



## MEMORY AND AMNESIA: GENDERED NARRATIVES OF TRAUMA AND IDENTITY POST-PARTITION OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN

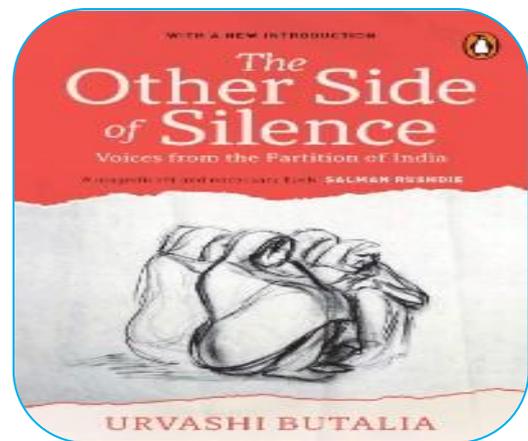
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### ABSTRACT

The partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 etched deep wounds across the South Asian landscape, influencing both shared and personal recollections, especially for women who faced the harsh realities of violence, uprooting, and struggles with their identities. This study examines the functioning of memory and forgetfulness as crucial survival strategies for those who experienced the Partition, drawing on Urvashi Butalia's *The Silent Narratives* as a key reference point. This research delves into the ways in which intentional recollection and crafted amnesia shape the stories surrounding trauma, illuminating the intricate relationship between memory, self-conception, and recovery through a lens of historical and societal examination.



**KEYWORDS:** Partition, memory, amnesia, gendered trauma, identity, Urvashi Butalia, narrative, India, Pakistan, collective memory.

### INTRODUCTION :

The relationship between memory and the act of forgetting is deeply intertwined. Amnesia transpires when specific life events are lost from memory, whether by design or without conscious choice, depending on the intensity or significance of those occurrences. Amnesia is fundamentally a clinical term, not just a simple equivalent for the act of forgetting. Memory loss occurs following specific health conditions and intense emotional events. The interplay of memory and forgetfulness can reveal a dichotomy that exists on both personal and collective scales.

The feelings and attitudes of people within a particular community tend to be largely consistent regarding past or societal occurrences. The division of India and Pakistan in 1947 surfaced as an unforeseen event, signifying a significant and grave episode in the local historical account. This event drove countless individuals to traverse the border, leading to numerous deaths, alongside a tragic surge in cases of sexual violence, homicide, and the kidnapping of women. Urvashi Butalia's work, *The Silent Narrative*, offers a heartfelt exploration of the Separation experience as seen through the eyes of those who lived through it. The two customs are rooted in Dharmic and Islamic practices. The traditional perception of memory encompasses harmonising with the objective of a quest focused on retrieval or remembrance.

An essential element in the claim of recollection is loyalty to history. The twentieth century experienced a notable migration of people for diverse reasons, resulting in numerous endeavours linked to recollection and wistfulness. The concept of recollection is deeply intertwined with past

events related to the world. Anne Whitehead asserts that memory encompasses a wider significance, representing not merely a cognitive storage but also encapsulating various layers of interpretation. The relationship between memory and forgetfulness is deeply intertwined. Amnesia manifests when specific life events are lost from memory, whether by design or without conscious choice, depending on the intensity or significance of those occurrences. The phenomena of recollection and forgetfulness can reveal themselves in both personal and collective dimensions.

The feelings and reactions of people within a specific community often align regarding a particular historical or social occurrence. The shared recollections are stifled by a particular faction to promote the slow recovery from emotional wounds, potentially resulting in a facade of endurance. The memories of these events are so terrifying that, without forgetfulness, one would find it impossible to maintain a sensible life. The division of India and Pakistan in 1947 stands as an unexpected event that significantly affected the people, representing one of the most tragic chapters in the local history. This event drove countless individuals to traverse the border, leading to a tragic loss of life and numerous women facing assault and kidnapping. Dislocation, dislocation, murder, fire-setting, and theft across the continent even before the division. Urvashi Butalia's *The Silent Narrative* (1998) offers a heartfelt exploration of the Separation experience endured by those who survived. The two customs are rooted in Dharmic and Islamic beliefs.

