





# Everyday Partitions

## 'My East is Your West' (2015) and 'This Night-Bitten Dawn' (2016)

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Rashid Rana, *War Within II*, 2013–2014, (detail), from the series 'Transpositions', 2013–2015, C Print + DIASEC, collection of the artist, photo: Mark Blower

There, behind barbed wire, was Hindustan. Here, behind the same kind of wire, was Pakistan. In between, on that piece of ground that had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.

Saadat Hasan Manto, 'Toba Tek Singh'<sup>1</sup>

1 Saadat Hasan Manto, 'Toba Tek Singh' [1955], Frances W Pritchett, trans, <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/00urdu/robateksingh/translation.html>, accessed 3 September 2016. Pritchett's literal translation is useful for my purposes as it accurately captures shifts in Manto's language, tone and affect. Other translations of the story are available in Saadat Hasan Manto, 'Toba Tek Singh', *Mottled Dawn: Fifty Sketches and Stories of Partition*, Khalid Hasan, trans, Penguin, New Delhi, 1997, pp 1–10, and Saadat Hasan Manto, 'Toba Tek Singh', Robert P Haldane, trans, *Mahfil*, vol 6, nos 2/3, 1970, pp 19–23.

2 Kai Friese, 'Marginalia', *Transition* 90, 2001, pp 4–29

3 Manto, 'Toba Tek Singh' op cit

Borders are the most imaginary of all territories. But, then, people are imaginative. India as we know it shares borders with six other states. Seven, if you believe in Tibet. Eleven, if you count the stretches of water that divide the Indian archipelagos from the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Sumatra. Twelve, if you accept India's wishful image of an undivided Kashmir stretching up to the Pamir panhandle in Afghanistan.

Kai Friese, 'Marginalia'<sup>2</sup>

Kai Friese's essay 'Marginalia' (2001) recalls Saadat Hasan Manto's short story 'Toba Tek Singh' (1955) about the exchange of inmates between mental asylums in India and Pakistan following the Partition of 1947. In Manto's story, the Sikh inmate Bishan Singh, a landowner and long-time resident of the Lahore asylum, who is known as Toba Tek Singh after his hometown, tries to make sense of his belonging in the world and the status of his lands by iterating a nonsensical utterance to guards, family members and fellow inmates: '*Upar di gur gur di annex di be dhyana di mung di daal of the lantern.*'<sup>3</sup> During his fifteen-year tenure at the asylum, Toba Tek Singh never slept and always stood, which gave him a fierce and somewhat frightening appearance. Yet officers find him lying at the border on the day after the exchange of inmates as he refused to be 'returned' to India and reunited with his family. Toba Tek Singh's story suggests that the madman's nonsense

has become common sense in a world gone mad.<sup>4</sup> With subtle and destabilising shifts between past and present, here and there, Hindustan (India) and Pakistan, the asylum and the border, Manto's language brings the reader to occupy common ground with Toba Tek Singh, to accept confusion and uncertainty as everyday conditions, to understand Partition as an enduring and intimate violence.

Friese observes how 'borders do strange things to bodies' as he traverses various sites, past and present, in South Asia and elsewhere: Sikkim, Tibet, Delhi, Berlin, Dachau and Ranchi.<sup>5</sup> He discovers two Chinese prisoners-of-war, Jiang Chen and M A Siblong, who have been held since the Sino-Indian war of 1962 in the Kraepelin ward (so named after German psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin) of the Central Institute of Psychiatry in Bihar, 'Asia's oldest mental asylum', once the European Mental Asylum.<sup>6</sup> According to the director of the asylum, the two Chinese prisoners are 'chronic schizophrenics' and 'burn-outs'.<sup>7</sup> According to the Chinese embassy official in New Delhi with whom Friese speaks, they came to India of their own 'free will', which is to say, they were asylum seekers.<sup>8</sup> As Friese walks through the women's wards of the asylum, he notes:

I saw a sign painted in English and it made me wince. 'A Patient Who Works Recovers Fast'. The old Dachau slogan: 'Arbeit Macht Frei'. Ranchi was no concentration camp, but the madness of institutions is universal. And so is the fragility of their victims.<sup>9</sup>

The mix of logic and illogic, tragedy and farce, violence and madness in Friese's ostensibly factual account of contemporary South Asia echoes Manto's fictional narrative set a few years after Partition.

Friese shows how the legacy of Partition extends to sites and struggles other than those of Punjab and Bengal, the two regions of British India divided in 1947 into India and Pakistan. Partition is foundational to the conception of citizenship and nationhood in South Asia and to practices of everyday life. It is materialised in the state's relationship to minorities, territory, cartography, security, nuclear science, and 'sensitive spaces' such as Kashmir and the Chittagong Hill Tracts.<sup>10</sup> It is experienced in mundane and routine contexts: farming and trading, soap operas and cricket matches, language politics and anti-terrorism policies, censorship practices and sedition laws. It is inhabited in analogues to Manto's Lahore asylum and Friese's Ranchi asylum such as Pagaltari (literally, Crazytown), a settlement of Bhatiyas (literally, outsiders) in Dahagram at the Bangladesh-India border.<sup>11</sup> It is embodied in what Friese calls 'borderline psychotics', 'the men who will kill you – or lock you up forever –because you live on the other side'.<sup>12</sup>

Friese's psychotics suffer from an acute version of the border disease that afflicts residents of the subcontinent and is related to his 'marginalia', a compulsive disorder and critical preoccupation with borders, nations and partitions.<sup>13</sup> Being 'fidgety at the edges', as Friese puts it, is a normal condition in contemporary South Asia where Toba Tek Singh's nonsensical common sense would not be out of place: 'Upur di gur gur di annex di be dhyana di mung di dal of the Pakistan and Hindustan of the get out, loudmouth!'<sup>14</sup> This condition was the subject of the

4 There is an autobiographical subtext to this story as Manto was admitted to the Lahore mental asylum to treat his alcoholism in 1954. He died in Lahore in 1955, the same year as 'Toba Tek Singh' was published. See Ayesha Jalal, *The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times, and Work Across the India-Pakistan Divide*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2013, p 184.

5 Friese, 'Marginalia', op cit, p 29

6 Ibid, pp 19–20

7 Ibid, p 22

8 Ibid, p 25

9 Ibid, pp 24–25

10 Jason Cons proposes the term 'sensitive space' to denote special enclaves, border areas, and conflict zones and their cognates, including refugee camps, detention centres and urban slums, employing it as 'a framework for understanding the confusions of land, community, and belonging at the fragmented edges of national imagination', Jason Cons, *Sensitive Space: Fragmented Territory at the India-Bangladesh Border*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2016, p 154.

11 Ibid, pp 95–98

12 Friese, 'Marginalia', op cit, p 29

13 Ibid, p 8

14 Friese, 'Marginalia', op cit, p 8; and Manto, 'Toba Tek Singh', op cit

- 15 Iftikhar Dadi, 'Partition and Contemporary Art', in Iftikhar Dadi and Hammad Nasar, eds, *Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space*, Herbert F Johnson Museum of Art, Ithaca, 2012, p 19. *Lines of Control* examines the effects of various partitions (India, Korea, Palestine and Ireland) in the work of over thirty contemporary artists from across the globe. The exhibition took its name from the Line of Control, which refers to the highly militarised, de facto boundary between India and Pakistan in Kashmir designated by the 1972 Simla Agreement following the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. Although the Line of Control is a geographic place and a proper noun – the only one of its kind in the world – the notion of lines of control applies to other lines such as the Line of Actual Control, the Radcliffe Line and the McMahon Line, to name but a few contemporary and historical boundaries separating India, Pakistan, China and Tibet. It also suggests exceptional spaces such as the Korean demilitarised zone, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Berlin Wall, exceptions that have become common in a modern world bursting with refugees, migrants and detainees. The lack of visual representations of Partition is a subject that deserves further study. Scholars have suggested that the experience of trauma has been unsayable, unspeakable, and impossible to represent. Others have suggested that the visual representation of Partition has been subject to nationalist codes of silence, repression and wilful forgetting, and that it has been represented in ways that are illegible, sublimated, displaced and deferred. See Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in*

exhibitions 'My East is Your West' (Palazzo Benzon, Venice, 6 May–October 15 2015) and 'This Night-Bitten Dawn' (24 Jor Bagh, New Delhi, 30 January – 29 February 2016), which adopted a stance akin to Friese's marginalia. These exhibitions presented a critique of contemporary nationalism and globalisation through the trope of partition, and imagined a region across shifting sites and scales that was at odds with dominant visions of the market and nation-state. The South Asia on view in 'My East is Your West' and 'This Night-Bitten Dawn' was neither a region unified by tastes, values, and consumer behaviours as envisioned by the South Asia and Middle East sales and marketing division of a multinational corporation, nor a region with a shared cultural heritage, preservation challenges, and tourism potential as envisioned by a group of government ministers at a SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) meeting. 'My East is Your West' and 'This Night-Bitten Dawn' unsettled conventional notions of region and claimed belonging to partition, that is, to division and dislocation as the basis of identity, territory, community and society in South Asia.

