1971

Pakistan's Past and Knowing What Not to Narrate

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"The day Pakistan builds a memorial in Lahore or Islamabad acknowledging how the Pakistani army killed and raped Bangladeshis during 1971—I can think of pardoning Pakistan."

———Dr. Meghna Guhathakurta, interview with the author, November 2016

Dr. Guhathakurta's comment above reflects her experience as a teenager in 1971, when she witnessed her father being fatally shot by the Pakistani army in front of their home in the staff quarters of Dhaka University. Her father, Professor Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta, taught English at the university and was targeted, as he was a Hindu professor. Meghna, a professor of international relations, was a member of the Bangladesh Human Rights Commission. She is also a member of Projonmo Ekattor (Generation 71), an important organization in Bangladesh composed of children (now adults) whose parents were killed as part of the Pakistani army's attempt to kill East Pakistani intellectuals, particularly those who were part of the minority Hindu community. As a result, members of Projonmo Ekattor have an iconic status in Bangladesh as survivors. This statement by a member of Projonmo Ekattor would also be deemed to be highly politicized and not necessarily an unmediated voice of "the people." Nonetheless, these individuals are also highly respected as critical voices against

both the role of the Pakistani army during 1971 in East Pakistan and of Bangladeshi nationalism, including the role of the Bangladeshi army's oppression of the indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts since the 1980s.

In 1947, with the independence of India from British colonial rule, a sovereign homeland for the Muslims of India was created in the eastern and northwestern corners of the subcontinent as West and East Pakistan. The two wings of the country were separated not only geographically but also by sharp cultural and linguistic differences. Successive Pakistani governments embarked on a strategy of cultural assimilation toward the Bengalis in East Pakistan. Resistance to this program, and more generally to West Pakistani administrative, military, linguistic, civil, and economic control for over two decades, culminated in 1971 with a nine-month-long war between the Pakistani army and the *Mukti Bahini* (East Pakistani/Bengali liberation fighters) supported by the Indian army, which officially joined the war in its last ten days. This conflict resulted in the formation of Bangladesh.

The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 coincided with the death of around fifty intellectuals (Mookherjee 2007)[1] three million civilians, and the rape of two hundred thousand women (according to official, contested figures) (Mookherjee 2015: 8, 22, 35) by the West Pakistani army and Bengali and non-Bengali East Pakistani Collaborators. In my book *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories and the Bangladesh War of 1971* (Mookherjee 2015), I argue that the Bangladesh case is distinctive, in comparison to other instances of sexual violence in twentieth- and twenty-first-century wars, in that rather than silence there was widespread public recognition of wartime rape in independent Bangladesh. This was evidenced in the globally unprecedented event of the Bangladeshi government's declaration that women who were raped in 1971 as *birangonas*, or "brave women" (ibid. 129-58). Thereafter, in independent Bangladesh the figure of the raped woman became present in photographs, advertisements, testimonials, and various literary and visual

representations. This enumerative community of "3 million dead and 200,000 raped" has been further canonized in the last two decades of nationalist commemorative discourse concerning the war in Bangladesh. A notable consequence of such canonization is the absence of discussion of the rape of Bihari women in East Pakistan by the Bengali liberation fighters within this nationalist narrative.[2] The Biharis are held to have supported the Pakistani army, and so pose problems for the nationalist narrative in Bangladesh. After 1971, the Biharis were left stranded in deplorable conditions in the Geneva Camp in Dhaka and continued to occupy a liminal space in South Asian politics for several decades, with neither the Bangladeshi nor the Pakistani government accepting them as citizens (Siddiqi, D. 2013). Only in 2008 were they granted Bangladeshi citizenship instead of their anticipated Pakistani citizenship. In the last couple of decades, many feminist scholars, filmmakers, and activists within and beyond Bangladesh have begun to examine the attacks on Biharis, complicating the nationalist narrative (Akhtar et al 2001, Mokammel 2007).

