A Forgotten Force:
the Gurkhas and the Partition of India.

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CONTENTS

A Forgotten Force: the Gurkhas and the Partition of India.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................2
CONTENTS .............................................................................3
ABBREVIATIONS ......................................................................4
INTRODUCTION .........................................................................5
METHODOLOGY ........................................................................14
(1) SILENCE AS REVEALING ..................................................19
(2) IMAGINED COMMUNITIES? .................................................27
(3) A FORGOTTEN FORCE ....................................................37
CONCLUSION ............................................................................46
BIBLIOGRAPHY .........................................................................50
ABBREVIATIONS

G/R – Gurkha Rifles.

The Gurkhas/Brigade - The Brigade of Gurkhas.
INTRODUCTION

Upon the transfer of power from Britain, on 15th August 1947, Indian was partitioned into two new states, India and Pakistan. The two countries celebrated independence separately; Pakistan on 14th and India on 15th August 1947.1 Faced with the threat of violence, distinct religious communities perceived themselves to be on the wrong side of the partition line. What followed the announcement of the Radcliffe Line, on 17th August 1947, was one of the most substantial ‘forced’ migrations in history.2 It has been estimated that 4 ½ million Sikhs and Hindus entered from Pakistan into India and 5 ½ million Muslims migrated in the reverse direction.3 The mass displacement and unfathomable scale of violence, so extensive that certain subsequent historians have referred to it as the ‘partition holocaust,’4 encompassed numerous individuals, regardless of which side of the partition line they were on. However, up to the present, no provision has been made to commemorate those who died, whilst each nation annually celebrates their acquisition of freedom.5 In Pakistan and India, official memory of these events is shaped by a determination, on the part of ruling elites, to differentiate themselves from partition violence and consequently from the reality of their own shared history.6 In these lasting omissions, the enormity of period, in terms of the scale of loss, dislocation and its relevance to the present, is relegated to a position of

3 ibid.
4 ibid.
lesser importance so that what remains is an enormous silence.\textsuperscript{8} The recollections of the Brigade of Gurkhas, who operated as an internal security force during the period, demonstrate the lasting and colossal impact these events have had and the inadequacies of dominant histories, which tend to reflect the interests of elite ruling groups and in doing so, have silenced numerous historical voices and subjects.\textsuperscript{9} The Gurkhas are one such group who are absent from histories of the period, therefore, this paper will seek to recover their role and provide a platform from which their experiences can be publicised and known; whilst in the process amending those omissions which permeate self-interested historical narratives of the period.

‘Official’ memory, for the purposes of this paper, refers to those elements of a country’s past which are accepted as its history and publically commemorated by dominant ruling groups.\textsuperscript{10} In a consideration of those elements that are omitted from official memory and the agendas which shape these omissions, questions arise relating to the accuracy of dominant historical narratives and their relationship to memory, as based on individual experience.\textsuperscript{11} Early studies of memory viewed public memorialisation to have a purpose linked to the ‘changing patterns of … national identity.’\textsuperscript{12} It was seen a selective process, which scathed over fractious elements in a country’s past to ensure the construction of a specific collective identity in the present.\textsuperscript{13} To this end, the two states have privileged a celebration

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
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\bibitem{Fulbrook2014} \textit{ibid}.
\bibitem{Fulbrook2014b} \textit{ibid}, p.68.
\bibitem{Fulbrook2014c} \textit{ibid}, p.70.
\bibitem{Fulbrook2014d} \textit{ibid}.
\end{thebibliography}
of independence to prevent a re-escalation in communal tensions. If addressed, the Governments of India and Pakistan have differentiated themselves from partition and the communal violence which accompanied it.\textsuperscript{14} Immediately following partition, silence was seen as essential to ensure they did not contradict the asserted secular identities, upon which they sought to frame the new nations.\textsuperscript{15} Even up to the present and in light of lasting tensions between the two countries, which have erupted into warfare three times, silence is upheld as a means to prevent a re-escalation of hostilities.\textsuperscript{16} Official memory ignores that partition was the ‘other face of freedom’\textsuperscript{17} to paper over cracks which might hinder their progress as ‘nations.’\textsuperscript{18}

Competing historical narratives, which account for the transfer of power from Britain in 1947, reflect the perceived process and function of official memory. They uphold the interests of dominant groups and contribute to ‘a nationalist effort premised on the need to construct a desirable loyalty to and insiders understanding of one’s country.’\textsuperscript{19} British colonial histories tend to privilege an image of Indian independence as the natural culmination of the British venture, whilst Indian nationalist tropes herald independence as an achievement of Indian nationalists and their ‘heroic’\textsuperscript{20} struggle against colonialism.\textsuperscript{21} Pakistani nationalist

\textsuperscript{16} B. Urvashi, \textit{The Other Side of Silence} (North Carolina: 2000), p.27.
\textsuperscript{18} G. Pandey, \textit{Remembering Partition}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ibid.}
accounts praise Jinnah for directing the success of Islamic nationalism. Each adopt a relevant approach to the transfer of power in line with the current interests of the dominant ruling group, with whom they associate. Crucially, common to each of these uniquely constructed perspectives is a focus on the allocation, or acquisition, of independence as the conclusion of their distinct teleologies’ and a concentration on the existence of a single ‘collective’ that is the nation. Halbwachs was the first to pioneer a concept he named ‘collective memory.’ Individual memory is shaped by and explicated in relation to a person’s social context. How a person remembers is fashioned according to a group criteria, formulated in relation to the interests of that particular social group, or ‘collective’ and rendered coherent through a shared framework of communication. Therefore, it is ‘through the group that an individual is able to remember and express personal memories.’ In those dominant official histories, as hagiographic accounts of an elite few, the partition of the subcontinent is conveniently relegated to a position of lesser importance. A process which leads to the silencing of histories of everyday people since ‘collective memory’ is viewed in a singular manner as the homogenous nation.

In fact, there exists in Halbwach’s outline as many collective memories as there are groups; a sensible understanding considering an individual will identify with numerous social

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22 M. Hasan, ‘Memories of Fragmented Nation: Rewriting the Histories of India’s Partition,’ Economic and Political Weekly, 33(41), p.175.
23 Pandey, Remembering Partition, p.6.
24 Zamindar, Long Partition, p.4.
29 Tan and Kudaisya, Aftermath of Partition, p.29.
categories relating to their region, gender, religion etc. Therefore, to record history in reference to a single collective, that is the ‘nation’, is inadequate. It presumes the existence of a ‘fixed subject,’ that exists in the past as something to be revealed. In the context of partition, the subject becomes the nation state, and with this in mind, the events surrounding 1947 are moulded into a ‘narrative of assured advance.’ However, this approach disregards the ‘epic quality,’ of what went on and the ‘sheer futility of narrating them [these events] within a single frame.’ The incidents, surrounding independence and partition, were far from static and will have been imbued with meaning, or experienced in numerous ways, by numerous individuals. A person’s experiences would have been unpredictable and framed by a complex decision making process. Therefore, a narrative depicting the triumph of the nation is inadequate in its simplicity. Pandey suggests it is in the midst of the ‘particular’ and the ‘universal’ in the ‘unintegrated histories … that we will find the particular valence of our history.’ An accurate observation since what lies behind these asserted narratives of partition are the reconstitutions of its events by distinct collectives in the wake of a shared experience. In recognising that partition did not simply involve a ‘constitutional division,’ but was a mutual experience of people on both sides of the partition line, it is possible, at

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30 Pandey, Remembering Partition, p.10.
31 ibid, p.4.
32 ibid.
33 ibid.
34 Tan and Kudaisya, Aftermath of Partition, p.29.
35 ibid.
36 ibid, p.4.
37 ibid, p.12.
38 ibid.
39 ibid.
40 R. Gildea in Fulbrook, ‘Collective Memory,’ p.72.
41 Pandey, Remembering Partition, p.15.
least, to improve our understanding of the period and make public that which has been obscured.\textsuperscript{42}