## South Asia as Art World

In the exhibition catalogue *Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space*, Iftikhar Dadi notes 'the resurgence of artistic engagement' with the Partition of 1947 after its striking absence from the field of the visual arts for most of the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> Since the late 1990s, the problem of borders, nations, and partitions has figured prominently in projects by Bangladeshi, Indian, and Pakistani visual artists who cite the historical and cultural legacies of Partition to reflect on the present. Many of these projects such as Nalini Malani's *Remembering Toba Tek Singh* (1998), Bani Abidi's *The News* (2001), Amar Kanwar's *The Lightning Testimonies* (2007), and Tayeba Begum Lipi's *1.7 million mi<sup>2</sup> to 55,598 mi<sup>2</sup>* (2013) examine the multiple afterlives or "shadow lines," of Partition in South Asia rather than focusing on a singular historical event.<sup>16</sup> In so doing, they take a *longue durée* view of Partition, what Vazira Zamindar has aptly termed the 'long Partition' in her study of the distribution of persons, property, permits, and passports in India and Pakistan during the late 1940s and 1950s.<sup>17</sup> Even more significantly, these artistic projects take up the idea of everyday partitions, to adapt Kamala Visweswaran's notion of 'everyday occupations'.<sup>18</sup> Rejecting an event-based or episodic account of violence, Visweswaran focuses on the intersection between politics and culture under occupation, a condition of 'violent peace' that is socially generative and foundational to democracy in South Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere.<sup>19</sup> By her account, occupation offers a 'distinct analytic' and 'ethnographic object' that revises conventional histories and temporalities of domination, resistance, violence, peace, life, death, exception and the everyday.<sup>20</sup>

Although Visweswaran and her collaborators examine 'poetry, song, and story' as 'genres expressive of political ambiguity, hegemony, and subversion', visual culture has also been a crucial site of power-knowledge and its critique in contemporary South Asia.<sup>21</sup> Indeed Bhaskar Sarkar argues that the photographic image, and thereby



- the Wake of Partition*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2009, pp 27–30, and Emilia Terracciano, 'Fugitive Lines: Nasreen Mohamedi, 1960–75', *Art Journal* 73, no 1, summer 2014, pp 44–59, pp 58–59.
- 16 Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, Ravi Dayal, New Delhi, 1988
- 17 Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2007. Emilia Terracciano deploys 'the long partition' as a critical framework for analysing the art and life of Nasreen Mohamedi (1937–1990); Terracciano, 'Fugitive Lines', op cit, p 57.
- 18 Kamala Visweswaran, ed, *Everyday Occupations: Experiencing Militarism in South Asia and the Middle East*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2013
- 19 Ibid, p 12, p 6. Visweswaran's notion of 'violent peace' relates to theories of war and peace such as those of military and political theorists Carl von Clausewitz and Carl Schmitt. Such theories have particular resonance for histories of partition. As David Lloyd writes: 'Partition is a settlement imposed under the threat of continuing violence; the border it establishes represents, in consequence, the suspension rather than the end of violence. The border in partition remains shadowed by the expectation of violence, violence that perpetually maintains the borderline as a fissure rather than a suture, sustaining antagonism rather than hybridity.' See 'Ruinination: Partition and the Expectation of Violence (on Allan deSouza's Irish Photography)', *Social Identities*, vol 9, issue 4, 2003, pp 475–509, p 481.
- cinema, possesses a privileged relationship to time, memory and death, and is especially well suited to the work of mourning.<sup>22</sup> For Sarkar, cinema represents a set of 'mass cultural practices' capable of providing a 'history from below', and illuminates 'the materiality of vernacular lifeworlds' that have been obscured by a focus on elite actors and grand narratives in official histories of Partition.<sup>23</sup> Highlighting the role of popular and vernacular cultural forms in recasting history and the everyday, Visweswaran and Sarkar elide visual art which circulates in elite gallery and museum settings. However, visual art engages the body, memory, and space in ways that are closely related to the affective, performative and embodied modes of cinema, conveying that which is unsayable or unspeakable in the aftermath of trauma, even as its materiality and language are distinct from that of cinema. South Asian artists have shown how high and low cultures produce vision and regimes of visibility that in turn create exclusion, violence, partitions and space. Their work operates between elite and popular registers, negotiating what David Gilmartin has called the 'high politics' of nationalism and the 'everyday politics of local life'.<sup>24</sup> It addresses Partition as it unfolds in homes and bazaars, on streets and sidewalks, in television shows and newspapers, on billboards and electronic discussion boards, in video games and sports competitions.
- The phrase 'everyday partitions' encapsulates the way in which contemporary art from South Asia decentres Partition from a fixed historical and geographical location in the past and recasts it as an incomplete process with resonances and reverberations in the present exemplified by extraordinary events such as the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 and the anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat in 2002, the ordinary workings of the state and the comings and goings of citizens and non-citizens in maps and checkpoints, classrooms and museums, border crossings and bureaucratic forms.<sup>25</sup> The everyday in this instance not only refers to the nature of Partition violence in contemporary South Asia, but also to the aesthetic means and political arguments mobilised by artists in response to that violence. It speaks to the tactics, in Michel de Certeau's sense, of contemporary artists who seek a new relationship between art and life; who understand themselves as activists, ethnographers and investigators; and who engage social and political issues more directly and interactively than their modernist predecessors.<sup>26</sup> It points to transformations of de Certeau's theory of everyday life, based in a Western tradition of critique and grounded in modernist practice, in postcolonial contexts where artists are reinventing the relationship between villages, cities, provinces, nations, regions and continents, and remaking place and society. South Asian artists walk cities different from mid-twentieth-century Paris and craft itineraries that deserve particular attention.<sup>27</sup> The notion of everyday partitions enables critical comparisons across sites in South Asia that are often viewed in isolation or as exceptions, illuminating links between Kochi and Jaffna, Kashmir and Assam, Dhaka and Guwahati, Delhi and Lahore, Mumbai and Bastar.
- The aesthetics and politics of everyday partitions were evident in 'My East is Your West' and 'This Night-Bitten Dawn', which represented collaborations between artists, curators and patrons in South Asia, and examined the region's relation to the past and future. Both exhibitions

Visweswaran's account of occupation as socially generative resonates with other accounts of war and violence as generative of new forms of life, personhood, and sociality and not merely dispossessing, destructive and deathly. See, for example, Sharika Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2011, p 11. The generativity of Partition was a key theme of *Lines of Control*, which sought to examine Partition as 'a productive act: generating new lines and maps; creating borders and regimes of control; fashioning new identities, reconfiguring memories and rewriting histories'. See Hammad Nasar, 'Lines of Control: Partition as a Productive Space', in Iftikhar Dadi and Hammad Nasar, eds, *Lines of Control*, op cit, p 10.

20 Ibid, p 19

21 Visweswaran, *Everyday Occupations*, op cit, p 16

22 Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation*, op cit, p 20

23 Ibid, p 17, p 19

24 David Gilmartin, 'Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol 57, no 4, 1998, pp 1068–1095, p 1069. Critiquing the narrative of Partition 'as a product of a deal between the Congress, the British, and the Muslim League', David Gilmartin proposes that Partition is 'a key moment in a much longer and ongoing history linking the state and the arenas of everyday conflict', p 1092.

25 Various scholars have addressed the notion of partition as recursion and repetition. See, for example, Suvir Kaul, ed, *Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2001, pp 2–3.

took up Partition as 'event, metaphor, memory', to cite Shahid Amin's study of Chauri Chaura, which is to say, a violence that links local and national histories, everyday life and organised politics, marginal and elite actors.<sup>28</sup> Like Amin's study, these exhibitions focused on quotidian rituals and lived experiences to reveal the intersection of these rituals and experiences with 'the mainstream story', that is, with nations, borders and partitions.<sup>29</sup> They were critical of official and unofficial nationalisms and posited South Asia as an oppositional framework, a cultural zone, and a space for action. They departed from the national art survey model that has dominated museum and international exhibition venues such as the Venice Biennale since the early 2000s.<sup>30</sup> This model has been rightly critiqued for colluding with the market and nation-state, and presenting an image of South Asia 'meant to win Western hearts'.<sup>31</sup>

'My East is Your West' and 'This Night-Bitten Dawn' instantiated a South Asian art world that has come into being since the 1990s through new networks forged by artists' organisations, art institutions, art exhibitions, and private philanthropy, including the Vasl Artist's Collective, Britto Arts Trust, Khōj International Artists' Association, the Theertha Artists' Collective, Sri Lanka Archive of Contemporary Art, Architecture & Design, the Samdani Art Foundation, the Gujral Foundation, the Devi Art Foundation, the Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art, the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, and the Dhaka Art Summit. In the past two decades, South Asian artists have participated in workshops, residencies, performances, exhibitions and other events in the region and elsewhere (such as Dubai, Sharjah, Hong Kong and Singapore, to name but a few prominent centres of display and critical discourse outside South Asia). They have come to regard each other's work as resources, and recognise themselves as members of a transnational community unified not only by history, language, religion, custom, popular culture, and the unfinished business of Partition, but also by structural conditions of artistic production.

Artists face unique challenges in South Asia, a region populated by million-man armies and haunted by the spectre of nuclear war. Cultural exchange, not to mention travel, is difficult within and across nation-states. Nevertheless, South Asian artists find ways to make meaningful connections with each other. Naiza H Khan, a founding member of the Vasl Artists' Collective in Karachi, characterises the South Asian art world in the twenty-first century by

a significant number of artist exchanges and a shared resistance to the difficulties that are common to people and institutions within the region: political conflicts, lack of government support and funding, and problems of mobility and international networking and communication.<sup>32</sup>

She claims: 'What binds us, regionally, is... a common goal to reshape dialogic cultural constituency in a postcolonial context, one that neither eludes difference nor renders it an impossible hurdle.'<sup>33</sup> 'My East is Your West' and 'This Night-Bitten Dawn' participate in the project that Khan outlines. In their effort to create dialogue in and through difference, they articulate new forms of postcolonial and global citizenship made possible in and through art.



