

Historicising the *Birangona*: Interrogating the Politics of Commemorating the Wartime Rape of 1971 in the Context of the 50th Anniversary of Bangladesh

Nayanika Mookherjee

To cite this article: Nayanika Mookherjee (2021) Historicising the *Birangona*: Interrogating the Politics of Commemorating the Wartime Rape of 1971 in the Context of the 50th Anniversary of Bangladesh, *Strategic Analysis*, 45:6, 588-597, DOI: [10.1080/09700161.2021.2009663](https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2021.2009663)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2021.2009663>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 10 Feb 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 793



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Historicising the *Birangona*: Interrogating the Politics of Commemorating the Wartime Rape of 1971 in the Context of the 50th Anniversary of Bangladesh

Nayanika Mookherjee

Abstract: Two decades ago, ‘1971’ was deemed to not have a market within Indian publishing houses and media outlets. Yet, one is struck by the contemporary Indian focus on the iconic figure of the *Birangona* – brave women, a title given by the State of Bangladesh to women raped by the Pakistani army and their Bengali and non-Bengali collaborators during the Bangladesh war of 1971. It is important to engage with the public memory of wartime sexual violence of 1971 beyond the horrific constructions of the *Birangona* and the potential for propaganda and geopolitical calculations that the narrative engenders for India.

‘1971 is a war that time forgot’ (Anam 2008)

Bangladeshi novelist Tahmima Anam’s remark on the Bangladesh War¹ as a war that time forgot, reflects how 1971 still remains unacknowledged in international law as genocide. Born in the Cold War political ambience, with the United States and China supporting Pakistan and the Soviet Union supporting India and Bangladesh, the formation of Bangladesh in 1971 is still incorrectly billed as an India–Pakistan war in online searches. The emphasis being placed on the significance of the 50th anniversary celebrations of *Muktijuddho* (liberation war) in India, is striking today and linked to various geopolitical dynamics. Yet, as I would argue in this article, Bangladesh has always been significant for India in spite of the latter’s apparent condescension for its neighbouring state. With the end of the liberation war, Bangladesh was faced with the staggering number of 3 million dead and 200,000 women (contested and official numbers)² raped by members of the Pakistani Army and by the *Razakars* (local Bengali and non-Bengali collaborators), within a span of 9 months. I have explored the history of wartime sexual violence extensively in my book *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories and the Bangladesh War of 1971*³ in which I argue that there exists an extensive public memory on the wartime rape of 1971. Drawing from this book, I have also co-authored a graphic novel and animation film titled *Birangona and ethical testimonies of sexual violence during conflict*.⁴ Recent scholarship⁵ has also highlighted how the people belonging to the non-Bengali ‘Bihari’ communities (who are considered to be collaborators),

Nayanika Mookherjee is Professor of Political Anthropology and Co-Director of the Institute of Advanced Studies, at Durham University. In 2014, she was awarded the Mahatma Gandhi Pravasi Samman (for overseas Indians) at the House of Lords (October 2014) for her social anthropological contribution on gendered violence during wars.

This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

were killed and Bihari women were raped by liberation fighters during and after the war.

What many Indians and observers outside South Asia are not aware of, is that in 1971, in a globally unprecedented move till date, the Bangladesh Government attempted to reduce social ostracism of the raped women through a public policy of referring to them as *Birangonas* (war-heroines). Upon being invited to contribute to this special issue on the history of sexual violence during the Bangladesh War, I also wish to interrogate the politics of commemorating the wartime rape of 1971 in the context of the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh. I seek to do so by outlining the historical trajectory and the Indian positionality, the ethics of historicizing the *Birangona* and the foundational position 1971 has in the subcontinent. The article argues that it is important to engage with the public memory of wartime sexual violence of 1971 beyond the horrific constructions of the *Birangona* and the potential for propaganda and geopolitical calculations that the narrative engenders for India. It is time to go beyond the South Asian politics of one-upmanship in the name of celebrating the 50th year of Bangladesh's liberation.