The Gurkhas are one group who have been submerged in histories of the period. This paper will seek to correct this omission and will contribute an additional viewpoint to the widening perspectives, relating to partition, that have emerged in recent years. The first to instigate this process was the \textit{Subalterns Studies Group}. Formed in 1982, they sought to challenge existing histories of post-colonial societies and the Eurocentric frameworks within which historians tended to structure their analyses.\textsuperscript{43} It petitioned a novel approach which challenged that historiography deprived the ‘common people of their agency.’\textsuperscript{44} The group recognised the need to reconsider dominant historical narratives, which privileged the history of elite groups and determined to re-examine history from the ‘subaltern’s’ viewpoint; referring to those subordinate ‘in terms of class, caste, gender [and] race.’\textsuperscript{45} August 2017 marked the 70th anniversary of the independence and partition of India. To mark this, a plethora of work has been dedicated to complicating existing ‘denial’\textsuperscript{46} narratives, which fail to address partition as ‘the other face of freedom.’\textsuperscript{47} These works have sought to include and base themselves upon the individual recollections and experiences of those who lived through partition, with a similar aim to that of the \textit{Subaltern Studies Group}.

\textsuperscript{42} ibid, p.7.
\textsuperscript{43} T. Ahmed, ‘Subaltern Project.’
\textsuperscript{45} ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} ibid, p.1479.
\textsuperscript{47} Tan and Kudaisya, \textit{Aftermath of Partition}, p.7.
The Gurkhas could be considered a ‘subaltern’ group as their role and experiences have been omitted from histories of partition, or else referred to in relation to embedded colonial perceptions of the Brigade, which have lasted into the present. The term 'Gurkha,' was a construct of British colonial imaginations related to the theory of martial races. The theory emerged under Lord Roberts, Commander in Chief of India 1885-93. It judged the martial capabilities of different ‘races’ based on their possession of specific attributes, namely, being ‘warlike and loyal.’

Loyalty was perceived to be a crucial attribute in light of the Indian Revolt of 1857. The theory was codified and functioned as the basis for recruitment of the South Asian population into the British army in India. It explained a ‘martial race’ as a group who possessed ‘some but never all of the fighting characteristics of a Briton.’

In this context, the capabilities of the Gurkhas were relatedly described. John Shipp asserted, they ‘despise the natives of India, and look up to and fraternise with EU’s … whom they imitate in dress and habit.’ Therefore, the relationship between the British and the Gurkhas was framed by colonial understandings of the superiority of the West whom the Nepalese soldiers sought to ‘imitate.’

However, to accept colonial abstractions, which assume the Gurkhas’ steadfast and uncontested loyalty to the British, is too simplistic an analysis. It depicts the Brigade as a passive and homogenous subject, a perception which has persisted in framing British policies, relating to the future of the Brigade, up to the present. Primarily in 1947, the Gurkha Brigade

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were subject to partition alongside India.\textsuperscript{52} Divided between India and Britain, Gurkha accounts, relating to the disorganised British decision-making process, reveal the confusion which materialised as a result of the lack of information provided to the Brigade regarding their future. A similar neglect, on the part of the British state, resulted in the launching of the Gurkha Justice Campaign in 2009. The Campaign sought to challenge laws which gave residency and pension rights to all sections of the British Army, except Nepalese soldiers who had operated in the Gurkha regiments before 1997.\textsuperscript{53} These incidents encourage a reconsideration of their position in India in 1947. To conceive of the Brigade as a passive, homogenous subject would simply add to the neglect which has been imparted on this force up to the present. Evidently to depict their role, during partition, simply as an impartial arbitrator operating at the behest of the British, or else to omit their contributions or experiences, is wholly inadequate. It disregards their unique experiences and denies any sense of agency to individual Gurkhas. Therefore, this paper will consider Gurkha recollections, relating to 1947, not simply to offer a unique perspective on its events but to correct the neglect that has been imparted on its regiment until now.

Gurinder Chadha, in recovering her own family’s memories of partition, noted that recollections of partition and how they are portrayed, is dependent on the individual.\textsuperscript{54} This study will consider this assessment and seek to discern the extent to which the recollections of individual Gurkhas pose a challenge to those ‘politically interested,’\textsuperscript{55} histories, which strive

\textsuperscript{52} Caplan, \textit{Warrior Gentlemen}, p.22.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{India’s Partition: The Forgotten Story}. Directed by Gurinder Chadha, performance by Gurinder Chadha, 2017. BBC 1.
to emulate a particular outlook, at the detriment of accuracy. In so doing, the role of the Brigade might be better known and understood. The first chapter will consider ‘the drone of silence’\textsuperscript{56} that permeates the recollections of those who lived through partition; the root of this silence and what can be gauged from the manner in which individuals frame their recollections in the present. The second chapter will consider whether an explanation for partition violence singularly as a product of communal difference is adequate. It will demonstrate how Gurkha recollections pose a challenge to how communalism has been defined in the South Asian context and the need for historians to offer a more detailed commentary on those other factors which shaped partition violence. Chapter three will expand on the limitations that exist in historiography and focus singularly on the role of the Gurkhas, the limitations they faced and their perceptions relating to their own future. It will discern the position they occupied in relation to the British state and how a continued application of colonial assumptions, which simply define the Gurkhas as an aspect of the military arm of British imperialism, persist, and hinder an accurate understanding of their role during partition and British presence in India more generally.

\textsuperscript{56} Zamindar, \textit{Long Partition}, p.3.
METHODOLOGY

As has been noted, the Gurkhas operated as an internal security force whose role was to assist in quelling the violent upsurges that sparked prior to and in the wake of partition and to protect and guide refugees, who had been forced to flee in the face of such violence.\textsuperscript{57} In this role, the Gurkhas were necessarily located in those areas where violence and disorder were the most pervasive. Since they were constantly assisting and interacting with groups of refugees, their accounts offer an invaluable insight into the impact partition violence had on the individuals they assisted. Equally, since they encountered various armed bands, in a determination to quell violence and ensure protection, their accounts offer a first-hand knowledge of those who partook in the violence and the form its specifics assumed. Dispensed to support civil authorities, the Gurkhas interacted with or operated alongside them. They offer a crucial commentary on the partiality of elements of the civil security forces, who at times assisted in or overlooked violence committed by groups who were of their own religion. Their perspectives help to identify the inaccuracies which exist in official nationalist narratives, which are determined to uphold the violence of state authorities as over and above the ‘primitive passions,’\textsuperscript{58} to which they assign partition violence.\textsuperscript{59} Crucially, the Gurkha themselves, in histories of the period, ‘attract little more than a footnote.’\textsuperscript{60} Therefore, a consideration of their experiences is essential to making public the part they played since there is a tendency to simply conflate their history and interests with that of the

\textsuperscript{58} Pandey, ‘Prose of Otherness,’ p.198.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{ibid}.
\textsuperscript{60} Gould, \textit{Imperial warriors}, p.286.
British generally. Their reflections on the period pose an alternative story. Many officers ponder the actions of the British state and offer criticism on the speed at which they quit India. Their recollections are crucial to demonstrating that to reify British elements in India is insufficient.