## 'My East is Your West' (2015)

26 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Steven Rendall, trans, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984, pp 47–55

27 Ravi Sundaram argues that the spatial theories of early twentieth-century European avant-gardes as well as those of Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, developed during the 1960s, are inadequate to understanding the media urbanisms and pirate modernity that emerged in Delhi in the 1990s. For Sundaram, this period was marked by a rapid transformation of 'the urban sensorium' and produced 'a series of shock experiences', sense of crisis and set of exceptions in India and South Asia more broadly (p 148, p 152). Lefebvre's and de Certeau's notions of ordinariness, repetition and banality (and theories of power such as colonisation and resistance), formulated in the context of post-war Paris, do not apply in a twenty-first-century South Asian context characterised by blur and flux between property and the commons, real and virtual realms, and commodity and immateriality, and by 'network and service breakdowns, infrastructure crisis, and rising demands about "rights to the city" exerted through proliferation of non-legal claims on the city', p 151; Ravi Sundaram, 'Re-visiting "Everyday Life": the Experience of Delhi's Media Urbanism', in Kamran Asdar Ali and Martina Rieker, eds, *Comparing Cities: The Middle East and South Asia*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, pp 130–158

28 Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992*, revised edition, Penguin, New Delhi, 2006, p xx

'My East is Your West', a collateral event at the Venice Biennale in 2015, brought together two contemporary artists, Shilpa Gupta and Rashid Rana, from India and Pakistan respectively, to collaborate on an exhibition in the sumptuously decorated Palazzo Benzon, a seventeenth-century building in the San Marco district of the city. While Rana's digital photomontages and video installations abounded in human figures and rich colour, referencing a tradition of Western painting since the Renaissance in order to consider the publics for art in East and West, Gupta's drawings, sculptural installations, and performance were abstract, conceptual and grey, as the artist aimed to simulate her experience of the Bangladesh–India border, which separates the eastern and western parts of what was once a unified Bengal. Both artists' work highlighted vision and occlusion in a history of images and everyday life, bringing into view – partially, obscurely, dramatically and repeatedly – modes of seeing and unseeing produced by nations, borders and partitions.

According to the press release for the exhibition, it was envisioned as a 'shared platform' for artists who 'explore notions of location and dislocation, transnational belonging, and the impact of cultural and political conditioning in determining our relationship to geographic and national territories'.<sup>34</sup> The notion of the everyday was crucial to this platform:

This journey towards conceiving a shared platform in Venice builds on the artists' concerns to negotiate between the individual and the communal in relation to the 'everyday' experiences of collective consciousness.<sup>35</sup>

Instead of representing the national cultures of India and Pakistan, the artists offered a critical framework for thinking about the South Asian region and its everyday partitions, what Dadi has called its 'frayed geographies' and 'fractured selves'.<sup>36</sup> Aesthetically, this was achieved by focusing on conditions of visibility: by a play on the fragility and ferocity of mark-making in Gupta's work, and by a relay of art historical and mass-cultural images and technologies of surveillance and spectatorship in Rana's work.

The title of the exhibition was drawn from a light installation by Gupta, who showed a body of work based on her research on the Bangladesh–India border, where a 4096-kilometre long, eight-foot high barbed wire fence is being erected to control and curb the movement of peoples and goods between the two nations.<sup>37</sup> This fence, the world's longest security barrier, restages and renews the logics of Partition, which David Lloyd has described as 'a political strategy of the colonial power, to separate conflicting parties, as a means to the cessation of violence' and 'a settlement imposed under the threat of continuing violence'.<sup>38</sup> Gupta's work on the Bangladesh–India border was originally commissioned by Kvadrat, a Danish textile company, in 2012, and then by the Samdani Art Foundation for the Dhaka Art Summit in 2014, and continued her longstanding engagement with security, borders, nations and maps.<sup>39</sup> In Dhaka, Gupta's was one of several solo projects by artists from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Pakistan commissioned for the Summit, where it enacted a critical regionalism that was reinforced



Shilpa Gupta, *1:998.9, 3360 KMS OF FENCED BORDER, EAST, SUNDERBANS TO TEEN MATH, DATA UPDATE: MARCH 31, 2014*, 2012–2015, performance-based installation with 3364 meters of cloth handwoven in Phulia, an India-Bangladesh border town, collection of the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark, photo: Sonal Khullar





Shilpa Gupta, *1:998.9, 3360 KMS OF FENCED BORDER, EAST, SUNDERBANS TO TEEN MATH, DATA UPDATE: MARCH 31, 2014*, 2012–2015, performance-based installation with 3364 meters of cloth handwoven in Phulia, an India-Bangladesh border town, collection of the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark, photo: Martina Celi



Shilpa Gupta, *1:998.9, 3360 KMS OF FENCED BORDER, EAST, SUNDERBANS TO TEEN MATH, DATA UPDATE: MARCH 31, 2014, 2012–2015*, (detail), performance-based installation with 3364 meters of cloth handwoven in Phulia, an India-Bangladesh border town, collection of the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark, photo: Sonal Khullar

29 Ibid, *Event, Metaphor, Memory*, op cit, p 234. The exhibition 'Part Narratives', 7–21 January 2017, curated by Gayatri Sinha and held in Bikaner House, New Delhi, took up the subject of Partition and explored similar themes – historiography, archives and fragments – as 'My East is Your West' and 'This Night-Bitten Dawn', but it did so from a national point of view, emphasising mythical, historical, and contemporary migrations in India. *Part Narratives* underscored the singularity of the Partition of 1947, which inaugurated 'an aesthetic of toxicity and trauma', rather than focusing on its afterlives and everyday impact or recursive character as in 'My East is Your West' and 'This Night-Bitten Dawn'. Gayatri Sinha, ed, *Part Narratives*, Critical Collective, New Delhi,

by the project's extension and installation in Venice. Commissioned by the Gujral Foundation, a Delhi-based arts organisation, and curated by Martina Mazzotta, 'My East is Your West' took place in a year in which neither India nor Pakistan had an official pavilion at the Biennale.<sup>40</sup> Feroze Gujral, Director of the Gujral Foundation, claimed: 'We [India and Pakistan] come from a shared past, we have a divided present, and we hope for a collaborative future.'<sup>41</sup>

This shared past and divided present were on view in Gupta's performance-based installation, *1:998.9* (2012–2015), where the viewer was witness to a slow and solemn ritual as a woman occupied a wooden desk, assuming the role of scribe and transcribing blue lines onto white cloth with a sheet of carbon paper. Her tracings on this cloth, and presumably that of other performers over the days, weeks and months of the exhibition, were piled up in a corner of the room, ghostly materialisations of the history and memory of Partition, and of the everyday partitions through which people and their property are partitioned and repartitioned. The province of Bengal was partitioned in 1905, then again in 1947, and the formation of Bangladesh in 1971 marked yet another partition. Once the performer completed her mark-making and left the exhibition space, the viewer contemplated the empty desk, darkened room, old paintings, and piles of cloth marked up with multiple, meandering and meaningless lines that suggest rivers and veins, maps and waves, topographies and physiognomies.



2017, no pagination. In so doing, this exhibition presented Partition as exception and event.

30 This model was exemplified by a series of exhibitions of contemporary Indian art outside India, including 'Kapital and Karma' (Vienna, 2002), 'Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India' (Perth, New York City, Berkeley, Mexico City, Monterrey, New Delhi, and Mumbai, 2004–2007), 'Indian Summer' (Paris, 2005), 'Indian Highway' (London, 2008, with restagings in Oslo, Lyons, Rome, and Beijing), 'Horn Please: Narratives in Contemporary Indian Art' (Bern, 2007–2008), 'New Narratives: Contemporary Art from India' (Chicago, 2007), 'Chalo! [Let's Go!] India: A New Era of Indian Art' (Tokyo and Seoul, 2008–2009), and 'Paris-Delhi-Bombay' (Paris, 2011).

31 Holland Cotter, 'Activist Energy with A Light Touch', *New York Times*, 1 October 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/02/arts/design/02group.html>, accessed 19 September 2016

32 Naiza H Khan, 'Mobility and Change: Creative Discourse Across Borders', in Eugie Joo and Ethan Swan, eds, *Arts Spaces Directory*, New Museum, New York and *ArtAsiaPacific*, Hong Kong, 2012, p 20

33 Ibid, p 21

34 The Gujral Foundation, 'The Gujral Foundation Presents 'My East is Your West' Collateral Event of the 56th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia', press release. <http://www.irmabianchi.it/sites/default/files/comunicati/Press%20release.pdf>, accessed 9 October 2017. Rana resisted the notion of an 'Indo-Pak collaboration',

In that space, I was reminded of physical sites such as the Marble Palace and the Writers' Building in Calcutta, and countless archives and museums in South Asia such as those that have been the subject of Dayanita Singh's *File Room* (2013), which contain traces of ordinary lives embodied in paper and things, and suggests how these lives exceed material remains and documentary evidence. I was also reminded of the work of Cyril Radcliffe, the British lawyer and chairman of the Boundary Commissions for Punjab and Bengal, who redrew the borders of the subcontinent along religious lines in 1947,<sup>42</sup> and the work of contemporary mark-makers such as the Joint Border Survey Team at the Bangladesh–India border, where concrete pillars are placed at regular intervals according to strict 'triangulation and measurement procedures'.<sup>43</sup> The title of Gupta's work, *1:998.9*, names a ratio that is 'a little off from' the standard 1:1000 scale and plays on the inaccuracy and uncertainty inherent in mapping exercises.<sup>44</sup> Mapmakers insist on their exactitude, which is ironic and even absurd in the case of the Bangladesh–India border where territorial boundaries are constantly shifting due 'to changing path[s] of river tributaries', natural disasters, and climate change.<sup>45</sup> In this border zone, land and water routinely swap identities. *1:998.9* evoked the bureaucratic machinery of the colonial and postcolonial state, the official and unofficial rooms in which records and files are kept, the ways in which lives are divided by line-making persons and processes. Gupta's text revealed that the 3364 meters – a number closely resembling the 3360 kilometres of fenced border from Sunderbans (swamp) to Teen Math (mountain peak) that Gupta noted in her research in 2014 – of cloth used in the performance was loomed in Phulia, a border town in the Indian state of West Bengal where weavers from East Bengal (which became East Pakistan and eventually Bangladesh) settled after Partition. Their labour and livelihood were rendered as the surface for lines drawn and shadows cast by the artist and her audience, echoing historical and contemporary processes of displacement and resettlement.

