currently publicly accessible via the Stanford Library Archive while the remaining are in the process of being published online. While the website gives no background information on the 'citizen historians', it is also unclear at the moment as to how many of the testimonies are by women. The oral histories that I am examining were conducted with women survivors of the Partition. They include: Sushiri Motilal's (79 years old) interview conducted by Zain Alam in November 2013 in Lucknow⁵⁰, India and Leela Mamtani's (87 years old) interview conducted by Prakhar Joshi in New Delhi, India in January, 2014.⁵¹ I selected these interviews based on the following criteria: they include experiences of both migrant and non-migrant women, are in Hindi language and were conducted in India. It should be noted that both interviewers identify as men whereas as both interviewees are women.

According to Kovach (2010), in-depth interviews and open-ended questions not only allow people to "relate their stories in a holistic fashion...not fragmented by a structured interview process" (99), but they also give researchers the space to nudge the conversation in a certain direction without taking over completely. Further, as also

⁵⁰ Sushiri Motilal's interview (conducted by Zain Alam) can be found on the Archive's website at <https://exhibits.stanford.edu/1947-partition/catalog/pq164zk2305>

⁵¹ Leela Mamtani's interview (conducted by Prakhar Joshi) can be found on the Archive's website at <https://purl.stanford.edu/cc041bc4311>

discussed in Chapter 3, Indigenous scholar Robina Thomas (Brown and Strega, 2016) says that, for her own research, she met participants informally over coffee and tea, refraining from treating it as an “interview” and structuring the process; but rather learning, listening, recording and facilitating (247). Such an approach allows for a storytelling experience rooted in genuine conversation and friendship. The “Archive’s” interviewing practices, on the other hand, while in theory followed a model of ‘assisted narration’, were highly structured in practice, as evidenced from the workshop, and followed a rigid pattern of setting up equipment and following an interview script, sparing 20 minutes for niceties and “getting to know” the interviewer.

For his interview with Sushiri Motilal, a Hindu woman originally from Jammu who relocated to Lucknow after Partition violence, Mr. Alam strictly follows the questionnaire (see footnote 46) and begins by asking questions about her family history. However, these questions are too open-ended and unstructured, causing the interviewee to give abrupt, confused responses. This becomes evident in the following transcript:

- Z: “Do you know anything about your family history?”
S: “What kind of family?”
Z: “Like....” (trails off, possibly trying to think of a specific term)
S: “My father?”
Z: “What your father or grandfather or great-grandfather used to do, their traditions, their traits...”

Sushiri then goes on to give a standard narration of the city in which her father lived and the job he was employed in until his retirement. The interviewer fails to engage by asking follow-up questions and instead asks, “and...do you know if you have any family history...can you trace your great-grandfather, his grandfather and so on...” Sushiri simply shakes her head in refusal and says “no”. In rigidly following the script and asking Sushiri to remember and recite her entire family history instead of focusing on one aspect of her life or the topics which she introduces, the interviewer is missing the opportunity to learn more about the interviewee’s life. As Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2010) also discovered in their interviews for the ‘Montreal Life Stories’ project, interviewees tend to give a “factual, narrative recitation of their Holocaust experiences” (200) because that is what they anticipated the interviewer to be looking for in the interview. However, unlike the “Archive’s” interviewers, after sensing a pattern in the interviews they conducted, Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2010) learned to adapt their methodology: “often interviews would start with more formal recitations of memories, and we would build from

there. We listened for their cues regarding what they felt was important to talk about and tried to go deeper from that starting point” (200).

In talking to oft-interviewed Holocaust survivors about what they defined as “real interviews”, Greenspan and Bolkosky (2006) discovered that interviewees valued it when narrators were able to find a rhythm. In “asking the right thing at the right time” (441), interviewers exhibit sensitivity, attentiveness and prior knowledge. This was clearly lacking in both of the “Archive’s” interviews. In case of Joshi’s interview with Mrs. Mamtani, he failed to follow a conversational narrative and instead, jumped from one question to another. In one instance, when Mrs. Mamtani is talking about her passion for singing – and how, as a TV and radio artist, her songs and interviews are often broadcasted internationally – the narrator abruptly switches the conversation to her village, despite her being clearly keen and interested in talking about her singing career. In another instance, the interviewer, in asking her about her schooling, casually poses a rather ambiguous question about the status of woman in her village: “were they oppressed, dominant or free?” She laughs and responds, “...my elder sisters weren’t allowed to go out without covering their head nor were they allowed to talk to strangers.” Again, the interviewer fails to ask Leela about how she felt about these restrictions. According to Anderson et. al. (1987), “if we want to know how women feel about their lives, have to allow them to talk about their feelings as well activities” (111). We have to ask them how certain events made them feel and what meaning they hold for them (Anderson et. al., 1987, 109). In this case, however, the interviewer reverts back to the questionnaire and continues asking her about her village. In their research about the nature of “real interviews”, Greenspan and Bolkosky (2006) have been informed of what survivors refer to as “hodgepodge interviews” (443) i.e. interviews that are poorly organized, uninformed and usually conducted by students, high school teachers or a religious entity of some kind (443). Such interviews, much like the “Archive’s”, either lack direction and there is little effort by the interviewer to dive deeper into the details of the narrative, or they are overstructured and not adapted to the conversational context (443).

Calling an interview a collaborative effort, Greenspan and Bolkosky (2006) assert that “a testimony that is simply given by one side, and gathered up by the other, need not entail any collaboration at all. It is more like a speech delivered to an assembly of one— “an interviewer”” (439). Such a one-sided “interview” is more like an “interrogation”

aimed at collecting data rather than a shared engagement between two individuals (439). As also pointed out in the previous section, because the interviewers of the “Archive” provide little reflection on their experience of the interview, the potential to gain a deeper insight into the how an interview is conducted and the context in which it is embedded, is lost. For instance, at one point in Mrs. Sushiri’s interview, an off-camera male voice, most likely a family member, can be heard telling her to “speak loudly” to which she responds with a simple “okay”. She was also seen pausing the interview briefly to talk to, presumably, the house-help, asking them to set up food. Sounds of food being prepared and cooked were also audible in the background. What does it mean, for Sushiri’s story to be framed and positioned against the sound of a pressure cooker’s whistle? What does her immediate agreement to “speak loudly”, on the insistence of, presumably her husband, imply? According to Anderson et. al. (1987), “interviews can also tell us how women felt about what they did and can interpret the personal meaning and value of particular activities” (104) but only if we listen to them deeply. “Deep listening”, a key principle of the methodology used by the ‘Montreal Life Stories’ project, involves “listening for meanings, not just facts, and listening in such a way that prompts more profound reflection from the interviewee” (Stacey and Zembrzycki, 2010, 199). By failing to engage their interviewees in meaningful conversations that prompted them to reflect deeply on their experiences of the Partition, especially as women, both the “Archive” interviewers were unable to read in between the lines. According to Ruth Behar (1996), a Jewish, Cuban, and American ethnographer, this disengagement of the researcher from fieldwork data is not uncommon in big research projects. Such endeavors “treat ethnographic work as that which is ‘other’ to the ‘self’” (4) and accumulate hordes of data that “can be compared, contrasted, charted, and serve as a basis for policy recommendations” (4) but they fail to engage with it meaningfully.