The scope of this analysis is restricted by various factors. In demonstrating the role of the Gurkhas, problems arise owing to difficulties relating to language, accessibility and memory. Stanley Roberts’ words encapsulate the limitations encountered in researching this paper. He lamented, ‘because of the impossible task of finding old soldiers in Nepal ... I regret that more down to earth views are missing. Their views and opinions would have been remarkable and ... without them this narrative of mine will always be incomplete.’ Crucially, the only accounts, which are held at the Gurkha Museum in Britain, are those written by the British officer class. Nepalese soldiers who witnessed these events are predominantly out of reach, or are deceased. Therefore, this consideration of the Gurkhas will necessarily be through the lens of the British officer class. Equally, those officers who do appear in the archives are now, for the most part, deceased. Therefore, it has been necessary to concentrate primarily on written sources, which include retrospective written memoirs, diary entries, correspondences, regimental newsletters and war diaries. A concentration on written sources renders the researcher unable to ask direct questions relating to specific areas or events. It restricts an analysis to those elements which Gurkha officers have deemed

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important to remember, or else which were recorded, or spoken of in correspondences, at the time.

Certain positives arise out these limitations. It would be inaccurate to assume that the perspectives of British officers and the Nepalese soldiers, on the events surrounding partition, were synonymous. However, arguably their perceptions would have held a similar focus. As noted, numerous accounts by British officers are critical of the disorganised manner in which the British state worked out the future of the Brigade and the rushed manner in which they left India generally. It can be logically assumed that Nepalese soldiers will have occupied a similar standpoint in relation to these two factors. This is a reasonable conclusion, considering they were also kept in the dark about their futures and witnessed the same upheavals, which provoked anger at the British government amongst the British officers. Equally, although further detail might have been possible through interviews, the fact that the events included in these officers’ accounts have been chosen for particular attention is testament to their perceived importance. It offers a crucial insight into what were the most memorable elements of partition to these individuals.

Roberts alludes to a second hurdle he encountered that is, ‘I have had to think long and hard about what happened. This record is not the work of an historian.’\textsuperscript{64} While researching this topic certain other individuals noted the difficulties of remembering fully. However, written accounts can be validated against war diaries, which were written daily by

Gurkha officers and recorded the movements of distinct regiments hour by hour or regimental histories, which are based on these. Crucially, many of the memoirs and written recollections, included in this analysis, were compiled following a reflection upon diaries and letters they kept and sent at the time. Such factors lessen concerns relating to the limitations of memory. In some instances, these letters or diaries have also been published and can be used to construct a more detailed picture. Furthermore, since this this paper is not concentrating on a timeline of events but is structured as a means to demonstrate experiences of partition and how these linger as a ‘shadow’ in the present, it is that which is remembered and how it is remembered that is of paramount importance. Therefore, certain failures in memory are far from detrimental.

As was so adequately put by Rajkumair Bowry, in an interview she gave on her experiences of partition, ‘History gives us the names of the big people, yet no one knows the names of the common people who died.’ Her statement encapsulates the inadequacies of historiography relating to this period. Primarily, the tendency for historians to privilege the interests of dominate groups, subordinates the experiences of everyday people. Secondly, that there is no adequate framework within which a historian can objectively account for such a scale of human loss. The result of these challenges is that the brutality and anguish, which attended partition, has been predominantly ‘left to literary works and film makers since the historians craft has never fit particularly comfortably in such matters.’ The choice of topic for this paper is personal in the outset, as the granddaughter of a Gurkha officer who was

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66 Prakash, ‘Subaltern Studies,’ p.1477.
68 ibid.
present in India during partition. Therefore, it is necessary to recognise that there is no totally objective history. Simply, it is better to proceed with an awareness of these limitations since the alternative is to allow for silence to persist.
E Valentine Daniels has identified that ‘a drone of silence,’\(^69\) is present in interviews, conducted with those who lived through partition, as individuals are ‘caught between not being able to speak and ought not to speak.’\(^70\) In Zamindar’s work, emphasis is placed on the latter enforced silence and it is asked that we ‘stretch our understanding of partition violence to include the bureaucratic violence of drawing political boundaries and nationalising identities which became interminable.’\(^71\) As noted, it has been the intention of recent scholarship to challenge ‘politically interested’\(^72\) histories and redress the enforced silence exacted on ‘voices of mourning,’\(^73\) that are ‘denied voices for the purpose of nation building.’\(^74\) Following the initiative of the *Subaltern Studies Group* and the plethora of works that have emerged following the 70\(^{th}\) anniversary of partition, the purpose of this chapter is to consider the former reason for silence to which Valentine Daniels refers; those who are ‘not able to speak.’\(^75\) In historiography, great emphasis is placed on discerning why individuals might feel they ‘ought not to speak.’\(^76\) However, too great a focus on the machinations behind this imposed silence is detrimental to the subaltern voices they seek to uncover. In concentrating on explanations for this enforced silence, historians still fail to provide a platform from which their experiences might be learned and incorporated into histories of the period. This chapter will attempt to discern what can be gauged from the ‘drone of silence,’\(^77\) that exists in the

\(^{69}\) Zamindar, *Long Partition*, p.3.

\(^{70}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{71}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{72}\) Hubel, *Independence*, p.16.

\(^{73}\) Mukhopadhyay ‘Partition in Literature,’ p.09.

\(^{74}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{75}\) Zamindar, *The long partition*, p.3.

\(^{76}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{77}\) *Ibid.*
recollections of Gurkha officers, when reflecting on partition. It will consider this in light of
their unique perspective on events, uninfluenced by an externally imposed silence and the
extent to which what framed their silence, encouraged a similar preference among the citizens
of the two new states.

It would be useful, primarily, to consider the limitations of those histories which
privilege their function over accuracy. For modernist thinkers, such as Hobsbawm, ‘the basic
characteristic of the modern nation and everything connected with it, is its modernity.’78
Britain as the ‘prototype of modernity,’79 and Western societies generally, were seen as the
pioneers of nationalism and the nation state.80 However, to frame the events of independence
and partition into a narrative of the nation state is to inhabit the Eurocentric framework within
which the nation state is defined.81 Since the incalculable violence and loss which
characterised partition belies the image of Pakistan and India as modern nation states, it is
denied a place in their history or explained as ‘collective madness,’82 as a means to uphold
their asserted identities.83 Individual experience is submerged and partition is considered only
in terms of its relevance to the ‘nation.’ However, such accounts are premised on an
assumption that Pakistan and India ‘emerged as nations fully formed.’84 To base a history of
independence on a perception that independence granted freedom to a nation already in
existence, limits the scope of analysis. It fails to recognise that the violence that was wrought

79 ibid.
80 Hastings, Nationhood, p.8.
81 ibid, p.10.
83 ibid.
84 Zamindar, Long Partition, p.18.
by partition could be considered as part of a process by which these constructed states were being reconstituted as nations in their own right.\textsuperscript{85} Not to mention that ‘the nation itself remains a highly contested phenomenon.’\textsuperscript{86} Therefore, as asserted by Pandey ‘if history is to be anything more than the celebration account of the march of certain victorious concepts and powers like the nation state then marginal voices and memories must be recovered.’\textsuperscript{87}

At the advent of independence, the Gurkhas, amongst other military units, provided support to the civil security forces in the two new states.\textsuperscript{88} Different battalions were positioned in those areas where there was thought to be the greatest potential for disorder.\textsuperscript{89} Since the Gurkhas were a contracted military force, who consisted of Nepalese soldiers under British officers, their presence was deemed crucial, owing to their perceived impartiality. They were seen to have less reason, than their Indian counterparts, to identify with a particular communal group.\textsuperscript{90} To an extent, the Gurkhas did occupy an impartial position since they were not native to India. Therefore, dislocation and violence was something the Gurkhas were witnesses to and yet were distanced from ideologically and politically. In interviews Butalia Urvashi conducted with citizens of India and Pakistan, she described that ‘when discussions of partition were reached and the falling apart of remembered worlds was discussed there was always unbearable grief, exhaustion and speechlessness.’\textsuperscript{91} The sorrow and silence that exists in the accounts of these individuals is emanating from a more personal loss. This is a

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{dura} Duara in Tan and Kudaisya, \textit{Aftermath of Partition}, p.17.
\bibitem{pandey} Pandey, ‘Prose of Otherness,’ p.213.
\bibitem{jeffreys} Jeffreys and Rose, \textit{Indian Army} p.204.
\bibitem{ibid} ibid.
\bibitem{ibid} ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
place that is lost both in the literal sense of forced migration and in the ideological sense of scenes witnessed, that to most were inexplicable and yet marked the moment that was being heralded as the birth of their new nations.\textsuperscript{92} In an interview with her daughter, Gurinder Chadha's mother refers to this double edged dislocation. She laments, ‘I miss that place very badly … very sad … a history written with blood.’\textsuperscript{93} Comparatively, the recollections of the Gurkhas are external to these constraints, both imposed and personal, since they were outsiders to the communal violence that consumed the area. Therefore, it is poignant that the manner in which they frame their recollections is similar to those citizens of the independent states. Marked by the same ‘silence’ it suggests that memories of partition are not framed by concerns relating to the triumph of the nation but are conflated with violence and loss. This would help to explain why the Gurkhas share in the ‘silence’ identified by Valentine Davis.