With the artist as guide, the viewer witnessed legal and illegal exchanges of cloth, cattle, and codeine-based cough syrup (legal in India, illegal in Bangladesh); precarious existence and contingent encounters against barbed wire and under floodlights; bustling activity and shadowy silences in fields and bazaars. Gupta placed objects such as unravelled yarn from a fine handwoven cotton sari or bone china fragments in vitrines with her notes and observations and other people's narratives of travel to, from, and across the border:

The guard at border post at the Tin Bigha Corridor firmly says only 30 cows are officially authorized to cross over at this unique entry-exit point on Mondays and Thursdays. Hundreds and hundreds of cows stand grazing in fields at the border.<sup>46</sup>

The traffic in cattle is a major flashpoint at the border since cows are sacred animals for Hindus, the dominant religious group in India, and their sale across the border for meat and other uses is contentious and heavily regulated. In Bangladesh, with a majority Muslim population,



Shilpa Gupta, *1763.06 Kms of Floodlighting*, 2015, carbon rubbings and incisions on paper, collection of Galleria Continua, Le Moulin, San Gimignano, Beijing, Les Moulins, Habana, photo: Ela Bialkowska, OKNOstudio

which 'actually reinforces the idea of Indian and Pakistan as polar binaries'. He wished for the exhibition to represent 'the subcontinent as a region'. Rachel Spence, 'Venice Biennale: India-Pakistan Art Collaboration', *Financial Times*, 1 May 2015, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/a2f0a180-ecc2-11e4-a81a-00144feab7de.html>, accessed 4 September 2016.

- 35 The Gujral Foundation, 'The Gujral Foundation Presents 'My East is Your West' Collateral Event of the 56th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia', press release

there is high demand for cattle that Indians supply. As a result, a robust, paralegal, and sometimes deadly trade flourishes at the border.<sup>47</sup> Gupta presented a complex picture of this commercial activity and other everyday partitions. She displayed a transcript of an Indian parliamentary inquiry into an extrajudicial shooting at the border with long passages of redacted text and the words '(Interruptions)', '\*Not recorded', and '\*Expunged by order of the chair' repeated at regular intervals. She staged spectral encounters with maps, drawings, lighting, and found objects that mimic, miniaturise and magnify security measures at the border.

In 'My East is Your West', Gupta's work conjured a borderland in which people are arbitrarily designated smugglers and traders, insiders and outsiders, citizens and stateless persons. The border emerged as a site that is policed and porous, protected and permeable, violently produced and barely perceptible, as exemplified by the artist's small perforations on a carbon paper drawing which stand for '1763.06 kms of floodlighting', a mock blueprint for the 'Department of Border Management, Home Ministry of India'.<sup>48</sup> In a field of blue, the familiar contours of Bangladesh's territorial boundaries were faintly visible like distant stars in the sky. Throughout the exhibition, Gupta challenged visibility, often obscuring images, objects and text, and occasionally blinding the viewer with the kind of floodlighting used at the border.





Rashid Rana, *War Within II*, 2013–2014, from the series 'Transpositions', 2013–2015, C Print + DIASEC, collection of the artist, photo: Mark Blower



36 Ifthikhar Dadi, 'Frayed Geographies and Fractured Selves: Shilpa Gupta's Untitled (2014–2015)', in *The Gujral Foundation, My East is Your West*, Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2016, p 70

37 The fence is scheduled for completion in 2017 and will be electrified in parts. 'Indo-Bangla Border Fencing Work to Finish by 2017', *The Indian Express*, 25 June 2016. <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/indo-bangla-border-fencing-work-to-finish-by-2017-2875548/>, accessed 17 September 2016. The light installation from which the exhibition drew its name was not on display at Venice because of logistical issues. Jyoti Dhar, 'My East is Your West: India and Pakistan at 56th Venice Biennale', *ArtAsiaPacific*, 12 May 2016. <http://artasiapacific.com/Blog/MyEastIsYourWestIndiaAndPakistanAt56thVeniceBiennale>, accessed 3 September 2016.

38 Lloyd, 'Ruinat', op cit, p 481

39 Established in 2011 by Nadia Samdani and Rajeeb Samdani in Dhaka, the Samdani Foundation is a non-profit organisation that aims to increase opportunities for contemporary artists from that country, and develop critical dialogues between Bangladeshi and international audiences. To that end, the Samdani Foundation sponsors the Dhaka Art Summit, a biennial event established in 2012, that claims to be neither art fair nor biennale (in contrast to the India Art Fair and Kochi-Muziris Biennale, other major regional art events) but an intellectual and cultural forum on contemporary art and artists in South Asia.

Rana's *War Within II* (2013), a spectacular digital photomontage based on Jacques-Louis David's *Oath of the Horatii* (1784), presented a different challenge to visibility. It is a computer-generated composite of smaller images of David's painting that was doubled and stretched across two walls. Viewed up close, *War Within II* disintegrates into pixelated fragments of drapery, architectural details and human extremities. For Rana, the French artist's famous painting of the Horatii, three brothers from Rome off to war with the Curiatii, three brothers form the rival city of Alba Longo, serves as a muse and metaphor for everyday life in Pakistan and the violence that pits Sunni against Shia, Balochi against Punjabi, *muhajir* (refugee, immigrant) against non-*muhajir*, and Muslim against Christian. In David's painting, Camilla weeps in anticipation of the death of her brother or betrothed, one of the Curiatii brothers, in the war to come. The condition of civil war, of which the Partition of 1947 was an exemplar, is an everyday reality and ever-present threat in South Asia where not only nation-states, but also clans, classes, castes, tribes, provinces, religious communities, and other groups are engaged in violent conflict.

In his novel *The Shadow Lines*, Amitav Ghosh poignantly evokes that condition:

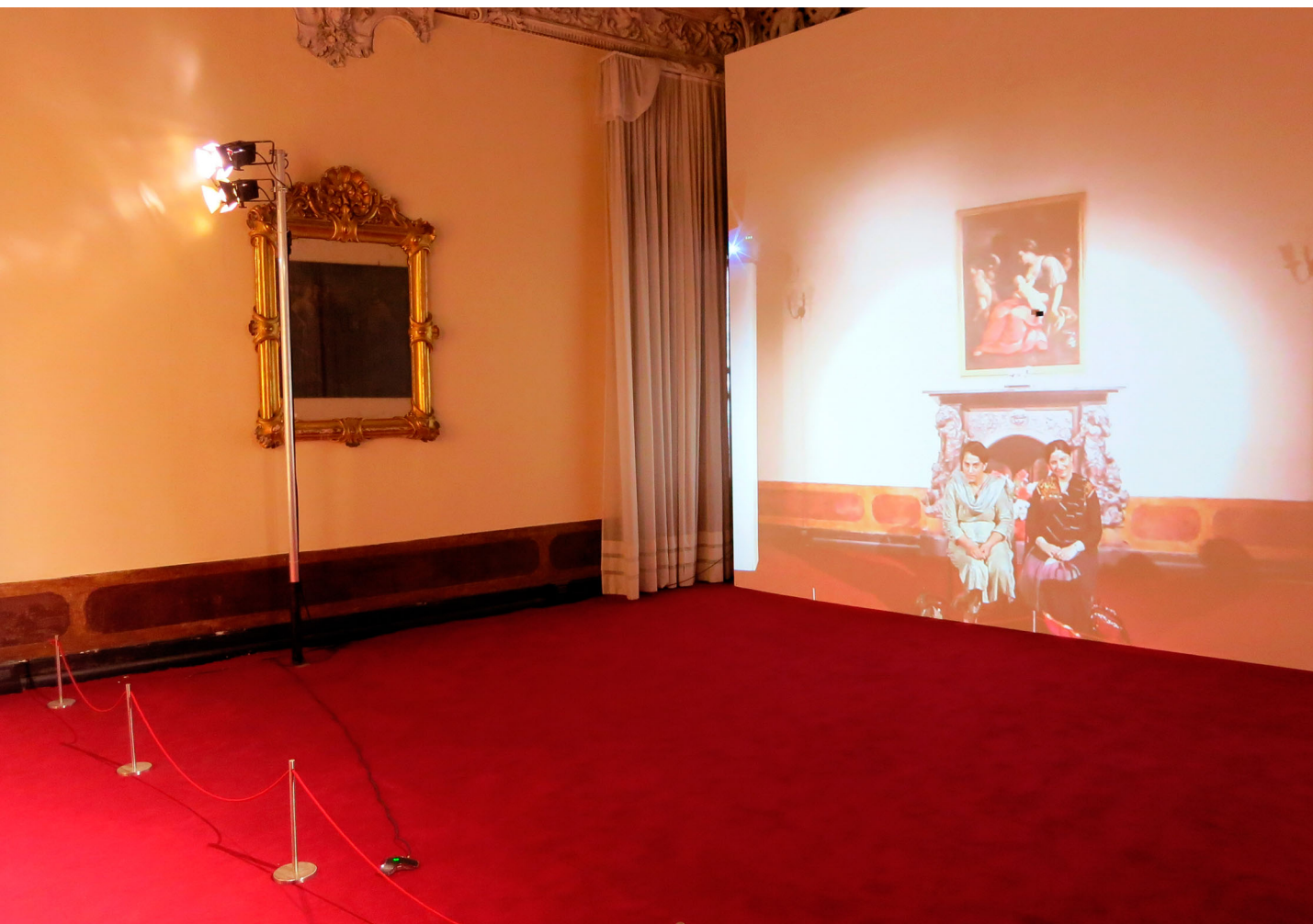
That particular fear has a texture you can neither forget nor describe. . . It is a fear that comes out of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can become suddenly, and without warning as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people of the subcontinent from the rest of the world – not language, not food, not music – it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror.<sup>49</sup>

This 'war between oneself and one's image in the mirror' is the central conceit of Rana's work. In 'My East is Your West', as in his wider oeuvre, the artist plays with scale, distance, illusion, reflection, surface and depth, and invites viewers to see contemporary image cultures of surveillance, cinema, television and the internet as existing in a complex relation to each other. Like Gupta, Rana has long been interested in how media and technology shape the public sphere in South Asia and enable new formations of culture and politics.

