“Believe Me, Believe Me”: Trauma and The Partition’s Tripartite Influence in “A Real Durwan”

Writing for Harvard Public Health, S.I. Rosenbaum describes modern history as “an age of trauma,” and it’s easy to see why (Rosenbaum). History classes teach of Holocausts, dictatorships, racism, while the modern media pumps into our feed stories and videos of terror in places like Gaza and Ukraine. We all see, hear, and read information about trauma daily. It has seeped its way into popular culture through murder mystery shows and true crime podcasts. It is inevitable, then, that our obsession with trauma has had an impact on current opinion. As James Berger puts it in his article “Trauma and Literary Theory,” “these events, and the visual representations of these events, have in large part shaped contemporary American modes of viewing the world” (Berger 572). Or, as Nicole Sutterlin’s “History of Trauma Theory” states, “Trauma has become a key interpretative category of our time,” as modern sensibilities have developed an acumen for suffering (Sutterlin 11).

Paired with the expansion of media coverage, there has been a veritable explosion of literature on the subject of trauma. Literature plays a valuable role in facing traumatic experiences by allowing authors to construct narratives within the void left after these events. Speaking on the vast amount of literature that has been created by Holocaust survivors, Victoria Aarons explains that these narratives are “never the event itself but the trailing, mediated articulation of experience filtered through the constraints of language and consciousness, thus turning ‘life history into life story’” (Aarons 43). Influential trauma theorist Cathy Carruth argues that the creation of these “life stories” is especially important for our understanding of history. By understanding “the possibility of a history which is no longer straightforwardly referential” (that is, a historical timeline built on specific points of reference), we allow

disparaged voices into the global story, helping to permit a new form of "history to arise where immediate understanding may not" (Carruth 182). This new form of non-referential, nonlinear history helps us to attempt to understand the experiences of trauma victims. Instead of referring directly to the incomprehensible event, victims of trauma can use literature and narratives to share their aforementioned life stories in unique ways that reflect their own nonlinear experience. Carruth boldly claims that in our "catastrophic age" this "may provide the very link between cultures" that we need, and "that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (Carruth 11, 192). As readers participate in trauma survivors and authors' life stories, they are exposed to new cultures, experiences, and, yes, tragedies—but this exposure can be vitally important, as it can lead to empathy, respect, and reconciliation, a new link in a proverbial chain that binds people together.

In the hopes of adding another link to this chain, this paper analyzes trauma and its literary representation in Jhumpa Lahiri's fictional short story "A Real Durwan," contained in her Pulitzer-prize winning collection *Interpreter of Maladies*. "A Real Durwan" focuses on the "plights" of Boori Ma, "sweeper of the stairwell" (Lahiri 69). A migrant of the Partition, displaced to Calcutta, she is taken in by an apartment tenement who let her stay underneath their letter boxes in exchange for her cleaning their stairs. The title of the story comes because "over the years, Boori Ma's services came to resemble those of a real durwan," with durwan being loosely translated as a doorman (Lahiri 72). This story and the collection in which it is part are both fairly recent publications, and as such academic attention is still forthcoming. In the few studies and readings on the collection, most critics focus on how the Indian American immigrant experience is portrayed, as nine of the twelve stories are set in America. "A Real Durwan" receives sparse mentions in some papers, discussing displacement and memory, and it is always

discussed in conjunction with other stories. While a fair reading, I believe "A Real Durwan" is most accurately read within its own historical frame of reference. Doing so makes it possible for one to understand the traumatic context of the Indian Partition and its likely effects on Boori Ma and her community.