Gurkha accounts encapsulate the dichotomous relationship of the ‘shadow’\textsuperscript{94} and the ‘silence’\textsuperscript{95} that exists amongst those who were witnesses to the chaos and tragedy of the period. One officer declares, ‘I shall not attempt to describe the ghastly scenes witnessed … but reflecting upon encountering so many dead and mutilated corpses … will haunt me until my dying day.’\textsuperscript{96} Here lies the dichotomy, an experience that will forever haunt him is one which he prefers to leave unarticulated. Ken Saxton writes under a similar ‘shadow.’ Referring to an earlier request to record his battalion’s movements in Amritsar in 1947, he recalls, ‘I

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{92} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{93}India’s Partition, Chadha.
\item \textsuperscript{94}ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{95}Zamindar, The long partition, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{96}‘The Dagwood Memoirs,’ 5th Gurkha Rifles Newsletter 122 (1997).
\end{itemize}
could not bring myself to write about Amritsar. The appalling scenes I witnessed there ... still haunt me fifty years later.’97 A letter he includes in his account sent 23rd August 1947, relating to the same events, contains in a similar vein that he had been ‘guarding refugees at Amritsar … Not a pleasant job at all … it’s probably better to forget all about it.’98 A silence pervades both his immediate recollections and those fifty years on. It demonstrates the scale of the scenes he witnessed since the ‘shadow’ of partition that ‘haunt[s],’ him in his later description is fresh enough in his memory that ‘silence’ is still preferred to remembering fully. One piece which amalgamates the recollections and letters of two Gurkha officers of the 2/6 GR asserts that ‘what took place is now history, and is too distressing to repeat.’99 The Gurkhas were an impartial force, amongst those who lay outside potential political machinations and yet still avoid any detailed consideration of the violence. Silence pervades many accounts since as noted by Stanley Roberts, who was stationed in Lahore with the 2/10 GR, ‘a bare tabulation of events of that time in the battalion’s life would not make easy reading.’100 It demonstrates the scale of loss witnessed as even those who have the means to speak feel they are unable. Regardless of any external forces, a consensus seems to remain on a preference to remain silent and to not dredge up the past or reflect on the ‘shadow’ that remains of those events.

The manner in which individual Gurkhas frame difficult scenes witnessed, when they attempt to address them more directly, is equally crucial to an understanding of their

98 ibid, p. 46.
100 Roberts ‘Indian Independence,’ p.98.
experiences. It has been a continual test for historians to develop a method that can adequately record the trauma, or suffering, which is intrinsic to events such as partition.\footnote{101} In the late 20th Century, discussions surrounding the Holocaust instigated a controversial debate over whether its events could ever be acceptably represented through historical analysis.\footnote{102} The discussion extended to concerns over how to integrate the Holocaust into historical representations and that it was essential to acknowledge its legacies.\footnote{103} How individuals and groups frame their recollections and how they have been reconstituted to construct personal and group identities in the present, are both important legacies to include. Despite the difficulties associated with accurately depicting the scale of suffering and loss in historical representation, a consideration of the legacies of partition, among the Gurkha officers and how they have framed their recollections is invaluable to understanding what they seek to describe.

The Gurkhas seemingly frame their recollections in relation to the unique experiences of their collective. Similar in their descriptions is an attempt to distance themselves from the scenes of loss and suffering they refer to. Common points of reference help to demonstrate the scale of loss witnessed as they produce almost standardised accounts, which convey that these events were indescribable. One officer states ‘nothing I saw in France and Burma was as bad as the scenes I saw here … whole heaps of bodies with pie-dogs, hawks and vultures all joining in the feast.’\footnote{104} Henderson similarly describes, ‘hundreds of shallow graves beside

\footnote{101} Hutton, ‘Memory,’ p. 362.  
\footnote{102} \textit{ibid}, 363.  
\footnote{103} \textit{ibid}.  
the road with vultures digging them up. In both instances, a reference to the presence of animals preying on the deceased is used as a means to picture the inhumanity of the scene. A reference to vultures, or else animals preying on bodies, is an unsettling and common description in Gurkha accounts. Equally, the Gurkhas often utilise previous experiences of war as a frame of reference to structure their observations; as seen in the first officer’s comparison of the scenes of partition to previous Burmese and French campaigns. Roberts uses a similar point of reference in his description of Mughalpura Junction. He outlines ‘I have recently seen pictures of the holocaust and the dreadful count of bodies; the scene at Mughalpura was similar except the bodies that we saw had been hacked to death beyond recognition. It was a sight which unless you witnessed it yourself, would have been impossible to believe.’ The Gurkhas frame their recollection in line with their numerous other experiences in a war zone. Their comparison and our knowledge of their experience of war, helps to convey the scale of what they saw as even the Gurkhas, who were regular observers of the horrors of war, are disillusioned by the scale of these acts of violence and can offer no adequate comparison.

Thompson and Samuel explain that ‘memory is an exercise of selective amnesia ... what is forgotten may be as important as what is remembered.’ Crucially, how something is remembered is equally important. What is obvious in a consideration of the descriptions outlined above is that loss and dissolution at its scale, was a shared experience of all communities who witnessed partition violence. This can be seen in a preference to remain

107 Virdee, ‘No Home but in Memory,’ p.190.
silent, which frames numerous accounts. Evidently, the ‘selective amnesia’\textsuperscript{108} of dominant narratives in relation to partition is unforgivable. To picture this episode in history as the triumph of the nation hinders any adequate view of its events and the importance these experiences have in the present. It omits that this was a shared experience of loss and that the shadow of partition extends beyond asserted national borders, neglecting the experience of those who belonged to neither ‘nation’ and who similarly continue to live under its veil. The memories of the Gurkhas contribute to a better understanding of this period in history as common codes of reference, within which they have framed their recollections help to convey the inhumanity and incomparable nature of the scenes witnessed. They emphasise what is important to remember since they do not hold the perpetrators of either community accountable but seek to convey the inhumanity of it all.

\textsuperscript{108} ibid.
In historiography, a focus on difference remains and there is a tendency to implicitly assume that the violence, which accompanied partition, was singularly communal in nature. In the South Asian context, a more restricted definition of communalism is employed and it is demarcated in the rubric of religion. In the lead up to and in the context of partition, Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus constituted distinct communal groups and were perceived to be internally homogenous in their interest and resentments, whilst incompatible with one another.109 The synonymy of culture and religion is accepted uncritically in the South Asian context, especially surrounding partition. However, in implicitly accepting that violence was sparked by communal interests and channelled through a communal lens, there is a tendency to miss certain other factors which shaped partition violence. The recollections of Gurkha officers demonstrate the limitations of conceiving of partition violence within this singular frame. The military heritage of certain groups, who spearheaded assaults; rumour and revenge as its associate, seem crucial elements in contributing to the intense nature violence assumed. Therefore, a consideration of whether communal groups, demarcated in the rubric of religion were perhaps more ‘imagined’110 communities in the context of 1947, is essential to demonstrating that partition violence was multifaceted and therefore, necessarily experienced in various ways.