In *Anatomy Lessons III*, from the two-part *My Sight Stands in the Way of Your Memory* (2012–2015), Rana created a video installation, based on Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1598–1599), from 'tons of YouTube clips, including film footage (fiction) as well as news media reportage and CCTV footage (non-fiction)'.<sup>50</sup> For the second part of the work, *Site-uations*, Rana displayed a photograph of *Anatomy Lessons III*, a still image of his video installation, on a set that replicated the interior in Venice where the original was on display. This set was staged in Lahore's streets and markets where the city's residents could walk past or closely view the work, look at it or away from it. Audiences in Venice could see Rana's nine-channel installation as well as footage of the Lahore audiences' reactions to his work. This splitting and doubling of the artwork and audience enacted what Nav Haq has called 'asymmetrical mirroring' whereby 'you do see something of yourself in



Rashid Rana, *Situ-ations*, 2015, from the two-part *My Sight Stands in the Way of Your Memory*, 2012–2015, single-channel projection, collection of the artist, photo: Ela Bialkowska, OKNOstudio



Rashid Rana, *Asl-e-Shuhuud-o-shaabid-mashhuud* (The viewing, the viewer, and the viewed), 2015, multi-site installation, collection of the artist, photo: Sonal Khullar



40 Although Indian and Pakistani artists have shown work in the official exhibition and elsewhere at the Venice Biennale, the government of Pakistan last sponsored a pavilion in 1956, and India's first and last government-sponsored pavilion was organised in 2011. Jason Burke, 'Pakistan and India to Share Exhibit at Venice Biennale', *The Guardian*, 30 January 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/jan/31/pakistan-india-share-venice-biennale-pavilion>, accessed 3 September 2016.

41 The Gujral Foundation, 'The Gujral Foundation Presents *My East is Your West* Collateral Event of the 56th International Art Exhibition -la Biennale di Venezia', Press release. <http://www.irmabianchi.it/sites/default/files/comunicati/Press%20release.pdf>, accessed 9 October 2017. Established in 2008 by Feroze Gujral and Mohit Gujral in New Delhi, the Gujral Foundation is a non-profit organisation that has commissioned artworks and sponsored exhibitions in India and abroad. Mohit Gujral is the son of Satish Gujral (b 1925), a distinguished Indian painter, sculptor and architect based in Delhi, who studied at the Mayo College of Arts in Lahore (now the National College of Art) and who lived through and produced work on the Partition of 1947.

42 The international border between Bangladesh, India and Pakistan is named the Radcliffe Line after Cyril Radcliffe, who had never visited India prior to his arrival there in July 1947. The Radcliffe Award, as the division of territory came to be known, was publicly announced on 17 August 1947. Based in Simla, the summer capital of the British colonial

the other, yet something is also profoundly different'.<sup>51</sup> This asymmetry was experienced individually and collectively as audiences in Lahore and Venice reflected on the place of and public for art, the role of women in myth and society, the status of armies and generals, and the culture of media and technology.

The relationship between the place of and publics for art in East and West was a key theme of Rana's work at Venice. *Asl-e-Shuhud-o-shaahid-mashhuud* (*The viewing, the viewer, and the viewed*, 2015), a multi-site video installation with live camera, generated a real-time dialogue between audiences in Lahore and Venice. Rana secured a studio space near Liberty Market in Lahore, where he installed a backdrop to mirror a room in the Palazzo Benzon. Audiences in Venice and Lahore were able to engage each other in live conversations through streaming video from and to a space that appeared identical on camera. With this work, Rana wished to challenge conventional notions of the art object and perceptions of time and space, 'creat[ing] an in-between space where different participants are self-reflective about their location and feel intrigued by their interaction'.<sup>52</sup> Participants were aware of the illusion that sought to place them in the same or a shared space, yet disjunctions between the two sites remained apparent in the work.

During my visit to the exhibition, I met Munazza, a sculptor at the National College of Art in Lahore, and her sister, a dentist, who were eager to engage audiences in Venice. I spoke in English rather than Urdu for the benefit of the other visitors. Both Lahori women were fascinated by my belonging to Delhi, but our conversation was unfinished because of technical difficulties. We (in Venice) could hear them but they (in Lahore) were unable to hear us. Such failures, or breakdowns of communication, were built into the exhibition and exemplified 'asymmetrical mirroring', whereby difference – of social and cultural capital, and of economic and political power – came into focus and was the basis for an exchange. In the exchange between Lahore and Venice that Rana orchestrated, the viewer was acutely aware of difference, yet also engaged in a dialogue that aimed to think through the limits and possibilities of postcolonial and global citizenship. What are the conditions of artistic production and circulation in postcolonial societies? How do these conditions affect claims to globality by artists and artworks?

In 'My East is Your West', Gupta and Rana deploy an aesthetics of fragmentation by which site and sight – place and image – are broken up into pieces, occasionally pixelated, occluded, and materialised only as parts rather than wholes. Like 'Toba Tek Singh', the exhibition generated confusion and uncertainty around place, which is to say, it dislocated relationships between identity, territory, community and society. Gilmarin has argued that in pre-Partition South Asia, place was bound up in 'networks of personal, genealogical, familial, and status relationships – and the local divisions – in relation to which moral community was experienced and enacted in everyday life'.<sup>53</sup> He proposes that Partition severed the link between place and those networks, and reads Manto's story as a parable of the destruction of 'locatedness':

if Toba Tek Singh stands for the human bonds of local community, this vision of place is repeatedly played off in the story against the division of territory represented by partition... The partition of territory, in this

government, Radcliffe and his collaborators devised the award in six weeks using inadequate maps and 'without foot, aerial, or hydrographic surveys'. Sumathi Ramaswamy, 'Midnight's Line', in *Lines of Control*, op cit, p 28

43 Cons, *Sensitive Space*, op cit, p 112

44 Personal communication with author, 3 April 2017

45 Ibid

46 Shilpa Gupta, 'Untitled (2014–2015): Visual Documentation', in *My East is Your West*, op cit, p 110

47 Delwar Hussain, 'Fencing Off Bangladesh', *The Guardian*, 5 September 2009 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/sep/05/bangladesh-india-border-fence>, accessed 25 September 2016. See also Delwar Hussain, *Boundaries Undermined: The Ruins of Progress on the Bangladesh/Indian Border*, Hurst, London, 2013.

48 Gupta's use of carbon paper in this work and the performance at Venice recalls her *100 Hand Drawn Maps of India* (2007–2008), an installation and video projection in which the artist invited participants to draw the national map from memory. The nonconforming, sometimes deformed, and often comical results were displayed together as tracings on carbon paper and digital projections. Gupta has extended this project to other nations, including Canada, Ecuador and Ireland. In the Indian context, the work is witty, resonant and subversive because maps are anxiously controlled and regulated by the state. The Indian Customs Declaration Form, which must be completed to enter the country, lists as first among

telling, becomes the antithesis of place, of community, and ultimately of humanity.<sup>54</sup>

'My East is Your West' destabilised place through the trope of everyday partitions. Yet, unlike the devastating conclusion of 'Toba Tek Singh', it also suggested an alternate mode of belonging through art – of belonging to partition, to borderlands and to South Asia as opposed to nation-states and statist categories.

