

# Progressives and “Perverts”

## *Partition Stories and Pakistan’s Future*

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Sa’adat Hasan Manto (1912–55), the Urdu short story writer, starts his story “Toba Tek Singh”<sup>1</sup> with the assertion that after British India’s partition the respective governments of India and Pakistan decided that inmates of mental asylums should be exchanged. So mentally ill Muslims in Indian hospitals were to be transferred to Pakistan, and Hindu and Sikh patients in Pakistani asylums would be sent to India. Manto’s representation of partition’s “insanity” in this and other stories is now well known in literary and popular circles. It is by now also well known that the violence that followed the partition of British India was unprecedented in its scale and method.<sup>2</sup> As the violence in South Asia during the last few months of 1947 became a reality, social turmoil forced many, like Manto’s mentally ill, to cross the still-porous borders toward unsettled lives in new and unseen lands.

This essay will discuss some of the intellectual debates among literary figures that followed the partition of South Asia in the newly formed state of Pakistan. As I develop my argument in the following pages, I suggest that as much as the new country was formed on an ideological platform of Muslim nationalism in South Asia, the shape of its future culture initially remained an open question.<sup>3</sup> Let me again turn to Manto to explain this point further. In an essay written as an introduction to a collection of his short stories in the early 1950s, Manto looks back at the time he spent in Bombay (twelve years) just before he migrated to Pakistan. He writes about the city with warmth and a sense of extreme loss yet is reconciled to the inevitable fact that he is now in Pakistan. But, he says, coming to the new country was an act full of uncertainty and anxiety:

No one had given it a thought that after such a revolution things would not remain the same. Whether small alleys would become large highways or their existence would be completely lost, we did not have an answer. Would there be a difference between the governance by foreigners or by those we call our own, about this people were not sure either. How would the new cultural and social atmosphere nurture our thoughts and feelings? What would be the relationship between the state, government, community and the individual? These were issues that we needed to seriously concentrate on.<sup>4</sup>

Manto's voice helps us to rethink the moment in Pakistan's history when contesting voices of uncertainty and confusion, against an emerging nationalist framework, discussed and debated the shape that Pakistan's social, political, and cultural life would take in the ensuing years. This was not an easy task; the question faced by various intellectuals and perhaps the state as well was how one even thinks about, writes about, or seeks to build a future immediately after witnessing (and in many cases living through) a catastrophe or carnage like the killings, arson, disappearances, and rapes of the partition. Entire communities that until recently had lived together turned against one another, and the carnage that followed undermined long-held practices of shared existence and tolerance.

However, periods of war and destruction also undermine normative values and loosen moral strictures. As chaos and random violence ensue, a new beginning can also be imagined in the ruins of the old order. As in Europe after the two wars of the twentieth century,<sup>5</sup> the violence of the mid-1940s in South Asia created opportunities for writers and intellectuals to rethink past certainties and generate visions for the future. Hence this sense of destruction of shared values after experiencing an "apocalyptic" event may have led to imagining other possibilities in new surroundings and, in my opinion, may have been partially responsible for the spate of literature that dealt with partition. These works were written from various ideological perspectives and personal experiences, and the debates that followed argued for conceiving different future trajectories for the newly independent country.

Within this larger context, in Pakistan's first decade of existence there were clear camps of intellectuals who had competing claims linked to various ideological positions that sought to impress on the state and the populace the legitimacy of one set of ideas over others. One group with a clear ideological perspective was the set of intellectuals closely aligned with the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP). The CPP as a continuation of the Communist Party of India (CPI) had some roots in the worker and peasant movement in the new country, but it is most remembered for its influence on the literary and intellectual debates of the era through its control of the All Pakistan Progressive Writers Association (APPWA). Of course there was opposition from various quarters to this particular

understanding of culture and literary undertaking. Yet other groups were not as organized and consisted of a range of free thinkers, modernist poets, and independent-minded intellectuals, along with those who sought to link the question of Pakistan with Islamic morals and values.<sup>6</sup> The latter group was intellectually eclectic and divided,<sup>7</sup> and many had also previously been close to the progressives.

In the following pages as I discuss the writings of specific personalities who belonged to these sides of the political spectrum, I will not provide another survey of the discussions on religion (Islam's role in the new country) and national belonging (patriotism, Muslim nationalism) within intellectual circles at the moment of Pakistan's inception—work that has been excellently performed by many.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to these dominant representational themes through which Pakistan's history is rendered intelligible to many, I will particularly focus on a debate surrounding the question of morality (“pure or perverse literature”) connected to a text of short stories on the partition by Manto himself. To be sure, I concentrate on the exchanges between certain intellectuals in postindependence Pakistan surrounding Manto's book to suggest how these arguments were not only limited to the literary sphere, but also raised pertinent questions regarding human subjectivity and its relation to the uncharted future facing Pakistan at the moment of its birth. By focusing on Manto's writings I revisit this period to demonstrate how, after Pakistan's creation, there was continued debate among intellectuals about what would constitute a national culture—a discussion that may still be ongoing and incomplete.

Manto's work enables me to open a space to specifically speak about this incompleteness by tracing the emergent post-partition identities in the new country. Historians have argued that Pakistan's creation was a partial resolution of the contradiction between the particularism of Muslim identity in South Asia, linked as it was to locality and place, and the larger construction of Muslim moral community connected to a territorially bounded nation-state.<sup>9</sup> As much as the Pakistan movement led by the Muslim League in the 1940s sought to transcend divisions among Muslims through the symbol of the emergent state and the formation of the moral sovereign, the diversity of people's lives and particularistic cultural experiences remained in perpetual tension to this order.<sup>10</sup> However, the mistrust shown by the new Pakistani state, wrapped as it was in the ideology of Muslim nationalism, toward the diverse aspirations of its own people led to the imposition on the populace of a metanarrative of an undivided nation. A reaction to this political process was the gradual cracking of the constructed ideological edifice of a unified Muslim moral community. For example, by the mid-1950s the promise of the Muslim nationalism that had led to the creation of Pakistan in 1947 was severely put to the test by regional and nationalistic claims of Pakistan's diverse

ethnic groups. Foremost among these was the voice of its Bengali citizens, who as the largest demographic claimed their economic and linguistic rights from the overtly centralizing state in Karachi, fourteen hundred miles away from Dhaka.<sup>11</sup>

Within this historical trajectory, since its creation in 1947 as the homeland for Muslims of South Asia, Pakistan has been a configuration of shifting alliances and competing political and social ideologies. Culturally, the Mohajirs (literally, refugees; those who migrated from India), along with the majority Punjabi ethnic group, have been the most closely linked with Muslim nationalism and with Urdu as the Pakistani national language.<sup>12</sup> I do not have the space here to discuss the history of communalization of the Urdu language as the language of South Asian Muslims. However, during the struggle for Pakistan's creation and after its independence, Pakistan's political leadership did emphasize such a linkage at the cost of even alienating Muslim ethnic populations, such as Bengalis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, and Baluchis, that lived within its own borders. Today, more than sixty years after its independence and forty years after the creation of Bangladesh, the Pakistani state has been unable to resolve the question of national integration of its many cultures and diverse linguistic groups.

Shahid Amin, in his rendition of another South Asian event of the early twentieth century, reminds us how nationalist master narratives can induce selective national amnesia in relation to events that fit awkwardly into neatly woven patterns.<sup>13</sup> As much as this paper in its conclusion will suggest an alternative historical reading of the early years of Pakistan's history, it will also use Manto's fiction to raise the question of how the marginal, the everyday, and the unpredictable are represented in order to bring an alternative historical reading forward to contest more established renditions of the past.

Within this context, I read Manto's work partly in light of what we have come to expect perhaps from contemporary queer theory, a theoretical framework that depathologizes sexuality within public life and also makes it possible to revalue and document the "nonnormative ways of living."<sup>14</sup> Manto during his brief life was duly criticized by his literary colleagues and others for his excessive drinking and his wayward lifestyle, and also for the depiction in his writings of what Aamir Mufti calls "sexually and morally displaced figures."<sup>15</sup> Manto, in these terms, could be read as a queer subject, both for his choice of characters and for his own personal anti-conformist lifestyle.<sup>16</sup> That said, as José Esteban Muñoz argues, queerness is linked to thinking about another world and a rejection of the status quo;<sup>17</sup> it is an undermining of linear history (the history of "progress" in Benjaminian terms)<sup>18</sup> and opens historical analysis to multiple temporalities. Queer time for some writers is the turning away from the certainty of

the dominant narrative of a developmental life cycle that follows the trajectory from adolescence to death through reproduction and child rearing. Queer subjects then are those who live outside what Judith Halberstam would call “reproductive time” or family time and also at the edges of logics of capital accumulation.<sup>19</sup> Hence ravers, club kids, the homeless, sex workers, the unemployed, drug dealers, and others become “queer subjects” as they may work when others sleep and also inhabit spaces that others have abandoned. These are also subjects that are inherently at social, economic, and physical risk while they live “without financial safety nets, without homes, without steady jobs, outside the organizations of time and space that have been established for the purposes of protecting the rich few from everyone else.”<sup>20</sup>

Hence I import queer theory into this discussion to interpret Manto’s stories in which many of his protagonists are marginal characters and discards of society, like sex workers, addicts, pimps, cab drivers, and petty criminals. These depictions of the “morally displaced” clearly question the normative constructions of the national subject during the process of assembling a nationalist project in newly independent South Asian states and are emblematic of some queer performances and creative efforts that may not be congealed into a dominant argument or a master narrative.