110 Chandra, Independence, p.401.
Historians have accounted for the development of religious communalism and its eruption into violence during partition, in different ways. Indian nationalist accounts predominantly blame British modes of governance. Colonial rule, in its codification of the Indian population based on class, caste, regional or religious lines, is thought to have functioned as a means to reduce the opportunity for, or deny the existence of, a unified Indian body. As Jalal describes, nationalist accounts perceived it was a ‘British notion to emphasise difference in diversity.’ As denoted by Chandra, it was these British policies, commonly defined as a process of ‘divide and rule,’ which sought ‘to weaken the growing nationalist movement,’ and ‘bore special responsibility for the growth of communalism.’ By contrast, Spears’ explains the failure of Indian nationalism as the product of inherent divisions that already existed in Indian society. He notes that ‘in looking for the roots of Indian nationalism we can begin with an emotion and a tradition. The emotion was a dislike of a foreigner... the tradition was that of Hinduism deeply rooted and the basis of what has been called the fundamental unity of India.’ He omits any consideration of British responsibility, instead explaining Indian nationalism as rooted in a Hindu aversion to foreign rule more generally as ‘impure.’ He denies the potential for a unified nationalism in conflating an Indian identity with a Hindu one and equating the Muslim population to conquerors.

114 ibid, p.408.
115 ibid.
116 ibid.
118 ibid, p.15.
119 ibid.
In their considerations of Indian nationalism, both Chandra and Spears emphasise Indian disunity as framed by religious communalism.\textsuperscript{120} They arrange their analyses on existing patterns in historiography, rather than basing their arguments on an ‘objective reality.’\textsuperscript{121} Spears replicates a British colonial standpoint, which recognised that fundamental differences were entrenched in Indian society, as an explanation for a divisive nationalism, which lead to partition violence.\textsuperscript{122} However, Chandra reserves blame for the British, replicating existing Indian nationalist tropes which sought to differentiate themselves from partition violence, concluding; ‘the hope was that madness would be exorcised by a clean surgical cut. But the body was so diseased, the instruments used infected, that the operation proved terribly botchy.’\textsuperscript{123} Neither line offers an adequate demonstration of what shaped partition violence, nor how it was experienced, since they base their analyses on existing ‘politically interested’ constructions of Indian society.

The ‘search for guilty men,’\textsuperscript{124} in these ‘politically interested’ histories functions as a means to push blame and transcend the violence which engendered partition. Pandey refers to histories which include the ‘prose of otherness.’\textsuperscript{125} Ruling groups uphold the use of state violence as necessary to police criminal elements and ensure the functioning of the bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{126} It is differentiated from popular violence, which is termed ‘chaotic ... [and] illegitimate.’\textsuperscript{127} Popular violence is assigned to the realm of the ‘other,’\textsuperscript{128} a constructed and

\textsuperscript{120} ibid, pp.15-18
\textsuperscript{121} ibid, p.16.
\textsuperscript{122} ibid, p.15.
\textsuperscript{123} Chandra, Independence, p.503.
\textsuperscript{124} Hasan, India’s Partition, p.173.
\textsuperscript{125} Pandey, ‘Prose of Otherness.’
\textsuperscript{126} Pandey, ‘Prose of Otherness,’ p.191.
\textsuperscript{127} ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} ibid, p.198.
homogenous group usually consisting of, as such accounts term them, ‘backwards’ peoples or the lower echelons of society, who easily fell prey to ‘madness,’ as Chandra so aptly described partition violence. Such categorisations enabled ruling groups to transcend blame and place violence at a distance from the functioning of the ‘modern’ state therefore, upholding this asserted identity. In fact, a distinction in the participation of these two groups was far from absolute in the context of partition. Gurkha accounts demonstrate how local police and civil forces were, at times, equal participants or corroborators in the violence.

The partiality of civil security forces was to the extent that one officer described the police as ‘not only useless but a definite menace.’ Major Wilson paints a similar picture of the Punjab and writes that local officers either didn’t care enough to intervene or were ‘secretly encouraging attacks on Muslims.’ Seemingly, police partiality did not only find expression in a failure to protect religious minorities but in assisting acts of violence. Attack makes a like observation when he writes, ‘refugees [were] being stripped by police ... of any implement that could be used as a weapon in self-defence.’ The account goes on to outline that ‘these implements/weapons [were] being distributed later the same day to local militants.’ Wride reports a similarly implicating incident in Gurdespur, where one police officer had participated in the loot of a Muslim village and that having taken him to the police station, Wride returned the next day to find ‘the policeman back on duty.’ Clearly such

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129 ibid.
130 Chandra, Independence, p.503.
135 ibid.
incidences were a frequent occurrence since he observed ‘it was no use reporting this sort of thing to the Civil authority; they took not the slightest notice.’ Officer Reynolds corroborates this fact as he writes, in a similarly blasé manner, ‘I arrested 21 looters and handed them over to the police who I knew would shortly release them all.’ In all these accounts, it is generally implied that the partiality of the police was unsurprising; such a regular occurrence that it is barely considered other than simply as part of their narratives. A demonstration of police partiality is not an attempt to lay blame on a particular group but to highlight the inaccuracies of those histories dedicated to a ‘search for guilty men.’ As seen, violence seemingly permeated all elements of society in the two new states and therefore, the distinction that is upheld between ‘state’ and ‘popular’ violence appears to be more an imagined construct, elaborated to serve the interests of ruling groups.

To explain partition violence singularly as a product of religious communalism similarly reduces any opportunity for a detailed understanding of its nature. Chandra convincingly identified that in accrediting certain individuals with leadership positions, relating to religious communities, they became constructed realities as distinct groups which possessed separate interests. However, to usurp these constructed entities in an analysis of the period, obscures the extent to which they were fully accepted by their supposed members. In fact, in British India, these communities had lived amongst each other in the same regional communities for, at times, generations. In interviews conducted with those who lived

137 ibid.
139 Hasan, ‘India’s Partition,’ p.173.
141 Hasan, ‘India’s Partition,’ p.183.
through partition, confusion is the dominant mode of expression when they recall the violence and deliberate on the decision to divide the country. Such reactions reveal that religious polarisations might not have penetrated as deep as is presumed. As expressed by Ms Chadha; before partition they were ‘all friends’ and ‘no one thought something like this would happen.’ In an interview conducted in the documentary *Legacy of the Line*, one Sikh man similarly recalled that he ‘didn’t see any reason for partition.’ Sarwari Begum, a Muslim woman, who had lived in the Punjab, the place which saw the most intense violence, recalled that previously, ‘Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims all lived in harmony side by side.’ One Gurkha officer conveys a similar sense of dissolution at what occurred in light of the fact that ‘for hundreds of years they had lived side by side,’ and yet ‘now that awful carnage of partition.’ Amongst those who lived in these perceived polarised religious communities an expression of surprise at partition and its repercussions is common. Prior to partition, these individuals recall a sense of community amongst the members of these various religions. The surprise and resentment which is expressed, when partition is considered, stems from the fact that it happened in light of them being ‘friends’ previously. Evidently, communalism, as explained singularly in terms of religion, is misleading in its application to society generally. In light of this, it is necessary to consider, that religious communities were merely ‘constructed nation[s]’ in the context of partition and address those other factors which shaped partition violence.