I argue that "A Real Durwan" is better understood as a trauma narrative in the wake of postcolonial, post-Partition India. Properly situated in this context, the traumatic tale of Boori Ma can be seen to have a threefold focus by showing how trauma interacts with individuals, communities, and nations. First, it highlights the effects of traumatic events (in this case, the Indian-Pakistan Partition) on the individual; second, it examines how communities can mishandle traumatic events and their victims; and third, the story can be read as a national allegory for the still healing India. Taken as a whole, the cyclical nature of a new exile at the end of the story—another Partition for Boori Ma—can be representative of the fact that history is no longer referential: it is circular, as cultures continue to unconsciously repeat the injustices inflicted upon them. Understanding the pattern involved in this story is yet another step forward to the "very link between cultures" that the world needs, as we are all impacted and "implicated" by the traumas of the world (Carruth 11, 181). It invites each of us to hear the stories of another culture, fostering greater empathy and understanding as we participate in the act of remembrance together, united.

Section 1: Situating Boori Ma as a Trauma Victim

One of the reasons that readers may gloss over Boori Ma's trauma is due to a lack of "world knowledge," as described by Steen Larsen and Janos Laszlo. In their study, they invited teenagers from both Hungary and Denmark to read a short story entitled *The Nacik* (The Nazis). Described as "emotionally quite provoking," the story is not violent, but deals with heavy themes

(Larsen 428). The title and author are Hungarian, but both were removed, making it necessary for their readers to call upon "world knowledge" to make inferences and fill in gaps, which is a common necessity in short stories like this and "A Real Durwan" (Larsen 426). The study found that the Hungarian readers were more likely to be correct in filling in gaps and felt more personally connected to the story as well. The study concluded that "the nature and effects of… [textual instances that invite foreknowledge] to fill in gaps were strongly conditioned by the reader's cultural background" and that "it is probably inevitable that cross-cultural transplantation of literature will result in differences of appreciation" (Larsen 438, 439). In conjunction with "A Real Durwan," it is easy to see how it requires "world knowledge." As a short story, with only brief mentions of the Partition itself, it is easy to overlook the traumatic nature of the text if one does not have the requisite cultural and historical understanding.

However, when one does understand the context, it is clearly a traumatic tale. Firstly, its protagonist Boori Ma is an immigrant who was violently displaced in the Partition. Like *The Nacik*, there are no actual descriptions of violence in the text—but, like the Nazis, Partition was violent. The phrase "Partition" refers to the partitioning of India and Pakistan by the British colonial government when they granted the Indian subcontinent independence in 1947. The land was split on religious beliefs: Pakistan, for the Muslims, and India, for the Hindu, Sikh, etc. However, the Partition of India was not a simple endeavor in line-drawing that displaced a few people: it was a complex affair that involved much politicking and ethnic/religious conflict, all of which had already been simmering for decades. As people fled to their new country, religious violence erupted between the Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus, leading to horrifying atrocities. Historian Navdip Kaur noted that trains full of refugees arrived at their destinations filled with dead bodies, but that "was far less than those killed on [the] ground" (Kaur 953). Due to its

hasty, aggressive nature, statistics have always been hard to come by when evaluating the toll of the Partition. But recent study from Prashant Bharadwaj calculates that based on census records there were 3.4 million people unaccounted for, with data "suggesting that… the greater part of the missing number is likely to reflect mortality during Partition" (Bharadwaj 43).

Women in particular became pawns in the power games of roving bands of men, with countless women being raped and abducted, their bodies desecrated and dismembered. To avoid this desecration, women would be killed by their husbands or even commit suicide. In her article "Gender, Memory, and Trauma: Women's Novels on the Partition of India," Ananya Jahanara Kabir says that this is because, "Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim men sought to humiliate and annihilate the 'other' while imprinting their own identity on the bearer of future generations" (Kabir 179). While we do not receive a description of Boori Ma's actual journey, the violence was universal: virtually all "society could count among their kinsmen those who were uprooted, plundered, assaulted and murdered" (Kaur 947). This is likely the environment in which Boori Ma survived and was traumatized during her flee to Calcutta.