Although the characters in Manto’s fiction are invariably similar to the people Halberstam posits as “queer subjects,” Manto’s work preceded the development of the theoretical paradigm of queer studies. Yet, significantly, as Ann Cvetkovich’s suggests, Manto does allow me to move queer studies across historical and geographical boundaries, away from the recent history of gay and lesbian identities and communities in the Western metropolis.<sup>21</sup> Further, to reiterate my earlier point, Manto also enables me to offer a critique of Pakistan’s normative national history and to suggest a different path to understand the country’s past and possibly its future.

In following the debates around Manto’s writings, this essay relies on research in public and private archives, newspaper reports, and memoirs of key participants in the debates. Some of the most valuable sources were found in literary journals of the era that helped me to follow the discussions of more than sixty years ago. Working with this non-Western archive, primarily in Urdu, at times meant trying to locate original editions of literary magazines and journals in libraries and private collections. Some of the material has been republished in recent years, but the editing has been selective. Other important sources, especially on the Communist Party, were police reports from a private archival collection in Pakistan and the political reports sent by British diplomats to the United Kingdom. There is very little cultural history written on Pakistan of the early period, so tracing certain assertions through a range of memoirs became “detective” work that had its own pleasures. As stories took their own life in vari-

ous narrations, they also opened up avenues for further speculation and analysis.

To situate the debates, in this essay I will initially provide a brief discussion of the Communist Party's position on the Muslim question in British India. Following this I will present intellectual interventions and contesting voices that are critical of one another—but also of state-imposed sanctions and ideals—in order to rethink Pakistan's early history (with all the messiness of the debates and arguments) as a period that could have led to a range of possible future historical trajectories.<sup>22</sup>

### **Communists in a Muslim Land**

In late February 1948, the CPI held its second congress in Calcutta.<sup>23</sup> The most important task performed during the congress was the shift toward a more radical political line by the party and a severe critique of reformist politics of the party leadership during most of the 1940s. As much as these discussions were the main focus of the congress, the delegates also took some time to divide the party into two constitutive parts: the CPI would confine its work to the boundaries of the Indian Union, and the post–August 1947 separated territories of Pakistan would be free to form a different communist party.

After the resolution on Pakistan was passed, the delegates from Pakistan met separately and convened the first congress of the CPP. It accepted with amendments the CPI's Report on Pakistan,<sup>24</sup> containing the resolution, and elected its first office bearers. Syed Sajjad Zaheer (1905–73), who was a member of the central committee of the CPI, was elected general secretary as he had opted to go to Pakistan. Like Zaheer, and very much like inmates in Manto's fictitious asylum, other Muslim members of the CPI were asked to follow, but many senior Muslim members declined.<sup>25</sup> Zaheer belonged to a very prominent, educated, and respected Muslim family from the United Provinces of the Owdh area.<sup>26</sup> After the Calcutta conference Zaheer came to Pakistan as the leader of the nascent party. Zaheer's attitude toward Pakistan and the Muslim League reflected the radical line of the CPI, which saw the need for the Muslim masses to be made conscious of their nationalistic (in this sense against the division of British India along communal lines) and historical duty and wrenched away from their communally-minded feudal Muslim League leadership.

In researching this body of work on Pakistan's early years, it became evident that the arena of culture and intellectual creativity was of immense importance to the CPP and to Zaheer himself. Zaheer, an accomplished short story writer and literary critic, did not produce much literary work during these early years in Pakistan, yet he was constantly writing for

party newspapers and sending long letters to all party committees. He also found time to read what was being written in the various literary journals and newspapers and would send individual comments and criticism to foes and friends alike. The militancy in his letters to party comrades was represented often with dictatorial language, giving much importance to the dissemination of party literature, opposition to the Muslim League leaders (he calls them downright scoundrels), and the building of open political fronts linked to other progressive forces in the country.<sup>27</sup>

One of these fronts was the reestablishment and reorganization of the AIPWA (All India Progressive Writers Association; commonly called the PWA). The PWA was one of the most influential literary movements in the decade that preceded the partition of British India. It was initially formed by a group of Indian students like Mulk Raj Anand and Zaheer, who were living in England during the 1930s. With annual gatherings, regional meetings, and affiliated literary journals, the movement attracted writers and intellectuals from almost all Indian languages; its strength, however, lay among the Urdu-Hindi writers of that era. The association from its very inception was influenced by socialist and Marxist tendencies, and soon after his return from Britain in 1935–36 Zaheer himself joined the CPI. Hence, although the PWA was open to all who broadly agreed with its manifesto — which called for a new literature that addressed progressive ideals and focused on the issues of poverty, deprivation, and servitude of the Indian masses — it soon became closely aligned with the CPI.<sup>28</sup>

As noted earlier in this essay, the APPWA was a continuation of the AIPWA and similarly closely affiliated with the newly formed CPP.<sup>29</sup> Within this context, the CPP, in control of APPWA and influenced by CPI's radical line, had by the late 1940s started to purge from its ranks those who did not completely toe the new party line. This became more evident after the introduction of the new manifesto, which targeted “non-progressive” writers during the first APPWA conference held in Lahore in November 1949. During this conference, the nonprogressive intellectuals were severely criticized for their perceived political failings, alliance with the state machinery, sexual perversions, and lack of social consciousness.<sup>30</sup> The manifesto for this meeting clearly divides the Pakistani cultural scene into many factions and speaks positively of those intellectuals who raise their voices against the ruling class and struggle against oppression and for independence, peace, and socialism.<sup>31</sup> Their writings, the manifesto proclaims, are full of optimism, progressive ideals, and a willingness to move the working class toward action. In opposition to these intellectuals, it says, are the groups that are undemocratic, support the status quo, and through their writings create confusion in people's minds. The manifesto in strong and uncompromising language establishes three groups of reactionary intellectuals. The first are the writers who proclaim the ideology of

art for art's sake. The text criticizes these writers as denying class struggle and hence acting in collusion with the ruling classes. The second group is designated as those who claim to write Pakistani literature. They too are condemned as people who favor the capitalist and feudal classes of the new country and in their communalist hatred toward India cannot differentiate between Nehru's fascist government and Indian working classes. The third group is labeled as Islamic writers who seek to establish Islamic law in the country. The manifesto lumps all of these writers—Islamists, nationalists, and liberals (art for art's sake)—into the same basket and paints them as reactionaries. The published manifesto then turns toward those writers who use bourgeois psychology and Freudian parameters to understand society. These authors are rendered as perverse, pornographic, and decadent for their depiction of life through the lens of sexuality. They not only distort people's experience, the manifesto asserts, but also disrespect love as a pure form of desire.<sup>32</sup> Hence the manifesto portrays these writers as antihumanists who can only make fun of the people's creative faculty and are insensitive to the struggle for human existence. The protagonists of their works are killers, thieves, prostitutes, and those elements of society that do not contribute to society's productive process, it says; they write pessimistic stories that sing of darkness and of death.<sup>33</sup> In addition to the arguments on literature and sexual themes, other areas of debate stand out. One is the significance of partition literature; others deal with the question of loyalty to Pakistan and the issue of Urdu as the national language.<sup>34</sup> Below I discuss more specifically the debates on partition literature with a focus on Manto's writings on the topic.

