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Transcultural, Transnational Histories: A Response to Stefano Bianchini's *Liquid Nationalism and State Partitions in Europe*

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Liquid Nationalism and State Partitions in Europe, by Stefano Bianchini, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK, 2017, 360 pp., $149.50 (hardcover), ISBN 9781786436603.

Stefano Bianchini's comprehensive work *Liquid Nationalism* focuses on the frequent redrawing of state borders, especially in Eastern Europe, the fluidity of the contours of nations, and the vagaries and idiosyncratic nature of political changes in the European continent from the 19th to the 21st centuries. The title of this work takes its inspiration from Zygmunt Bauman's famous work, *Liquid Modernity* (2000). Bauman's work, which was published in 2000 in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and also Yugoslavia that resulted in the Balkan wars of the 1990s, first posits the obvious – that fluids cannot hold their shape as solids do because the structural arrangements of solids, unlike liquids, bind their atoms together. Bauman characterizes solidity as having hardened contours and belonging to a pre-modernity with its unchanging or slowly changing social, political, and economic mores. Modernity, on the other hand, is likened to liquids in that, like time, there is a fluidity and a fast-moving quality associated with it brought about by the European Enlightenment and the development of democracy and capitalism. As he states, "When describing solids, one may ignore time altogether; in describing fluids, to leave time out of account would be a grievous mistake. Descriptions of fluids are all snapshots, and they need a date at the bottom of the picture" (2). The lightness of touch, the quickness of response to changing times that liquid modernity promised, he points out, has resulted in postmodernity or late capitalism as "deregulation, liberalization, 'flexibilization', increased fluidity, unbridling the financial, real estate and labor markets, easing the tax burden, etc." (5).

The genealogy of Bianchini's work is important as it sheds light on its focus. Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* was itself a response to Marshall Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (1982). In this work, Berman posits that the world that we live in is motivated by the force of transformations and the constancy of change and disintegration. For Berman, "To be modern is to live a life of paradox and contradiction" (13). Berman's title for this work, in its turn, was inspired by Marx's *Communist Manifesto.* Here, in the first chapter, Marx examines the role of the bourgeoise in the development of capital in modernity. For Marx, the bourgeoisie constantly revolutionized the instruments of production and, therefore, the relations of productions and, in turn, transformed the whole relations of society itself. As a result, "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind." And finally, of course, Marx's reference to solidity and air harks

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back to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* where, in Act IV, Scene 1, Prospero (the exiled Duke of Milan who has colonized the island he now lives in with his daughter Miranda, the spirit Ariel, and the enslaved Caliban who is actually the lawful ruler) halts the betrothal masque for his daughter, with whom Prince Ferdinand of Naples has fallen in love, in order to deal with a plot to overthrow his rule of the island. He states, "These our actors / As I foretold you, were all spirits, and / Are melted into air, into thin air; / And….The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces, / The solemn temples, the great globe itself /… shall dissolve." Here, Shakespeare is pointing not only to the uncertain life span of towers and palaces and temples but also to the drastic changes that have transpired in Prospero's own life and now in front of the bridal couple. And it is this same regretful prescience that Marx displays in the first chapter of *Communist Manifesto*: the shift in capitalism spearheaded by the bourgeoisie will lead to the hollowing out of society. All these works focus on the relentless nature of change, which is also the theme of Bianchini's work.

Locating Bianchini's work within this genealogy is also meant to echo his careful and painstaking scholarship in considering European history as a whole in his discussion of state partitions. He dives deep into the political, historical, and geographical archives to trace the origins of nation-state partitions and new formations. Indeed, one needs to unpack the various antecedents to Bianchini's work to see the connection between Marx's assessment of how capitalism will change habits, memories, social relations, practices, and societies, and Bianchini's core concern in this work – namely, the precarity of nation-states and the shifting sands upon which they are scaffolded in Europe. Bianchini's methodology is to consider European history as a single corpus, which allows him to move from Russia to Estonia, to Lithuania, to Germany, to Poland, and to Ukraine, all within the space of a few dizzying pages, as, in the hindsight of history, he can examine all the nuances of how a political decision made in one place affects the lives of people in another. This vast knowledge of the political vagaries of successive European governments in a number of countries is breath-taking. To a non-European reader such as myself, whose familiarity with European history is limited to Britain and, to a certain extent, France – both of which had contact and colonies in India where I am from – this work had to be read alongside a map of Europe to get a proper understanding of the connections made here.