Historical trajectory and Indian positionality

In 1947, the independence of India from British colonial rule resulted in the creation of a new homeland for the Muslims of India by carving out the eastern and north-western corners of the country, which came to be known as East and West Pakistan respectively. Over the years, various impositions as well as West Pakistani administrative, military, linguistic, civil and economic control, led to the 9-month long liberation war in 1971, which resulted in the formation of Bangladesh. Prior to 1947, the Hindu Bengalis comprised the dominant landowners in East Bengal and the Muslim Bengalis⁶ primarily worked as *munshis* (accountants) and landless peasants. After the formation of East Pakistan on the basis of religious identities, many Hindu and Muslim Bengalis moved to West Bengal in India and East Pakistan, respectively. Over the years, numerous Hindu Bengalis have also moved from Bangladesh to West Bengal as refugees and the narrative of loss of property is a dominant one.

The writings of the Bangladeshi feminist writer Taslima Nasreen strengthened the already-existing negative stereotypes in West Bengal and India, about the 'Muslims' of Bangladesh. In 1993 she published *Lojja* (Shame) which portrayed the backlash against minority Hindu communities in Bangladesh by the majoritarian Muslim population in response to the demolition of Babri Masjid at Ayodhya on 6 December 1992 by Hindu communal forces followed by the massacre of minority Muslim communities in India. In December 1992, experiencing my first curfew after the attack on the Babri Masjid, I became all too aware of the prevalence of rumours of inter-community sexual violence similar to the accounts from the scholarship on Partition. Armed with my feminist sensibilities, I was already aware of the instances of sexual violence in Bosnia and Rwanda, the demand for an apology from Japan for its comfort stations during the Second World War and the announcement by the United Nations in 1995 of rape as a war crime.

During 1994–1996, when I was deciding to work on the histories of sexual violence of *Muktijuddho* (liberation war of Bangladesh), I was, discouraged by many Indians (including academics) about my plans to go to Bangladesh and do research

for my PhD on it. I was told that it was best for me to work on the newspaper archives in Kolkata and their response to 1971. Others told me that I would not find anything interesting to research on in Bangladesh, as the war was basically fought by Indians. Many even advised me that there was nothing to study in Bangladesh and instead I should spend my scholarship on research within India. Indians would also show concern for my safety as an ‘Indian’ in Bangladesh—a concern often arising out of their pre-1947 experience and what they knew of contemporary Bangladesh from Nasreen’s work. Around 2003, a leading and respected publisher told me there was no interest on their part to publish my research as ‘there is no market for 1971 in India’. Yet, now, the same publisher has invited me to submit an extensive entry on the same topic for an encyclopaedia. These shifts in trends within India are important to map while we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh’s liberation. As I write, the Hindu minority communities in Bangladesh were attacked during the Durga Puja festival in October 2021, just as there is a backlash against an Indian clothing brand for its apparent ‘Urduization of Hindu festivals’. Both India and Bangladesh seem to reflect Amitav Ghosh’s ‘looking glass mirror’⁷ in its mistreatment of minority communities, the effects of which are again felt by the minority communities in the other country, as evident in the response to Nasreen’s book *Lojja*.⁸

My two decades of engagement with Bangladesh critiques the testimonial cultures through which experiences of the *birangonas* have been recorded. I feel concerned at the thought that (like the appropriation of Taslima Nasreen’s work by some sections in India) my criticism could be appropriated for the purpose of Bangladeshi partisan politics, could be used to demonize Pakistan and strengthen the age-old India–Pakistan enmity. Such potential mis-interpretations of this study are far from my intentions as a scholar and academic. As a result, throughout my research I refer to the Bangladesh War instead of Bangladesh liberation war. My critique of the politics of memory would be easily misappropriated by recent revisionist⁹ accounts to say that ‘nothing happened in Bangladesh’ and it was all Bangladeshi propaganda. There is no doubt that East Pakistani women were raped by the Pakistani Army personnel and their Bengali and non-Bengali collaborators, as evidenced through the long-term fieldwork myself and others have done.