### **Partition, Progressives, and "Perversion"**

During the late 1940s the progressives were dominant on the literary scene, and their insistence on creative activity that focused on a clear ideological position was the legacy of their anticolonial and class-based politics. To take a more concrete example, on 11 December 1948 in a weekly literary meeting organized in Lahore by the APPWA, Abdullah Malik, an APPWA officeholder and member of the CPP, presented a paper for discussion on a new text by Manto titled *Siyah Hashiye (Black Margins)* that comprised very short stories on the partition.<sup>35</sup> In it, Malik argued that Manto does indeed portray a system that is breaking down but does not show us the system that is rising from this rubble. Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, the secretary general of the association, reacted:

In the initial section of the article the author [Malik] claims that Manto unveils social wounds, but does not provide the treatment. In my opinion there has to be a difference between literature and writer. An artist who merely sketches social portraits can also be progressive. In addition how does



the writer come to the conclusion that Manto does not analyze his characters from a social perspective or that his short stories are reflective of death or his protagonists are primarily individualistic? It is possible that Manto does not have the remedy for social problems, but it is incorrect to say that he has only portrayed weak and tired characters. For example in “Halfia Biyan” [“Deposition under Oath,” a short story in the volume] he has suggested ways of understanding our changing society and *Khol Do (Open It)* is a successful example of his realistic temperament. We should not create a final impression of Manto’s work until we have read all his stories.<sup>36</sup>

Another writer, Hameed Akhtar Qureshi, argued: “Manto mostly has sick characters very few of them seem healthy. A majority of his characters are abnormal.”<sup>37</sup>

After further discussion and severe criticism of Manto’s text, Qasmi ends the discussion by backtracking on his earlier support: “The writer should have written this paper with more detail and clarity. However, I am in agreement with the paper’s argument about Manto’s text. In this new book Manto’s abnormality has reached its zenith. I regretfully say that while reading *Siyah Hashiye* I felt as if dead bodies were scattered all over a large field and the short story writer was stealing money and cigarettes from their pockets.”<sup>38</sup>

I present these quotes from a longer exchange to give a flavor of how these weekly gatherings would take up various discussions and reach a consensus about what was and was not considered progressive literature. It may be clear from the above that the main critique against Manto by the assembled progressive intellectuals was that although Manto realistically portrays the declining social order, he does not give the reader a sense of the emerging “new order.” His characters were deemed weak and ineffectual, and his plots, although acknowledged as realistic, were dismissed as pessimistic and perverse; a pleasurable perversion that hinted, according to some, at Manto’s own pathologies and deviances. Some in this meeting defended one of the greatest living Urdu short story writers from such attacks and argued that not all writers need have a solution to society’s ills; to make people think was perhaps enough of a social task.<sup>39</sup> One disgruntled participant, who remained unconvinced by the tone and temper of the discussion, argued that if we as writers are so concerned about finding cures, then we should open up a doctor’s clinic and not continue in our profession. But these were minority voices, and the larger consensus kept on bracketing Manto’s work in terms of its inadequate relationship to a healthy society (the medical metaphors abound in this discussion).

In condemning Manto’s text as a perversion, the discussants were also following a well-established critique of nonprogressive writers who were publishing stories and poems on the violence during partition. Hence converting a series of Manto’s short stories on the absurdity of violence

into a text about sexual deviance becomes a dismissive move, a move that uses a historical materialist lens and the primacy of social structure to undermine Manto's empathy for individual experience. The progressives argued that reactionary authors did not understand or write on the social and political aspect of the violence and merely presented psychological and sexual renditions of the events.<sup>40</sup> Ali Sardar Jafri, a famous and well-respected progressive poet, asserted in contrast that the progressives deeply analyzed the situation from social and political angles and found the light of humanity even in this darkest hour of the nation's history.<sup>41</sup>

It should be evident from the above discussion that the issue of perversion and sexuality was a major concern within literary circles during the late 1940s. Themselves under attack for tolerating such works, the progressives had become very sensitive to this criticism, and in an almost puritanical mode sought to distance themselves from writers who were free thinkers and were writing poetry or stories with explicit sexual content. In their analytical writings they acknowledged that some writers like Manto may have produced good art at particular moments in their literary careers but had since become escapist writers who took refuge in sexual themes.<sup>42</sup> Progressive stalwarts like Jafri and even Zaheer argued that these free thinkers and liberal artists possessed a sick mentality that made them avoid real people's problems. Hence in Pakistan's early years there was much anxiety present among progressive writers to create a distance from those who were perceived by them as standard bearers of middle-class values and perverted literature.<sup>43</sup> For example, Jafri attacked poets like N. M. Rashid (1910–1975), a major modernist poet of the era, arguing that he and others like him were perpetrators of the death wish, escapists, and obsessed with sexual themes, and he condemned Manto for elevating such topics to the level of religious belief.<sup>44</sup> During the late 1940s, another progressive intellectual, Aziz Ahmed, in his book on the subject accused people like Manto of being so obsessed with sexuality that he wondered whether they were mentally stable. He goes on to say that this perversion had entered Urdu literature due to the influence of D. H. Lawrence who, according to Ahmed, no longer held the respect of British literary circles.<sup>45</sup> Within this context, Qasmi, in an important defense of progressive literature, proclaimed that the progressives had learned from their mistakes and had cleansed their house from the impure infections brought in by perverted artists whose pornographic work and psychological analysis was influenced by the decadent intellectual Sigmund Freud.<sup>46</sup>

Ironic as it may seem, calling works of literature obscene meant taking them out of public circulation—a framing that seemed akin to the censorship that progressives themselves at times suffered under the moral surveillance of the community and the state (colonial or postcolonial).<sup>47</sup> As Geeta Patel masterfully explains, the progressives in this period absorbed

the critique directed at them and used these same rules of morality and propriety to expel those whom they deemed to be improper from within their own ranks.<sup>48</sup> Even if we take Freud's psychoanalytical model, the simplified reading of perversion is the persistence of earlier phases of development in maturity. These often infantile drives and pleasures are to be repressed, tamed, and disciplined by education and the moral force of shame, disgust, and embarrassment to create the proper bourgeois subject: a tamed adult (there is the persistence of hydraulic images in Freud of dams and flows of energy into "proper direction" in adolescence).<sup>49</sup> The progressives, while distancing themselves from Freud, were also paradoxically using his terms. In a way, by condemning other writers as perverts, the leftists were perhaps calling people like Manto children who had yet to grow up into mature and responsible adults. Ironically, they may have followed Freud's own arguments about adulthood's emergence from the unruly past of adolescence; by seeking to censor speech they were performing a task akin to repressing infantile behavior—the behavior of someone who has not come to his or her senses—so that a tamed adult could appear.<sup>50</sup>

### The Writer Responds

*Siyah Hashiye* is a book of very short stories that depicts the absurdness and the arbitrary nature of partition's violence. I of course do not have space here to present each and every story, but I will share a few of their plots in an attempt to convey the flavor of Manto's writing. One story, titled "Safai Pasandi" ("Clean Habits"), is about a stationary train (implicitly during the time of partition) where some people come and ask about whether there are any "roosters" around.<sup>51</sup> The passengers initially hesitate, but then one answers that the people should themselves look in the trunk on the berth above them. Armed with spears, some men enter the compartment and break the trunk, where they find a "rooster." One calls out asking whether he should sacrifice the "rooster."<sup>52</sup> The other replies, "No, not here, take it out of the train, the compartment's floor would get dirty." The story ends here.<sup>53</sup>

Another story is titled "Sorry," as in the English word. It consists of a few sentences depicting the act of stabbing. The knife continues beyond the abdomen and cuts open the trousers. The killer laments and just says, "Uh oh, I committed a mistake," leading the reader to believe that as the trouser falls down, the "identity" of the victim is revealed in some capacity.<sup>54</sup> Yet another story is "Munasib Karawai" ("The Proper Decision"). The story opens with a married couple who after hiding in their basement for several days feels compelled to come out. They go to their neighbor's house and implore the neighbors to kill them, as they cannot bear it anymore. The neighbors, who are Jains, say that it is clearly against their

religion to kill people. After giving the request some thought, however, they deliver the couple to people in an adjoining neighborhood who do not share the same beliefs.

In the post-partition climate, when everyone was trying to understand or perhaps forget the carnage of the past year, such pieces of fiction had an uneasy aura about them. These morally ambiguous and disturbing stories that most of the time did not mark people through their religious or cultural affiliations gave rise to the kind of criticism presented above.<sup>55</sup> For Manto these were not new accusations. In the late 1940s he had several times been taken to court by the state on charges of writing indecent literature.<sup>56</sup> It is ironic that the progressives thought Manto represented middle-class values. Rather, his work and life especially in the late 1940s challenged and disrupted middle-class and bourgeois morality. As mentioned in the introduction, his excessive drinking, personal mannerisms, and at times inappropriate public behavior, in addition to his stories, made those around him uncomfortable.<sup>57</sup> It can be argued that the attacks reflected the moral positioning of the progressives themselves, who sought to negate Manto's libertine lifestyle and found it socially regressive.<sup>58</sup>

In a short essay, Manto addressed these questions in his own distinctive style.<sup>59</sup> In the essay he rhetorically questions why people constantly ask him about sex. He answers by arguing that it is perhaps because they think he is a progressive writer (and hence does not adhere to traditional moral codes), or because some of his writings deal with the topic, or perhaps it is that by raising such issues people want to banish him from religion, from the world of literature, and from society altogether. He then makes use of familiar progressive tropes of realism, optimism, and human needs (the medical metaphors are there, too) to argue his point. For example, Manto says that man's struggle against hunger and his need for sex are universal facts that even religious texts discuss, so why should literature not represent the relationship between a man and a woman? He insists that writers are not prophets; rather than giving final answers, they tend to analyze the same phenomena from various perspectives and present them to the world without insisting that people accept their offerings. Manto asserts that he does not write on sexuality, but portrays the sexual lives of particular men and women. Those who seek sexual pleasure in such stories, according to him, should understand that writers like him are not wrestling coaches who train people in the techniques of the art; rather they are mere observers. So, when a wrestler falls to the ground, writers according to their ability explain the causes for the fall. Within the same logic, depiction of prostitutes—as suggested in the introduction, his chosen characters were prostitutes, pimps, madams, vagabonds, the mentally insane, horse-carriage drivers, and religious minorities such as Christians and Jews (the marginal, the queer)—is not intended to make them attractive or

make the reader abhor them, but rather make the reader show the spark of humanity within each and every individual irrespective of his or her position in life.