According to Dandekar (2019), there are significant methodological differences between public archives and oral histories that are personally recorded by researchers. She draws on Partition scholar and oral historian Pippa Virdee (2013, 2018) to state that subaltern feminist research insists on a relationship between researchers and the research participants for “the eliciting of a layered and empathetic narrative, produced outside the domain of power relations” (Dandekar, 2019, 394). However, this method seems to have been reversed in the “1947 Partition Archive” with it “being the first public oral history archive of its kind that defocusses from the interviewer and the relationship between interviewer and respondent” (394). Strangers to the respondents and their

stories, interviewers or 'citizen historians' are often "amateurs and lay-society enthusiasts" (394) armed with the template of questions provided by the "Archive" who are largely invisible in the interview process. Further, as evidenced by the interviews analyzed above, there is little to no evidence of any rapport-building between the interviewer and those being interviewed. As Dandekar (2019) argues therefore, such an interview with "a virtual stranger... objectifies Partition narratives as exhibits of national memorialization within the public domain, musealizing nation-making events and moments" (394). Moreover, these individualized oral narratives are also open to the threat of the governments of India and Pakistan co-opting these stories to further their nationalist agendas (395). This is especially relevant in the present-day politics in both nations where "the public history of Partition is...vulnerable to nationalist deployment, as part of renewed history-writing endeavors" (395). Therefore, it is impossible to separate the problematic process of creating public history from the power imbalance that is inherent in the interview process.

4.3.5. Contextualizing Testimonies

In doing collaborative research, it is imperative that researchers monitor and reflect ethically on their research practices (High, 2014, 20). While the "Archive" does require its interviewers to write a 1-2 page 'interview summary' with a section reserved for 'interviewer's background/personal reflection', neither of the two summaries (Appendix A) include any personal information on the interviewer. Rather, they read more like blurbs designed to enhance accessibility for viewers who may be combing through the interviews.

The online Google Form document for the 'Interview Summary' (Appendix B) states the following:

"In all, the interview summary is meant to create a full picture of the interviewee's life story and aims to be report-like. The INTERVIEWER BACKGROUND/ PERSONAL REFLECTION section provides a space to share how you felt about the interview and inspiration you came away with. You can also describe the circumstances surrounding the interview, for example, how you met the interviewee, if the family came and gathered around to hear their story, or if the interviewee is hard of hearing."

However, as can be seen when filling out the actual form, the interviewers are expected to fill out "½ to 2 pages" summarizing the interview and are given little to no space for their own background and personal reflections. Further, the section comes

with the following warning: “THIS WILL BE A PUBLIC SUMMARY. CHOOSE WORDS CAREFULLY”, thus clearly wanting the interviewers to censor themselves for the public.

Therefore, in merely describing the contents of the interview and offering little to no reflection on the setting, the interview process and the nature of the conversation, these summaries fail to locate deeper meanings within the narratives or make meaningful connections.

For instance, in her interview, Mrs. Sushiri continuously praises her father, talking about his commendable traits of honesty and discipline that he has passed on to his children. She talks at length about how he stressed the importance of education, helped all the children with homework and took them on picnics during the holidays. Tearing up on several occasions, she remembers him fondly and says, “he taught us how to live...and I really miss my father...so much he has given to us.” At the same time however, talking about a period in time when Partition tensions were at their peak, she says that her father “kept a cannister of oil” in the room, saying that, “if something happens, I will kill everybody...all the girls.” Sushiri does not question her father’s behavior and seems to simply accept his decision to kill the women as the right one. In another similar instance, Sushiri seems to unquestioningly accept her father’s decision to marry her to her best friend’s son, saying, “neither he (her husband) nor I knew – we were told later we were engaged (laughs).”

Similarly, in her interview, Mrs. Mamtani while constantly asserting that Hindus and Muslims had amicable relations in her village prior to the Partition, and that she was friends with people of all ethnicities, remarks that Muslims were “illiterate” and worked primarily as manual workers and drivers for landowners (including her father who belonged to the landowning class). Here, neither does she seem to be aware of her own animosity towards Muslims nor does she acknowledge the obvious communal class difference between Hindus and Muslims, accepting it as what was normal for the time. Recalling her involvement in the independence struggle, she remembers being sent to prison thrice as a 15-year-old for participating in the rallies organized by the Indian National Congress. When asked if both Hindus and Muslims participated in the rallies, she enthusiastically answered yes but added that “less Muslims – only those who were educated” participated. Repeatedly making a distinction between Hindu and Muslim women, she asserts that “our Hindu women used to participate, not Muslim women.” Sprinkled in between reassurances of a close harmony between Hindus and Muslims in

her village, paying close attention to these statements reveal Leela's clear disrespect and even aversion of Muslims. However, nowhere in her interview or the interview summary is this acknowledged or highlighted. Had the "Archive" tried to contextualize her testimony, it would have become clear that she evidently harbored negative biases against Muslims, especially women, viewing them as inferior to Hindus. While this, in no way, excuses the ignorance of her remarks, it is also important to note that Leela's response, in part, may have been shaped by how she perceived the interviewer and the wider audience would want her to tell her "story". This is why it becomes important for the "Archive's" citizen historians to critically reflect on their positionality and how it affects the accounts of participants. It is also likely that, as a minority in a Muslim majority village, especially in a time marked by heightened political tensions, Leela came to define herself through the nationalistic lens of religious superiority of the Hindu Indian nation-state. The "Archive", in failing to adequately contextualize her testimony and critique her thinly veiled disdain for the Muslims of her village, results in the creation of an apolitical, singular narrative that does not account for the communal politics and tensions of the time.

Oral historian William Schneider (2014) makes a distinction between the recording of oral histories and the original telling, calling the former "an entity that has been derived from the telling" (21). He points to the problematic separation between the processes of creating narrative and delivering it, arguing that oral historians must closely document the original interview in order to present an accurate narration and convey the original intended sentiment (21). While video captures elements such as emphasis, silences and pauses, it fails to present other crucial information such as what happened prior to and after the interview, the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee and their interaction (23). It is imperative then, as Parr (2010), quoting Portelli (1997), states, that an oral historian must be an "engaged interlocuter" because "people will not talk to you unless you talk to them, will not reveal themselves unless you reveal yourself" (Portelli, 1997, 52). For Portelli (1997), fieldwork is a form of "political intervention, because it encourages an effort at self-awareness, growth and change for all those involved...unlike hard data or archives" (52) Therefore, in order to fully understand the initial exchange, it is necessary to capture "the circumstances of the recording, the intent and interest of both recorder and teller, previous recounting of the information on the part of the speaker, and some historical and cultural context of the subjects discussed" (Schneider, 2014, 22). The way the narrator retells their story and

grapples with memory; and the context of this retelling – add another layer to the oral history interview (Schneider, 2014, 23). By adequately contextualizing the interview, oral historians can draw fuller meanings and conclusions from the exchange.