Understanding this history of Partition, it is easy to identify physical and psychiatric symptoms of trauma in Boori Ma's character. The story begins with this line: "Boori Ma… had not slept in two nights" (Lahiri 69). She blames mites, but her neighbor examines her and tells her she is "imagining things" (Lahiri 73). From the very first line, then, we can see the suggestion of trauma in her lack of sleep. Soon after this line, her distinguishing characteristic is described: "the only thing that appeared three-dimensional about Boori Ma was her voice: brittle with sorrows, as tart as curds, and shrill enough to grate meat from a coconut" (Lahiri 69). She uses this voice to repeat her sorrows and her past pleasures as she sweeps the stairs. She claims that "the turmoil had separated her from a husband, four daughters, a two-story brick house, a

rosewood almari," and more (Lahiri 70). This kind of consistent repetition is indicative of a post-traumatic state. Christa Schönfelder explains that "repetition compulsion is one of the determining features of trauma" (Schonfelder 6). Lastly, Boori Ma's wanderings near the end of the story could be seen as signs of dissociation, another one of the "crucial characteristics of the psychiatric history of trauma" (Schonfelder 28). Understanding the violent nature of the Indian Partition, specifically for women, helps us easily identify these characteristics as some of the somatic signs typical after a traumatic experience.

Boori Ma's clarion call is "Believe me, don't believe me. My life is composed of such griefs you cannot even dream them" (Lahiri 71). This is her go-to phrase whenever the neighbors doubt her stories, which happens often because "every day, the perimeters of her former estate seemed to double" (Lahiri 70-71). The text says that "she garbled facts. She contradicted herself. She embellished almost everything" (Lahiri 71). The confusion around her past further reinforces the concept that for trauma victims, history is non-referential. When trauma victims attempt to describe their experience, the facts are "inevitably arbitrated by and filtered through the ambushes, reflections, and calculations of memory as well as its defenses and instincts for deflection, repression, and survival" (Aarons 43). This leads to the "garbled," contradictory state of Boori Ma's story—it is simply impossible to make something so incomprehensible fit a linear, referential timeline. This non-referential view of history and memory is a key concept in attempting to express trauma in literature. When Boori Ma exaggerates or contradicts herself, she is simply trying to express her life story and the horror she has experienced. Understanding that these aspects of Boori Ma's character stem from trauma is important, as they set up the juxtaposition between how Boori Ma and the community interact with the notion of trauma.

Section 2: Community and Trauma

The interactions of communities and individuals in response to traumatic events, both positive and negative, has long been an object of study. If, as Caruth posits, our new understanding of a traumatic history requires our recognition that "history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas," then trauma is not necessarily in the hands of the individual: it is in the hands of the community. While not neglecting the fact that trauma is a deeply personal experience, the act of sharing the stories of trauma necessarily invites reflection and judgement. An outcome of reflection and judgement is a decision of what is valuable, or what is not. In her article "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory," Michele Balaev articulates this idea well: "Few would disagree that individuals suffer traumatic responses in the context of a culture that ascribes different value to the experience and a person's feelings that surround the experience" (Balaev 155). Later, she writes: "A central thematic dynamic in the trauma novel is thus found in representations of individual experiences of trauma that necessarily oscillate between private and public meanings, personal and political paradigms" (Balaev 156). While the narrative and its expression is in the purview of the victim or artist, its actual reception or value is inevitably decided by the community who partakes in its telling. These value-based decisions by the community can be a boon or a detriment to victims of trauma.

The community's view of Boori Ma's narrative and her assigned role as a durwan clearly influence their assessment and isolation of her. They allow her to stay because they find her to be "a superb entertainer" and conclude that "her throaty impostures hurt no one" (Lahiri 72). Their evaluation of her stories shows that she is harmless, and their finding her entertaining shows that they do not take her life story very seriously. Importantly, though, it is very clear that they recognize her as a victim. The women describe her as "bechareh," (which loosely translates as

"pitiable") and think she constructs her tales to cope with losing her family (Lahiri 71). One of the few named residents, Mr. Chatterjee often repeats that "Boori Ma's mouth is full of ashes, but she is the victim of changing times" (Lahiri 71). Hearing her stories constantly, the community's decision to let her stay demonstrates that it is not the victim of trauma who decides the outcome of their story—it is the community that gets to assign their ending.