Responding to the progressives, he proclaims that writers like him need to be considered optimists who also find light in society's darkness. Rather than pass moral judgments about human failings, Manto states, he wants to understand people's motivations for their actions. This is an empathetic move that Manto makes toward the marginal and the morally suspect protagonists of his stories. Much like Judith Halberstam in her depiction and discussion of "queer subjects," Manto does not pass judgment on the moral leanings of his characters, but rather asks us to enter their life-worlds to appreciate and understand what leads them to act in certain ways. He also asserts that it is not humans who should be condemned for their actions; the real culprits are the social circumstances that create the environment in which people exist and make "moral" and "immoral" choices. He thus pushes us to rethink those historical trajectories whose unfolding and perspectives are already known and urges us to appreciate lived experiences and practices howsoever messy and unpredictable they may be.

In the final paragraphs of the essay, Manto turns to the most important social subject of the time, the violence and social changes due to British India's division. Above we clearly saw that Manto's book of short stories on partition was criticized for its pornographic content and perverted sense of reality. In the essay under discussion, Manto shows how partition and sexuality are intrinsically linked. He raises the question, what should the artist create in the midst of people killing each other in the name of religion, when one law can divide the country into two, and during times when nothing seems sacred? Yet, in this moment of uncertainty and chaos, Manto answers, no politics, law, or religion could separate the two sexes. People who regard writings that depict common men and women as immoral or perverse need to understand, Manto metaphorically asserts, that morality is the rust that has accumulated on society's blades. In negating traditional morality (not unlike the progressives), he too defends his writing as realistic, necessary, and optimistic, as it shows us the "true" face of society. Yet, he acknowledges that this kind of writing can be a bitter pill, "like the leaves from the Neem tree, they are bitter, but they do cleanse the blood."<sup>60</sup> Through his elaboration on the contradictions of postindependence emergent society—where nothing remained sacred, lives had been uprooted, relationships had been reconfigured—and his depiction of the "perverse" and the sexually suspect, Manto criticized the insistence on recouping a moral order (whether by the progressives or by the state) that sought to impose normative behavior on a social landscape that had fundamentally changed.

## Other Ways of Being Human

In the immediate postindependence moment, Mohammad Hasan Askari (1919–78) was one of the major critics of the progressives. Askari's is an important voice in the history of Urdu criticism; it is he whom Aamir Mufti rightly proclaims as a magisterial intellect, a polyglot of staggering erudition.<sup>61</sup> In his youth, Askari had been close to the progressives, as they were the dominant literary movement of the time. However, later, Askari, along with others like the poet N. M. Rashid and even the poet Meeraji,<sup>62</sup> became associated with the modernist movement, or that of *jadidiyat*. This of course was not a movement in the conventional sense of the term but a trend in literature that experimented with form through which writers sought to channel experience.<sup>63</sup> Askari soon after independence had started arguing for a specifically Pakistani literature and found the Muslim progressives, especially the more left-leaning communists within the literary movement, to be alienated from their own cultural history and also to be uncommitted to the idea of Pakistan itself. This was a major charge that he pushed in his writings of the time with much force.

In a series of articles published in October and November 1948, Askari discusses how, after Pakistan's independence, Muslim intellectuals should think about culture and literature in this new land and look ahead toward an unprecedented and uncharted future.<sup>64</sup> A major thrust of his argument in these essays is how the writer/intellectual should understand and represent the material needs of the populace. This impulse to connect with the masses echoes the argument made by the progressives. However, in a subtle intervention, Askari suggests that mere advocacy of the economic needs of the people is not enough, as people also have nonmaterial and spiritual needs. Unless the intellectual understands these demands the masses will not come any closer. This, according to Askari, was the major and primary intellectual task. This spiritual need was linked in Askari's early writings to the creation of the Muslim homeland as a culmination of the Muslim nation's desire for freedom. He forcefully recognizes the cumulative aspiration for a space where Muslims could think, live, and create freely, a space devoid of censorship and surveillance and influenced by their own history and cultural heritage. Of course his attempt to push this agenda, he complains, was being marred by the negative attitude of the Pakistani state against intellectual and creative production—an attitude enacted through various forms of censorship, propaganda, and coercion. Askari argues that only in a society that is based on social justice, economic progress, and the defense of individual freedoms can arts and cultures flourish.<sup>65</sup>

While disagreeing with the government's censorship policies, Askari also openly attacked the Muslim communists (such as Zaheer) who,

according to him, negated or distorted the history of Muslim culture and society. Further, he attacked the progressives based on his understanding of tradition as a key element in the development of new Urdu literature. Mehr Afshan Farooqi in an essay on Askari's work shows how the terms *progressive (taraqi)* and *modernist/modernity (jadidiyat)* are not connotatively very far apart. She argues that for the progressive writers the issue of form was not relevant, and for most (there were always exceptions, like the poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz), the desire was to break from the past, bringing in modern Western concerns to show the decadence and backwardness of Muslim society and relate literature to immediate political concerns, while people like Askari wanted to retain a link with the more classical tradition of Urdu literature and then put it into a dialogue with Western influences. Hence the issue of relationship with Muslim history and Muslim past retained an important hold on Askari's formulations.<sup>66</sup>

Askari in his writings remains interested in bringing creativity and tradition together to generate new literature. However, it is not only Urdu literature that he discusses; when Askari discusses literature from England, he praises the new writing being produced during World War II as not determined by the point of view of any government, society, or political party but based on individual experience and observations. Where the war, according to Askari, killed millions and destroyed countless cities, it also brought thousands into contact with each other and generated new ideas for stories to be told. According to him, class barriers were challenged and new people entered the field of artistic production, bringing fresh perspectives with them. It was clear to him that the ordinary English writer was committed to defeating fascism. But Askari asserts that the English writer was not merely interested in portraying the heroic. Rather, the characters were also silly, cowardly, had doubts, and were envious of each other.<sup>67</sup> He praised the English for not following narrow political agendas, something for which he criticized the communists, and for writing human stories that reflected social complexity and moral ambiguity.

These insistences by Askari on creativity and also on being nonconformist are brought together in his very erudite introduction to Manto's text *Siyah Hashiye*, that was discussed in the progressive meeting.<sup>68</sup> Defending the importance of the volume within the genre of partition literature, Askari argues in the introduction that Manto's short stories do not morally judge or condemn the perpetrators. Neither do they shed tears for the victims. Rather, they seek to portray how in extraordinary times people sometimes have ordinary habits. For example, Askari argues, in unusual times it may be plausible that after killing two hundred people the killer wears a necklace made of their skulls. But when we see that this same individual is worried about bloodstains on the floor of the rail carriage (echoing a scene from one of Manto's stories, "Safai Pasandi," discussed above) in

which this carnage took place, then, Askari argues, we are in the realm of something that shocks us. For a killer to keep on killing does produce a feeling of disgust, but it is expected of him.<sup>69</sup> But, Askari asserts, we are surprised when we observe people who retain a sense of aesthetics, a sense of what cleanliness is, of what is pure, and who yet continue to kill.

To have ordinary feelings while committing extraordinary acts shows how human beings can simultaneously have contradictory qualities. This, according to Askari, is the crux of Manto's optimism; among all of the uncertainties and prevailing violence as witnessed during partition of British India, the ordinary and pure sentiment that humans possess could not be crushed. This optimism is manifested in the strength of the ordinary and the everyday that continues to assert itself within us. For Askari, Manto does not shame people or label them as good or bad, rather he portrays how we are pulled back by our core humanity whenever we commit acts that are excessively barbaric. Within the parameters of such an argument, Manto, according to Askari, has more faith in human nature than people give him credit for.