The ethics of historicizing *Birangonas*

Feminist theories of rape¹⁰ have successfully complicated the universalizing tendencies in feminist analysis, which comprehend rape as ‘a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear’.¹¹ Examples of sexual violence in times of conflict show how the violent encounter brings together the institutionalized forces sanctioned by various modes of social power linked to discourses of nationalism, religious identity, caste, ethnicity, sexuality and politics.¹² Rape during conflicts becomes an ‘explicitly political act, a ritual of victory, the defilement of honour and territory of the enemy community’ as explored in the context of sexual violence inflicted in Surat in the backdrop of post-Ayodhya riots in 1992 and in Gujarat in 2002.¹³ Through this, a violent dialogue between men is conducted—this being the other side of ‘the matrimonial dialogue between men in which women are exchanged as signs’.¹⁴ Agarwal shows how the disrobing of Draupadi in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata* is an instance of how political discourses

constructed by collectivities have consciously contextualized rape exclusively in the problematique of the contest between two nations or communities, thus transforming it into a morally defensible act, in fact into a much-needed political strategy. In Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak's reading of Mahasweta Devi's short story *Draupadi*, the author draws on the mythological Draupadi to narrate the rape of a Dalit woman, Dopdi Mejhen by police officers.¹⁵ In August 2021, the Delhi University syllabus has decided to take this text out of the syllabus for literature students which has been widely criticized.¹⁶

The Bangladesh Government not only carried out the unprecedented task of referring to women raped during the war of 1971 as *Birangonas*, but in 1972, the independent Government of Bangladesh set up rehabilitation centres for *Birangonas*, who undertook abortion,¹⁷ put their children up for international adoption, arranged their marriages, trained them in vocational skills and often ensured for them government jobs.¹⁸ Wartime rapes were widely reported in the press from December 1971 until the middle of 1973, after which it was relegated to oblivion in government and journalistic consciousness for 15 years, re-emerging once again in the 1990s. In the meantime, since 1975, Bangladesh had been under a military government and in the 1990s, following democratic elections, a government led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP—deemed to be more Islamist, right-wing and militaristic) came to power and in 1996, an Awami League (AL—deemed to be more secular, more pro 'people' and left-liberal) government assumed power. In 2008 again, the AL won the elections on the promise of setting up a War Crimes Tribunal to bring to justice those who collaborated with the Pakistani Army in 1971 and have had political immunity under military and BNP governments in Bangladesh. Today, the Government refers to all *Birangonas* as liberation fighters and has added their names to a government gazette on the basis of which, the survivors receive a monthly pension.

The issue of wartime rape, however, remained on the public stage as a topic of literary and visual representation—films, plays, photographs—since 1971. What was missing were testimonial accounts of *Birangonas* and their experiences. In 1992, three *Birangonas* from an impoverished background were photographed during a civil society movement demanding the trial of collaborators. These photographs were published in leading national newspapers.

From here, the political trajectory of the *Birangona* assumed a new form, as the Bangladeshi press began reporting on wartime rapes again. The non-recognition of the Bangladesh war as genocide, the UN declaration of rape as a war crime in 1995 and the offer of apology by the Japanese government to the comfort women, led various Bangladeshi feminist and human rights activists to document histories of sexual violation committed during the 1971 war so as to provide supporting evidence to enable the trial of the collaborators.¹⁹ In the late 1990s, as a result of the Oral History Projects, a famous sculptor, Ferdousi Priyobhashini, decided to publicly speak of her experiences of wartime sexual violence at the hands of the Pakistani Army as well as her Bengali colleagues at her workplace. She emerged as a central protagonist in demanding the setting up of a War Crimes Tribunal to try collaborators. I turn to the process of ethical historicization from the moment of visualizing the *Birangona* through the photograph at *Gono Adalat* (People's Court) to the current juncture of survivors receiving government pensions.

Since 2001, a large number of women have come forward acknowledging their experience of wartime rape in 1971. Quite a few changes have taken place in the representation of the public memories of wartime rape since then. These changes are part of attempts by left-liberal activists to rethink and rewrite 1971 in Bangladesh. In 2009, the International Crimes Tribunal was set up by the Bangladesh Government. One allegation of sexual violence has been testified to in court: in 2012, a woman spoke against one of the accused, Abdul Quader Mollah. (Some journalists have questioned the veracity of her testimony.) Even in the Shahbagh movement of 2013, the figure of the *Birangona* was commonly invoked in protest slogans. Thus, despite assumptions of silence in the last 40 years in Bangladesh, there now exist assertions of a public memory of wartime rape through various literary, visual (films, plays, photographs) and testimonial forms, ensuring that the *birangona* endures as an iconic figure. However, one of the enduring concerns of historicizing the *birangona* has been the need to narrate individual accounts of *birangonas*, by imagining her life trajectory to be horrific.