In Boori Ma's case, this assignment of trauma is quite literal. The text tells us that the residents assign her sleeping place: underneath their letter boxes. Out of all her work, the neighbors are said to have "most of all… liked that Boori Ma, who slept each night behind the collapsible gate, stood guard between them and the outside world" (Lahiri 72). As a stand-in durwan, Boori Ma is a shield between the community and the larger world. She "patrolled activities in the alley" and "screened the peddlers who came to sell combs and shawls" (Lahiri 72). This guardianship is valuable to the community and influences their decision to accept and listen to her. However, it is also a form of isolation, as she is viewed by the community to inhabit a gulf that separates her from them and anyone else. This liminal space that Boori Ma is assigned is a wasteland between the world and the community—she is alone in this space, neither here nor there.

Another example of this isolation is that Boori Ma is allowed to come into the residents' apartments, but when she does, she is largely ignored, and she knows "not to sit on the furniture." "She crouched instead, in doorways and hallways, and observed gestures and manners in the same way a person tends to watch traffic in a foreign city" (Lahiri 75). This metaphor of viewing traffic in a foreign city depicts especially well Boori Ma's isolated, foreign nature. The neighbors allowing her to be a part of their homes, but not at rest in them, typifies how she is viewed by the community. She is not truly one of them, although by rights she should be. They

have a token acceptance of and an assignment for her, but her religious exile during the Partition was supposed to help her arrive at a place where she fits in.

Despite her complaining and confusion, on Boori Ma's part there is some form of acceptance. She fills her role as a stand-in durwan well. She is said to have "honored the responsibility, and maintained a vigil no less punctilious than if she were the gatekeeper on Lower Circular Road…or any other fancy neighborhood" (Lahiri 72). She also has at least some communion with the neighbors, even if she is treated as lesser while she is with them. This fraternization is an essential element for recovery; psychiatrist Judith Herman claims that the original success in treating trauma came in the form of psychoanalytic talk therapy for women suffering from "hysteria" (Herman). This kind of stability can be important for those who have suffered from traumatic events. It provides a space for their stories to be heard, as is seen in the text when Boori Ma "enumerated, twice a day as she swept the stairwell, the details of her plight and losses suffered since her deportation to Calcutta after Partition" (Lahiri 69). Boori Ma's "rants were so persuasive, her fretting so vivid, that it was not so easy to dismiss her" (Lahiri 71). Boori Ma's vocality as a victim of trauma helps her secure the liminal space she inhabits. Even in a less-than-ideal fashion, her job and the ability to share her story is invaluable to her.

The danger for the place of the traumatized arises when the community has a shift in values and invades the space previously given to them. We see this when the neighbors begin to improve the apartment. The apartment is overwhelmed by workmen "night and day," and "to avoid the traffic, Boori Ma took to sleeping on the rooftop" (Lahiri 79). This change in sleeping position is not ordered by the community, but it also does not reflect autonomy on Boori Ma's part—she is forced to this new position by the busyness. Already we see the slow slip to her sudden expulsion as she is displaced again. As the community begins to value the apartment

more than its durwan, Boori Ma becomes increasingly dissociated. She starts to embark from the relative safety of the liminal space she inhabited, wandering the streets. and one day she is pickpocketed, losing both her life savings and the "skeleton keys" to her long-lost coffer boxes (Lahiri 70). It is upon her return home that she discovers the residents angrily waiting for her, who then blame her for not being on watch while a basin was stolen, and they expel her to end the story.