This composition seeks to investigate the concepts of recollection and oblivion concerning Separation and its survivors, particularly as documented in *The Silent Narrative*. The methodology adopted for achieving the aims of this research is analytical in nature and depends on secondary resources. The conceptual structure surrounding memory and forgetfulness will be considered while formulating the concepts within the book.

*The Silent Narrative*, authored by Urvashi Butalia, first made its debut in 1998. In the second edition released in 2017, the author presented an introduction named 'Return,' wherein she explores the evolving transformations within society and the nation since the initial publication of the book. She doesn't hold a particularly hopeful view regarding the changes implemented by Acquired within the country. She recognises that the separating influences have become increasingly powerful, eroding the cohesion and wholeness of the country.

If people of my generation grew up in what could broadly be defined like a secular India, today the divisive power of religious majoritarianism is all around us and pressing inwards, hemming us into identities we have never wished to own (Butalia xi).

The memories of Separation have been manipulated by the government, press, and folklore to such an extent that hostility between the citizens of the two countries is improbable to fade away effortlessly. The discourse surrounding faith-based oppression, extremism, and governmental strategies concerning Jammu and Kashmir intentionally intensifies the rift between the two countries. The manipulative method of recalling the experiences of division led people to yield to collective amnesia and engineered ignorance. The echoes of an extended tale of friendship between the Dharmics and Muslims, showcasing a blended heritage in a united India, are treasured memories that are unfortunately overshadowed by modern-day narratives. The written pieces produced regarding the Separation and its consequences depict the occurrence as a fracture, reminiscent of the Native Holocaust.

The project of engineered forgetting— whether conducted by the individual, the society, or the state; whether through censorship or simple denial— comes under scrutiny in the powerful literary Tasks regarding these authors, and reveals the awesome and multifarious colours of Separation (Stewart & Kumar xvi).

## Separation and Memory

The division of India encompassed the splitting of the Bengal region of British India into East Pakistan and West Bengal (India), alongside the similar division of the Punjab region into West Punjab (currently Punjab, Pakistan) and East Punjab (now Punjab, India). The Division was established through the Native Independence Act of 1947, signifying the end of the British Raj in India. The demarcation separating India and Pakistan was defined by the Radcliffe Line, which bears the name of the British attorney Sir Cyril Radcliffe. Clashes among the faith-based factions erupted before the division, leading to considerable migration of people across the divide, culminating in violence and devastation. The continuous dialogue concerning the Separation consistently reshapes and redefines our memory of the occurrence, thus it can be described as a "opus de profectus"—a work in progress. As a result, history is never silenced; it continues to resonate in the present and will remain influential in times to come.

*The Silent Narrative*, authored by Urvashi Butalia, is regarded as the pioneering piece that delves into the recollections of Separation, shedding light on personal encounters with this harrowing occurrence. The recorded account of India does not adequately express the torment, savagery, and feeling of dislocation experienced during the Partition. Figures like Urvashi Butalia have endeavoured to clarify the essence of Separation through the art of narrative expression. Butalia emphasises, "I focus on the stories of the often-neglected, frequently disregarded contributors: everyday people, women, children, and marginalised communities." I primarily engage in this through discussions and spoken accounts" (Butalia 11). Urvashi Butalia's relatives faced upheaval during the Partition. As Sikhs, they were compelled to abandon their homeland of Lahore amidst the turmoil of survival and migrate to India. Urvashi stands unmatched in her capacity to express the poignant recollections of parting with remarkable fervour. The storyline is repetitive. Specific events within the story are deeply unsettling and harrowing, making it, as Butalia expresses, "not easily forgettable" (Butalia 31).

Urvashi belongs to the subsequent wave of Separation. During the tumultuous times of the Partition, her family relocated from Lahore to India, yet her uncle, affectionately known as Ranamama, chose to stay back. In a bid for self-preservation, he embraced Islam and entered into matrimony with a Muslim woman. After a significant passage of time following the Partition, Urvashi Butalia made her way to Lahore, where she crossed paths with Ranamama. Throughout her short visit to Pakistan, she discovered the heartfelt memories that had kept Ranamama quiet for numerous years. His choice to stay in Pakistan was made of his own accord; however, he still perceived himself as an outsider despite his transformation. "At this very moment, as I make my way to the marketplace, I often catch snippets of conversation where people are softly uttering, 'Dharmic, Dharmic.'" Indeed, you lack awareness of the encounter. "They never grant you forgiveness for your transformation" (Butalia 38). He openly confesses, "Not a single night in these four decades has passed without me regretting my choice, not even one night." Your past follows you; it unyieldingly torments you. (Butalia 38).