## 'This Night-Bitten Dawn' (1947/2016)

This stain-covered daybreak, this night-bitten dawn,  
This is not that dawn of which there was expectation;  
This is not that dawn with longing for which  
The friends set out, (convinced) that somewhere there we met with,  
Faiz Ahmed Faiz, 'Freedom's Dawn (August 1947)'.<sup>55</sup>

Taking its cue from Faiz Ahmed Faiz's famous poem about Partition, 'Subh-e-Azadi' (Freedom's Dawn), the exhibition 'This Night-Bitten Dawn', curated by Salima Hashmi (who is the poet's daughter and an artist and curator based in Lahore), was held in New Delhi in 2016 to coincide with the India Art Fair, a commercial venture established in 2008. Sponsored by the Devi Art Foundation and the Gujral Foundation, the exhibition was staged in a private home-turned-art space, 24 Jor Bagh, a stone's throw from Lodi Gardens, a complex of tombs dating to the Sultanate period that give New Delhi 'the appearance of an Islamic necropolis'.<sup>56</sup> A grey haze enveloped the city, as it often does in winter months, providing appropriate atmospheric effects for an exhibition devoted to a dawn that has been translated as 'night-bitten', 'stained', 'mottled', and 'leprous'. That dawn was the moment of India and Pakistan's independence from British rule, and the genocidal violence and mass displacement of Partition. Hashmi summarised the aims of the exhibition: 'the artists here probe the past and the present simultaneously to circumvent history as it is told and to try to reimagine and fashion it anew'.<sup>57</sup> Thus she envisioned the work of art as analogous to Amin's 'alternative histories... which alter materially the terms and conditions on which the Big Story (e.g. India's freedom struggle) is told'.<sup>58</sup>

Much of the work by the approximately twenty Indian and Pakistani artists on display such as Somnath Hore's 'Wound' series (1970) and Zarina Hashmi's 'Letters From Home' (2004) was familiar to art-going audiences in Delhi.<sup>59</sup> Yet some work such as Iftikhar Dadi and Nalini Malani's *Bloodlines* (1997) had never been shown in South Asia before. Other work such as Sheba Chhachhi's *Cleave/Cleave To* (2016) and Risham Syed's *Vaila K'vaila* (Time Un-Timed, 2016) was newly produced. Many works such as Gargi Raina's *Constructing the Memory of a Room* (2001) and Pushpamala N's *Labyrinth* (1994) referred to specific acts of violence and historical events in South Asia: the Partition of 1947, the Bangladesh War of 1971, and the destruction of the Babri Mosque in 1992. Others such as Anita Dube's *Silence (Blood Wedding)* (1997) and Imran Ahmed's *Implode I* (2007) conveyed a threat that was diffuse and displaced, everywhere and nowhere. Yet others such as Bani Abidi's *Mangoes* (2002) and Asma Mundrawala's *Love Story*



Risham Syed, *Vaila K'vaila (Time Un-Timed)*, 2016, installation, collection of the artist, photo: Sonal Khullar



'items prohibited for import': 'maps and literature where Indian external boundaries have been shown incorrectly'. At the bottom of the form is the greeting: 'Indian Customs Welcomes You to India'.

49 Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, op cit, p 204

50 Rashid Rana, 'An Exchange Between Rashid Rana and Sandhini Poddar', in *My East is Your West*, op cit, p 122

51 Nav Haq, 'Dimension Intrusion: Rashid Rana's Spatio-Temporal Practice', in *My East is Your West*, op cit, p 29

52 'An Exchange Between Rashid Rana and Sandhini Poddar', op cit, p 122

53 Gilmartin, 'Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History', op cit, p 1084, p 1088

54 Ibid, p 1085

55 Faiz Ahmed Faiz, 'Freedom's Dawn', in *Poems by Faiz*, Victor G Kiernan, trans, Allen and Unwin, London, 1971, p 123. Here is Kiernan's loose translation of Faiz's verse: 'This leprous daybreak, dawn night's fangs have mangled –/This is not that long-looked-for break of day/Not that clear dawn in quest of which those comrades/Set out, believing that in heaven's wide void'.

56 Vidya Dehejia, *Indian Art*, Phaidon, New York, 1997, p 262

57 Wall text and print brochure titled 'This Night Bitten Dawn', a curatorial statement by Salima Hashmi. January, 2016.

58 Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory*, op cit, p 234

59 Many works were drawn from the collection of the Devi Art Foundation and had previously been shown in *Reassemble Assemble*, an exhibition of contemporary Pakistani

(2004) focused on utterly ordinary acts such as the eating of mangoes and fading of flowers that give way to violence and signify loss, absence, devastation and death.

In contrast to 'My East is Your West', which emphasised public spaces and interactions, 'This Night-Bitten Dawn' highlighted intimate relations and domestic spaces as the terrain of Partition. It recalled the left luggage and abandoned homes of Partition refugees, the evacuee property administered by the state and inhabited by displaced persons from the other side. Informed by feminist histories, 'This Night-Bitten Dawn' represented Partition as a 'major event' in 'minor keys', showing artworks such as Roohi Ahmed's *See Sow* (2015) that placed human bodies in intimate relation with territorial boundaries and installed them in a space equipped with kitchen cabinets and bedroom closets.<sup>60</sup> The exhibition served as a reminder of the gendered nature of Partition, and the use of women's bodies in constructing community through rape, recovery and rehabilitation programmes.<sup>61</sup>

'This Night-Bitten Dawn' had a ghostly effect as the viewer walked through bedrooms and bathrooms, kitchens and sheds, rooftop terraces and gardens looking for, and at, art. As I peered in and through windows and screens, passed other viewers on staircases and in corridors and encountered locked rooms and forbidden passages, I felt as though I were being let in on a secret and that it was being hidden from my view. Being in someone else's home, the cognitive understanding of it as an art space notwithstanding, was an estranging and haunting experience. This home, likely constructed during the late 1950s or early 1960s in a city that was rebuilt and remade after Partition, is located in a neighbourhood where wealthy refugees settled. Its history resonated with Risham Syed's description of her grandparents' home at 50 Lower Mall Road in Lahore, built by R B L Jagdish Chander in the late nineteenth century and torn down in the late twentieth century to make way for new structures. The artist memorialised that loss through found objects and footage – her grandmother's wedding dress and her mother's home video – and through a painting and quilt with digital printing, embroidery, acrylic paint and applique on cotton support. She juxtaposed handmade and mechanically-reproduced images of the new city that has arisen with car centres and shopping plazas, in a state of perpetual construction and demolition, against family photographs of her grandparents' stately home. In Delhi as in Lahore, sprawling bungalow homes and gardens with *shahtoot* (black mulberry) and *jamun* (java plum) trees have been demolished to make way for high-rise office buildings and apartment blocks. The dilapidated home in Jor Bagh that served as the site of the exhibition is a mid-twentieth-century building that may not survive long into the twenty-first century. Feroze Gujral, who owns the building, has declared her plans to renovate the structure, reinforcing the air of transience and decay that hangs over the property.<sup>62</sup>

In the exhibition, Partition violence was evoked through an aesthetics of cuts and wounds, gaps and fissures, memorialisation and mourning. This was not the imagery of burning trains, bloodthirsty mobs, mutilated bodies and 'great migration' of millions in caravans that has been common to photographic and cinematic representations of Partition. Nor was this an expression of 'personal agony', 'collective anguish', or 'melancholic pessimism', as Sarkar has characterised Indian cinema in the wake of Partition.<sup>63</sup> In this cinema, Sarkar views Partition as a

art, curated by Rashid Rana at that institution in 2010. See Rashid Rana, ed, *Reassemble Assemble*, Devi Art Foundation, Delhi, 2010.

60 Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1998, p 16

61 See Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*, op cit, and Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1998. Like these pioneering histories, the exhibition privileged the partition of Punjab in part because of the locations of the curator, patrons, and exhibition venue in Lahore and Delhi. For a critical overview of the literature on Partition, see Joya Chatterji, 'Partition Studies: Prospects and Pitfalls', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol 73, no 2, 2014, pp 309–312; and David Gilmartin, 'The Historiography of India's Partition: Between Civilization and Modernity', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol 74, no 1, July 2015, pp 23–41. As Chatterji and Gilmartin argue, the experience of the Punjab was the exception rather than the rule of Partition in South Asia. Indeed, Chatterji proposes that the focus on Punjab has been a drawback of Partition studies. Joya Chatterji, 'New Directions in Partition Studies', *History Workshop Journal*, vol 67, no 1, 2009, pp 213–220, pp 216–219. The Partition of Bengal has been the subject of Joya Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition: Bengal and India, 1947–1967*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007 and Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994. For critical histories of the

'social cataclysm' and 'ordeal', a traumatic event that is mourned through spectacular visual representations as well as indirect and coded references.<sup>64</sup> Instead, the exhibition highlighted the everydayness of Partition, its gradual, repeated, practiced, lived, local and humdrum character. It proposed the everyday as a site of violence rather than a refuge or respite from it, as 'the ground between the violence of the past, and its future anticipation' in Visweswaran's terms.<sup>65</sup> It referred to what Ravi Sundaram has called 'an elevation of ordinary life into a sharply conflictual experience' in Indian cities since the 1990s, where residents have witnessed 'a war of the mundane that is increasing day by day'.<sup>66</sup> Naiza H Khan uses similar language to describe conditions of everyday life and artistic production in Lahore and Karachi: 'our strategies of survival in the city are like guerrilla tactics'.<sup>67</sup>

Together these artists and intellectuals call attention to violence that is not merely a condition of wartime, or a function of colonial or imperial domination. Their work responds to a situation in which exceptions – raids, sieges, bombings, shootings, displacement, relocation, occupations and evictions – are the norm, and modes of resistance and survival unclear. In 'This Night-Bitten Dawn' as in 'My East is Your West', the everyday was less utopian potential than a ground zero of gendered violence, family feuds, communal conflict, nationalist ideology and state intervention. Partition was not in the past or out there at the Wagah Border or Tin Bigha Corridor, but present and in here: in drawers and closets, stairs and niches, walls and cracks.