The loss of Boori Ma's skeleton keys in this last scene is particularly noteworthy. Throughout the story, she would use these keys to emphasize important points: when the children questioned her immigration story, she "would reply, shaking the free end of her sari so that the skeleton keys rattled" before answering. (Lahiri 71). When she is faced with accusations at the end of the story, she changes her clarion call and begs: "believe me, believe me" (Lahiri 80). This signifies that she is no longer sharing her life story—she is trying to protect it and stay in the community. The story ends with these lines: "'Believe me, believe me,' she said once more as her figure began to recede. She shook the free end of her sari, but nothing rattled" (Lahiri 81). The rattling of the skeleton keys at the beginning of the story can be taken as a symbol of her voice, her defining feature. Her voice was described as the only "three dimensional" feature she possessed (Lahiri 69). With the loss of the skeleton keys, her figure and dimensionality literally recede, and her voice is lost. The community is no longer listening. The skeleton keys are also a symbol of her past, as they are a physical reminder of her former possessions. This loss of her voice and her past is also the loss of a listening ear–it is what leads to her second exile.

While the community may not have been the ones who pickpocketed her, their shift in values is what put her in that dangerous position in the first place. By isolating her, and then

invading the minimal space she was given, they drive her to her fatal wanderings. The final voice in the debate over Boori Ma's expulsion was Mr. Chatterjee. As he "considered their arguments," he "gazed at the bamboo scaffolding that now surrounded his balcony" and noticed that "the shutters behind him, colorless for as long as he could remember, had been painted yellow" (Lahiri 81). These developments, the improvements of the building, influence his catchphrase as well, altering it to: "'Boori Ma's mouth is full of ashes. But that is nothing new. What is new is the face of this building. What a building like this needs is a real durwan'" (Lahiri 81). Mr. Chatterjee's focus on the building instead of Boori Ma is emblematic of the community's shifting values. His earlier lines foreshadowed this moment, as Boori Ma is once again the "victim of changing times" (Lahiri 71). It may have been more accurate to describe her here as the "victim of changing opinion," as the community decided it no longer valued her story.

Further complicating this story, though, is the understanding that the residents of Boori Ma's apartment complex most likely experienced violent elements of the Partition as well. While none of the other residents of the building are described as being physically affected by the Partition, the city of Calcutta in which the story takes place was the origin of the religious violence. Muslim riots in Calcutta started the physical escalation of Partition. These riots lasted several months and were so deadly that they were christened "The Great Calcutta Killing," as described by historian Nicholas Mansergh (Mansergh 3). Although an undisclosed amount of time has passed since Partition and Boori Ma's arrival, it is hard to imagine the memories of this violence would have faded. Indeed, one of the residents may still be troubled by those events: Mr. Chatterjee never leaves his balcony and has not "opened a newspaper since Independence, but in spite of this fact, or maybe because of it, his opinions were always esteemed" (Lahiri 71).

Prabal Gupta theorizes that this reluctance to leave or read newspapers may be because the truths of the violence of post-Partition India are "unbearable for Mr. Chatterjee" (Gupta 39). This characterization rings true and is foreshadowing for the way that the community handles the trauma of Partition in Boori Ma's case. In attempting to move through their own trauma and progress as a community, they are willing to leave behind those who are suffering from greater exposure to it.

Besides the focus on trauma and its interaction with the self, then, this story can also be read as a cautionary tale about how communities can mishandle both communal trauma and its individual victims. By showing the devaluation of Boori Ma for the sake of progress, a warning is given to the reader, a reminder of the importance of hearing and taking seriously the life stories of these victims. Local communities can provide the support and structure necessary for recovery, or the detrimental environment, isolation and possibly expulsion that these victims, like Boori Ma, cannot handle. As such, the story instructs that care must be given and invites remembrance of those who have been through things that most people can hardly comprehend. By doing so, every individual and community can be participants in "the very link between cultures" that we need to open the space necessary to create narratives and safety for disparaged voices today (Caruth 192).

Section 3: Reading "A Real Durwan" as a National Allegory

Before expounding on my claim that "A Real Durwan" can be read as a national allegory, I first feel the need to respond to the critical conversation around national allegories. Anyone versed in postcolonial criticism immediately thinks of Frederic Jameson's infamous claim that for "third-world cultures," the "story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the

embattled situation of the… culture and society" (Jameson 69). Immediately laying aside the problematic debate on the definition of "third world," I am in disagreement that this is always the case. However, there are some narratives that fit Jameson's description. Even still, some key mechanical and authorial details make it hazardous to slot this story into Jameson's boundaries. First off, it is a short story, not a novel; and second, its author is a second-generation Indian immigrant to America. By any stretch, Lahiri's background and modus operandi would be difficult to fit into Frederic Jameson's claims. What I am claiming, however, is that the story *can* be read as allegorical.