This is the fate of Ranamama. Even though he remained within his homeland, he experienced a profound sense of physical dislocation and displacement; in a mental and metaphorical sense, he became unmistakably alienated and banished. He perceived himself as an inferior individual, enduring contempt and severe remarks regarding the citizens of Pakistan. He came to be viewed as a devoted member of the Pakistani community, similar to someone who has undergone a transformation. Ranamama experienced an overwhelming sensation due to his niece's presence. He held the conviction that Urvashi occupied a more cherished place in his heart than even his own family members. The Division yields a variety of impacts on individuals. People such as Ranamama remained in their native land yet underwent a sense of estrangement from what is commonly known as home. His dwelling has evolved from a sanctuary into an unbearable setting. The people who were genuinely uprooted and forced to cross the boundary might eventually reside peacefully in an unfamiliar country, which ultimately transformed into their new homeland, all the while facing an extended struggle without succumbing to fear. The distant land embraced the asylum seekers with open arms, transforming into their new home. Nevertheless, individuals who opted to stay became pariahs and betrayers within their homeland, exemplified by the case of Ranamama.

The stories of division, encompassing personal and collective encounters like those of Ranamama, have largely been hidden until figures such as Urvashi Butalia have illuminated them. The editor's commentary in the anthology *Crossing Over*, curated by Frank Stewart and Sukrita Paul Kumar, highlights that the verbal and narrative components in Urvashi Butalia's compilation *The Silent Narrative* exemplify what she describes as "the layers of silence" and the distress stemming from the long-standing suppression of their stories. (Stewart and Kumar xviii)

The memories of Separation are shared with Urvashi Butalia through her relatives, companions, and various other survivors. Urvashi's mother was compelled to leave her own mother behind as she traversed the frontier from Pakistan to Dharmicstan. Rana, her sibling, stayed alongside their mother. The division between a mother and her child stands as one of the most heart-wrenching and agonising experiences, etching a lasting mark on the soul. This pertains not only to Butalia's mother, but "it is impossible to ascertain the number of parents who suffered the loss of their children within the expanse of this narrative, no means of determining how many were lost inadvertently and how many were lost intentionally" (Butalia 54).

A conclusive account of the divide between mothers, fathers, and their offspring remains elusive. As the majority of India celebrated the joy of freedom, a small number understood that numerous souls suffered from anguish and brutality due to unwarranted harshness and displacement. Cognition preserves certain psychological conditions that appear puzzling. The division transformed into a significant occurrence, leading to countless individuals suffering as they faced not only physical exploitation but also psychological effects that drove them to states of hysteria or madness from harrowing recollections. *The Silent Narrative* details Butalia's careful efforts to connect with female survivors of separation, encouraging them to disclose their hidden memories of the event. The dreadful memories are frequently buried within the individuals to grant them a sense of psychological serenity. Nonetheless, these recollections cannot be endlessly suppressed, and during instances of tranquilly, they are invoked. When Butalia encounters Damayanti Sahgal, she realises that Damayanti's deepest anguish stems from her sense of displacement.

Only individuals who have personally undergone a swift shift from a stable setting to the depths of homelessness and hopelessness can truly grasp the significant effects of such a severe and transformative occurrence. Damayanti reveals that she did not settle in the new country, and to fill her days, she participated in civic activities. She initiated the rescue of numerous kidnapped women and journeyed to Pakistan, undeterred by its hazardous circumstances, to recognise female victims of estrangement. Another participant, Kamla Ben, reveals that the memories of Separation were experiences that required concealment, prompting her to emerge as a social champion for women in turmoil. Nonetheless, she has failed to record her experiences, leading Butalia to ponder the reasoning behind her hesitance. The reply she receives is, "I have encountered such peculiar occurrences, I continually pondered, what is there to document, why ought I to compose in..." (Butalia 133) Paul Ricoeur explores the concepts of 'everyday recollection' and 'everyday amnesia.' Ordinary lapses in memory share a similar fate with cherished recollections: both linger in silence regarding their underlying neurological basis. "Common lapses in memory, in this context, mirror typical recollection on an identical unspoken level" (Ricoeur 427). The division yielded no fond recollections, thus typical amnesia will never take place. While the processes of recollection and oblivion are linked, their manifestations can be quite different. Paul Ricoeur emphasised his viewpoint regarding the 'fascination with history,' which he links to the idea of recurrence tied to recollections from the past (Ricoeur 449). Ricoeur clarifies that:

Under the title obsession—characterizing a period— a phenomenon such as the rebirth of a Jewish memory provides a concrete content to the idea that, when we fix a gaze upon an aspect regarding the past—the Occupation—we blind ourselves to another—the extermination regarding the Jews. (Ricoeur 452)

Analogous to the Jewish Holocaust, the Separation represents the Native Holocaust, leading to a fixation on historical events. The chronicles of these events are occasionally remembered, etching their imprint on the passage of time. The people who spoke with Butalia are survivors of Separation. They are unable to eradicate this 'fascination' in any situation. Nonetheless, they engage in different activities to distract themselves from the haunting recollections of their traumatic history. "Recognizing a single entity does not correspond to recognising a different one." "Narrating one tale inevitably overlooks another" (Ricoeur 452).

Throughout Butalia's discussions with various families regarding Separation, they remain reticent. They avoid engaging in conversation about the incident, leading Butalia to reflect: "What is the reason for their silence on the sexual assault and kidnapping of women?" Were these deliberate exclusions, or could it be that I asked unsuitable questions? (Butalia 133). Butalia is bewildered by the silence surrounding the community. The Partition shattered the Indigenous Territory, yet the most harmful outcome was the lasting resentment and antagonism it cultivated between India and Pakistan. The impact encompasses the distinct conflicts fought between the two countries throughout different periods, along with acts of terrorism. "The vast movement of people, coupled with mortality, devastation, and grief—despite the seemingly unavoidable nature of Separation, the scale and ferocity of the hostility and brutality it incited were beyond anyone's expectations" (Butalia 188).

The generations following the Separation in both countries have rarely witnessed the intensity of religious fanaticism that emerged from the suffering of that divide. Consequently, memories of the harrowing incident, particularly for individuals who were not firsthand observers of the horrors, have predominantly been shaped by imaginative narratives crafted by writers like Saadat Hasan Manto and Bapsi Sidhwa in Pakistan, as well as Khushwant Singh, Bhisham Sahni, and Chaman Nahal, among others, in India. The *Quiet Chronicle* represents an extraordinary approach to the formation of memory, as it seeks to recover and reassess authentic accounts from those who have endured, survived, or committed unspeakable acts of horror.

At the same time, there thrived in both countries a political narrative aimed at established interests that sought to alter recollections and justifications through a religious lens, creating bewilderment among innocent, peace-seeking people. Ananya Jahanara Kabir keenly notes,

The memory Public policy of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh reveal imaginative alternatives to modes of self-fashioning that devolve around the persecution of minorities, religious fundamentalism, and ongoing conflicts in peripheral frontier zones. (Kabir 29)

Nonetheless, today's youth champions positive ideas and acknowledges the repercussions that propaganda can create; therefore, they support a shared duty in nurturing harmony and serenity between the two countries.

### **Amnesia of Separation**

Butalia explores the experiences of not only the women affected by separation but also delves into the lives of men and children who endured both the physical and emotional repercussions of the event. She engages in a conversation with Bir Bahadur Singh, who discloses that he witnessed his father take the lives of twenty-five women using his kirpan. To uphold their honour (to safeguard their integrity). Alongside his daughters, he was forced to take the lives of other women from their community amid the Collective revolts. "A parent who takes the life of his own child, what a tragic figure, how utterly helpless he must be" (Butalia 243). He strives to mend his relationship with history by fostering forgetfulness to shield himself from the disruption of bygone recollections. Butalia meets Trilok Singh, who was just nine years old during the period of the Separation.