In one room of the exhibition, Dube's blood-red human bones, drawn from a medical skeleton that once belonged to her brother (an erstwhile medical student) and ornamented with velvet, beading and lace, were juxtaposed with Ahmed's stainless steel surgical instruments and a shotgun cast in aluminium that hung, unadorned and unsecured, from the ceiling. These brittle and sharp sculptural objects suggested intimate losses and immediate dangers, and acquired specific meanings in the space of a private residence, an art gallery, Delhi and India. They recalled visits to the doctor and mourning with relatives, stays in hospital and trips to surgery, the traffic in human organs, and daily journeys through cities in which assault, theft and kidnapping are constant concerns. Their evocation of violence was ambiguous and poetic in contrast to the Western-orientated and 'issue-driven' South Asian art that Holland Cotter observed in the 'Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India' (2005) and 'Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art from Pakistan' (2009), exhibitions held respectively at the Asia Society in New York.<sup>68</sup> For the *New York Times* art critic, *Hanging Fire*, curated by Salima Hashmi, 'with its references to war, religion and consumerism', was emblematic of the Asia Society's approach to curating culture: 'topical in content, market ready in format and didactic in delivery'.<sup>69</sup> Indeed Quddus Mirza has noted how contemporary artists from Pakistan must produce work that corresponds either to the 'beautiful art of miniature making' or to spectacularised 'images of violence and terror' in order to meet the demands of an international art world.<sup>70</sup> While the work of the contemporary artists participating in 'This Night-Bitten Dawn' and indeed 'My East is Your West' had been displayed in national art surveys that correspond to the model Cotter critiques, the critical regional framework changed the terms on which this art was viewed. Instead of proposing a distinct





Unum Babar, *Thin Cities*, 2015–2016, plaster of Paris, Hydrocal, and paper, collection of the artist, photo: Sonal Khullar



Bangladesh War of 1971, see Yasmin Saikia, *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2011 and Nayanika Mookherjee, *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories, and the Bangladesh War of 1971*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2015.

- 62 Gargi Gupta, 'Feroze Gujral – More Than Just a Glamorous Face', *DNA India*, 29 March 2015, <http://www.dnaindia.com/lifestyle/report-feroze-gujral-more-than-just-a-glamorous-face-2072788>, accessed 19 September 2016. The Gujral Foundation, which manages 24 Jor Bagh, organised the loan of the Aspinwall House venue at the Kochi Biennale, a warehouse-turned-art space that also conveys a sense of ruin. Feroze Gujral's husband Mohit Gujral is a senior executive with DLF, the Indian real estate company that owns and leases Aspinwall House. See Sonal Khullar, *Worldly Affiliations*, University of California Press, Oakland, California, 2015, pp 214–227.

- 63 Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation*, op cit, p 227, p 165, p 156

- 64 Ibid, p 199, p 157

- 65 Visweswaran, *Everyday Occupations*, op cit, p 19. This relation to violence is not unique to South Asia. Writing about car wrecks and border landscapes in relation to Allan deSouza's Irish photography, Lloyd argues that 'the quotidian is saturated with the memory and the expectation of violence', and this violence in turn divides the everyday into a retrospective anticipation of violence and a recursive – and perhaps redundant – iteration of mourning', Lloyd, 'Ruination ...', pp 490–491.

national-cultural or South Asian identity, these exhibitions suggested partition as a form of belonging, a shared terrain of experience, and a political claim on the future.

For many artists in 'This Night-Bitten Dawn', partition was a tool with which to analyse the ordinary and extraordinary reorganisation of urban space under globalisation and in the name of development, what Rosalyn Deutsche has called 'evictions' in her study of contemporary art and spatial politics in the United States.<sup>71</sup> Unum Babar's series 'Thin Cities' (2013) refers to real and imagined cities in South Asia, to a history of building and destroying, to dismembering and remembering in poetry and prose by Ghalib, Hali, Abdul Halim Sharar and Ahmed Ali. Her delicate mark-making on small-scale architectural casts suggest graffiti, spider's webs, bird's nests, moss and creepers. For the artist, these mobile homes and model cities are 'pocket-size memories' whose function is akin to that of photographs and postcards.<sup>72</sup> Laid across the terrace of 24 Jor Bagh, Babar's dwellings, which were conceived as she shuttled between Boston, Lahore and Karachi, recalled the work of dreamers and builders who have reimagined and renovated Delhi time and again. This work powerfully reverberated with its location in the capital city of multiple empires spanning a millennium, an imperial palimpsest whose ruins are now the site of a real estate boom.

The effects of booming and bursting cities were the subject of Varsha Nair and Tejal Shah's 'Exquisite Crisis and Encounters' (2006), which examined the artists' relationship to the rapidly-changing urban environments of Bangkok and Mumbai, where they lived. Covering their bodies in a white embroidered cloth, Nair and Shah performed a strange movement of twins and opposites, a dance of suffocation and release, in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, and photographic documentation of that performance was on view in 24 Jor Bagh. In those photographs, the shroud-like cloth binds the two artists together and cuts them off from each other as their bodies are conjoined, extended, separated, and contorted across the exhibition space. Ayesha Zulfiqar Sheikh's *Slice* (2009), a sculpture made of concrete, rubble, broken glass and plastic, explored the psychic and physical costs of urbanisation through the metaphor of cake. Her rough and exposed layers suggested the displacement and relocation of people in the making and breaking of roads; the labours of engineers, planners, day labourers and corporate executives; and the debris and detritus of construction and reconstruction. In the towns and cities of twenty-first-century South Asia, municipal authorities and real estate companies draw lines and carve up territory, partitioning space and lives, enacting everyday evictions. The division of territory is an ongoing process as new state boundaries and spatial formations such as satellite cities and Special Economic Zones are created, often by forcible removal and displacement, pitting the factory against the farm and the state against the subaltern. Belonging to place is continually constructed and fiercely contested.

Much of the art on view in 'This Night-Bitten Dawn' took up the informal and improvised nature of urbanisation in twenty-first-century South Asia, with its security barriers, VIP protocols, capitalist and bureaucratic regimes, and distinctive vernacular cultures and creative economies. Even as this art addresses loss, violence, trauma and death, its focus on the everyday marks its difference from the 'migratory' aes-

- 66 Sundaram, 'Re-visiting "Everyday Life"', op cit, p 152
- 67 Naiza Khan, 'Art and Social Change', Artist's talk at the Seattle Public Library, 2 April 2017, Seattle, Washington
- 68 Cotter, 'Activist Energy with A Light Touch', op cit
- 69 Ibid
- 70 Quddus Mirza, 'Miniature, Monster, and Modernism: Curating Terror or Terror of Curating', in *InFlux: Contemporary Art in Asia*, Naman Ahuja, Parul Dave-Mukherji, and Kavita Singh, eds, Sage, New Delhi, 2013, p 91. Mirza has argued that a 'new internationalism' in the art world has given rise to a community of contemporary Pakistani artists who are 'exiles at home' and 'hardly shown in local galleries', p 69. He concludes that 'the more it [contemporary art from Pakistan] is uprooted from its native soil, the more accolades it receives in the mainstream art world', (69). Quddus Mirza, 'Exile at Home: Pakistani Art in the Global Age', in Salima Hashmi, ed, *Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art from Pakistan*, Asia Society, New York, pp 67–71.
- 71 Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996
- 72 Quoted in Cate McQuaid, 'Unum Babar, Massachusetts College of Art and Design', *The Boston Globe*, 18 April 2013
- 73 Terracciano, 'Fugitive Lines', op cit, p 58; and Aamir R Mufti, 'Zarina Hashmi and the Arts of Dispossession', in *Lines of Control*, op cit, p 87
- 74 Zamindar uses the term 'Partition effects' to describe critical links between past and present, 'what actually happened at Partition, and the ways in

thetic Emilia Terracciano has identified in Nasreen Mohamedi's work or the 'art of dispossession' Aamir Mufti has theorised in Zarina Hashmi's work.<sup>73</sup> Similar 'Partition effects' are visible in the careers of Satish Gujral, Somnath Hore, K G Subramanyan and Tyeb Mehta, artists who lived through the Partition of 1947 and the Bangladesh War of 1971, and whose work directly or indirectly refers to their experience of those events (in this regard, these artists are comparable to Ritwik Ghatak, M S Sathya and Govind Nihalani, some of the directors whose Partition films Sarkar analyses).<sup>74</sup> By contrast, for the vast majority of artists who showed work in 'This Night-Bitten Dawn', as indeed in 'My East is Your West', there was no memory of an undivided subcontinent, no dream of reunification, and no quest for reparation.

The exhibitions suggested an understanding, if not an acceptance, of partition – of fracture and rupture, of edginess and eruptions – as the ground of everyday life in South Asia. The artwork in these exhibitions displayed a shared sensibility toward art and politics, and offered a collective critique of nations, borders, markets, militarisation, development and urban planning. This sensibility is distinct from that of 'Toba Tek Singh', which conveys exception, tragedy and social death as the protagonist of Manto's story and belonging to place are destroyed. Contemporary artists take Toba Tek Singh's dislocation and disintegration as the starting point of their investigations into the South Asian region, and as a profoundly generative source and subject for their art. For these artists, Partition provides a method and material with which to interrogate the unevenness of globalisation's effects (evident in the organisation of the artworld; the geopolitics that divide and connect cities, regions, nations and continents; and patterns of circulation and obstruction in the movement of labour and capital) and formulate new notions of place, identity, community and society. Their gaze is directed less at the past than at the present and future, an orientation that was apparent in 'The Missing One', an exhibition of contemporary South Asian art at the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Dhaka Art Summit 2016.<sup>75</sup>

## Coda: The Missing One (1896/2016)

By the merest chance, a catastrophe was averted.