The text itself is rich in elements of allegory. Some examples of this are found in the story's syntax and a lack of characterization. The story is told from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, not from that of Boori Ma. This is different from most stories involving trauma, where the accounts are told from the perspective of the survivor, but it is common in allegory. In addition, the short story format lends itself well to allegorical telling. As mentioned previously, there are typically gaps and inferences that must be made in a short story. In comparison to a full-fledged novel, sparse details can be valuable, as the author is able to focus on what is most important to their purpose. One of the choices Jhumpa Lahiri made in this story was to include a lack of characterization. Outside of Boori Ma, there are only four other named characters, and each receives vague descriptions, like having "diaphanous eyelids" (Lahiri 73). The rest of the community is nameless. They are typically referred to as "the neighbors" or by a physical identifier common to the group speaking (the women, the children). This lack of characterization can also be typical of allegories, where the focus is more on the ideas than the characters themselves.

Contrasting with the lack of characterization is the attention given to the place where the story is set: the apartment building. The building receives more description than anything or anyone in the story aside from Boori Ma. After Boori Ma is situated, the story immediately describes the building in great detail. New, hyper-specific imagery for the building is also added throughout the text, whether it be of the rain with lines like, "it came slapping across the roof like a boy in slippers too big for him," and "creaky shutters were closed and tied with petticoat strings to the window bars," or of the improvements to the building itself (Lahiri 75). This focus on "place" is different than a mere setting for the story; in trauma novels, settings become "place" when they are endowed with value. The concept of a "place" is described as "not only a physical location of experience, but also an entity that organizes memories, feelings, and meaning because it is the site where individual and cultural realities interact" (Balaev 160). The importance of place in trauma novels allows for the expression of meaning and the construction of a symbolic narrative. This is visible throughout "A Real Durwan." The community puts a higher and higher importance on the upkeep and renovation of the building. They've imbued it with a sense of value, and the importance of the "place" becomes more important than Boori Ma—without the building, the narrative conflict and traumatic representation could not occur.

The descriptions, renovations and importance add an element of personification to the apartment, making it feel more alive than most of the characters—and, as Walter S. Melion articulates, "Talking about personification means talking about allegory" (Melion). Personification in allegories creates metaphors and symbolism for the personified thing: in this case, the apartment building. The apartment building can be read as representative of the struggle between trauma victims and their communities, as it is the battlefront that the neighbors use to wage war on Boori Ma, even though she is ironically the one who keeps it clean. The

interactions it contains and the values it holds are a visual reminder of the dangers that can come when a community mishandles trauma.

In reality, allegory extends much further than the community; it can also be representative of the culture of a nation. Ismail Alexander explains that allegory can be used "as a particular method of reading historical facts" (Xavier 342). Even more specifically, he later argues that allegory has a history of dealing with nationhood and the ideals of a country, and "tends to interact with historical fractures and violence, especially when observed from the point of view of the defeated" (Xavier 346). As a story that empathizes with the defeated (Boori Ma) and deals with the victims of arguably the greatest historical fracture of all time (the Partition), it is natural that one with the requisite "world knowledge" can read this story as an allegory describing the aftermath of the Partition itself.