Taking his cue from Bauman and the liquifying nature of social relations in Europe, the specific goal for Bianchini is to unravel the history of shape-shifting democracy and nationalism from the 19th century to the present in Europe. As he moves into the 21st century in Chapter 15, the last chapter, he suggests that his approach of the homogenous nation-state with "a predominant faith, economic unity and a standard language," the key features of Europe's march toward liberal democracy, "is increasingly challenged by the intensity of the new phenomena" (256), such as the developments in medicine, global economy, multilingualism, European Higher Education Area, people's mobility, low cost flights, the development of the World Wide Web, and women's increasing roles in the public sphere, among other changes. The expansion of the EU and their various plans, according to Bianchini, have also led to the creation of a European elite, who are not hemmed in by previous narrow nationalisms. However, in this final chapter, Bianchini once more focuses on the precarity of democracy and the rise of the far-right in Europe, the threat to Schengen with rising nationalism, and the impact of Brexit and the lessons to be learnt from it.

I would like to offer some further points about partitions in general, based on the issues that I am researching rather than this being a specific response to Bianchini's work on European partitions. In so doing, I hope that my foci will complicate the reading of his monograph because of my different premises. As mentioned before, I am from India and my current research is on the impact of the 1947 Indian partition on the subcontinent. There are also striking disciplinary differences in my approach to partitions from that of Bianchini's in that I am located within literary and cultural studies. Inevitably, our interests diverge from each other, and, obviously, this response reveals our disciplinary differences. My interests are not on treaties signed and the intricacies of governance but rather on the minor tradition of studying culture from below. My work on the Indian partition has been concerned more on how this event affected the cultural practices and rituals of everyday life

and transformed them, associated not with those of the elite, either social or political, but those of ordinary people; how this event changed public and private life in the subcontinent, the comprehensions of gender, the reshaping of daily life, even architecture, neighborhoods, dwellings, friendships, and how to think of the other, the re-charged meaning of violence, the reshaping of the writing of fiction itself, and how the unhealed trauma of this unacknowledged and unspoken wound changed the subcontinent completely and transformed every aspect of the lives of people in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. It not only governs the everyday lives of citizens but also their governments' defense policies, their foreign policies, and the shape of nationalisms in these countries. It penetrates the religious, social, economic, and political lives of the citizens of all three countries. Given my research interests, my focus has been on affect, the deep sense of loss of ancestral homes and places of origin and the memories that they contain: community, assets, friendships, identities, opportunities, and happiness, those feelings that play a large part in our day-to-day life. For instance, in my knowledge of European partitions, I have been struck by the breakup of Yugoslavia as scholarship has focused around the deeply traumatized populations, the effects of which are still in the process of being unraveled and reflected upon, especially amongst the women, as well as the children who were born of rape, issues that also oscillate around democracy, rights, and the law and the difference between the public and private, and the shifting attitudes toward them. The violence around the breakup of Yugoslavia resonates in its similarity to the 1947 Indian partition.

Trauma and Memory

In my current work on the 1947 Indian partition, my focus is on the notion of trauma because of the unimaginable numbers of people subjected to upheavals – up to 12 million refugees – considered to be one of the largest transaction of populations in history – of Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, on all three sides of the border (West Pakistan, India, and East Pakistan, which later became Bangladesh in 1971) who were on the move: There were about two million deaths caused by the ensuing violence; between 100,000 and 200,000 women were abducted (records were just not properly maintained) in both countries either by men of the other or even the same religious group, men of the same communities and villages; over 50,000 children were lost by their parents while fleeing to the right country. The effects of this loss to the emotional landscape of people, unacknowledged and unrecognized by the governments, still reverberates to this present day, 76 years after the partition. The ongoing violence and the continuous military presence in the northernmost state in India, Jammu and Kashmir, contested by Pakistan, has shaped and developed nationalism in both India and Pakistan. Both countries have fought three wars against each other and have been at the brink of war on other occasions. How all this has affected the daily lives of the populations fluctuates between the serious to the ridiculous – for instance, the outbursts of violence between Hindus and Muslims that happens periodically in both countries have resulted in so many lives, properties, and sense of communities lost. Muslim Indians under the current right-wing Hindu fundamentalist government lead lives of great precarity in India. More recently, on October 24, 2021, three Kashmiri students were arrested by the police in Agra (the city in which the Taj Mahal is built) for celebrating Pakistan's win over India in the World Cup T20 cricket match. In the northwestern Indian state of Rajasthan, a school teacher was arrested for posting a WhatsApp message celebrating Pakistan's win in the match (*BBC News* 2021). Baffling incidents of this sort also exemplify the erosion of rights for some citizens and the withering of democratic principles in a country that labels itself as "the world's largest democracy."