Echoing Askari's discussion, Manto himself in an article published in the early 1950s raises the question of what it means to be a human. He rhetorically proclaims: "I am human, the same human who has always betrayed humanity and has sold other humans as commodities in the market place. I am the same human who has attained the heights of prophethood, yet also the same human who has murdered many of them as well. I have all the same positive and negative aspects within me that any other human possesses."<sup>70</sup>

Manto, by bringing himself into the picture, of course hints at how he constructs his fictional characters and compels us to think about humanity in a post-catastrophic moment. Perhaps this was also Manto's attempt to inhabit the same humanist space that he was being forced by the progressives to vacate. Yet in his writings Manto also opens up an arena for us to appreciate the emergent debate on post-partition identity. As suggested in the introduction, the postindependence Pakistani state emphasized national unity on the basis of a single national language (Urdu) and a unified religious identity (Islam), which remained in conflict with the cultural and linguistic diversity of the people who had become part of this new land. I would read some of Manto's short stories, written after the carnage of 1947, during the early years of Pakistan's existence, as representing his already developing ambivalence and uncertainty about the consolidation of a unitary identity in the Pakistani state. For example, the short story "Sorry" may not only deal with the similarity and distance between the self and the other, Hindu or Muslim; it is also about how in the new country, people—much like Manto in his uncertainty—were still unsure about who they were or had become. What lay under the trouser after the violent act



of ripping it open can of course be read in terms of religious or for that matter sexual/gender identity. But the “exposure” or the “unveiling” of what lies underneath may also be understood as the ambiguous nature of identity itself in a post-catastrophic moment, the early years of Pakistan’s history. The act of stabbing created a fissure and perhaps an open wound that could not be correctly identified or healed. These fissures would fester and continue to trouble subsequent Pakistani history, whether in the form of the struggle of independence in East Pakistan/Bangladesh or in the insurgencies for regional autonomy in Baluchistan,<sup>71</sup> or perhaps now with the war in the northwestern part of the country.<sup>72</sup>

## Partition Revisited

On one hand, the progressives asserted that historical events are shaped by social forces and that people need to be clear about the political sides they choose. They argued for progress based on objective truths. While on the other hand, the response by some, especially people like Manto and perhaps Askari, was more ambivalent in terms of universal truths; they were more unsure what path history should take and how change would occur in the foreseeable future. In the essay discussed above, Askari further chastises the progressives for their politics of evenhandedness and shows how in depicting violence they always used a scorecard. He particularly takes to task one of the most important short stories by a progressive writer on partition, “Peshawar Express” by Krishan Chander (1914–77). The story depicts a train (the train is the protagonist) moving through various spaces, starting from Peshawar (which was now in Pakistan) and then entering India. There is continuous killing by Muslims of Hindus and Sikhs in the areas that have been designated as Pakistan, and the opposite happens when the train enters the Indian territory. The ending shows a Muslim girl who is reading a socialist text pleading with her abductors to spare her life—she is ready to convert and live as a wife; but they kill her. Finally the train laments the violence it has witnessed and dreams of a future in which it would carry grains to famine-stricken areas rather than dead bodies; a future where people would salute the brave new world, where there would be no Hindus or Muslims. It would be a world of peasants and workers; of human beings.

Askari and other “nonprogressives” portrayed this story, which became an icon of progressive fiction writing of the period, as one of “balanced killings”: if a certain number of Hindus were killed in the first half of a short story written by a progressive, then the story ended with equal numbers of Muslims losing their lives.<sup>73</sup> Such depictions for Askari were not about truth but were related to ideology and the desire to please. No progressive writer in Askari’s analysis wanted to understand that dur-

ing times of upheaval and turmoil all kinds of demons were unleashed, and people acted in ways that cannot always be characterized as pure and humane. Hatred, racism, the construction of stereotypes, and demonic behavior were realities that, according to Askari, needed to be addressed if one sought to create literature that had lasting value and was not just an ointment to placate human sentiments. Further, Askari argued, progressives by merely speaking about social aspects of the violence forgot that real individuals were behind these acts, and without understanding the motivations and complexity of these actions it was difficult to pronounce judgments. Askari acknowledged that the progressive writers, by showing the broad contours of evil and oppression, wanted us to hate the perpetrators of violence. But, Askari argued, to love or hate people we need depictions of humans who were alive with emotions, not mere sketches of those who committed violence and their victims.<sup>74</sup>

Similarly, Askari's reading of Manto's text is motivated by curiosity and seeks to find pleasures, emotions, and feelings within the text.<sup>75</sup> In doing this, Askari shows that people like Manto convey a different kind of humanism from that of the progressives. If we look again at one of Manto's short stories discussed above, "Safai Pasandi," we see a humanism in which those who murder hesitate at the moment of their action due to their keen sense of cleanliness. In pushing this argument, an uncertain future is imagined that does not follow the rules of the more determined sociohistorical trajectory posited by the progressives.<sup>76</sup> It brings to us a reading of history and of literature that is more idiosyncratic, nuanced, and open-ended, a reparative reading instead of a programmatic or ideological one that merely juxtaposes progressives against the reactionaries. This is a reading that is more affective and relies on a sensuous feel toward our objects of study.<sup>77</sup>

### **What about the Future?**

Intellectuals like Askari and others continued to question the populist stance of people like Zaheer.<sup>78</sup> Askari was an eclectic scholar;<sup>79</sup> his support of Manto's ambivalence toward human subjectivity notwithstanding, for Askari the creation of Pakistan was indeed the culmination of the struggle of ordinary South Asian Muslims. He argued that although many lost their lives and homes in the process, people were content that they had finally reached their historical destination. He therefore accused the progressives of negating the completeness of the independence project and asserted that for them partition was not the logical endpoint of the struggle; the endpoint would come only after the emancipation of the masses through a proletarian revolution.<sup>80</sup> Although critical of the ruling Muslim League government, it is clear that people like Askari were committed to

creating a Muslim national culture and sought to shape a future national imaginary that the state could eventually incorporate. This was in sharp contrast to the notion of a future promoted by Zaheer and the CPP.<sup>81</sup>

Sensing communist ambivalence toward the creation of Pakistan, Askari and others in the “nonprogressive camp” openly questioned their patriotism. As discussed earlier, hostility toward the Muslim League pervaded the CPP leadership’s political position, entrenched as they were within the larger argument of pre-Independence nationalist ideals and the radical CPI line.<sup>82</sup> Zaheer was aware of these attacks and argued that CPP’s loyalty was not to the Pakistan of Muslim League landlords and their vested interests, who in his opinion were British lackeys. The progressives constantly argued that their loyalties were with the masses, not with the state. Jafri, the progressive poet, intellectual, and party member mentioned above, openly took up the challenge and in turn accused Askari of instigating a witch hunt against the communists.<sup>83</sup> According to Jafri people like Askari knew that the progressives would never proclaim their loyalty to the state or the government, but still they were being attacked as traitors so that the progressives could be sent to prison or into exile.<sup>84</sup>

Indeed, the Pakistani state may have found its own fodder in pronouncements by people like Askari and others against the CPP. For example, Mohammad Din Taseer, an eminent man of letters who was also one of the founders of the progressive writers movement in the 1930s, had by the late 1940s become one of its major opponents. In a trenchant piece published in 1949, Taseer clearly states that although not all progressives are socialists, and not all progressives are traitors, all socialists are traitors to the cause of Pakistan. This is so, Taseer explains, because their loyalties are with the Soviet Union or with India, and they seek the destruction of the new nation.

Such proclamations aided the ruling elite in the first year of Pakistan’s existence, suspicious as they were of any challenges to their authority.<sup>85</sup> Important members of CPP’s central committee were periodically put in jail, and communist publications were routinely banned or confiscated. Further, the state also started using Islam as a political weapon to counteract various democratic forces. Islamic doctrine was employed in the media to persuade people against the anti-religious (meaning anti-Islam) — and, linked to it, the anti-Pakistan — political stance of the communists.<sup>86</sup> The party was under perpetual government surveillance and attack. During the early 1950s, Zaheer spent several years in jail, and soon after his release in 1955 he went back to India. The CPP was itself officially banned as a political organization in 1954.<sup>87</sup>

This said, the arguments presented in this essay were between groups of intellectuals who were looking toward creating a new future after a major social catastrophe. Whether the answer lay in class solidarity (as it did

for the communists) or in the moral community of South Asian Muslims (as the Pakistani state desired) was a matter of continuing debate. I argue that the progressives, at least in this era (perhaps as a reaction to their own suppression), sought to tame the conditions of the debates according to their own vision of a more egalitarian future. In doing so they used the trope of sexual deviancy to curb the chaos that they thought would ensue from “nonprogressive” literature. It was a morally conformist politics that was in Benjaminian terms also linked to a history of redemption; a history that conquers nature with technology and glorifies work while never probing the creative multiplicity of the social.<sup>88</sup> This political stance of the communists was at times dangerously close to that of its own opposition, the Pakistani state and the Islamists, for example, as they too were seeking to create a universalist politics of social identity and homogeneity and a rational society. In this rational-universal world of order and truth there would be no contingency and no ambivalence.<sup>89</sup>