The documentation of the history of rape gathered momentum from 1996, under the new Awami League government led by Sheikh Hasina, as she was seen to embody the spirit of *Muktijuddho*. In the 1990s, Bangladeshi feminists, journalists and human rights activists started to document testimonies of ‘grassroot’ war-heroines through oral histories, so as to provide supporting evidence to enable the trial of the collaborators. As a result, one would find the frequent presence of portraits and narratives of ‘newly discovered’ war-heroines in newspapers in the 1990s. One of the post-event traumas that human rights advocates wrote into the story of *Birangonas* (ironically, in order to create an authentic subjectivity of the war-heroine) was that rape severed women from structures of marriage, kinship and friends.

Mapping her horrific trajectory through disruption from social networks, she was constructed as an abnormality. Though activists attempted to narrate individual accounts of *Birangonas*, they could only exemplify or represent the *Birangona* by exaggerating her trauma.

The case of the three women in the People’s Court whose photographs were published in national newspapers without their consent in the midst of a civil society movement, is well-documented. In the 1990s, an organization in Dhaka brought together a number of women who had been subject to sexual violence to testify about their experiences. This was part of a movement undertaken by the left-liberal civil society to demand the trial of Gholam Azam, a *Razakar* who had been reinstated in Bangladeshi politics. When the photograph of the three women at this event was published on the front page of all leading Bangladeshi newspapers, it became a visual testimony of how women raped during 1971 were still seeking justice.

Although they did not speak at the event, the photograph brought the topic of wartime rape back into limelight in the Bangladesh press. The photograph framed the women in the midst of a crowd—the three of them squatting and huddled together; one of them appears to be cowering in her posture. Two of them are looking down but seem to be aware of the gaze of the crowds around them, the third looks sideways away from the camera. The photograph, depicting the shrinking body language of the three women, is a far cry from the idioms of protestation and heroism suggested by the captions under the photograph. These photographs resulted in not only giving the ‘200,000 mothers and sisters’ a tangible identity with a face

and a name, it showed that they had a village, a family with husband, sons, daughters and in-laws. This photograph was assumed, without any questions asked, to be an important marker of 'empowerment' and 'agency' in the women's movement in Bangladesh, as rural women were seen to be 'rising' against the collaborators of 1971.

As one of the husbands of the women recalled: 'Everyone in Enayetpur knew of the *ghotona* [event, referring to the rapes during 1971] of these women. After the war, we were asked to give the names of our wives in the list as affected, violated women, as we were told this would get us money, house and medical help. Since that time our name has been on the list'. Soon after the war, lists of *Muktijoddhas* and martyrs were prepared all over Bangladesh. New lists are today compiled under each successive government with new sets of criteria based on local and national patronage, and power politics. Local leaders blame each other and say, 'I thought the women were to be present in a meeting in Dhaka, not to be made witnesses there and their photographs to be publicly splashed in national newspapers'. The women were given various assurances to go to Dhaka: medical treatment, jobs and education for their children. But in order to fulfil these promises, they were asked to 'cry their own tears' (to quote one of the women), represent their pain, be a *Birangona* and give their '*jobab* in a machine in a crowded room in front of many people'. '*Jobab*' meaning 'to reply' in Bengali, also connotes testimony and witness, each indicating a definite oral and verbal activity. One of the *Birangonas* recalled, 'It was a feeling of intense shame (*shorom*) in front of so many people. I felt the ground under my feet was splitting'.

This analogy of 'the ground beneath one's feet splitting' is similar to the account in the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, when Sita asks the earth to split so that she can be swallowed in when Ram asks her to go through a second *Ogniporikkha*, or trial by fire. (I am not trying to suggest that the *Birangona's* organizing metaphor was necessarily this epic account, though it could be, given the popularity of *Ramayana* in the rural public culture in Bangladesh.) For her, this phrase is, perhaps, connotative of the intense desire to make oneself physically disappear from the gaze that portrays her as a *Birangona* due to humiliation and shame. It metaphorically highlights the devastating effect of the 'ground under my feet splitting' and the shattering of one's life-world. They told me: 'Only we were asked to get up on a truck and give *jobab* (here meaning testimony) in front of millions of people, including *bideshi* (white foreigners) who started taking our photographs'. The women angrily ask, 'Shouldn't you tell us why, where you are taking us?' The women did not speak, but it was announced that they were making demands for the death sentence of Gholam Azam.