These incidents, trivial though they may seem, are a result of the unresolved trauma of partition. Trauma theory has its genesis in psychoanalysis and the writings of Freud but gained in significance and traction in the second half of the 20th century in response to the Holocaust and the Vietnam war. With the second wave of feminism, trauma also came to be associated with rape victims and domestic violence. Indeed, the 20th century is perceived to be the century of trauma. Judith Herman, who is particularly well-known as an analyst of trauma, suggests that the traumatic

incident not only causes physical pain but also inserts the victim into a state of terror. She states that "traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning" (Herman 1992, 33). Trauma, often caused by those who are held in positions of authority, manifests itself in other signs – the deliberate amnesia cultivated by the victim so that they can forget the traumatic event, the dissociation, dislocation, and sense of fragmentation in the victim, and, most importantly, the unspeakable nature of the trauma itself.

Scholars such as David Lloyd, Stef Craps, Kali Tal, and Sam Durrant have read colonial rule as a traumatic event for colonized populations. Lloyd suggests that "the overwhelming technological, military and economic power of the colonizer, the violence and programmatically excessive atrocities committed in the course of putting down resistance to intrusion, the deliberate destruction of the symbolic and practical resources of whole populations" resulted in the objectification of the colonized and the annihilation of their subjectivity and agency (Lloyd 2000, 214). In those terms, the Indian partition of 1947, which was the condition of Indian independence from British rule superimposed one trauma over another through both events. In the scholarship on the South Asian partition, the focus has been more on the political and economic aftermath of 1947. There has been a general silencing of people's stories of what they themselves perpetrated or had undergone, a national amnesia of sorts, especially a forgetting of how all the various religious groups had been a part of the same community in pre-partition India and that the enemy in colonial India had been the colonizer, the British, not each other. If Indian independence had been famously achieved through non-violent means, the virulent violence around the Indian partition often reads like a displacement of the previous trauma of the nearly 350 years of colonial contact and rule.

Both trauma studies and partition studies valorize the importance of remembering the repressed past, as this act has a therapeutic value and functions to restore social order and harmony. Within the framework of memory studies, Maurice Halbwachs argues that social consciousness is collective and for society to be unified, there has to be a collectively imagined past (Halbwachs 1992).[1] For Halbwachs, each group's memory highlighted its particular identity as memory is always socially framed, which determines what and how the individual has to remember. Halbwachs claims, "The individual calls recollections to mind by relying on the frameworks of social memory" (182). He adds that group memory depends on the social power of the group. In other words, collective memory is linked to power; and, notwithstanding that collective memory consists of the recuperation of individual memories, the lower the social standing of the individual, the more likely that their memory is relegated to the bin of forgetfulness.

Memory is, therefore, linked to mnemonic groups, and the three significant mnemonic groups are the family, the ethnic group, and the nation. In partition studies, then, the depth and bits of memory and how far back one must remember is determined by the ethnic group and the nation, which, oftentimes, can function oppositionally, in that all that an ethnic group remembers might be irrelevant to the memory of the nation. The nation as a primary mnemonic community often demands a forgetting of certain narratives on the part of all its citizens. As Ernest Renan has pointed out, shared memories are essential for a cohesive society. In "What Is a Nation," he places a high value on forgetting (within the context of a nation) in that "historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial. Unity is always effected by means of brutality" (Renan 1990, 11). Effectively, he adds, the "essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things" (11). Philosophers such as William James and Friedrich Nietzsche also point to the burden of remembering everything and instead advocate for an active forgetting or a willful abandonment of the past because "in the case of the smallest or of the greatest happiness … it is always the same thing that makes happiness happiness: the ability to forget or, expressed in more scholarly fashion, the capacity to feel un-historically during its duration" (Nietzsche 1983, 62). In "Seven Types of Forgetting," Paul Connerton describes prescriptive forgetting to be one prescribed by the state in order to secure order and cohesiveness (Connerton 2011, 34). He also suggests another type of forgetting that is central to the constitution