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142 *India’s Partition*, Chadha.
143 *ibid*.
145 Sarwari Begum in S.T.M, p.32.
147 *ibid*.
148 *India’s Partition*, G. Chadha.
149 Zamindar, *Long Partition*, p. 3.
Gurkha accounts demonstrate the atmosphere surrounding partition was characterised by insecurity and this appears to have been a crucial factor which contributed to the intense nature partition violence assumed. Insecurity not only encouraged the flow of refugees but created fertile ground for the spread of and belief in rumour.¹⁵⁰ Naturally, the movement of refugees, ever increasing as violence mounted, would have helped to propel these stories.¹⁵¹ Tales arose out of fears relating to personal or transferred experiences. Both real and exaggerated accounts instigated, in the words of one Gurkha Major Wilson, a ‘pendulum of communal retaliation’¹⁵² which ‘once started ... swung with ever increasing momentum.’¹⁵³ The spread of ‘communal hatred’¹⁵⁴ he writes, was exacerbated and spread to ‘hitherto peaceful areas ... by the vernacular press and [was] fanned by highly coloured stories from refugees on both sides.’¹⁵⁵ The effects of this relentless circle of rumour and reprisal are articulated by Peter Attack. He described that ‘a rumour of a massacre of Moslems near Amritsar would provoke a reprisal on Hindus at Gujranwala which in turn would set off further killings.’¹⁵⁶ The spread of rumour was to the extent that even the Gurkha forces were duped. Whilst overseeing refugees across a bridge from India into Pakistan, one officer met his opposite number working to direct refugees in the other direction. Having heard gunfire, he refused to believe that only two people had died. He had stated that it was ‘the refugees’¹⁵⁷ who ‘had brought in lurid tales of massacre.’¹⁵⁸ Major Wilson depicts a similar situation in

¹⁵⁰ Zamindar, Long Partition, p.56.
¹⁵¹ ibid.
¹⁵³ ibid.
¹⁵⁵ ibid.
¹⁵⁶ Attack, ‘Second Battalion,’ p.38
¹⁵⁸ ibid.
which ‘rumours were rife and a string of inaccurate and panicky police accounts of often non-existent occurrences poured in without ceasing.’\textsuperscript{159} Evidently in a chaotic atmosphere marked by insecurity these ‘highly coloured stories’\textsuperscript{160} were more believable. However, since ‘reprisals’\textsuperscript{161} as he asserts ‘inevitably followed,’\textsuperscript{162} such stories, rumour became reality in the process. What can be gauged from these accounts is an image of the inevitability of rumour and the devastating and relentless impact this had. Individual experience actually shaped the direction of violence as stories of personal experience spread and were at times exaggerated, which in turn directed reprisals and contributed to the devastating intensity violence assumed.

The Punjab, and the violence that virtually engulfed the region, features in numerous of the Gurkha accounts. Located in the Northwest of India, as noted, it was subject to the most intense violence and much political attention prior to and following independence. Home to Punjabi Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs alike it was a highly contested space in debates amongst the asserted leaders of these communities.\textsuperscript{163} Differences between the leaders emerged over where the boundary line should fall and who would assume control over the region.\textsuperscript{164} The Punjab Boundary Force was formed in anticipation of the announcement of the Radcliffe Line, which partitioned the region.\textsuperscript{165} With numerous Gurkhas operating in the force itself, or else in the region more generally, their accounts provide a useful insight into the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Wilson ‘Transfer of Power,’ p.15.
\item \textit{ibid.}
\item \textit{ibid.}
\item \textit{ibid.}
\item Virdee, ‘No Home But in Memory,’ p.176.
\item Jeffreys and Rose, \textit{Indian Army}, pp.204-5.
\end{enumerate}
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character violence assumed here. The organised nature of the violence in this region is repeatedly referred to in Gurkha accounts. In light of this, the depiction of the violence as portrayed by Shah as a product of the ‘masses’\textsuperscript{166} who, 'under the pressure of communal propaganda'\textsuperscript{167} were incited to violence, is evidently too simplistic. A more detailed consideration of those who participated and the atmosphere in which they were operating is necessary.\textsuperscript{168}

Aiyer has indicated that the Punjab was a ‘highly militarised’\textsuperscript{169} society and that this framed the distinct intensity and nature that violence assumed in the region. Recruitment into the British army in India placed great emphasis on men in the Punjab.\textsuperscript{170} It was the ‘cornerstone of the Raj’s military establishment,’\textsuperscript{171} and was proportionally the greatest contributor of men to its ranks.\textsuperscript{172} Prominent amongst those military elements of the Punjab, who repeatedly appear in accounts of partition violence, were Sikh \textit{jathas}. As termed by Hajari these Sikh ‘death squads,’\textsuperscript{173} were experienced in warfare and so able to employ professional methods. Experience and access to superior weaponry seemingly rendered violence in the Punjab uniquely intense. This can be seen in Gurkha descriptions of the organised manner in which attacks were conducted in this region. The Sikhs, as recalled by Captain Knight had ‘formed jathas, a hard core of skilled fighters ... they were armed with automatic weapons,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[166] Shah in Chandra, \textit{Independence}, p.405.
\item[167] ibid.
\item[168] Aiyer, ‘August Anarchy,’ p.15.
\item[169] ibid.
\item[170] ibid, p.26.
\item[171] ibid.
\item[172] ibid, p.27.
\end{footnotes}
rifles, mortars and grenades.’\textsuperscript{174} He recounts the calculated tactics they employed, particularly, when escorting refugees through the Montgomery district in the Punjab. He describes how they would ‘wait until the trucks could be seen and then charge us ... out of wooded cover, slashing their way through the column of refugees.’\textsuperscript{175} Evidently, the organised nature of violence perpetuated by Sikh communities owed much to their military background. Access to superior weaponry and experience in battle allowed for ‘a state of total war,’\textsuperscript{176} to exist in the district where each group was ‘armed with fire arms ... and pitch battles were being fought in the area.’\textsuperscript{177} Evidently, to frame partition violence in a single explanation of religion only depicts one facet of the brutality. The organised manner in which attacks were conducted in the Punjab demonstrates that military experience contributed to the intense nature violence assumed in the region.

\textsuperscript{174} Roberts ‘Indian independence,’ p.109.
\textsuperscript{175} ibid.
\textsuperscript{176} 6th G/R 2nd Battalion War Diaries, Regimental History February 1946 – March 1948.
\textsuperscript{177} ibid.
(3) A FORGOTTEN FORCE

The Gurkha Brigade assisted civil forces in the protection of refugees from armed bands and helped to quell the violence that sparked following the announcement of the Radcliffe Line. The inclusion of the Gurkha Brigade into internal security roles was deemed crucial owing to their termed ‘impartiality’.\(^{178}\) Consisting of Nepalese soldiers under British leadership, the Gurkhas were considered to be external to communal tensions, which had engulfed areas of India and Pakistan and a reliable force in their loyalty to the British and as external to the pull of the Indian nationalist cause.\(^{179}\) That the ‘cornerstone of the Raj’s military establishment,’\(^{180}\) was now producing ‘death squads’ inevitably placed even greater pressure on the Brigade.\(^{181}\) However, despite the responsibility they bore, their contributions are rarely credited, or referred to, in histories of the period.\(^{182}\) When included, the operations of the Brigade are conflated with British involvement as a whole. However, to frame their participation in this manner denies their unique and separate experiences. A problematic approach since, as noted in the previous two chapters, the individual recollections of Gurkhas offer an invaluable insight into the events surrounding the period generally. Additionally, historians have neglected the operations of the Brigade as an internal security force who were, in fact, crucial to the survival of so many and therefore, prominent actors who helped to shape events of the period. A more detailed reflection on these factors and a complication of British colonial constructions of the force, which have persisted into the present, will help

\(^{178}\) Jeffreys and Rose, ‘Indian Army,’ p.204.

\(^{179}\) ibid.

\(^{180}\) Aiyer, ‘August Anarchy,’ p.27.

\(^{181}\) Gould, Imperial Warriors, p.303.

\(^{182}\) ibid, p.286.
to make public the operations of the Gurkhas who, as noted by Gould, ‘have attracted little more than a footnote.’