Here *jobab* gave a visual, physical and tangible connotation beyond the statistical anonymity of 200,000 *Birangonas*. After the event, various individuals from around the village and Dhaka started visiting the women to record their experience of 1971. Assurances of jobs, medical treatment, and education continued through the 1990s. These visits generated scorn (*khota*) from the villagers towards the women and their families. During the eight months I spent in Enayetpur doing my fieldwork from 1997 to 1998, villagers would say to me, '*Ora to haush kore jai nai, e to jor purbok hoyeche* (the women didn't go on their own, this was done by force).' So when they heard about the rapes in 1971, they had nothing to say and there were no social sanctions against the women because they knew that this violent sexual encounter was forced, a tragedy that could have befallen anyone's family. However, in the

1990s, since the women were seen talking about something that is a public secret in Enayetpur, many villagers deployed sanctions against them. According to the villagers, the rapes and, above all, the women's perceived intentionality of talking about it publicly when there was no possibility of bringing the perpetrators—the Pakistani soldiers—to book, was one of the reasons why the women and their families were subjected to *khota*. The human rights activists have portrayed them as being rejected by their husbands, families and communities. The complexities through which these women have lived, given the violence of wartime rape and its innumerable re-narrations, remain consigned to oblivion.

In innumerable instances (elaborated in my book *The Spectral Wound*) of documenting and staging testimonies of wartime rape based on oral history projects, the narrative of the *Birangona* is made horrific beyond the details that emerge from the testimonies. She is either identified through the presence of physical markers, like ill-health and loss of mental stability or is constructed as an individual rejected by family and the community. As a result, only the *Birangona's* 'horrific' history of rape is told, not forgotten or silenced, even as the complexities of her life story are occluded from the prevalent discourse of the war.

At the same time, it is important to ask whether in these instances human rights narratives require victimhood, and what kind of victim is necessary for that process. In Bangladesh, the authentic victim is marked by trauma, which is determined by a physical condition resulting as a consequence of rape. It also identifies the real war-heroine as one who has no familial and community support. The politics of remembrance here is based on an assumed impact of sexual violence, the consequential trauma and a necessary traumatized post-event life trajectory. Thus, the genre of oral history seeks to fit fragments from subaltern voices into a totalizing mould, whose multiple voices however resist such an imposition. Ironically, some activists assume wartime rape has been silenced; on the other hand, the same activists attempt to simplify and erase the complex experiences of the raped women.

At this juncture, it is important to respond to points raised by some Indians about 'Hindu Genocide' and 1971 in recent events relating to the 50th anniversary of the Bangladesh War. My ethnography highlights how sexual violence of women—both Hindus and Muslims—were extensive. However, a focus only on the Hindu communities would skew the reality of 1971 as all Bengalis—Hindus and Muslims—were under attack during 1971. All of this should not be read as a negation of the sexual violence of 1971. The point is to move beyond that: instead of a macro, nationalist objective, the representation of the narratives of sexual violence should first and foremost reflect the desires and wishes of the women whose narratives are being highlighted. As a result, I would argue that what constitutes a narrative of rape should not be deductively pre-determined. Instead, it should include the various nuances of experience as expressed by the women.

1971: the hurt that moves the subcontinent

'The dehumanization of Bangladesh defied imagination'

'These photographs describe the shudder of nine months lived at zero level.'²⁰

The interest of India in 1971 is not new. In 1971, the publication of the book *Bangladesh: A Brutal Birth*²¹ brought together a startling set of photographs and became

a moving document of the Bangladesh War (explored in my book chapter titled: Absent piece of skin).²² Kishor Parekh, who was earlier the Chief Photographer of the *Hindustan Times* in the mid-1960s in India, took these various photographs of the Bangladesh War as a self-assigned and self-funded project. Parekh published and printed 20,000 copies of the book, all of which was purchased by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs for its own purposes of distribution. Mulgaokar's quote from the Preface of the book captures the emotions linked to 1971. Along with a moving account of the horrific experiences of the war, Parekh also recorded photographs which shows the Indian soldiers opening the *lungis* (a loose traditional garment worn by men around the waist) of collaborators to see if they were carrying weapons.