Both the summaries and the interviews by the “1947 Partition Archive”, therefore, in failing to adequately contextualize the interview encounter and analyzing the subtext behind the narrator’s words, remain largely apolitical, much like the “Archive” itself. They miss the opportunity to read in between the lines and conduct a meaningful analysis of women’s narratives. As Kaur (2016) too reiterates, the “Archive” presents a simplified narrative of human suffering and irons over the complexities of Partition politics. Narrators are completely disconnected from the larger political context which is seen as existing outside of the narrators’ lives. The fact that “personal and collective negotiations, transgressions and compromises underpinning messy social relations in everyday life also constitute politics is barely acknowledged” (Kaur, 2016). According to Larson (2018), situating the narratives of women, especially, in the personal contexts of their class and educational backgrounds as well as the wider political contexts of their communities and cultures is imperative in giving us “a deeper and fuller grasp on the interview process and content” (300). The “Archive”, in alienating its narrators from the political context in which their stories took place, hinders the creation of a fuller, richer history of the Partition. Instead of looking at history critically, this project of “affective memorialization” (Kaur, 2016) presents its narrators as either passive victims or unwilling participants in the events that unfolded post-independence, thus reducing them to one-dimensional figures.

Another concern voiced by Gluck (2014) and Sheftel and Zembrzycki (2017) is how the online context of dissemination of oral histories might impact what the interviewees and interviewees may choose to reveal. For instance, in her own interviews with women, Gluck (2014) was especially concerned “about whether narrators would be willing to share intimate, vulnerable, and sometimes unflattering stories with the specter of Web dissemination looming” (105). She further brings up questions of how does the knowledge that an interview may be uploaded online affect what a narrator chooses to tell, especially older interviewees or other marginalized populations who do not understand or have access to digital tools. Gluck (2014) also brings up the issue of how digital information might be used and by whom, reminding oral historians “of the increased surveillance of political progressives by governments and their use of digital

technology to do so” (106). While the internet is conceptualized as “liberating”, at the same time, it functions as a surveillance tool that discourages open discussions. For instance, as also stated earlier, Dadekar (2019) mentions the potential threat of poorly contextualized testimonies of Partition survivors falling into the hands of the nationalistic governments of India and Pakistan who might misuse them to fulfill their personal agendas.

Moreover, placing digital and audio interviews online also open them up to the threat of manipulation by others – a concern that was echoed by Jewish Holocaust survivors who were afraid that Holocaust deniers might misuse their interview excerpts (Gluck, 2014, 107). As oral historians, Gluck (2014) suggests that they can begin by monitoring themselves and the narrators in terms of what both the parties reveal. However, “the danger, of course, is that this cautionary approach can stifle the spontaneity of the interview” (Gluck, 2014, 106) and might advocate an approach of parentalism (Gluck, 2014, 251). Nevertheless, Gluck (2014) believes that oral historians “have an obligation to warn people about the possible unintended use of their oral histories” (254) as part of their decision-making process of determining what should be recorded and archived online.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter outlined the critiques of digital oral history, arguing that while digital technologies allow easy editing, uploading and transcribing of interviews as well as increased access to a widespread global audience, at the same time they are exploitative, costly and hard to access. Particularly, it highlights issues with digital infrastructure and unequal access to online spaces, the extraction and commodification of people’s memories on the internet, dangers of unrestricted public access to sensitive narratives and the use of misleading measures of audience engagement – all of which further contribute to the marginalization of those who have been historically oppressed.

Using these critiques, this chapter further examines the “1947 Partition Archive” to reveal how, unlike the reconstruction of history done by Indian feminists, Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000), the slow and careful practice of oral history is replaced by an accelerated process of ‘collecting’ testimonies that commodifies vast numbers of memories for a wider viewership. Unlike subaltern feminists’ open-ended, responsive and participant-driven process of questioning, the “Archive’s” volunteer

interviewers are required to read from a script of questions that the “1947 Partition Archive” developed in order to produce uniform narratives of the Partition. As the chapter further illustrates, in a clear contrast to the flexible and reflexive methodology used by the ‘Montreal Life Stories’ project, the “Archive” has carefully crafted a rigid interview “format”, for instance, by insisting that family members cannot be present during the interview or that interview videos should refrain from capturing the respondent’s surroundings.

Further, the chapter also illustrates how the “Archive’s” research methodology is poorly developed and offers little to no reflection on the ethical considerations of working with “memories”. Not only are the interviewers given any equipment or a space to meet and talk with fellow oral historians, they are also told to make themselves “invisible”. This obscures the context of the interview and the interviewer’s presence, depriving them of the opportunity to offer their own insights and reflections on the interview process. Unlike the ‘Montreal Life Stories’ project where an organic exchange of personal stories was encouraged, the “1947 Partition Archive” clearly states that the interviewers should refrain from conversing with their narrators during the interview. The “Archive” also fails to offer any counselling aid, assistance or resources either to its interviewers or to its narrators despite the sensitive and traumatic nature of the testimonies they give. Additionally, the narrators are entirely excluded from the interpretation process since they are not provided access to the final video clip or allowed to give feedback. The authority to decide what is uploaded onto the website lies entirely with the “Archive”.

Finally, the chapter outlines how lacking both political and personal context, the testimonies created and uploaded on to the “Archive’s” website are abstracted from the realities of Partition violence and fail to make connections with present day communal turmoil in the country. As individuated and poorly contextualized narratives available in a publicly accessible archive, these testimonies can be easily poached by the Indian state or other nationalist stakeholders to support their self-serving nationalist agendas.

The next chapter gives a sustained discussion of how this thesis analytically compares feminist oral histories of Partition survivors with the collection of “memories” as done by the “1947 Partition Archive”. It also outlines the limitations of this research and reflects on the questions that further emerge from the analysis done in this thesis.

Chapter 5.

Discussion and Conclusion

Committed to a critical examination of the politics of production of knowledge, my thesis analytically compares two different kinds of oral history projects: grassroots feminist oral histories of women survivors of India's 1947 Partition conducted by Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) over the course of 10 years and the digital "1947 Partition Archive" based at Stanford University Library, that has amassed over 8,000 interviews conducted by volunteers. In comparing the methodologies and research processes used by Butalia, Bhasin and Menon with those of the "1947 Partition Archive", I argue that while the former followed a feminist and reflexive framework of collaboration, shared authority and co-production, the latter paid little attention to ideas of inclusive, community-based research. Moreover, I argue that by creating and uploading individuated and poorly contextualized interviews, the "Archive" commodifies the testimonies of Partition survivors. I follow a two-fold framework of analysis that argues that a feminist historiography of Partition as formulated by Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) not only challenges and critiques existing hierarchal forms of knowledge but also presents an alternate methodology grounded in notions of community-based co-production of knowledge. In doing so, my analysis fulfills two objectives: that of recognizing how feminist oral history, by placing women's lives at the center of historical analysis, identifies them as producers of knowledge; and arguing for practices that ensure transparency and adherence to ethical practices of reflexivity, shared authority and collaboration within 'digital' oral history.

In the first chapter (Chapter 2), I draw on feminist historians Joan Scott (1988) and Joan Kelly (1984) to argue the importance of including gender as a category of historical analysis. I further draw on Mary Maynard (1994) to outline her principles of what comprises as a "feminist" methodology: the recognition that women have been marginalized within the discipline of History and thus the reality of their everyday lives remains obscured. As a result, it is imperative that researchers use research practices informed by feminist politics, such as putting women and their experiences at the center of analysis, addressing ethical concerns regarding respecting and listening to participants and highlighting the efforts of the researcher in shifting the power dynamics

in the research process. I then discuss how Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) illustrate what Maynard (1994) has identified as a "feminist" methodology by pointing to the glaring omission of women from Partition history, stating that "there has been no feminist historiography of the partition of India, not even of the compensatory variety" (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 8). The final section of this chapter, in outlining the development of feminist oral history since the 1960s, highlights the importance of adopting an intersectional approach to feminist oral history that takes into account the heterogenous nature of oppression that women face across the categories of class, caste and race.