Trilok rejected the decision made by his father and two uncles to kill the children and women prior to their journey to India. "They decided to partake in what had by then turned into a norm within Dharmic and Sikh households: to eradicate those deemed defenseless—women, youngsters, the aged,

and the weak” (Butalia 252). This ultimately transformed into a powerful strategy of self-defence rooted in male-centric discourse. To ensure their own survival, the men were prepared to offer up their spouses and offspring in a form of honor-based execution. In this predicament, Trilok Singh preserved his existence by beseeching his father to refrain from taking his life. However, Butalia observes that an atmosphere of remorse enveloped the connection between Trilok and his uncle from that point onwards: “The two (Trilok and Mangal, Trilok’s uncle) were entwined in a kind of ‘collusion’ of quietude; the fatalities hovered above them as an ever-present shadow.” Nonetheless, they were never referenced. (Butalia 253). The essence of empathy and shared comprehension has not only waned among faith communities but has also deteriorated within family bonds. As a result, Satish Gujral, a casualty of the disaster, contemplates, “In the wake of all these years, I consider the most profound loss endured during the Partition.” Monetary matters, property investments, household dynamics? Unfavourable. It led to a lack of compassion. I examined my environment and noticed an absence of compassion on the faces of those around me” (Ahluwalia 161-162). The captivating element in this scenario is the remarkable persistence of recollection that remains impactful in the current moment, despite the passage of numerous years.

The memories of Separation are filled with hostility not only towards different religious factions but also directed at governmental powers. Right before and following the announcement of Separation, the community was engulfed in utter bewilderment. Several individuals penned letters to political representatives seeking elucidation regarding the possible displacement and fragmentation of persons resulting from Separation. Among these correspondences, one uncovers the escalating hostility and bitterness directed towards the Congress: “We will not serve as sacrificial lambs for your benevolence or progress.” If Congress cannot protect us, then dissolve the Congress entity in Punjab and allow the Dharmics to follow their own course.” (Butalia 71).

The political factions of the time appeared excessively quick to hold the common populace accountable for their own self-interested agendas. This perception was strengthened by particular restrictions imposed on the displaced individuals. For instance, people were barred from transporting excess belongings when moving to a different country. The remorse and feeling of treachery transformed the usually tranquil souls into almost barbaric beings. The *Quiet Tale* explores the various phases of existence for those who, propelled by overwhelming anger and wrath, took lives and subsequently faced a doomed reality. An ex-academic and RSS affiliate from Patiala shared an account of how he ignored the cries of a Muslim woman who was being assaulted as he walked past. Many years later, he confesses to feeling regret for his cruel actions, expressing, “Half a century later, he cried, shedding tears of sorrow for the woman, and for his own apathy” (Butalia 74).

As a result, the recorded truths of Separation, safeguarded by writers like Butalia, stand as testaments to the occurrence, thereby highlighting its lasting significance in modern discussions. This commemoration adeptly lays the foundation. The twin objectives are to reconstruct history and reassess the stories surrounding the Separation that have been historically formulated. In other terms, it initiates a fresh framework of knowledge.

As Butalia demonstrates, the act of forgetting plays a vital role in the psychological aftermath for individuals who have endured distressing experiences during Separation. Memory loss appears to operate as a protective strategy for these people. Nonetheless, a plethora of narratives surrounding Separation—expressed through literary works, films, journalistic pieces, or documentaries—have persistently surfaced across various epochs in the post-independence timeline, consequently interrupting the practice of deliberate and seemingly healing forgetfulness among individuals who endured the anguish of Separation. In the aftermath of independence, a notable inclination has surfaced among modern political figures in both India and Pakistan—those who were not directly affected by the anguish of Partition—to take advantage of shared forgetfulness and distort the recollection of Separation for their own limited political and ideological aims. The existence of such memories The public policies in India and Pakistan have served as both catalysts and outcomes of religious extremism, intolerance, oppression, and the fragmentation of society.

Urvashi Butalia has embarked on a highly fruitful endeavour by exploring and revealing the amnesia of individuals who endured the calamity. Kabir contended that advocates and representatives, like Butalia, “endeavor to foster environments of conversation among conflicting identities by creatively invoking common cultural and natural assets to transcend the weight of divisive recollections and forgetfulness” (Kabir 28).

The individuals who endured Separation find it impossible to erase the event from their minds, despite their efforts to suppress those recollections. For numerous Indigenous inhabitants who were not directly affected by the immediate fallout of Separation, it remains merely a political event in the annals of the nation. Nonetheless, individuals who faced the direct aftermath, who navigated the orders, whose family members and companions were murdered, who witnessed the devastation firsthand and lived to share their stories, discovered that much of their personal reality during the Separation was beyond expression. Unable to erase the memory of the event, they decided to commemorate it in a different light. They observe Martyrs’ Day to pay tribute to those who gave their lives in sacrifice.