The historical certainty of the Marxists aside, it would be fair to argue that scholars like Askari (despite his views on Manto’s text) or Taseer were—much like the new Pakistani state—as eager to create a new world on the ashes of the old. Pakistan for them was a regenerative project where a new “Muslim” culture could prosper. Manto may have been marginal to such programmatic agendas, but Askari definitely sought to counter his attack on the progressives with the excitement of being given a fresh start in a place called Pakistan. Yet the idea of a new nation and its distinct identity after a process of fragmentation—as the history of partition had created—can, as Jacqueline Rose argues, also lead to fissures and to the alienation of those newly arrived in diaspora (those who migrated from India).<sup>90</sup> It can then make the new arrivals dig for a history that may eventually legitimate state violence. This came to pass in Pakistan’s subsequent history as the emergence of Islam as a state ideology, linked to Urdu as the national language, violently undermined the political aspirations of other linguistic, religious, and cultural groups. In some ways this was a politics of closure, of forced consensus, and of order (based on an implied threat of a perpetual state of emergency).<sup>91</sup>

In conclusion, following Walter Benjamin, I would argue that both the Marxists and the state were enmeshed in similar kinds of historicist visions in which history was progressing toward a desired future—proletarian revolution or Muslim state.<sup>92</sup> In following this argument, the question for me in this essay has not been to find a preconceived progressive or retrogressive politics in Manto’s text. I suggest a reading that may enable us to move away from liberal modernist interpretive strategies that force the plurality of social life into the representational apparatus of a particular political philosophy.<sup>93</sup> As Manto in nonprogrammatic terms

sought to depict the ordinary and the everyday in order to make sense of the tumultuous events of the partition, his interventions force us to rethink how history manifests itself at the level of affective experience and even sexuality. By using characters that are morally ambiguous and depicting people from the margins of societies as protagonists of his stories he very much revalues the nonnormative ways of living.<sup>94</sup> Hence in his work, as in queer studies, I find there is an idiosyncratic and unpredictable sense of the future that contains within itself political elements that depend on everyday forms of cultural expression, and such forms may not always rely upon fixed categories of institutionalized politics.<sup>95</sup>

For example, in the above-mentioned short story “Peshawar Express” by the progressive writer Chander, eventually the train, which is the protagonist of the story, dreams of a progressive future of peace and order. In contrast, Manto was constantly agitated in his writings about settled endings. In one of his essays he gives an example of a young, middle-class, beautiful woman who runs away with a destitute good-for-nothing young man.<sup>96</sup> Rather than moralize about her, Manto wonders about her life and unresolved future. He does not want her to “come to her senses,” as a normative rendition of this story would demand; rather, he shows how desire creates moments in which different histories—the middle-class woman, the underclass man—brush against each other. In these terms, Manto queers history by positing the particular life histories and the related counter-logics that emerge from the “perversities” of such existences and forwards a critique of the generalized subjectivities that take on the onus of the universal.<sup>97</sup>

Manto’s short stories written after the carnage of 1947 during the early years of Pakistan’s existence can, therefore, be read as representing his ambivalence and uncertainty about the consolidation of a unitary identity in the Pakistani state. The rupture and the calamity of the partition was already constituting new identities in Pakistan, and a language of tolerance and compassion that was being perpetuated by liberals and conservatives alike—one language (Urdu), one religion (Islam), one people (Pakistani), or, for that matter, class solidarity—could not work as a palliative for the unsettling, troubling, and disabling wound. No calm or resolution was possible for this history.<sup>98</sup> The “real history” that would come afterward (the historiography of Muslim nationalism)<sup>99</sup> would seek to override or repress the flaw; this wound was bound to make such resolutions indecisive.

## Notes

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1. Toba Tek Singh is a town and district in the Central Punjab region of Pakistan. Manto uses the name of the town, as the protagonist of the story comes from this area and does not want to leave his ancestral land to migrate to India.

2. Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

3. My arguments are also in contrast to historical representations that dominate the retelling of Pakistan's history. For example, one narrative about the first ten years of its independence is that of the failure of the ruling classes to institute a parliamentary government. The Muslim League, the party that led the nation to its independence, had by the mid-1950s disintegrated into multiple factions representing different social, economic, and regional interest groups. By 1956, when the first constitution of the country was passed, the bureaucracy aligned with the military had effectively sidelined all other political forces and was in control of the state machinery, leading to a military intervention that unseated the civilian government. Another narrative retells the story of Muslim nationalism and its logical continuation in the Objective Resolution for an Islamic State of the late 1940s (demanding the Islamization of laws, this Objective Resolution was written by a group of Islamic scholars in Pakistan in 1949 and was passed by the Constituent Assembly), culminating in the Zia-era Islamization in the 1980s and the proliferation of contemporary Islamist politics.

4. Sa'adat Hasan Manto, "Jaib-Kafan" ("The Shroud's Pocket"), in *Manto Nama* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1990), 221–29; first published as the introduction to the volume of short stories by Manto, *Yazid* (1951, reprint, Lahore: Maktabah e Sher o Adab, 1975).

5. In the ongoing larger work on post-partition South Asia, I discuss how history can be written or imagined in a post-catastrophic moment. Within this framework the sentiments expressed by Manto were not unlike the philosophical introspections by European intellectuals after the two world wars during the first half of the twentieth century. World redemption and world destruction, hopelessness, and prophecies of a glorious future are familiar tropes of the ideologies and philosophical arguments that suffused Europe after the two wars. For example, while World War I produced images of universal destruction and messianic redemption, World War II was an apocalyptic moment that was more anti-redemptive. Hannah Arendt was clear in seeing that Nazis were people like us, and hence the question of evil became a fundamental one for postwar European life; the legacy of progress, secularism, and rationalism could not be unlinked from events that seemed to violate these ideals. See

Anson Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 10–11; Hannah Arendt, “We Refugees,” in *The Jew as Pariah*, ed. Ron Feldman (1943, reprint, New York: Grove, 1997), 55–66; and Edward Said, *Freud and the Non-Europeans* (New York: Verso, 2003).

6. Eventually many of them became associated with Halqa-Arbab-e-Zauq. While APPWA included names like Hamid Akhtar, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Sibte Hasan, Ibrahim Jalees, Abdullah Malik, Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, and Sajjad Zaheer under its banner, the “non-progressives” consisted of, among others, Ahmad Ali, Mohammad Hasan Askari, Sa’adat Hasan Manto, Mumtaz Mufti, Akhtar Hussein Raipuri, N. M. Rashid, M. D. Taseer, and Mumtaz Shirin.

7. Askari wrote a scathing critique of M. D. Taseer during the late 1940s in his discussions of Pakistani culture. See Mohammad Hasan Askari, *Majmu’a* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 2000).

8. The literature is too large to detail here. The academic discussion on the partition of British India is ongoing and has produced a series of excellent texts; see Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 3–4 (esp. 3n4 for a series of books on the period). Also see Vazira Jacobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), for an innovative read of the partition process. Partition literature (fiction and poetry) has also become a specific genre within South Asian literary trends. This literature is mostly in Urdu and Hindi and deals with the horrors of 1947. See Mumtaz Shirin, “Fasadat aur Hamare Afsahne” (“The Riots and Our Short Stories”), in *Miyar* (Lahore: Naya Idara, 1963), for a detailed early discussion of this literature. Also see Jason Francisco, “In the Heat of Fratricide: The Literature of India’s Partition Burning Freshly,” *Annual of Urdu Studies* 11 (1996): 227–50, for a review of the subject.

9. David Gilmartin, “Pakistan and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 57 (1998): 1068–95.

10. *Ibid.*, 1090–91.

11. Eventually this led to a civil war and the independence of Bangladesh in December 1971.

12. It is indeed a popular assertion that Urdu was the language of North Indian Muslims. The historical inaccuracy of this claim remains contested (even in the twentieth century Urdu was the first language for many Hindus and Sikhs, and indeed some of its most famous literary figures are non-Muslims). See Aijaz Ahmad, *Lineages of the Present* (New Delhi: Tulika, 1996), and Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

13. Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922–1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Amin discusses the Chauri Chaura incident of February 1922. See p. 3 for discussion of national amnesia.

14. See Ann Cvetkovich, “Public Feelings,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106 (2007): 461.

15. For a more comprehensive discussion on Manto, see, among others, Aamir Mufti, “A Greater Story-writer Than God: Genre, Gender, and Minority in Late Colonial India,” in *Community, Gender and Violence*, vol. 11, *Subaltern Studies*, no. 11, ed. Partha Chatterjee and Pradep Jeganathan (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2000), 1–36. Mufti’s article is a brilliant analysis of Manto’s work and shows Manto’s ambivalent relationship to the question of nationalism and the place of Urdu and Muslimness within the larger story of the partition of South Asia in 1947.