After illustrating how the research conducted by Bhasin and Menon (*Borders and Boundaries*, 1998) and Butalia (*The Other Side of Silence*, 2000) uses a feminist approach, in the second chapter (Chapter 3), I focus my analysis on their oral histories of women survivors from India's 1947 Partition, first examining their contribution to understanding Partition from a gendered lens and then, as I discuss below, their methodology.

In order to examine Partition from the perspective of women, Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) spent years travelling across the country, meeting with women and listening to their stories, even living with them and sharing meals on several occasions. In revealing the gendered nature of Partition violence and pointing to the precarious position that women occupy in a patriarchal society, both texts reveal a facet of history that has remained obscured in official accounts. In addressing not just explicit violence against women, but deaths that were disguised as "suicides" to avoid rape and conversion, their writing challenges the dominant narrative of women heroically "sacrificing" their lives in the name of "martyrdom" and "honour" (Butalia, 2000, 204) (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 31-64). In this way, they pose a question about the veracity of existing forms of hierarchal and specifically male knowledge. At the same time, by juxtaposing women's testimonies alongside a reading of the state's actions, institutions and policies, they present a contextualized micro-level analysis that reveals how women's everyday lives were shaped by the larger political landscape. For them, the objective of their research was not just place women's voices at the center of their analysis, but also to situate them within the socio-political context of the time including the constitutional debates, the Indian state's forceful recovery agenda and the politics of abduction and rehabilitation.

Further, in order to critically examine the oral history projects by Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) at a methodological level, I adopt an interdisciplinary approach, drawing not only from feminist research and oral history, but other disciplines such as anthropology and sociology and, other oral methodological approaches such as life story and storytelling, in order to create a critical framework, comprising of key principles of reflexivity, sharing authority, friendship, deep listening, collaboration and co-production of knowledge, through which to examine these works. Here, I refer to the works of feminist oral historians Judith Stacey (1988), Joan Sangster (1994), Srigley, Zembrzycki and Iacovetta (2018), as well as, oral history theorist Lynn Abrams (2010). All of these scholars emphasize the importance of not only redressing the power imbalance inherent in the interview encounter, but actively working to be self-reflexive and listen deeply to their narrators in order to fully share authority. As Srigley et. al. (2018) have pointed out, feminists were among the first to borrow and put into practice Michael Frisch's (1991) idea of shared authority. In fact, feminists go a step further in arguing for sharing authority throughout the research process, insisting that participants should be setting the research agenda to allow for the co-production of knowledge. They advocate for a relationship-based approach, rooted in the ideals of friendship, when researching people's personal narratives and testimonies (Tillmann-Healy, 2003). In their work with women survivors of the Partition, both Bhasin and Menon (1998), and Butalia (2000) have adopted a similar approach to their research. For instance, this becomes apparent, in Damyanti's close friendship with Butalia and her insistence that she call her 'masi' (a term of endearment for 'auntie'). Further, while working from this ethic of 'friendship', both Bhasin and Menon and Butalia display an awareness of the power imbalance inherent in the interview encounter. For instance, they constantly question the misguided notion of "empowering" research subjects by "allowing" them to speak (Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 15). Citing Daphne Patai, they urge researchers to ask themselves: "Is this empowerment or appropriation? And what does it mean...for researchers to claim the right to validate the experience of others"? (Patai, 1994 cited in Bhasin and Menon, 1998, 16) While they acknowledge the impossibility of completely resolving the ethical issues that are embedded "in the very nature of oral history" (16), their own research strives to give women's voices "a privileged position" (16) by placing them at the center of the analysis. Additionally, by offering sustained reflections on their own positionalities, biases and research processes – answering questions of how and why they talked to women, the ways in which they identified and met participants and the

motivations behind their actions – Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) exhibit self-reflexivity and an understanding of the power dynamics that shape the interview and the overall knowledge-production process.

My analysis also identifies their use of storytelling as a methodology and draws on research by Indigenous scholars Margaret Kovach (2010) and Rubina Anne Thomas (Strega and Brown, 2016) to recognize the importance of creating contextualized knowledge that challenges dominant narratives of victimhood. I also draw on Suparna Mukherjee's (2010) approach to storytelling that she used in her oral histories with survivors of the Bhopal industrial disaster and the Stree Shakti Sangatha's (Women's empowerment collective) (1989) interviews with women involved in the Telengana peasant struggle. Both projects, guided by the objective of producing grassroots Indigenous knowledge, insist on the power of oral transmission of knowledge and its potential to dismantle existing systems of colonial power. I further draw on Parin Dossa's (2009) research with Iranian immigrant women in Canada in order to highlight the importance of 'deep listening', which, according to her, involves actively engaging with narrators to direct attention away from imperialist narratives to those who have been historically marginalized. Butalia, Bhasin and Menon too point to the practice of deeply listening to women – "to their speech, their silences, the half-said things, the nuances" (Butalia, 2000, 101) – in order to identify the gendered nature of narratives. As pointed by Theresa de Langis (2018) in her research with the victims of the Khmer Rouge regime, listening to women also reveals the cultural ideas and categories through which they navigate the world; and in contexts of mass atrocities and violence, such as the Partition, the very act of remembering publicly can be politically powerful. According to her, listening to women creates a counter-narrative that can challenge what is considered mainstream "history" (164). As I also discuss in the first chapter (Chapter 2), Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000), in not only putting together women's experiences of the Partition, but juxtaposing them against official narratives, have too created a counter-narrative that questions the existing nationalist narrative surrounding Partition. They build this wider context over the years from 'fragmentary' sources such as official documents, government reports and records, parliamentary debates, legal documents, newspapers, letters, diaries and memoirs. This, according to them "would allow the women, speaking for themselves, to be heard – sometimes challenging, sometimes agreeing with, sometimes probing historical "facts", insinuating themselves into the text and thereby compelling a different reading of it" (Bhasin and Menon, 1998,

17). Ultimately, the goal for Bhasin, Menon and Butalia is to place women at the center of history writing and listen to their experiences. In this way, they truly collaborated with their participants, shared authority and co-produced women's experiences of the Partition.

In the third chapter (Chapter 4), I critically analyze the "1947 Partition Archive" – an open access digital repository of oral testimonies of Partition survivors collected by volunteers around the world and housed by the Stanford University Library. Established in 2011, the "1947 Partition Archive" now boasts of having collected over 8000 testimonies and urges its volunteers or 'citizen historians' to reach "10,000 families by August 2020" (Homepage, the 1947 Partition Archive). With its overzealous emphasis on 'numbers', the "Archive" fails to consider its poorly developed research methodology and lack of ethical considerations, especially when working with trauma survivors. Further, in failing to adequately contextualize the testimonies in the social and political context of the Partition, the depoliticized nature of the "Archive" commodifies survivors' memories and opens them up to potential threats from the nationalist governments of India and Pakistan.

In order to critically examine the "1947 Partition Archive's" research methodology, I conduct an analysis of the oral history documents provided to 'citizen historians' – volunteers responsible for "collecting" testimonies – by the "Archive" for their training including a guide, questionnaires, forms and other resources. My study also includes observations from my participation in the "Archive's" mandatory online oral history workshop that spanned over two hours. The final section of the chapter closely examines two interviews by the "Archive", conducted with women survivors in India that can be publicly accessed online.