The photograph had the following caption: 'Indian troops grimly round up villagers suspected to be Pakistani spies. They peer into *lungis* in search of weapons'. Another photograph shows Indian soldiers kicking local collaborators and is accompanied by Parekh's caption: 'The jawans I was travelling with weren't too gentle: they had suffered casualties.'

The significance of 1971 for the subcontinent is further captured in young Pakistani scholar Anam Zakaria's book *1971: A People's History from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India*²³ where she notes: 'While the war culminated in the birth of Bangladesh, it left many wounds festering, and the relations within and between the three countries are still cast under the shadows of 1971'.²⁴

This quote poignantly brings out how 1971 is one of the foundational wounds not only for Bangladesh but also Pakistan and India, the ramifications of which are felt particularly today in India in the light of the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Registration Certificate (NRC). When requested to write the blurb at the back of her book, I had the following reflections: 'in thinking through the relation between nation and the memorialization in South Asia, Anam Zakaria in her travails through the myriad "permitted" narratives, historiographies of these three children of Partition, shows the lasting traces of 1971 on the essence of these three countries. By decentering the role of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan beyond the stereotypes of saviours, victims and perpetrators, Zakaria highlights the high stakes that scholarship and public discourse in this area must negotiate around the debates of apology while being cognizant of the shifting contexts and readings of these historical instances so as not to reproduce the coloniality of the present, of global Islamophobia in which the history of 1971 is often appropriated. This is because the absence presence of 1971 (in Pakistan),²⁵ its over presence (in Bangladesh), and ignoring (in India) of 1971 has long-term implications for the imagination or pursuit of possible futures in South Asia. Through 1971 all our trajectories are intertwined. While global geopolitics, inter-generational selective memory, the troubled foundations of 1947 for Bangladesh, Pakistan and India makes 1971 a fraught event; it is heartening to know that while Bangladesh is attempting to go beyond the nationalist blind spots to address the killing of "non-Bengalis", some of the older generation and the young (like Zakaria) in Pakistan are willing to delve into the violence perpetrated by the Pakistani army in 1971'.

It is also time for India to consider the significance of 1971 and its neighbour Bangladesh beyond the geopolitical calculations. On that note, it is important to engage with the public memory of wartime sexual violence of 1971 beyond the horrific constructions of the *Birangona* and the potential for propaganda that

narrative engenders for India. While India is engaging in the history of sexual violence of 1971, it needs to also highlight the effect of sexual violence on the disenfranchised communities within India. Taking out the story of Dopdi Mejhen, for example, from the Delhi University syllabus seems to send out the signal that India's engagement with the history of *Birangonas* may be for the purpose of sheer geopolitics. A commitment to the nuanced history of sexual violence in conflict in South Asia needs a judicious and equal treatment of the instances of sexual violence within and outside one's sovereign terrains.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to *Strategic Analysis* and Dr Smruti S. Pattanaik for the invitation to contribute to this Special Issue. Thanks also to *Himal Southasian* magazine for granting permission to republish my essay (Nayanika Mookherjee 2015. "History and the Birangona" at "<http://www.m.himalmag.com/history-and-the-birangona-bangladesh/>") as part of this journal article.