of a new identity (36). For him, identities follow established narratives, which shape behavior. When new identities are formed, they require new narratives and demand the forgetting of older narratives as they have no significance in the new era.

What interpretation can we give partitions within the context of national memory? In post-colonial South Asia, the successful fight for independence against British rule is valorized and remembered over partition violence, which occurred simultaneously. For Pakistan, refugee memories of homes and relationships lost in India with family members killed in partition violence is subordinated to that of the achievement of a new nation for South Asian Muslims. Partition losses to communities, families, and the social fabric, rather than being grieved over, is successfully re-narrativized as triumph by the two newly independent but attenuated, nations: India and Pakistan. The older narrative of an undivided India, multicultural and secular, which had striven for independence as one people had to be forgotten as they had no significance in the new era.

Partition as Rupture

It must be acknowledged that it is also problematic to view partition as a rupture, notwithstanding the specificity of the violence that surrounds them. Indeed, South Asianist partition scholars (including myself) give its traumatic effects a particularly pathological slant – namely, that partitions can only lead to sadness or a sense of loss of the past. However, James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta challenge the commonplace understanding of partition as a rupture in that it is predicated on understandings of place as disjointed (Ferguson and Gupta 1992). For Ferguson and Gupta, cultures as discrete or object-like is problematic for various reasons: first, it does not accommodate those people who inhabit the borderlands and whose presence questions the idea of the purity of any culture or nation. This category includes not only permanent migrants but also those who are seasonal workers and who routinely cross borders over and over again. To which place do they belong? What is their culture? Gloria Anzaldua points out: "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" (Anzaldua 1987, 3).

Secondly, by equating place with culture, Ferguson and Gupta point out that it flattens the heterogeneity of a place and does not "account for the cultural differences *within* a locality" (Ferguson and Gupta 1992, 7). Indeed, there is a plurality of cultures within a national identity. There is also a mix of various ethnic groups living side by side within a nation, whether in Europe or in South Asia.

Thirdly, Ferguson and Gupta query how do we categorize colonized societies? Do they remain unchanged during the period of colonization, or do they change? And, similarly, does the colonizing culture remain intact, or does it also change through its relationship with its colonies? Did Indians change due to the period of British colonialism? Did the British change through their colonial rule? In fact, one of the many reasons attributed to Brexit has been that Britain still has invested memories of its imperial past. Pursuing this line of thought, how would we regard the many manifestations of a country such as Yugoslavia, which was partitioned in the 1990s. Yugoslavia itself was an effect of the partition of the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian empires and was only formed in 1918, after the first world war. The partition that ensued in the 1990s was only one more political division in a long history of political divisions. Ferguson and Gupta suggest that social change and cultural transformations must *not* be seen as located within the concept of rupture but rather as "situated within interconnected spaces." They state, "the presumption that spaces are autonomous has enabled the power of topography to conceal successfully the topography of power" (8), and they argue instead for places as being hierarchically interconnected. They also add that "instead of assuming the autonomy of the primeval community, we need to examine how it was formed *as a community* out of the interconnected

spaces that always already existed. Colonialism, then, represents the displacement of one form of interconnection by another" (8; emphasis added). The shift in thinking of places that Ferguson and Gupta recommend would allow us to see nations as always already diverse and mixed. Partitions can never restore cultural purity, as such a concept is fictional. The clock can never be set back; history cannot be reversed.