In this chapter, I pay close attention to the digital medium and first delineate how the internet, with its emphasis on speedy encounters and quick transactions undermines and makes it hard to facilitate the intimate and slow practice of oral history. I argue that while digital oral history has certainly made it easier to collect and distribute content, and reach larger audiences, this very preoccupation with amassing videos and measuring their popularity through 'likes' or 'hits' contradicts oral history's commitment to building relationships, collecting meaningful stories and providing the centerstage to its narrators. Feminists have been vocal about the need to acknowledge the "ethical fault lines that might undermine the democratizing potential of this technology" (Srigley et. al., 2018,

11). To further my point, I draw on the work of feminist oral historians Mary Larson (2018) and Margo Shea (2018) who question how the widespread online dissemination of oral histories might negatively affect the process of building trust and giving consent, as well as what the narrators choose to reveal in an interview. Further, I draw on Larson's (2018) critiques of digital oral histories, who has pointed out that the internet and its oral history tools fail to capture the essence of what oral history is – "an intimate encounter between people rooted in relationships forged over time and through the process of sharing stories" (Srigley et. al., 2018, 11). Stories shared in online spaces such as websites or social media spaces can "create the illusion that we are experiencing intimate storytelling spaces" (Srigley et. al., 2018, 11) but in truth, this is difficult since we know very little about the narrators themselves. But in order to show that it is possible to use digital technologies ethically, I draw on Steven High's (2014) 'Montreal Life Stories' in this section as a counterproject to the "1947 Partition Archive" His project, by ensuring that researcher participants have an active role in co-producing knowledge, highlights the possibilities of using digital technologies and adhering to the principles of collaboration, co-production and sharing authority, and thus, illustrate the capacity of the digital to produce research that is by, for and about the research participants. As Srigley et. al. (2018) note, in order to engage with stories in the digital age, "we need to rethink how we can proceed in an ethical manner that respects that humanism that is at the center of our diverse practices, feminist or otherwise" (12).

In contrast to High's (2014) project, I outline how the "1947 Partition Archive" fits the mold of an online profit-driven enterprise that commodifies testimonies by emphasizing entirely on 'numbers'. In particular, my analysis of the "Archive's" documents and interviews, as well as the online oral history workshop, reveals its focus on the quantity of testimonies collected as opposed to their quality. As I discuss, the "Archive" emphasizes the commercial value and quality of the video recordings with little to no attention paid to contextualizing interviews or inviting the interviewees to share their reflections. As the oral history workshop revealed, interviewees are trained to solely focus on producing videos that are fit for consumption. Emphasis is on superior video quality, aesthetically pleasing footage and narratives that will keep the viewers glued. Further, once the interview is completed, narrators are neither allowed to view the final video file, in case they want revisions, nor are they provided with any counselling resources after recounting traumatic memories. In this manner, narrators are almost treated as vehicles to generate more testimonies and "add" to the already growing

number of interviews collected instead of as storytellers who share authority with the “Archive”. Additionally, since interviewers are encouraged to remain “invisible” during the interview and are given little to no space to reflect on their own biases and backgrounds, and how these inform the interview process.

While the “Archive” has succeeded in creating, perhaps, the biggest repository of Partition testimonies, its size and vast scope, much like other big archives such as the Spielberg Foundation video archive on the holocaust as pointed out by Kushner (2006), lacks any sign of following oral history methodologies grounded in the ideals of authority sharing, reflexivity and co-production. It has thus resulted in the creation of a library of incomplete stories that lack coherent narratives, nuance and depth. Hence, much like the Partition fridge magnets sold by the Partition Museum in 2017⁵², the “Archive” commodifies people’s memories of an exceedingly traumatic event in time. Unlike Bhasin, Menon and Butalia, it also fails to adequately contextualize the testimonies in relation to the political and communal debates of the time including the state’s role in re-abducting and displacing women as part of their “recovery” mission. By committing to remaining ‘apolitical’, it irons out the complexities of the communal nature of Partition violence and how it continues to manifest itself in similar, familiar forms today. Additionally, without adequate context, these testimonies also become vulnerable to threats from nationalist governments of India and Pakistan who may co-opt these narratives to serve their personal agendas.

However, in this conclusion, while I have criticized the “Archive,” I want to point out that Dandekar (2019) holds that, due to a lack of social history resources on the Partition (compared to the vast amount of films, literature, documentaries and art on the subject), the “methodologically imperfect” (396) oral histories curated by the “1947 Partition Archive” constitute an important resource for researchers interested in the fields of migration, oral history, memory and violence (395). While I am much more critical about it being a significant resource, it is also important to note what we *can* learn about Partition from the “Archive”, if we ensure we make an effort to critically analyze the oral narratives within their political and historical contexts. For instance, Sushiri’s and Leela’s oral history interviews depart from Partition related narratives of genocide and mass

⁵² In his piece ‘Seeing Partition Through a Different Prism to Liberate Ourselves From its Trauma’, Tarun K. Saint (2017) mentions fridge magnets bearing the Partition Museum logo being sold at the 2017 Jaipur Literature Festival.

migrations to give us an insight into the emotions experienced by the two women – the permanent sense of homelessness, nostalgia and longing for a “home” that no longer exists and their perseverance in rebuilding new lives in an alien land.

Finally, an archive such as the “1947 Partition Archive”, while can be critiqued for its methodological imperfections and skewed interview process, is inevitably entangled in a process of gathering testimonies and growing in its scale and size. While my research focuses on critiquing the “Partition Archive” from a methodological perspective, critically analyzing its methodologies, its use of “oral history” and the testimonies collected by its citizen historians, a larger study could perhaps look closely at the nature of archives and what it constitutes as worth “archiving”. Situating the “1947 Partition Archive” within this larger discourse on the nature of archives, could perhaps provide a different lens through which to examine its infrastructure, methods and testimonies. Drawing on Kleinberg (2017), Dandekar (2019) states that “an archive is never complete and secular, or completely representative of a whole social spectrum in time and space” (396); similarly, The “1947 Partition Archive” is a growing public repository of interviews that continue to represent different responses, including emotional responses, to the Partition. The question then, perhaps, is to find ways to carefully listen to and meaningfully engage with these stories in order to do justice to its narrators, who, in revealing deeply personal narratives about their lives, exhibit unfathomable courage. Similarly, as my analysis of two of the “Archive’s” interviews suggests, it is also possible to learn from the “Archive’s” oral histories, that is if one is able to critically “read” or analyze them, both taking into account the political context that the “Archive” fails to include and the limitations of its methodological approach that selectively and sensationally focuses on particular types of information while excluding details and narratives that do not fit the “checklist” given by the “Archive” to its citizen historians .