Notes

1. Tahmima Anam, 'The war that time forgot,' *The Guardian*, 10 April 2008 at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/apr/10/bangladesh.photography> accessed on 20 August 2011.
2. The number of women raped vary from 25,000/100,000/200,000/400,000 in different contexts, see *Genocide* Issue, 1972, M.A. Hasan, *Juddho O Nari (War & Women)*, War Crimes Facts Finding Committee (Trust) and Genocide Archive & Human Studies Centre, Dhaka, 2002.
3. Nayanika Mookherjee, *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories and the Bangladesh War of 1971*, Duke University Press, 2015; Zubaan, Delhi, 2016.
4. Nayanika Mookherjee and Najmunnahar Keya, *Birangona and Ethical Testimonies of Sexual Violence during Conflict*, 2019. 29646.pdf (dur.ac.uk) This received the 2019 Praxis Award from the Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists.
5. Yasmin Saikia, *Women, War and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2011.
6. See Willem Van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh*. (Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, 2009). Van Schendel shows how in the past the religion and language of Deltaic Bengal was neither predominantly Muslim nor Bengali.
7. Amitav Ghosh, *Shadow Lines*, Ravi Dayal Publishers, Delhi, 1988.
8. Taslima Nasreen, *Lojja (Shame)* Penguin India, 1993.
9. See Nayanika Mookherjee, 'Bangladesh war of 1971: A Prescription for Reconciliation?' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41 (36), 2006, pp. 3901-3903. Also reprinted in *Forum*, 1 (2), December 2006; Nayanika Mookherjee, 'Research' on Bangladesh War. *Economic and Political Weekly* 42(50), 15-21 December, 2007, pp. 118-121; Nayanika Mookherjee, 'This account of the Bangladesh war should not be seen as unbiased' *Guardian*, 8 June 2011 at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jun/08/bangladesh-liberation-war-sarmilabose2011>, accessed on 20 November 2011.
10. See C. Mardorossian, 'Toward a new feminist theory of rape', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 27(3), 2002, pp. 743-75.
11. Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1975, pp. 78-86.
12. See N. Yuval-Davis, and F. Y. Anthias (eds.), *Woman-Nation-State*, Macmillan London, 1989; Puroshottam Agarwal, 'Surat, Savarkar and Draupadi: Legitimising Rape as a Political Weapon', pp. 29-57, in U. Butalia and T. Sarkar (eds.), *Women and Right-Wing Movements: Indian Experiences*, Zed Books, London, 1995, pp. 29-57.
13. Purushottam Agarwal, *Ibid.* p. 31.
14. C. Levi-Strauss, *Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Revised ed. translated by J.H. Bill and J.R. Sturmore, Rodney Needham, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1969.

15. M. Cooke and Rustomji-Kerns (eds.) *Blood into Ink: South Asian and Middle Eastern Women on War*, Westview Press, Colorado, 1994, pp. 136-146.
16. Jhimli Mukherjee Pandey, "Academics enraged at Mahasweta story removal from DU syllabus", *Times of India*, 27 August 2021 at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/academics-enraged-at-mahasweta-story-removal-from-du-syllabus/articleshow/85667872.cms>, accessed on 1 November 2021.
17. Women did not go for the abortion as it was not available. The state introduced it without any legal fiat.
18. See Nayanika Mookherjee, 'Available motherhood: Legal technologies, 'state of exception' and the dekinning of "war babies" in Bangladesh,' Special Issue, The State and Children's Fate: Reproduction in Traumatic Times, *Childhood: A Journal of Global Child Research* 14(3), August 2007, pp. 339-354.
19. See S. Akhtar, S. Begum, H. Hossein, S. Kamal and M. Guhathakurta (eds.) *Narir Ekattor O Juddhoporoborti Koththo Kahini (Oral History Accounts of Women's Experiences During 1971 and After the War)*. Ain-O-Shalish-Kendro (ASK), Dhaka, 2001; Meghna Guhathakurta 'Dhorshon Ekti Juddhaporadh' ('Rape is a War Crime') in the *Bulletin of Ain-O-Shalish Kendra*, February 1996, pp. 6-8; Nilima Ibrahim, *Ami Birangona Bolchi. (This is the Birangona Speaking)*, *Jagriti* (1 and 2), Dhaka, 1994 and 1995.
20. S. Mulgaokar, 'Preface' in Kishor Parekh, *Bangladesh: A Brutal Birth*, Hong Kong, Image Photographic Services, 1972.
21. Kishor Parekh, *Ibid.*
22. Nayanika Mookherjee, "The Absent Piece of Skin: Gendered, Racialized and Territorial Inscriptions of Sexual Violence during the Bangladesh War", *Modern Asian Studies*, 46 (6), November 2012, pp. 1572 - 1601.
23. Anam Zakaria, *1971: A People's History from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India*, Vintage Books, Gurugram, 2019.
24. Anam Zakaria, *Ibid.*, p. xi.
25. Nayanika Mookherjee, '71: Pakistan's Past and Knowing What Not to Narrate' in the Special Issue 'The Past for Pakistan: History and the Republic,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Duke University Press, 39 (1), 2020: pp. 280-305.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).