

Statement of Intended Research

‘Comparing experiences of partition-induced violence during the Partition of India and the Northern Irish Troubles’. I endeavour to draw on the recent multi-disciplinary attention given to comparing colonial partitions, which in many cases has testified the efficacy of comparing the Indian and Irish experience. Much of the comparative literature focuses on analysing the specific construction of partition at a state or governmental level. My own focus would be on the human experience of partition, and its infliction of multiple forms of violence including physical, cultural and bureaucratic forms, to expound this in the Northern Irish context and in a wider comparative framework. In this sense I would also be utilising the Northern Irish experience as a form of ‘deferred partition violence’, recognising that though it took place well after the original partition of Ireland, the incidence, meanings and complexities of sectarian violence bears considerable parallels to the earlier Indian experience.

There is a small, expanding historiography on comparing partitions, with considerable attention given to Indian/Irish parallels, connections and disjuncture’s. Much of this focuses on the high-level mechanics of the political ‘tool’ of partition, following T. G Fraser’s pioneering 1984 study¹. ‘From below’ comparisons are of more recent emphasis, largely spearheaded by literature. Joe Cleary, though looking at Ireland and Palestine, provided a compelling methodological framework for comparing literary representations of partition experiences.² A recent conference held by University of Illinois in 2016, ‘Ireland, India, Palestine & Beyond: Partitions and Empire’, drew together political and more socio-cultural analyses, but focused largely on investigating isolated experiences of partition within a wider comparative understanding.³ A publication of particular interest is Ellen Sweeney’s doctoral thesis on partition in Indian and Irish cinemas, demonstrating how far the two are a worthwhile and fruitful comparison in the dimension of lived experience.⁴ Sweeney and Cleary’s work convincingly showcases the merit of including comparative literature and media as an aspect of this thesis, but alongside a more thorough and holistic interrogation of how communities experienced as well as presented their experiences of violence.

Thus, Gyan Pandey’s comment in reference to South Asia, that violence is often treated as ‘outside’ history of partition, is pertinent for comparative analyses of Ireland and India.⁵ Pandey and numerous others including Urshavi Bhutalia, Ritu Menon and Kamila Bhasin,

¹ T. G. Fraser, *Partition in Ireland, India and Palestine: Theory and Practice*, (Springer, 1984); K.J. Rankin, ‘Theoretical Concepts of Partition and the Partitioning of Ireland’ *Mapping Frontiers, Plotting Pathways Working Paper No. 17*, 2006; B. O’Leary, ‘Debating Partition: Justifications, Evaluations and Critiques’ *Mapping Frontiers, Plotting Pathways Working Paper No. 28*, 2006; B. O’Leary *A Treaties on Northern Ireland : Volume 1 Colonialism*, (Oxford University Press: 2019), pp 371-396.

² J. Cleary, *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel and Palestine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2001). Cleary also pointed out the strength of the South Asian genre of partition literature and stated ‘it would be useful to add India to the compass of [his own] study was there but ‘world enough and time’

³ <https://publish.illinois.edu/partitionandempire/>

⁴ E. Sweeney "Partition and its legacies: a cross-cultural comparison of Irish, British and South Asian cinemas." PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) thesis, (University of Iowa; 2013)

⁵ C. Fox ‘The Elephant & Partition: Partition and Memory: Ireland, India, Palestine’ *History Ireland*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring, 2002)

Gyan Pandey and Joya Chatterji have since firmly engrained the subaltern, lived experience of South Asia's partition into its historiography⁶. This has not occurred in the Irish case, and thus in a comparative framework Irish historiography and particularly the historiography of the Troubles could benefit hugely from the conceptual frameworks and analysis developed. One example that I think will particularly elucidate this is the gendering of violence, a topic researched thoroughly in South Asia but with the exception of Aisling Swaine's recent publication⁷ is a comparable lacuna in Troubles histories. I also hope that placing the Indian experience alongside a more recent but equally brutal and harrowing incidence of sectarian violence within the boundaries of modern Britain will contribute to the de-exceptionalising of 1947 and its aftermath. As Ian Talbot surmises, the violence accompanying India's vivisection is often placed into a condescending Euro-centric narrative, existing outside of the bounds of modernity, which is one key narrative I hope to counter.⁸

The thesis would look at multiple forms of violence beyond just the physical including ideological violence, the imposition of sectarian identities in place of fluid self-imaginings, and 'bureaucratic violence' (as Vera Zamindar coined⁹) as a result of peace processes inflicted from the state to historical agents. I was particularly drawn to this after attending an event at St Catherine's College: the Challenges of Delivering the Good Friday Agreement, and studying the Indian Constitution in my Special Subject. In both instances the positioning of state level change simultaneously portrayed as 'above' the violence but also existing entirely in response to it was captivating. Political comparisons have been made between aspects of the Indian Constitution and the Good Friday Agreement e.g. their respective pitfalls and triumphs for consociational governance but nothing has been done on comparing the experience of conflict 'resolution' of those living through physical violence.¹⁰ Living with the memory and trauma of violence would also be a fruitful site of enquiry, due to its intimacy in both contexts and the fact that many victims still live in societies with their perpetrators. The official 'memory' of violence, its conception and impact on individual narratives will be an interesting point of comparison especially as in both cases requirements for peace dictated mediating between two opposing views.

Because of the existing wealth of scholarship on India's partition experience, as well as financial and language constraints to conducting oral interviews in India, I plan to only conduct original oral research within Northern Ireland. This would mean a large part of my thesis would focus on Northern Ireland, with the comparative dimension with India here coming from secondary frameworks and materials. However, I would also like to study

⁶ For example, but not limited to: Urvashi Butalia: *The Other Side of Silence : Voices From the Partition of India*, (Duke University Press; 2000) G. Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001); R. Menon and K. Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: How Women Experienced the Partition of India* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998)); J. Chatterji. 'South Asian Histories of Citizenship 1946–1970' *The Historical Journal*, 2012

⁷ A. Swaine. *Conflict-Related Violence against Women: Transforming Transition*. (Cambridge University Press; 2018)

⁸ 'I. Talbot 'The 1947 Partition Violence: *Characteristics and Interpretations*' in R. Mohanram, A. Raychaudhuri, eds. *Partitions and their afterlives: Violence, memories, living*. Critical Perspectives on Theory, Culture and Politics, (Rowman and Littlefield, 2017)

⁹ V. Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia*. (Columbia University Press: 2010)

¹⁰ B. O'Leary, 'A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume III: Consociation and Confederation, pp 2-32.

literature and film and museum exhibitions, such as in the Partition Museum in Amritsar and Ulster Museum in Belfast, enabling a more fully comparative dimension to the study. Having studied both South Asian partition in Part 1 in *Paper 23* and Part 2 in my special subject *Indian Democracy*, and the Northern Irish Troubles in Part 2 *Paper 25*, I have a good foundational understanding of both topics, historiographies and source materials available.

I am particularly drawn to pursuing this thesis under the Cambridge World History MPhil. Where possible I have always studied world history throughout the [REDACTED] and have always found these topics the most enjoyable and stimulating. I appreciate the combination of both taught and research elements, as I have always found the history faculty's teaching invigorating and beneficial and would relish an extended chance for individual research. The ability to learn a language is also something that draws me to the course, having not had access to the Cambridge Language Centre during my undergraduate degree due to financial and time restraints.