5.1. Limitations of research

While my thesis gives a sustained critique of the research methodology of the “1947 Partition Archive”, I believe that it is limited in its scope. If I was to conduct a more extensive study, the next step could potentially include interviews with its employees or volunteer ‘citizen historians’ in order to gain a deeper insight into its research process and learn about the perspectives of the interviewers or the “oral historians”. Another way to expand the scope of this study to gain a more in-depth understanding of the “Archive”

would be to examine more testimonies. While in choosing to examine two interviews in particular, my objective was to conduct a detailed and in-depth analysis, a more extensive study of the “memories” being collected by the “1947 Partition Archive” could include a systematic analysis of their publicly available interviews and their summaries. A third way to expand this study would be to include an examination of other, similar grassroots oral history projects with women survivors coming from diverse regional, religious and caste backgrounds (since the oral history works of Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000) are published in English and focus primarily on the experiences of north Indian Hindu women). For instance, a more detailed study could critically analyze the oral histories conducted by Bagchi and Dasgupta (2003) and Chakravartty (2005) (as also mentioned in the Introduction) with women Partition survivors along the eastern border of India in the state of West Bengal. Similarly, another perspective to consider is that of Dalit women and their stories of surviving Partition violence. Scholars such as Ravinder Kaur (2006) and Akanksha Kumar (2016) for instance have written about the ways in which social class affected how Dalits, including Dalit women, migrated during the Partition. A more exhaustive analysis of marginalized narratives from India’s Partition could, therefore, take into account these diametrically diverse stories of how women experienced Partition.

It is also worth noting here that, as I also mention in Chapter 1, the objective of my research was not to interview women Partition survivors but rather to analyze the ways in which the methodologies, research practices used by Bhasin, Menon and Butalia compared to the “Archive” resulted in the creation of distinct and diametrically different kinds of knowledge. For this, I analyzed a number of case studies across disciplines to prepare a framework of reflexivity, sharing authority, collaboration and co-production through which to examine feminist oral histories and the “1947 Partition Archive”. While the lack of interviews with Partition survivors can be seen as a limitation of my research, I believe that in immersing myself on literature on working with testimony as well as oral history, and by systematically analyzing the two projects, this research has given me the foundational background to more responsibly do fieldwork and interviews as part of my doctoral work. Examining the literature on feminist oral history methodologies and assessing two case studies has provided me with insights into how different approaches to oral history can either reproduce or try to challenge relations of power on one hand and how they can be appropriated for nationalist government agendas on the other.

5.2. Taking a “pause” and asking new questions

In this thesis, by conducting a sustained analysis of oral history as a feminist methodology, important questions were raised for me about who gets to produce knowledge, about whom and to what end. It brings to light the political importance of survivors' accounts and the significance of 'remembering' in the face of patriarchal omissions repression and denial of people's experiences. As Dossa (2009) too points out, the act of remembering and telling one's story is especially forceful when they are uprooted from their communities and their social existence is denied. For survivors of trauma then, for instance those being forcefully silenced by dominant forces such as state-sponsored institutions, as in the case of the Partition, telling their stories is an act of resistance. By doing so, survivors can take charge of their own narratives and tell their stories of survival and the ways in which they exercised agency, thus challenging the existing, dominant accounts of victimhood. It is also important to acknowledge here that people telling their stories and sharing deeply personal details about their lives is in itself an act of courage. It is, therefore, imperative that we listen to people's stories, as Liisa Malkii (1997) writes, with a “caring form of vigilance” (7).

Further, as Butalia (2000) argues, the act of remembering is just as significant as what is being remembered. Therefore, the ways in which people remember and assign meanings to past memories gives us an insight into the dominant ideologies that shape their worldviews. This is evident in the ways in which Partition is articulated in the Indian subcontinent today – often recalled and remembered, at the heights of religious and political instability, as a yardstick of horrific communal violence that seems to continue repeating itself.⁵³

Thinking of this conclusion as a “pause” as opposed to a full-stop, my research brings to surface numerous issues following oral history's advent into the 'digital', which

⁵³ Since December 2019, India has been witnessing horrific, state-sponsored violence after the right-wing Hindu nationalist government announced its decision to implement a nationwide national register of citizens (NRC), deeming millions of citizens “illegal migrants”. However, this situation is further aggravated by the state's implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that grants 'refugee' status to Indians from all religious backgrounds except to Muslims. Massive protests against the anti-muslim NRC and CAA that have erupted across the country have been systematically suppressed by the police – who continue to illegally beat up, harass, detain, and even kill protestors, all under the pretext of “nationalism”. Additionally, the police have been singling out predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods and educational institutions in brutally beating up, injuring and even kidnapping protestors (Chaudhuri, 2019).

has changed the way in which research with oral narratives is conducted. There is a marked escalation in problems regarding trust, confidentiality, access and the power imbalance involved in the interviewer-interviewee relationship due to stories being opened up to public access. One objective of my comparative analysis was to highlight that that in order to engage with stories in the digital age, we need to rethink the ways in which narratives are produced and circulated. There is an increased need for scholars to systematically examine ethical issues and respect the guiding principles of feminism in formulating practices of digital oral history. Here, the analysis in my thesis points to questions such as – how can we democratize digital oral history? How can authority be shared across virtual spaces? How can we integrate practices of collaboration and co-production when working with narrators who have no access to the internet? Who does this kind of work entail and to what end? My research, therefore, opens up space for a potential future project that examines the ways in which digital oral history can inch closer towards the principles of reflexivity, sharing authority, collaboration and co-production of knowledge, perhaps, much like Steven High's (2014) Montreal Life Stories project.

In terms of my own research journey, after conducting an in-depth analysis of how feminists continue to develop oral history as a methodology that is informed by the principles of reflexivity, collaboration and co-production of knowledge; and after considering critiques not only by postcolonial and Indigenous researchers but also studies by Indian grassroots feminists, I plan to conduct oral history interviews in my own doctoral research. I am interested in learning about the lives of Rohingya refugee women living in makeshift camps across the state of New Delhi in India⁵⁴, particularly focusing on how they navigate their everyday life as refugees in an alien country, as well as communities and networks they have access to. Much like Bhasin and Menon (1998) and Butalia (2000), my research is underlined by the grounding notion that women exercise agency in various forms, drawing upon resources and creating opportunities to improve their lives. Here, in adopting the concept of 'agency', I intend to go beyond the limited ideas of economically and socially valuable contributions to also look at voluntary

⁵⁴ The Muslim Rohingya minority of the Rakhine region in Myanmar has been historically prosecuted by the Burmese government that has launched a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing against them. After the latest wave of violence in 2018, thousands of Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh and India in search for a better life. As of October 2018, there were 18,000 Rohingya refugees in India, including a significant number of refugees residing in New Delhi (Brenner, 2019).

work, social practices, building of support networks and other resilient ways in which people work through trauma. Further, by listening to women's own accounts of their lives, a second objective of my proposed research is to challenge the dominant narratives of "poverty" and "helplessness" that are used to represent refugee women, particularly those from Rohingya (Dey and Bali 2019). As Jenny Lalneipar (2019) has rightly argued, when many Rohingya women are already gaining more economic roles in the community, their stories should also be told as "it is important to recognize their capacity to act as the protagonists of their own story" and their immense potential to serve as "agents of constructive change within their families, communities, and nation."