Other anthropologists, such as Liisa Malkki and Arjun Appadurai, also critique this concept of nations as being bounded places. For instance, Malkki suggests that this view of the autonomy and purity of places has led to the understanding of natives as being autochthonous – as springing from the soil – with roots and territories (Malkki 1992). For Appadurai, such an ascription of natives to certain places has led to the incarceration of the native, making them immobile not only within place but also within the scholarship that ensues – such is the cost of belonging to certain places (Appadurai 1988). Indeed, in such a view, the ability to move is an indication of a cosmopolitan or of belonging to a modernity, as the native is incarcerated not only spatially but also temporally in that natives are conferred a pre-modern identity. Implied within this line of thinking, then, is that modern-day partitions, which focus on ethnic "purity" (Serbia for the Serbs, Croatia for the Croats, etc.), not only deny history but also their own diversity, and are attempts to turn the clock back to a mythical past that never existed.

Transnationalism, the large-scale movements of population, and diaspora cannot be just limited to the development and ubiquity of cheap airlines, the World Wide Web, or the Schengen agreement. The global movement of people, which is part of globalization and the erosion of nationalism, is not just a feature of late capitalism. When we think of the close to 20 million African slaves who endured the Middle Passage and were brought to Europe and the "New" World, the 12–15 million indentured laborers taken to different parts of the globe to work on plantations after slavery was abolished, and the 55 million Europeans who left Europe to travel to the colonies to live and work in or settle in the "New" World, all of which happened in the 18th and 19th centuries, one feels compelled to question the purity of identities that underpin partitions. Indeed, the racial and cultural mixture of people that was always already a part of human history belies this notion of purity.

Conclusion, or the History of Europe

There is a final complication to the notion of the history of Europe as a specific entity. I mentioned above the 55 million Europeans who moved to the colonies and the New World, the 20 million West Africans enslaved, and the 12–15 million indentured Asians, in particular, who were needed to provide the cheap labor that both classical capitalism and the industrial revolution required to develop and modernize Western Europe and the Americas. Until recently, 19th-century British history focused on Britain as a hermetically sealed space, whose history was determined only by itself and its people. Yet as most postcolonial scholars have pointed out, its colonial holdings in the Asian and African continents have played a huge part in the shaping of its national contours, characteristics, identity, and history. Bianchini's argument that huge shifts that have occurred in national landscapes in Europe in postmodernity due to the ubiquity of cheap airlines and the Schengen agreement is problematic, as we realize that the movements of vast numbers of the population had already begun in previous centuries. The distance between the mid-19th century Californian and the Australian gold rushes was a mere six weeks by boat from Californian shores to New South Wales when populations moved from one country to another, one hemisphere to another in pursuit of finding gold. Large numbers of Europeans moved to the USA, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela, Australia, New Zealand, and Siberia. In addition, there was internal movement within the European continent as well – not only within the context of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation but also the World Wars, the end of the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman empires, and the internal migration in Europe to France, Belgium, and Germany as these countries became wealthier than their European counterparts.

   The argument of linguistic nationalism or ethnic nationalism that partition histories focus on is problematized due to Europeans having always already being on the move, always already transnational, their histories always already inextricably braided with that of others. Globalization and the transnational movement of people are not new phenomena where the impact of one place is felt strongly in others. It is an old, old thing. To perceive Europe only through its geographically bounded contours begs the question, how European is Europe? In the still relevant essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Spivak points to the enmeshment of the Western intellectual within Western economic interests. She wonders what part the history of imperialism plays in the construction of knowledge (and history) of Europe. Is it a subjugated knowledge "located low down in the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition" (Foucault's *Power/Knowledge*, quoted in Spivak 1988, 281)?[2] As many scholars of the British empire have indicated, Britain's history happened elsewhere, in its colonies, in Asia, in Africa, in the Caribbean, in North America, in the Pacific, in Australia/New Zealand. So my final questions to Stefano Bianchini are: What part did the 55 million European emigrants who left in the 19th to early 20th centuries play in the production of the history and nationalism of their countries of origin? What part did non-European spaces play in the liquidity of Europe's borders and nationalisms? How central are the histories of non-European peoples to the development of European histories and nationalisms? How might *Liquid Nationalism* have been reshaped keeping these questions in mind?

Notes

1 See also Misztal (2003) for a good overview of memory studies, and Connerton (1989, 2009, 2011), particularly the chapter "Seven Types of Forgetting" in *The Spirit of Mourning*.
2 Here, Spivak is using Foucault's words against Foucault, the intellectual who seems oblivious to the track of ideology and his complicity within Western institutions.

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