16. See Geeta Patel, *Lyrical Movements, Historical Hauntings* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). Patel presents an intellectual and life history of one of Manto's contemporaries, the poet Meeraji, who is one of the quintessential queer characters of the period. A poet and literary editor of some stature, Meeraji died while in his late thirties in the late 1940s; like Manto, he drank himself to death.

17. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

18. See Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the History of Philosophy," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), 253–64.

19. See Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), esp. chap. 1.

20. *Ibid.*, 10.

21. Cvetkovich, "Public Feelings," 463.

22. I borrow here from Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 3–4.

23. The dates of the congress were 28 February to 6 March 1948.

24. See "Report on Pakistan," Review of the Second Congress, in *Documents of the Communist Party of India*, vol. 5 (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1997), 757–61.

25. It is indeed ironic that a secular and noncommunal party like the CPI was dividing itself along communal grounds and also asking specifically Muslim cadres to go to Pakistan. While among the senior Muslim cadres within the CPI, people like Syed Sibte Hasan followed the orders, Dr. Kunwar M. Ashraf, for example, a historian by training, was in London during this period and did not come back to India until the mid-1950s. He opted for a self-imposed exile rather than becoming enmeshed in disagreements with the newly radicalized party. Dr. Z. A. Ahmad, another party member, actually faced the wrath of the CPI's left turn in politics and was forced to remain underground for a number of years. See Z. A. Ahmed, *Mere Jeevan Ki Kuch Yaden (Some Memories of My Life)* (Karachi: Idara Yadgar-e-Ghalib, 2004).

26. It goes to Zaheer's credit that he never used his extended family's influence and wealth for his personal gain. Even when his own family faced extreme financial burdens during his time in Pakistan and after his return to India in the mid-1950s, he seldom received (or asked for) assistance from his more well-off relatives. A glimpse of this relationship can be gauged from the memoirs of Zaheer's youngest daughter, Noor. See Noor Zaheer, *Mere Hisse Ki Roshnai (My Portion of Ink)* (Karachi: Sanjh, 2006). Also see "Chief Event in Past History of Communist Party of Pakistan," Public Record Office, London, DO 35/2591.

27. See Anwer M. Ali, *The Communist Party of West Pakistan in Action* (Lahore: Punjab, Criminal Investigation Department, 1952).

28. See Carlo Coppola, "The All India Progressive Writers' Association: The European Phase," in *Marxist Influences and South Asian Literature*, vol. 1, South Asia Series Occasional Papers, iss. 23, ed. Carlo Coppola (East Lansing: Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1974), 1–34.

29. In 1947–48, the various CPP district organizing committees supervised the formation of the local APPWA chapters. Before coming to Pakistan Zaheer was in charge of the AIPWA and hence took a deep interest in retaining the association as a party front. See Coppola, "All India Progressive Writers' Association," 1–5.

30. See Hafeez Malik, "The Marxist Literary Movement in Pakistan," *Journal of Asian Studies* 26 (1967): 649–64.

31. Anonymous, "Manshoor" ("Manifesto"), *Sawera* 7–8 (1950): 24–31.

32. *Ibid.* It will take a longer article to unpack the puritanical bent in progressive discourse of this era.



33. Ibid., 28.

34. The harsh criticism of people who were until recently fellow travelers reflected the radical turn in the CPP's politics caused by the election in 1948 of B. T. Ranadive as the secretary general of the CPI. Ranadive's speech at the Second Party Congress in Calcutta, where he became secretary general, laid the foundation of this new radical line, calling for the Party to struggle for a new kind of state, based on an alliance of workers, peasants, and a progressive intelligentsia under proletarian leadership. The CPI in effect declared war on the then Indian government led by Nehru.

35. See "Hamari Tehreek, Anjuman Taraqi Pasand Musanafeen Lahore Ke Hafta War Ijlas" ("Our Movement, the Weekly Meeting of the Progressive Writers Association Lahore"), *Naqush* 5 (February 1949): 179–85. The names mentioned as participants in the discussion of Manto's text are Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, Abdullah Malik, Arif Abdul Mateen, Zia Jalhandari, Ahmad Rahi, Tufail Ahmad Khan, Mohammad Safdar, Hafeez Qandhari, and Qamar Azad.

36. "Hamari Tehreek," 179.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., 180. *Khol do (Open It)* by Manto is a masterpiece. It is a very short story on the traumas of the partition violence. It was first published in *Nuqush* (the very journal that published the report of the meeting), edited by Qasmi. The journal was attacked by the censors for publishing the story. Qasmi later used the phrase about picking pockets in an open letter and condemned the story as perverted and antihuman. See Intizar Hussain, *Chiraghon Ka DoohaN (The Smoke of Lamps)* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1999).

39. Including, especially, Zia Jalhandari and Hafeez Qandhari. Also notice Qasmi's reversal of his views after receiving intense criticism from others—a kind of social censorship.

40. Ali Sardar Jafri, *Taraqi Pasand Adab (Progressive Literature)* (Aligarh, India: Anjuman Taraqui-e-Urdu, 1957), 202–3.

41. Ibid., 203.

42. Ibid., 195.

43. Ibid.; see also Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, "Kuch to Kahiye" ("Say Something"), *Nuqush* 9 (1949): 4–9. In the early 1930s the publishing of the collection *Angarey (Sparks)* by Zaheer and others started the literary journey that ended in the founding of the PWA. This particular volume was attacked for its anti-Islam representations and also for its perversity. The progressives had always been viewed with suspicion by the more conservative reading public and the British Indian government as propagating free thought and lax morality.

44. Jafri, *Taraqi Pasand*, 198. N. M. Rashid was one of the most original Urdu poets of mid-twentieth-century South Asia. Although criticized by the progressives for his writing style and his themes, he was friends with many of them and wrote the introduction to progressive poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz's first book of poetry. He was underappreciated as an intellect during his lifetime. After the creation of Pakistan he had a career with the United Nations in various countries. He died in 1975 in London, where he had retired. Recent academic work by Sean Pue will, it is to be hoped, reintroduce this creative genius to the wider reading public in the West.

45. Aziz Ahmed, "Taraqi Pasand Adab" ("Progressive Literature"), quoted in Mumtaz Sheereen, *Manto Noori na Naari (Manto: Light nor Fire)* (Karachi: Scheherazade, 2004), 145–49.

46. Qasmi, "Kuch to Kahiye," 6.

47. The classic case was the uproar around publication of the book *Angarey* in

1932. As mentioned above, this was a collection of short stories by Zaheer, Ahmed Ali, Mahmooduzzafar, and Rashid Jehan, all of whom would later be among the founders of the PWA (Ahmed Ali later left the group). Publication of the book drew strong protest from the Muslim public and also from the government of India, which in 1933 ordered its forfeiture on the grounds that the book was indecent, morally corrupting, and sacrilegious.

48. I borrow this from Geeta Patel's excellent argument on the progressives and their relationship with the question of sexuality in *Lyrical Movements*, 83–171.

49. An accessible reading of perversion can be distilled from Claire Pajackowska, *Ideas in Psychoanalysis: Perversion* (Cambridge: Icon, 2000).

50. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time*, 3–5.

51. Sa'adat Hasan Manto, "Safai Pasandi" ("Clean habits"), in *Manto Numa* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1991), 770–71.

52. Manto here uses the word *halal*, which is the Muslim form of religiously killing an animal.

53. My readings of Manto's stories have been partially influenced by the recent writings of the India-based literary critic Shemeem Hanfi. Especially, see Shemeem Hanfi, "Adab Me Insaan Dosti ka Tassawar" ("The Concept of Humanism in Literature"), *Dunyazad* 21 (2008): 13–30.

54. *Mistake* is said in English. The issue here is what becomes visible when the trouser falls down: a circumcised or uncircumcised man, which would make him either a Muslim or a Hindu, respectively. I am of course assuming that the killer and the murdered are both males; it was more likely that a female victim would be raped and then killed or left to die.

55. Manto was very aware of these attacks on him and was particularly upset at Qasmi's characterization of his stealing cigarette butts from corpses. He had considered Qasmi a friend and maintained in a piece of writing that his anger was not because Qasmi did not understand him, rather he was dismayed that Qasmi had followed the reigning fashion in literary circles where only "redness" could be considered a trustworthy cause. See Manto, "Jaib-e-Kafan," 223. In this piece he never names Qasmi, but rather uses the first letter of the Urdu alphabet, alif, with the sound *a* (for Ahmed, from Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi) to identify him.