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Appendix A:

Interview Summaries

1. Summary of interview with Sushiri Motilal as uploaded on the 1947 Partition Archive's Website:

Sushiri Motial, née Gupta, was born to Lala Bishindaas and Prakash in the Amira Kadal district of Srinagar on July 11, 1940. The family would spend half the year living in their ancestral home in the Purani Mandi village of Jammu and the other half in Srinagar, Kashmir, where their father was a civil servant and eventually retired as deputy home secretary. He was later asked by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad to start an anti-corruption department and also ended up in charge of the Maharaja trust in the Jammu and Kashmir state. In Jammu they had a sizable five-bedroom house while in Srinagar they regularly switched between government accommodations. This annual cycle of switching between the two cities was really the “greatest fun,” Mrs. Motial says, as they were always excited to move back and forth while enjoying the best climate of each. He studied in Jammu and was fluent in Sanskrit, English, and Hindi. The family spoke Dogri at home and English and Hindi outside. Mrs. Motial once knew Kashmiri and Bengali (after having lived in Calcutta for thirteen years) but has since forgotten them both. Their family had strong “lotus roots”—fond of all things Kashmiri, its paneer, the chashma shai water, and a composite religious atmosphere that she will forever feel nostalgic for. Mrs. Motial's maternal grandfather was a rich jagidar originally from Lahore who died early, just before Mrs. Motial's mother was born. Her father was the only child of fourteen to survive, so she had no cousins from his side, while the few from her mother's side only ever briefly visited. Her father's foremost focus was the education of his children. Accordingly, each of them have gone on to high achievement in life, getting Ph. Ds, becoming doctors, and so on. She herself has an M. Sc. in zoology and is a retired sujok practitioner. Her and her siblings were raised with a strict 10 PM bedtime and a 4 AM wake-up call after which they took a walk, jogged, and completed their homework. She was fond of running, playing ball, boating, and taking Sunday picnics. “Nobody just sat at home,” she says, even on their free days. She grew up with an elder sister and brother, as well as another two younger sisters and brother. Her father was an exceptionally strong character, she says—a simple man who remains an enduring influence in her and

her siblings' life. Candidates for jobs that he interviewed would bring him gifts, only to be refused. No showing off—keep things simple and live a simple life, was his motto. Discipline and honesty underpinned his life and what he passed on to his children. Their house was their temple. As their father was a great singer, he recited devotional bhajans and passed on the singing trait to his children. Mrs. Motial had Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh friends; her best friend was Sikh, her father's best friend was Muslim. She remembers times when Muslims (even males, alone) would accompany her home late at night to make sure she arrived safely. These religious differences didn't matter where she lived. She celebrated both Eid and Diwali with her family and Muslims friends —why shouldn't they celebrate together when they lived together? Her father's Muslim best friend stayed behind in India even after his children and wife went to Pakistan to join the rest of their family in Lahore and Rawalpindi. The best friend illegally crossed the border and was arrested on a number of occasions trying to see them. She remembers a dramatic episode in which he came to her sister's wedding in handcuffs, after convincing the police that he had to come and give his blessings. "I can't tell you," she says, "how life in Srinagar—maybe the best in the world." Though Partition was the first shock, everything bad in that region—that remains to this day—began in 1965. The family was in Srinagar at the time of Partition. Before they left the city as tensions arose, her mother filled up their pockets with basics like dry fruit, in case anything happened and they were separated. There was so much burning in the city that the sky turned a red hue while on the ground friends became enemies. Her family was still welcomed by friendly Muslims though and they took refuge in their homes on their way to safety in a military store. The image of dead bodies piled on carts remains with her to this day. Their father collected gasoline in the hopes of killing attackers—or the whole family—before they tried lay a hand on his daughters. Her ancestral village in Jammu became a battlefield in the days of Partition. Like that of so many others, her family's property was all cleared out in the violence. Her maternal grandmother's house was lost because it was on the Pakistan side of the border; her subsequent claim to the Indian government failed. Her father lost his job soon after Partition because he went to drop his family in Rothak, Haryana where his friends were well settled. Mrs. Motial did not go to school for a year, while her mother stitched and knitted to work and keep herself busy at their friends' home. When things calmed down following Partition, the family returned to their regular schedule of spending half their time in Srinagar and half in Jammu until things permanently worsened after the 1965 war. She was married in 1963 to Virendra Singh Motial after a

five-year engagement; their fathers were best friends. The Motials had three daughters, and she remembers hearing gunfire in when she was once feeding the first. Her husband said it was only fireworks, but the bullet marks on the side of a neighboring house confirmed what she had heard. Casualties in a nearby marketplace only added to their feeling that communal conflict had come to stay in the region. For the most part, changes in the region since 1947 have uniformly been bad, she feels. It's sad that a few have been able to poison the whole place. In 1967 she moved with her husband after he got a job in Lucknow. He then was posted in Calcutta for a time before returning to Lucknow again permanently. They both continue to visit Jammu and Kashmir, but each visit has been tinged with sadness for what has developed there since their childhood when it was a place to have lovely experiences for people of all faiths who felt no tension in eating from the same plate, the same apple tree. What hurt most was in 1989 when someone in Srinagar after realizing who she was said, "This is not your Hindustan." How could someone say that to her in the city where she was born, where she had been educated and married? In 1990 her best friend's husband, a Hindu who owned a factory, was killed while living in a Muslim-dominated neighborhood. A cousin-in-law was murdered—after the house was demolished—when a group of Muslims felt disrespected. Friends in Jammu ended up in refugee camps after their homes were set on fire. Even Muslim friends have been caught in the crossfire though—the "sharif admi" (good man) has suffered regardless of faith, she says. "Understand your brother to truly be your brother," she continues. "Think with your own brain. We should remain united." She can still visit Jammu but not Srinagar, regardless of the lovely memories she has of the city. She recoils and shudders when I ask her what image comes to her mind on mentions of Partition: it is the mother of a friend going mad and eating coal after the trauma of 1947.

2. Summary of Interview with Leela Mamtani as uploaded on the 1947 Partition Archive's Website:

Mrs. Leela Mamtani was born in Kandyara town of Nawab Shah District in Pakistan on October 21, 1932. Until the age of fifteen, she lived in Kandyara while her brothers lived in Karachi and Hyderabad. Her father was a prominent landlord and they lived in a huge haveli. The house had various secret cupboards called *hoori*, which were used to hide valuables. In 1947, the family had to abandon two *hoori* full of riches. Mrs. Mamtani walks down the memory lane when she describes the family life in Kandyara. Her family had very harmonious relations with Muslims and there were brotherly sentiments. Mrs. Mamtani recalls her mischief from childhood and shares memories with friends Devi, Tilli and Sheila. They used to bunk classes and ran into the orchards for fruits or the ponds and waterfalls. Mrs. Mamtani mentions a festival *Thaddari* which was celebrated during the monsoon months. It was not a religious festival but a community celebration when all the families got together for singing and merriment, and exchanged sweet breads. Mrs. Mamtani's family offered prayers to the water god *Darya Shah*. Folk songs were a major part of all revelry- community or religious and all major activities like child birth, marriages, crop harvest. Mrs. Mamtani bursts into a melodious song that the women used to sing overnight during celebrations. Another unique aspect was the intricate embroidery work of Sind province, mostly done by Muslim ladies. The markets in Kandyara were elaborate and segregated according to commodities- cloth, general items and food. The Indian National Congress, in its bid to raise awareness about the national movement, was popularizing the spinning wheel *charkha*, which went on to become the symbol of India's freedom movement. Mrs. Mamtani recalls they had a dedicated period at school every day for learning how to spin the wheel and weave yarn. The Congress organized rallies to ignite the patriotic fervor amongst everyone. With an air of pride for the country, Mrs. Mamtani says, "By the time I was fifteen, I had been to jail twice". The months of 1947 that saw British India's freedom and consequent division of the land were met with hardly any disturbances in Kandyara. Mrs. Mamtani recalls sporadic attacks and night long pelting of stones at her house. By December of 1947, the attacks increased in intensity and the family had collected stones and red chilli powder for protection. On January 1, 1948 Mrs. Mamtani's family decided to leave and took a bus to Hyderabad with all that they could carry. On their way to the port city of Karachi, the family was robbed off everything. After five days, Mrs. Mamtani boarded a