In historiography, the British army in India is predominantly depicted as a homogenous unit, which operated as the military arm of British Imperialism. In other circumstances, British colonial abstractions are replicated, which distinguished between the ranks of the army in terminology associated with the theory of martial races. Martial race theories developed in Western imagination in the late 19th Century as an accompaniment to what Said termed the ‘self-congratulatory narrative of the west.’ British perceptions of the ‘East’ or the ‘Orient’ designated Asian societies and cultures as perennially underdeveloped. Western colonialists accepted that fundamental differences existed between Western and Eastern societies which, according to Said, was used as a ‘form of power,’ and to legitimise the ‘imperial endeavour.’ The theory of martial races, which differentiated between the fighting capabilities of individuals based on their race, developed in this context. It constructed a socially accepted military hierarchy, which graded individual sections of the army based on their relationship to the British. A group’s position in the hierarchy was defined in terms of the respect or credit they solicited from the British and in terms of the ‘soldiering’ qualities they possessed. These were determined by the extent to

183 ibid.
184 Streets, Martial Races, p.5.
186 ibid.
187 ibid.
188 ibid.
189 ibid.
190 ibid.
191 Morton-Jack, Indian Army, p.34.
which a particular group reflected the qualities of the British race. The codification of South Asian society functioned as the base to military measures, alongside those administrative policies outlined previously and was rooted in a recognition of the British race as superior.

The Gurkhas, particularly, were heralded for their great capacity for soldiering and by default, the special relationship they shared with the British. The superior fighting capabilities of the Nepalese were identified as early as 1816 when John Shipp described, ‘in my humble opinion, they are, by far, the best soldiers in India,’ whose ‘physique, compact and sturdy build ... eminently capacitate him for the duties of a light infantry soldier.’ James Baille Fraser made a similar observation stating, ‘they fought us in fair conflict like men ... and in the intervals of actual combat showed us a courtesy worthy of a more enlightened people.’ The military capabilities of the Nepalese soldiers, here witnessed during the Anglo-Nepal War of 1814-16, were understood in terms of their relationship to the British. This can be seen in Fraser’s remark, who observed their fair warlike temperament and equated it to that of ‘more enlightened people.’ In both commentaries, the homogenising depictions of the Gurkhas, in terms of their race is evident. It was specific elements of their shared ‘physique’ which rendered them good soldiers. Therefore, in the context of the British Empire, the ‘Gurkhas’ were a constructed community, which existed in military imagination

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192 ibid.
194 Jeffreys and Rose, Indian Army, p.198.
195 Tuker, Gurkhas of Nepal, p.93.
196 ibid.
197 ibid.
198 Tuker, Gurkhas of Nepal, p.93
199 ibid.
200 ibid.
as a homogenous force whose martial attributes were understood in relation to a model premised on British superiority.

Colonial abstractions of the Brigade framed their inclusion into internal security roles, following partition. As outlined by Roberts, ‘Gurkhas with British officers were considered a prime requirement as they seemed to be neither pro-Hindu nor pro-Muslim.’\(^{201}\) Perceived as external to communal identities, which at first glance, framed the violent upheavals of the period and revered for their dedicated loyalty to the British, their reliability was unquestioned.\(^{202}\) However, to presume that the force simply emulated the British colonial state in India, in their steadfast loyalty, denies any sense of agency or individuality to those who constituted its ranks. More generally, the British position should be reconsidered. Stoler has noted that conflating the British under the single banner of ‘colonists’ and accepting its associated stereotypes, is problematic. It is essential to understand that their ‘interests and intentions were rarely unified and more often at war,’\(^{203}\) rather than, as in Said’s critique, to reify the ‘West’ and represent the British as homogenous in their outlook and aims.\(^{204}\) Such depictions conceive of colonialism as ‘an abstract force,’\(^{205}\) that was exacted on a given community. ‘Universalism[s]’\(^{206}\) of ‘East’ and ‘West’ persist in this static definition of colonialism as the colonised are depicted as the victim and the coloniser as oppressor.\(^{207}\) In reality, colonial rule was a process of reconfiguration shaped by a given context. Its

\(^{201}\) Roberts, ‘Indian independence,’ p.104.
\(^{202}\) Jeffreys and Rose, *Indian Army*, p. 204.
\(^{203}\) Stoler, ‘Rethinking Colonial Categories,’ p.145.
\(^{204}\) Zachariah, ‘Postcolonial Theory,’ p.381.
\(^{205}\) Stoler, ‘Rethinking Colonial Categories,’ p.136.
\(^{206}\) Zachariah, *Postcolonial Theory*, p.381.
\(^{207}\) Stoler, ‘Rethinking Colonial Categories,’ p.136.
enforcement was uneven and subjective in relation to individual enforcers, their context and temperament.\textsuperscript{208} As given entities of ‘coloniser’ and ‘colonised’ are misleading so are its additions, such as the stereotypical image of colonial military relations, outlined previously, which have been transferred onto the Brigade. In light of observations of mutual devotion and a shared resentment towards the British Government, which are plentiful in descriptions of the Brigade, it is essential to reconsider their role during this period.

Shame permeates the recollections of Gurkha officers who consider the rushed manner in which the British exited India and its inevitable repercussions. Langland wrote, ‘I felt we were scuttling from India.’\textsuperscript{209} Hartley voices a similar dissolution at the British exit stating, ‘no matter how many or how few suffered it was a disgraceful and unworthy event which must be laid at the door of the politicians – British, Indian and Pakistani.’\textsuperscript{210} Notably, Hartley seeks to differentiate himself from the machinations of elite ruling circles, a demonstration that the British Gurkha officer class, who this paper considers, cannot simply be included in the reductive category of British ‘colonists.’ Similarly, Quantrill adopts a detached perspective stating that it was the ‘British government of the day’\textsuperscript{211} whose ‘haste to quit India, created and left behind a litany of problems.’\textsuperscript{212} Attlee’s government, he alleges, was ‘intent only on quitting the subcontinent as quickly as possible.’\textsuperscript{213} The focus of these

\textsuperscript{208} ibid., p.137.
\textsuperscript{209} E. Langland, ‘Last days of the Raj,’ Red Flash 8\textsuperscript{th} Gurkha Rifle Regimental Journal (Feb, 1985), p.6.
\textsuperscript{212} ibid.
\textsuperscript{213} ibid.
statements lends itself to a demonstration of the differing perspectives and positions British elements in India occupied.

Gurkha officers seemingly saw the Brigade as a unique collective, seen in the blame they impart on those ruling groups who partitioned India. Arguably, the unique experiences of the Gurkhas cemented their attempts to disassociate themselves from the machinations of ruling circles, as they themselves became an object of partition, divided between Britain and India. Quantrill does not dilute the blatant affront that was felt by the Gurkhas relating to the vague manner in which their future was considered by the British Government. The title of Quantrill’s piece ‘a matter of dishonour’\(^{214}\) is revealing in the outset. Within the text, he criticises Attlee’s Labour Government and ‘its treatment of its faithful ally Nepal and its Gurkhas,’\(^{215}\) whose future, he asserts, was ‘disgracefully ignored.’\(^{216}\) A letter from Dorothy Russell to her father in law, in reference to her husband, encompasses a similar sentiment when she states, ‘there is still no news of Ted’s future ... Ted feels things have been mismanaged.’\(^{217}\) Dissolution seemed to transcend all levels of the force as Quantrill writes, ‘...serving British officers were inundated with questions from the soldiers, questions that ... remained unanswerable simply because London had issued no directive.’\(^{218}\) Evidently, a shared experience of partition, which was unique to the Brigade, helped to shape their perceptions of the British presence and demonstrates that to conflate the experiences of the British as a whole is misleading.