56. For a discussion of Manto's own rendition of some of these cases, see Sa'adat Hasan Manto, "Zehmat-i-Mehr-i-Darakhshan" ("Thought of the Rising Sun"), in Manto, *Manto Nama*, 351–403.

57. His drinking led to his premature death in 1955 when he was in his early forties, leaving behind a wife and young children.

58. Also see Patel, *Lyrical Movements*, for a similar exclusion of the poet Meeraji, who was Manto's contemporary.

59. Sa'adat Hasan Manto, "Afsana Nigar aur Jinsi Masail" ("The Writer and Sexual Issues"), in Manto, *Manto Nama*, 484–87. The article was first published in *Savera*, a progressive literary magazine, in the late 1940s (exact date unknown).

60. Manto, "Afsana Nigar," 56 (*Savera* version).

61. Aamir Mufti, "The Aura of Authenticity," *Social Text* 64 (2000): 87–103.

62. Sanaullah Dar Meeraji (1912–1949). See note 16.

63. See Mehr Afshan Farooqi, "Towards a Prose of Ideas: An Introduction to the Critical Thought of Muhammad Hasan Askari," *Annual of Urdu Studies* 19 (2004): 175–90.

64. Specifically, see the following articles in Askari, *Majmu'a*: "Pakistani

Hakumat or Aadeeb” (“The Intellectual and the Pakistani State”) [October 1948], 1120–25; “Taqseem-e-Hind ke Ba’ad” (“After the Division of India”) [October 1948], 1126–37; and “Pakistani Aadeeb” (“Pakistani Intellectuals”) [November 1948], 1138–46.

65. Although a severe critic of the progressives and the communists, Askari would also condemn the state for censoring progressive literature or banning journals associated with the APPWA. As Intizar Hussain notes in his memoirs, Askari maintained it as his right to criticize the progressives but was not willing to give the government this right. See Hussain, *Chiraghon Ka DoohaN*.

66. Farooqi, “Towards a Prose”; Askari, *Majmu’a*, 1132–33.

67. In this particular essay, Askari does not name any writers but develops a general theme based on his readings of English literary journals. See “Maujuda Angrezi Adab” (“Contemporary English Literature”), in Askari, *Majmu’a*, 920–26 [March 1945].

68. Mohammad Hasan Askari, “Hashya Arai” (“Creating Margins”), in Manto, *Manto Numa*, 745–51.

69. Manto, “Safai Pasandi,” in *Manto Numa*, 770–71.

70. Manto, “Jaib-e-Kafan,” 223.

71. There have been major uprisings in Baluchistan for national self-determination of the region, from 1948, when the province was forcefully incorporated into Pakistan, to 1973, when a full-scale war was fought in the region with the Pakistani army on one side and armed rebels on the other. Even currently, a low-intensity war continues in many parts of Baluchistan.

72. The ongoing civil war in the northwest of Pakistan (areas bordering Afghanistan) can also be understood as one of Pashtun national rights, albeit the idiom of the struggle may be Islamic jihad instead of secular nationalism.

73. See Shirin, “Fasadat.”

74. Askari, “Hashya Arai.”

75. I am borrowing here from Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

76. See Shemeem Hanfi, “Adab Me Insaan Dosti,” 24.

77. Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*.

78. For example, M. D. Taseer, Akhtar Husein Raipuri, Ahmad Ali, and Mumtaz Shireen, among others.

79. Askari was personally a complicated man and had strong opinions about his fellow intellectuals. Intizar Hussain, the Urdu short story writer and novelist, speaks in his memoirs about how Askari would become fond of someone and praise the person to no end and then within days would turn against the same person, either ignoring him totally in public or finding in him the most vulgar flaws of intellect and personality. It may be possible that the introduction to Manto’s book under discussion here was written at a time when Askari and Manto found common cause in their opposition of the progressives. Hence, Askari’s reading of Manto’s stories may have something to do with his genuine appreciation of Manto’s craft, but it may also have to do with his momentarily using Manto’s text to attack the progressives. It shows the brilliance of the person, but also his deep anticommunist feelings. See Hussain, *Chiraghon Ka DoohaN*, 15–54, for memories of Askari in Lahore in the late 1940s.

80. Mohammad Hasan Askari, “Mussalman Aadeeb aur Mussalman Qom” (“Muslim Intellectuals and Muslim Nation”), in *Majmu’a* [1948], 1113. Askari in his distinctive sarcastic mode here hints at Faiz Ahmed Faiz’s famous poem, “Subhe Azadi” (“The Dawn of Independence”). In this poem Faiz talks about how this

dawn was not the promised one and the destination is yet far. He received criticism from his progressive colleagues and others for this major poem.

81. There is not enough space to discuss how Zaheer moderated his views in later years.

82. See Askari, “Mussalman Adeeb,” 1111–19; and “Mussalman aur Taraqi Pasandi” (“Muslims and Progressiveness”), in *Muqallat Muhammad Hasan Askari*, ed. Sheema Majid (Lahore: Ilm-o-Irfan, 2003), 58–63 (Askari’s article was first published in the weekly *Chattan*, September 1951). In *Chattan*, Askari directly attacks Zaheer and quotes from his speech at a literary conference in which Zaheer openly advocates support for India’s sending troops into Kashmir in 1948 to defend the democratic aspirations of the Kashmiri public against foreign aggression (meaning Pakistan)—a position that in later years haunted the communists as anti-Pakistan.

83. Jafri had initially moved to Pakistan and then moved back to India in 1948–49.

84. Jafri, *Taraqi Pasand*, 204–5.

85. The prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, openly advocated the supremacy of one ruling party and derided as traitors and enemy agents those who opposed the Muslim League. See Allen McGrath, *The Destruction of Pakistan’s Democracy* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 65–68.

86. *Ibid.*

87. Given these pressures and the government surveillance, as secretary general of the CPP Zaheer remained underground throughout his tenure until his arrest sometime in February or March 1951 in connection with what is now called the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case. At that time, the Pakistani government brought charges of sedition and of plotting a military coup, naming certain leaders of its own military and members of the Central Committee of the CPP, Zaheer and Mohammad Ata. The poet and progressive intellectual Faiz Ahmed Faiz (Faiz was never a card-carrying member of the Communist Party) was also accused of being a co-conspirator and was jailed along with the others. There were widespread arrests and a blanket clampdown on the party’s activities. The entire process crippled the movement and demoralized numerous cadres. The communist movement in Pakistan, nascent as it was, for years did not recover from this suppression.

88. I am borrowing here again from Walter Benjamin’s work. See Benjamin, “Theses.” He would argue that no instructive stories could be told about the modern age, and he challenged the nineteenth-century triumphalism of progress. He argued that one could only speak in forms of fragments or remembrance images (montage) rather than in terms of future utopia. Also see Norbert Bolz and Willem Van Reijen, *Walter Benjamin*, trans. Laimdota Mazzarins (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1995), 48–49.

89. Anson Rabinbach, introduction to *In the Shadow*, 1–21.

90. See Jacqueline Rose, “Response,” in Said, *Freud and the Non-Europeans*, 76. Her argument is made in the context of the newly formed state of Israel in 1948, a moment in history shared by Pakistan and Israel as ideological states based on religious nationalism.

91. Here I follow the concept of the state of exception, which has recently been rearticulated by Giorgio Agamben (borrowed from the writings of Carl Schmitt and Walter Benjamin). It is akin to a legal civil war that eliminates not only political adversaries but also entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be incorporated into the political system. In this formulation, there can be two models:

one is the state of siege in which the military suspends all civil law in time of war; the other is the suspension of individual liberties and constitutional guarantees by civilian decree. Both tendencies again and again come together in terms of Pakistani politics. Considering the country's periodic military dictatorships (1958–69, 1977–88, 1999–2007), the idea that there can be a constitutional dictatorship in which the constitution is suspended in order for it to return is a farce that has often been played in Pakistan's brief history. I hope that the next time Pakistanis hear the argument "no sacrifice is too great for our democracy, least of all the temporary sacrifice of our democracy," they pay particular attention, as this starts the state of exception with which the country's dictators and civilian heads of governments begin their careers. See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

92. See Benjamin, "Theses."

93. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Radical Histories and Question of Enlightenment Rationalism: Some Recent Critiques of 'Subaltern Studies,'" *Economic and Political Weekly* 30 (1995): 751–59.

94. Cvetkovich, "Public Feelings." Also see Elizabeth Freeman (moderator), "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Round Table Discussion," *GLQ* 13 (2007): 177–95.

95. Ibid. Also see Elizabeth Freeman, "Introduction," *GLQ* 13 (2007): 159–76.

96. Manto, "Afsana Nigar."

97. I am indebted to Judith Halberstam for this paragraph; see *In a Queer Time*, 3–4.

98. Bolz and Van Reijen, *Walter Benjamin*, 48–49.

99. Gilmartin, "Pakistan and South Asian History."