ship with her family for Mumbai. The captain of the ship did not know the directions for Mumbai and he anchored in the middle of nowhere. Mrs. Mamtani remembers the conditions of sea sickness and loss that had gripped everyone. The ship then docked in Kutch in Gujarat. After moving through several towns the family settled in Ajmer, Rajasthan. After her marriage to Mr. Satram Mamtani in 1952, Mrs. Mamtani moved to Delhi. Her talent in singing was acknowledged by a music director Darshan Singh, and he trained her in modern vocal music. Mrs. Mamtani went onto become a radio singer of repute. She sings in Sindhi, Hindi and Punjabi; and works hard to popularize and preserve Sindhi folk songs. Her radio programs are also broadcasted in Pakistan by the External Affairs Ministry of the government of Pakistan. In 2009, Mrs. Mamtani was invited by the Urdu Services of the BBC London to visit Sindh. She recalls with nostalgia the love and warmth she received as she travelled across the province. She also visited her old house and hometown. People loved her there and arranged for recording her songs.

Appendix B: Google Form Document given to ‘Citizen Historians’ for submitting their interview summary

Interview Summary

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING YOUR SUMMARY

Each summary aims to tell a complete story of the interviewee's life, so including many details helps to create an accurate, fully-formed life story. Of course, you don't need to write-up the interview word-for-word—rather, include the major details (at least 3) from each part of life - childhood, Partition, after Partition, and current life. In all, the summary should be 1 to 2 pages in length.

This document justifies the stories of these Partition witnesses, and will be read by thousands, possibly millions, in the future, so please write carefully!

Below are some examples of details to include:

1. Pre-partition life: birth date and place, home life, community, school memories, siblings, friends, parents and their occupations, ancestral background, how communities got along
2. Partition: When/how they heard the news, reaction to news
3. Migrants: Making the decision to migrate, migration route and experiences along the way, how they travel and with whom, feelings during the journey, what was left behind;
4. Non-migrants: Changes witnessed in society and economy, feelings and opinions about the changes or lack of, how their daily lives changed, how communities got along
5. Post-Partition: New homes, adjustment to new place, allotments or compensation, education, career/jobs, marriage, children, traveling, any outstanding details or anecdotes
6. Now: Where they live now, how they spend their time, opinion on Partition, message to future generations

In all, the interview summary is meant to create a full picture of the interviewee's life story and aims to be report-like. The INTERVIEWER BACKGROUND/ PERSONAL REFLECTION section provides a space to share how you felt about the interview and inspiration you came away with. You can also describe the circumstances surrounding the interview, for example, how you met the interviewee, if the family came and gathered around to hear their story, or if the interviewee is hard of hearing.

After you have written the summary, please go over it with the interviewee and/or a member of their family before turning it in online. This is the interviewee's opportunity to make factual corrections about any misunderstandings, misspellings, mistaken dates, names, or places. After the interview has been completely archived, they will also receive a copy of the summary you've written as a part of the confirmation email. This will be their final opportunity to make changes.

EXAMPLE SUMMARY:

The EXAMPLE SUMMARY below is from an interview conducted by Story Scholar Prakhar Joshi with Mrs. Leela Mamtani on January 29, 2014 date in New Delhi. [Link to the FB summary](#) or the [StoryMap summary](#).

Mrs. Leela Mamtani was born in Kandyara town of Nawab Shah District in Pakistan on October 21, 1932. Until the age of fifteen, she lived in Kandyara while her brothers lived in Karachi and Hyderabad. Her father was a prominent landlord and they lived in a huge haveli. The house had various secret cupboards called hoori, which were used to hide valuables. In 1947, the family had to abandon two hoori full of riches. Mrs. Mamtani walks down the memory lane when she describes the family life in Kandyara. Her family had very harmonious relations with Muslims and there were brotherly sentiments. Mrs. Mamtani recalls her mischief from childhood and shares memories with friends Devi, Tilli and Sheila. They used to bunk classes and ran into the orchards for fruits or the ponds and waterfalls.

Mrs. Mamtani mentions a festival Thaddari which was celebrated during the monsoon months. It was not a religious festival but a community celebration when all the families got together for singing and merriment, and exchanged sweet breads. Mrs. Mamtani's family offered prayers to the water god Darya Shah.

Folk songs were a major part of all revelry- community or religious and all major activities like child birth, marriages, crop harvest. Mrs. Mamtani bursts into a melodious song that the women used to sing overnight during celebrations. Another unique aspect was the intricate embroidery work of Sind province, mostly done by Muslim ladies. The markets in Kandyara were elaborate and segregated according to commodities- cloth, general items and food.

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On their way to the port city of Karachi, the family was robbed off everything. After five days, Mrs. Mamtani boarded a ship with her family for Mumbai. The captain of the ship did not know the directions for Mumbai and he anchored in the middle of nowhere. Mrs. Mamtani remembers the conditions of sea sickness and loss that had gripped everyone. The ship then docked in Kutch, Bhuj in Gujarat.

After moving through several towns the family settled in Ajmer, Rajasthan. After her marriage to Mr. Satram Mamtani in 1952, Mrs. Mamtani moved to Delhi. Her talent in singing was acknowledged by a music director Darshan Singh, and he trained her in modern vocal music. Mrs. Mamtani went on to become a radio singer of repute. She sings in Sindhi, Hindi and Punjabi; and works hard to popularize and preserve Sindhi folk songs. Her radio programs are also broadcasted in Pakistan by the External Affairs Ministry of the government of Pakistan.

In 2009, Mrs. Mamtani was invited by the Urdu Services of the BBC London to visit Sindh. She recalls with nostalgia the love and warmth she received as she travelled across the province. She also visited her old house and hometown. People loved her there and arranged for recording her songs.

*Required

Your Name *

Please enter your full name

Your answer

Your Email Address *

Your answer

Interviewee's name *

Enter the interviewee's full name

Your answer

Interview date *

Date

yyyymmdd

ENTER: INTERVIEW SUMMARY *

Interviewer, please enter background information on the person you are interviewing. What do they do today? What is their profession and their personal position or accomplishments in life? If they are retired, what was their occupation? Where do they live now? Can you summarize their life story and Partition experience (include names of places and their age during Partition). Is there something very special about their life or migration story? What about their ancestry? How many daughters/sons, grandchildren? Please write a short paragraph here. Use as much space as you like. We recommend ½ to 2 pages for this summary. THIS WILL BE A PUBLIC SUMMARY. CHOOSE WORDS CAREFULLY.

Your answer

ENTER: INTERVIEWER BACKGROUND/ PERSONAL REFLECTION *

Tell us a bit about yourself and your relation to the interviewee. What is your profession and age? How did you feel about the interview? What draws you to this project? How do you know the interviewee? This is your opportunity to provide your personal reflections about the interview and/or the project. THIS WILL BE A PUBLIC SUMMARY. CHOOSE WORDS CAREFULLY.

Your answer

Submit