Jagadish Chandra Bose, 'The Story of the Missing One'<sup>76</sup>

Inspired by Jagadish Chandra Bose's 'The Story of the Missing One' (1896) and organised around the twin themes of spirituality and science, 'The Missing One' (2016) was curated by Nada Raza and featured the work of twenty artists from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. A painting by Gaganendranath Tagore, *Resurrection* (c 1922), served as the point of origin for this 'intergalactic, intergenerational exhibition', which was divided into three movements – 'Staring Up At The Sky', 'Alienation', and 'Light Blindness' – that took the viewer on a journey from light to darkness, from the heavens to the earth, and from utopias to dystopias (in the last section of the exhibition, Tejal Shah's *Landfill Dance* (2012), a multi-channel video installation in which masked and gloved performers resemble cockroaches as they occupy a toxic waste site, was the aesthetic counterpoint to Tagore's ethereal



Firoz Mahmud, *Flights of the desire for castles in the air, a figment is not far that will be very near*, 2015-2016, from *Soaked Dreams of Future Families* series, 2008-present, photograph, lightbox, mixed media sculpture, installation at the Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka Art Summit 2016, private collection, photo: Firoz Mahmud and Exhibit 320, New Delhi



which Partition is rhetorically invoked and socially remembered'; Zamindar, *The Long Partition*, op cit, p 238.

75 The 2016 Dhaka Art Summit was directed by Diana Campbell Betancourt and held in the Bangladesh Shilpkala Academy, the National Academy of the Fine and Performing Arts, in central Dhaka. It featured multiple exhibitions of modern and contemporary art, live performances, a film program, and discussion panels.

76 Jagadish Chandra Bose, 'Runaway Cyclone', translated by Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, see *Strange Horizons*, 30 September 2013, <http://www.strangehorizons.com/2013/20130930/3bose-f.shtml>, accessed 2 September 2016. The story was originally published as 'Niruddesh Kahini' ('The Story of the Missing One') in 1896 and reworked by the author as 'Palatak Toofan' ('Runaway Cyclone') for his collection *Abyakta* (1921). The prize-winning entry in a competition promoting Kuntalin hair oil, 'The Story of the Missing One' is one of the earliest examples of science fiction in South Asia.

77 <https://www.dhakaartsummit.org/the-missing-one/>, accessed October 8, 2017

78 Bose, 'Runaway Cyclone'. In Bose's story, the hair oil, Kuntal Keshari, subsequently commercialised as Kuntalin, is originally gifted by an Indian ascetic to an English circus manager who uses it to tame a lion's mane, a detail which contributes to the strange charm and Swadeshi (of one's own country) politics of the narrative.

and dreamy cloudscape – the first work viewers encountered).<sup>77</sup> Although Partition was not explicitly a theme of the exhibition, its evocation of South Asia had much in common with 'My East is Your West' and 'This Night-Bitten Dawn'. 'The Missing One' presented a region without centre, emblematised by the widely anticipated cyclone of Bose's story that disappears in the Bay of Bengal, baffling scientists across the world from Calcutta and Simla to Oxford and America. The 'atmospheric disturbance' is averted by a man traveling to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) aboard the SS Chusan who uses a magical hair oil to soothe the troubled waters of the 'angry sea', 'produc[ing] a wave of condensation, thus counteracting the wave of rarefaction to which the cyclone was due'.<sup>78</sup> The cyclone is a metaphor for the centrifugal and centripetal energies that bind and separate South Asia, for a crackling disturbance in the air, for the averted catastrophe of nuclear war. In this exhibition, South Asia was figured as dispersed particles and gravitational pulls, meteoric events and miraculous discoveries, exiled scientists and apocalyptic futures exemplified by Hajra Waheed's *Still Against the Sky* (2015), Neha Choksi's *Skyfold* (2013), Rohini Devasher's *Helio Blue* (2015), Zihan Karim's *Eye* (1) (2014), Marzia Farhana's *Connecting to Infinity* (2011), Sahej Rahal's *Tandav III* (2012), David Alesworth's *Probe Intervention* (2002–2003), and Mehreen Murtaza's *Comet Bennet over Delhi, Humayun's Tomb March 1970* (2013).

Collectively these works turned their gaze to the sky, imagining other worlds and ways of being in, and belonging to, this world. They performed local and global affiliations, and attempted to make contact and connection with aliens, outsiders, strangers and others. Firoz Mahmud's *Flights of the desire for castles in the air, a figment is not far that will be very near* (selection from *Soaked Dream and Future Families*, 2012), depicted families and fictive kin wearing green goggles fashioned by the artist from waste materials collected from his subjects and linked to their occupations such as 'small devices from sewing machines which are used in garment factories' or used in their everyday lives such as 'old Pringle chips container[s] and Coca Cola or other soft drink plastic glasses'.<sup>79</sup> The colour green signified affiliations to nation and Islam, to an environmental consciousness and extraterrestrial beings, the 'little green men' of science fiction and fantasy novels.<sup>80</sup> Mahmud's collaborators and subjects pose for the camera, embodying hope, whimsy, and sincerity in their effort to see differently and remake community through upcycled goggles.

A playfulness and sense of flight also animated Iftikhar Dadi and Elizabeth Dadi's *Magic Carpet 2* (2005–2016), an image of the future that was grounded in the past, making reference to Islamic ornament, Op Art, Orientalist design, and mass-manufactured commodities. Their sculpture, with its glowing neon lights and psychedelic patterns, simultaneously evoked a pool table and a prayer mat, astronomical charts and mathematical puzzles, time travel and architectural mazes. It suggested altered states of perception in a gambling hall, a space ship, and indeed an art exhibition. *Magic Carpet 2* was the second iteration of a work the artists produced for the exhibition 'Fatal Love: South Asian American Art Now' at the Queens Museum of Art (27 February – 5 June 2005) that was shown alongside that institution's panoramic relief map of New York City. What if we were to imagine *Magic*



Iftikhar Dadi and Elizabeth Dadi, *Magic Carpet 2*, 2005–2016, aluminum, digital print, LED lights, collection of the artists, photo: Iftikhar Dadi

79 Personal communication with author, 13 May 2017. 'Soaked Dream: German Hope in Firoz Mahmud's Eyes', *The Dhaka Herald*, 9 October 2013, <http://www.dhakaheald.com/art-culture/soaked-dream-german-hope-in-firoz-mahmuds-eyes/>, accessed 11 October 2016

80 In the Hindi sci-fi film *Mr. India* (Shekhar Kapur, 1987), the hero Arun defeats a megalomaniacal, fascist leader and evil mastermind Mogambo with the aid of magic goggles, a band of orphaned children, and a feisty journalist Seema, who goes undercover as the dancer Ms Hawa Hawaii. This film was a huge hit and remains popular in South Asia, where the reach and appeal of Bombay cinema is immense, so it is possible that some of Mahmud's subjects knew of it.

81 Gayatri C Spivak, *Other Asias*, Blackwell, Malden, Massachusetts, 2008, p 9. This notion of a critical regionalism is distinct from its conceptualisation and use in architectural history and theory, notably by Kenneth Frampton. See Kenneth Frampton, 'Prospects for a Critical Regionalism', *Perspecta*, vol 20, January 1983, pp 147–162. Spivak's use of the term refers to bearing witness to the displacements of contemporary globalisation and analysing the connections and contradictions it produces, a critical position shared by the artists and exhibitions I discuss.

82 Manto, 'Toba Tek Singh', op cit

83 Ibid

84 Friese, 'Marginalia', op cit, p 8

85 Spivak, *Other Asias*, op cit, p 5

86 Ibid, p 8

*Carpet 2* alongside a map of South Asia? Following the artists' logic, this map would stretch the boundaries of the subcontinent to include Las Vegas and the Levant, encompassing gamblers, dreamers, builders, traders, designers and cartographers who make South Asia through their visual-cultural production. Indeed, this artwork and the exhibition in which it was shown signalled the rise of a critical regionalism despite – and because of – formidable barriers to cultural exchange in South Asia.

The region of *Magic Carpet 2* and 'The Missing One' enacts what Gayatri C Spivak has called a critical regionalism against 'identitarianism', a regionalism that connects places – villages to cities and provinces to nations – in uneven and unexpected ways.<sup>81</sup> By this account, the South Asian region is not merely a reification produced by Cold War politics and academic area studies or a conglomeration of nation-states instrumentalised by global capital, but the product of contingent and resistant cultural practices. The critical regionalism of which Spivak writes is not new: recall Toba Tek Singh's utterance, 'Upar di gur gur di annex di be dhyana di mung di dal of the Pakistan and Hindustan of the get out, loud-mouth!'<sup>82</sup> Like 'Toba Tek Singh' before them, 'My East is Your West' and 'This Night-Bitten Dawn' destabilise notions of place and belonging to South Asia. In Manto's imagination, South Asia after Partition is unfamiliar terrain and indeterminate form: 'In between, on that piece of ground that had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.'<sup>83</sup> In Friese's opinion, to be South Asian is to be afflicted by marginalia, to be 'fidgety at the edges'.<sup>84</sup> In 'My East is Your West' and 'This Night-Bitten Dawn', it was not a regional style on display so much as an analytic mode, critical stance and historically-informed approach to the region and its borders, nations and partitions that is shared by writers such as Manto and Friese.

Spivak describes her experience of thinking and writing postcolonialism in relation to Armenia: 'I began to see this small bit of the Caucasus differently. I began to realize how uncertain the shifting outlines of "regions" can be.'<sup>85</sup> Through this project and others, she concludes: 'The ongoing effort to build another Asia – not necessarily in the image of current dominant (a "selfsame", "proper", "authentic" Asia) – can belong to the future.'<sup>86</sup> Substitute South Asia for Asia in that sentence, and the ambitions and achievements of 'My East is Your West' and 'This Night-Bitten Dawn' come into focus. Inflected by the everyday, these exhibitions revealed the costs of nationalism and globalisation, and charted novel itineraries in, of, and through the South Asian region that span Planet Earth and outer space. Paradoxically, Partition – a synecdoche for processes of dislocation, disintegration, devastation, and death – is the basis for imagining place, identity, community and society anew. It is also the location of art in South Asia, a shape-shifting region of mysterious storms, fissile materials, averted catastrophes and unknown futures.

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