When read this way, a unique pattern espoused by Caruth is visible. In the same article that she establishes the concept of non-referential history, she extrapolates another historical theory from Freud's book *Moses and Monotheism*. Based on Freud's arguments, Caruth introduces the notion that when a nation experiences a traumatic event, a breaking point (like the Jewish Exodus from Egypt) it is typically considered a return of sorts—a return home, to the past, to the ideal, etc. Caruth argues that while this is true, it is also paradoxically a departure from their desired outcome. Think of how the Jewish people received the Ten Commandments on their return home, which was also an Exodus. This actually represents a radical departure from the current trend of their society and changes the course of their history forever. Or, as Caruth puts it,

> In this rethinking of Jewish beginnings, then, the future is no longer continuous with the past, but is united with it through a profound discontinuity. The exodus from

> Egypt, which shapes the meaning of the Jewish past, is a departure that is both a radical break and the establishment of a history (Caruth 184).

She continues on to argue that these traumatic returns and departures slip into a cyclical pattern as cultures unconsciously repeat these events, experiencing more returns and departures as these events are self-inflicted again and again.

This notion of traumatic returns and departures that establish a new history is especially meaningful when evaluating Partition and "A Real Durwan." In the desire for Indian Independence, we see an almost romantic return to freedom. Juxtaposed against this is the religious desire of some for a separate state, a radical departure from the previous division of territory in India. Britain's own careless exodus led to the Partition of India, which had both the return of self-government and, in the creation of Pakistan, the departure from one pluralistic religious country. A victim of this, Boori Ma was returned to a state where she was a religious majority, a state that should have welcomed her with open arms. But in her violent departure from her home, everything changed. She lost her family and her possessions and was never the same woman again, nor was she accepted upon her arrival. At the end of the story, as the neighbors cast Boori Ma out and start their search for a real durwan, they are departing again towards a brighter future, or so they think—in reality, it is a return to Partition again. Boori Ma's second exile is a Partition reborn. History is no longer linear- it becomes circular as the cyclical nature of trauma sets in, and violence, exile, returns and departures in India related to the Partition are repeated again and again.

To be sure, this allegorical reading raises more questions than answers. This is normal: "allegory refuses to provide humanity with an aesthetic redemption of the world in perfect forms, or beautiful totalities that celebrate an illusory sense of unity and harmony," which can explain

the sad ending of this story (Xavier 346). Instead, it invites introspection. Is it possible to break the cyclical nature of trauma by understanding its workings? In India, what must be done to return those who were left behind in the excited departure for a brighter future? Questions like these have no one answer. However, consistent thought and effort can possibly yield them as we understand even further the globality and ever pervasive nature of trauma. Raising these questions through an allegorical reading of "A Real Durwan" is an important part of that equation.

Conclusion

While debates abound on the exact method of interpretation for trauma literature, one of the few credible critiques of modern trauma theory as a whole comes from postcolonial critics. Most traumatic histories and anthologies are focused only on Eurocentric events, leaving out the trauma caused by Western civilizations through colonial practices. While it would be futile to attempt to compare traumatic experiences, one can understand that trauma has occurred all over the world. Trauma is, unfortunately, ubiquitous, and the forgetfulness of the first trauma theorists is both ironic and dangerously counterintuitive. In their introduction to a journal written entirely on postcolonial trauma novels, Stef Craps and Gert Buelens state: "if, as Caruth argues, 'history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas,' then Western traumatic histories must be seen to be tied up with histories of colonial trauma for trauma studies to be able to redeem its promise of ethical effectiveness" (Craps 2). Their journal, along with many other promising works, attempts to bridge this gap, evaluating the role that trauma plays in postcolonial studies.

Introducing "A Real Durwan" into this ongoing discussion is an attempt to add another link to the chain in which we are all part. By reading and understanding the traumatic tale of

Boori Ma in its proper historical context, it is possible to raise a greater awareness of the importance communities and nations have in listening to these narratives. Communities can create the space for the construction of these narratives and provide a supportive atmosphere to those still healing from these unresolved, incomprehensible traumatic events. Perhaps most importantly, the allegorical nature of "A Real Durwan" can serve as a recognition of and a call to action for the still healing Indian subcontinent. As we each understand our own implication in the traumas of the world, we can begin to take the steps necessary towards their resolution—or, at the very least, we can hear the stories being told by countless people like Boori Ma around the planet.

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