\(^{214}\) ibid.
\(^{215}\) ibid.
\(^{216}\) ibid.
\(^{218}\) Quantrill, ‘Matter of Dishonour,’ p.128.
Perhaps in their treatment as a homogenous object in the past and a failure, on the part of historians, to consider the integral individual role and experiences of the Gurkhas during partition, they could be considered a ‘subaltern’ group. The Subaltern Studies Group, sought to recover the diverse understandings and experiences of individuals in history which had been submerged, or reduced to a position as the subject of the actions of dominant groups.219 However, the application of the term ‘subaltern’ to the Gurkha Brigade as a whole is problematic, owing to the meaning it has assumed since its appropriation by numerous historians. The term has developed into a sort of ‘metaphor’220 for ‘all oppressed peasants’221 and ‘non westerners.’222 Since the Gurkhas includes both Nepalese soldiers and a British officer class, an application of the term to the collective force is problematic. Yet, alongside other ‘subaltern’ groups, the history of the Gurkhas has been for the most part neglected, regardless of the position individuals occupy within its ranks.

Therefore, it is essential to make public the operations of the Brigade, especially in light of the fact that their accounts demonstrate they were heavily relied upon during partition. Their centrality can be seen in the operations they undertook and repeated references to the force being ‘stretched thin on the ground.’223 John Hartley in his account of the operations of the Punjab Boundary Force writes that ‘the strength of the force,’224

220 ibid.
221 ibid.
222 ibid.
translated to only ‘one soldier per square mile.’ Colonel Kitson similarly conveys the pressure that was placed on the Gurkhas in his description, ‘...we were practically on our knees with fatigue.’ The manner in which their role is recalled is evidently framed by the anger they felt towards the British state. One officer wrote of the ‘hectic’ few weeks of the 7th G/R who were ‘patrolling, guarding, escorting and investigating reposts for twenty-four hours a day.’ Frustration at the lack of organisation is clear in his assertion that ‘there were simply not enough of us to cope with the outbreaks’ and that ‘maps were many years out-of-date, and we had little or no information about the situation.’ A similar impression of the unrelenting work undertaken by the Gurkhas is given of Delhi where it is reported, ‘these convoys patrolled and guarded vital spots and hospitals without rest for four days.’

Yet even in light of these difficulties, the contributions of the Gurkhas in their role as an internal security force were, as was said of James Vickers’ role particularly, ‘life saving.’ Vickers when ‘placed in charge of the New Delhi railway station,’ prevented the slaughter of hundreds of Muslims who were arriving by train when he arranged auxiliary carriages to form a visual barrier so that ‘a huge number of irate Hindus and Sikhs,’ were contained and ‘slaughter was avoided.’ Stories similar to this abound in Gurkha reflections, with Attack estimating, ‘I am sure they escorted at least a million refugees to safety.’ That the contributions of the Gurkhas are hardly mentioned in histories of the period is disturbing.

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225 ibid.
228 ibid.
229 ibid.
230 ibid.
233 ibid.
234 ibid.
235 Attack, ‘Second Battalion,’ p.43.
considering the termed ‘life saving’\textsuperscript{236} endeavours they undertook. In addition, it is evident from Attacks remark that the Gurkhas were crucial in the transfer, protection and resettling of refugees. In doing so, they helped to shape the histories of these two states. Therefore, their omission is not simply disturbing but debilitates any possibility of offering a complete impression of the events surrounding partition.

\textsuperscript{236} Pettigrew, ‘Vickers,’ p.73.
CONCLUSION

Considering the role of the Gurkhas during partition is evidently complex and leaves much to reflect upon. Owing to the diverse makeup of the Brigade, constituting individuals of distinct ranks and nationalities, it is difficult to satisfactorily identify the Gurkhas as either a ‘subaltern’ or ‘elite’ group in the past or present. Gurkha officers’ reflections on partition demonstrate the problems that accompany the use of given entities, such as ‘coloniser’ and ‘colonised’; ‘subaltern’ and ‘elite’ or ‘east’ and ‘west’, to understand the past. Their deliberations demonstrate, primarily, that British colonists as a whole were not singular in their outlook or intentions. Resentment, directed at elite ruling groups by Gurkha officers, is testament to this. A more focussed consideration on this relationship might help to identify where the Gurkhas relatedly stood. As a subject of partition, in 1947, the Brigade was treated as simply another asset to be divided. Their future was negotiated by ruling groups, which were external to the individual concerns and reflections of the Gurkhas themselves, who were ‘disgracefully ignored.’ In the present, the relationship between the Gurkhas and British ruling groups remains complex; as seen in 2009 when a similar neglect lead to the initiation of the Gurkha Justice Campaign. Up to the present, the history of the Brigade, in relation to their role during partition, has been submerged, despite the fact that the Gurkhas were crucial actors in stemming the violence, which emerged in the wake of partition. However, to term the Brigade a ‘subaltern’ group, as this evidence suggests they are, is problematic, owing to the connotations the term evokes in light of the Subaltern Studies Project. The Gurkhas seemingly occupy a precarious middle ground. Uncertainty begs the question of how

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237 Quantrill, ‘Matter of Dishonour,’ p.125
beneficial it is to consider history in relation to such ‘universalisms’ which abound in critical reflections on the past. The use of these terms, at least, in relation to the Gurkhas seemingly hinders any detailed understanding of their role during the period.

In histories of partition, it is particularly tempting to utilise such opposing categorisations. However, a concentration on themes of difference is detrimental to the experiences of certain individuals who are submerged or omitted as result. Therefore, it forgoes an accurate picture of events. As seen, an explanation of partition in terms of communal or national identities is problematic and reductive. Gurkha reflections on the period have demonstrated that in the context of partition, communal groups, defined in terms of religion, were perhaps more ‘imagined communities.’ In the face of partition, emotions of surprise and resentment were clearly felt by individuals within these asserted communities and suggests that incompatible religious communal identities did not encompass everyone, nor were they all consuming. Individuals clearly identified with other groups relating to their region or immediate neighbours, seen in various expressions that they had all been friends before partition. It cannot be denied that partition violence assumed a religious tinge, however, it should be noted that other factors helped to shape the intense nature it developed. To demarcate partition violence singularly in the rubric of religion neglects that certain individuals were simply surprised victims of violence. Alternatively, it denies the profound impact that rumour and military experience had.

238 Chandra, Independence, p.401.
Collective memory of these events has become conflated with the history of the ‘nation state’ which imagines another layer of polarised groups; two distinct nations with few commonalities. In prioritising the history of the nation state, a celebration of independence is privileged and a focus on difference assumes centre stage. This focus emerges as essential to the establishment of these two newly constructed states as ‘nations.’ Official memory creates an ‘other’ as a means to differentiate itself from the termed ‘collective madness’ that was partition violence, which was thought might hinder its asserted identity as a modern nation state. Inevitably, to neglect the reality of partition is to neglect the reality of their shared history. A focus on difference has simply exacerbated tensions between India and Pakistan, as seen in the persistent conflicts that have emerged between them. National identity has seemingly been imposed from above; one which focuses on difference and which, at least initially, was little more than an intemperate illusion.

Incredibly, ‘difference’ seems to mark every element of the events surrounding 1947 in official memory and histories of the period. However, most striking in a consideration of the Gurkhas role in and reflection on its events are the similarities that exist between their accounts and the recollections of others who lived through partition. Individual recollections seem to focus on partition in terms of the violence and the dislocation it wrought. Common to all is the unfathomable scale of loss and missing from most is a celebration of what was achieved. Yet this shared sense of loss, in histories of the period, has been pushed to the sidelines. It is true that more recently the Subaltern Studies Group has instigated a reorientation in focus away from official dominant narratives, however, this process needs to be extended
further. At least, it is essential that the Gurkhas do not remain a *forgotten force* but are heralded as critical actors in histories of partition and independence.
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