

“My other mother”: Narratives of the 1947 Indian/Pakistani partition, Separated Families and Mourning as Agency

This paper will look at one of the most iconic forms of loss in narrative representations of the partition – that of families separated across the borders. Stories of separated families can be found in almost every literary and cinematic representation of partition, most often as an example of powerlessness in the face of wider events over which one has no control. In particular, I will be focussing on M.S Sathyu's *Garam Hava* (1973), Sabiha Sumar's *Khamosh Pani* (2004), as well as particularly poignant examples of separated families in the body of oral history testimonies that I have collected. While I obviously have no intention to underestimate the trauma suffered by individuals separated from their families, I do argue that there is a problem with the way in which individual (often female) grief at this separation gets appropriated to represent a national trauma. In this paper, I disentangle this collusion between the patriarchy of the state and the patriarchy of the family by demonstrating the radical potential of women (and men) who articulate other, counter-hegemonic affective relationships which extend beyond, and are sometimes more powerful than, their relationships with their family. Evidence of such agency in the way one conceptualises one's position relative to one's family can be further seen in the long shadow that such separation of families has cast over private and public life in south Asia, and the ways in which people try (or refuse to try) to find and reconcile with missing family members.