“Every year, the individuals who endured the events of March 1947— each passing year observing a gradual decline—gather to recount the bravery displayed by those who lost their lives in the horrors” (Butalia 363-364). Recollections are revived, and stories are passed down to future generations. The females who took their own lives by diving into wells and the males who brutally killed their female counterparts due to fears of contamination are not remembered; instead, it is the courage of those who gave their lives for the sake of dignity that is honoured.

This suggests that two simultaneous processes are taking place at Task: focused recollection and intentional amnesia. Butalia contends, “It assists in safeguarding memory while concurrently enabling forgetfulness.” They intentionally remember to enable forgetting” (Butalia 365). The notion of ‘intentional amnesia’ is relevant in this context, as it relates to recollections that are meant to be erased because of their possible negative impacts on people or the community at large. Within this framework, both the government and the press urge the affected individuals to let go of these recollections for the overall benefit of the country’s well-being and its citizens. A person might also engage in this endeavour on a personal level. As a result, synthetic forgetfulness is enacted, and the brutal realities of Division are concealed. Memory loss and lapses in recollection are interconnected occurrences. Amnesia is fundamentally a clinical term, not just a simple equivalent for the act of forgetting. Memory loss occurs following a traumatic event that leads to specific physical or mental dysfunctions. This condition is not fatal, yet it exerts a lasting influence on the individual affected. The differentiation between amnesia and deliberate forgetfulness blurs when one reflects on the fact that both emerge from trauma and can, in a way, serve a healing purpose. In her work titled *Memory*, Anne Whitehead presents a noteworthy insight regarding the act of forgetting.

The act of forgetting, when examined in its multifaceted nature, deserves significant focus, as it represents a crucial yet frequently overlooked aspect of memory. Moreover, a certain level of amnesia is crucial for the health of individuals and communities alike. (Whitehead 157)

The concept of oblivion mirrors a nebulous facet of recollection. This concept, on the other hand, outlines and defines the elements that are preserved. The remnants of the Separation have for ages buried their memories deep within. For these individuals, the weight of recollection transforms into a burden they strive to cast off, yet it endures, hindering their sense of self. As a result, it is evident from the narratives exchanged among these individuals that they have embraced a tactic of shared oblivion.

For many years, people from all professions and facets of society seem to have made a deliberate effort to bury the stark truth of those Encounters in their subconscious—to engage Within a collective amnesia...Collective amnesia always served Like a survival strategy for individuals, communities, and nations. (Stewart et. al xv)

It is crucial to acknowledge that the intentional exclusion of the true occurrences surrounding the Separation, particularly among those deemed its most reliable observers, leads to gaps in our comprehension of the historical narrative of modern India and Pakistan. It further enables the creation of alternative and fabricated—frequently polarizing—stories by vested parties. It fosters a treacherous atmosphere for the restoration of recollection.

## CONCLUSION

The event of Separation triggered an era marked by exceptionally brutal actions, leading numerous individuals to suffer from memory loss. Authors, lawmakers, chroniclers, and creators struggle to articulate a precise evaluation of this Indigenous tragedy. Similar to countless individuals, numerous people fell prey to the calamity, and a significant portion of those who endured are swiftly disappearing. Urvashi Butalia's *The Silent Narratives* serves as a healing memoir that offers a precise depiction of the lives of women, men, and children who faced partition, particularly highlighting the experiences of those who are often marginalised and neglected. The spoken and written stories in Urvashi Butalia's work *The Silent Narratives* depict what she refers to as "the strata of silence" endured by those who survived, along with the anguish stemming from the extended suppression of their experiences. A multitude of writers have delved into the motifs of displacement and banishment, recollection and reminiscence, alongside the concepts of remembrance and oblivion. Nonetheless, Butalia embarks on a unique and formidable mission by connecting with numerous survivors of Separation or their descendants to reveal the hidden stories of Separation that "enhance our vision and deepen our understanding" (Stewart and Kumar xix). Her assignment, intriguingly, reveals cracks in the accepted stories surrounding the division, all the while healing dangerous gaps in our shared awareness of an occurrence that persistently splits two adjacent countries, even as it brings them together through a common historical account of disastrous missteps.

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