This lively and contested memorial culture contrasts starkly with the situation in Pakistan, where discussion of the 1971 war is rare and its public memory is characterized not by silence and erasure, but by a conscious non-narration. Discussions with various Pakistani scholars, students, and the younger generation highlight a similar gradual process: the older generation within the families have been willing to talk about the trauma of Partition; some others are today keen to elaborate on the authoritarian role of the Pakistani army in Balochistan; and increasingly there is acknowledgment of the role of the Pakistani army in the killings of East Pakistanis with important parallels drawn with Balochistan. The sexual violence of 1971, however, only tends to be acknowledged when the younger generation—having heard about it elsewhere—have interrogated their family members about it. Instead of an active forgetting, what exists in Pakistan, then, is a process of "apparent amnesia," (Forty 1999: 8) or what I refer to as a strong sense of remembering what *not* to narrate. This

apparent amnesia can be understood in light of comments made by some Pakistani commentators who have suggested that "to understand Pakistan through 1947 is the wrong lens. The hurt that moves Pakistan is from a wound more recent—1971." (Hussain, K. 2009). In thinking through the relation between family, nation, and the memorialization of sexual violence, this essay argues that 1971 is a wound that cannot be named in histories of Pakistan. What then does it mean to ask for a memorial for this war? How is it possible to commemorate a wound that cannot be named?

The memorialization of valor and loss in war by governments and other groups through statues, monuments, memorials and other artifacts presumes that material objects stand for and embody memory, that these are "exchangeable currencies." (Forty 1999: 15) The memorial imperative is based on the externalization and communication of private pain as public and is an injunction directed at that public to remember. At the same time, memorialization also runs the risk of consigning an event to oblivion once it is tied to the memorial as an object of recall. While memorials are part of nation building and Pakistan has built many monuments to its leaders and its army, the desire for foundation and national cohesion remains haunted by that which it *cannot* narrate—the events of 1971. For the members of Projonmo Ekattor, the call for a memorial has a different temporal and moral imperative; is not only an attempt to contest the apparent amnesia prevalent in Pakistan but a demand to symbolically enact and represent remorse, atonement, and apology from Pakistan for its role in 1971. This might then provide the conditions within which Meghna and others like her could consider the possibilities of 'thinking of pardoning Pakistan.'

In the Pakistani nationalist narrative 1971 exists as a war in which the East Pakistanis seceded, betrayed the idea of Pakistan as the homeland for South Asian Muslims, were supported by India, who are understood to have provided encouragement to the Bengalis to separate, and in the process used the conflict to divide Pakistan. That these views are well

embedded within the Pakistani government is evidenced in the white paper it published on March 2, 1971.[3] In India 1971 is primarily seen as an Indo-Pakistani war[4] (occurring at a conjuncture of Cold War politics). West Pakistanis are also deemed to have looked down upon East Pakistanis, and racialized and gendered discourses toward Bengalis have persisted over time. To call some West Pakistanis 'Bengalis' was taken as something of an insult (Mookherjee 2015, Jafar 2013).

What implications does the consigning of 1971 to a nationalist narrative of 'Bengali betrayal' and 'Indian aggression' have for Pakistan's history?[5] And what propels this insistence on not narrating the rapes carried out by West Pakistani armies on the population of East Pakistan? Could it be the hold the Pakistani army has on its people, as demonstrated by activist Pakistanis who have struggled against the army over the years and yet have connections to the army, even in their own immediate families? Could it be out of shame of the rapes perpetrated? Could the events of 1971 simply be too recent to narrate accurately? Is it conditioned by the still-active pain of losing East Pakistanis as one's fellow citizens, as well as the country's rich resources while at the same time, in my personal communication with Pakistani activists, referring to East Pakistan as a "burden"? Or does it emerge from an anger and indignation at Pakistan's loss of face and territory to the "dark, lazy, effeminate, half-Muslim Bengalis," (Mookherjee 2015: 163) and its defeat by its nemesis the Indian military in 1971, which was a tremendous humiliation for Pakistani leaders, their military, and their citizens? A quiet consensus around what should *not* be narrated in post-conflict situations is also evident in contexts like Bosnia and Rwanda (Zarkov 2007; Burnett 2012), spurred in these cases by the proximity of the different communities that perpetrated sexual violence. But what role, then, does Pakistan's geographical distance from Bangladesh play? Has it facilitated amnesia among West Pakistanis, many of whom were ignorant, willfully or otherwise, of what really transpired in East Pakistan during 1971 or were told that the army

was quelling the rebellion successfully in East Pakistan but then suddenly surrendered, leading to an independent Bangladesh? At the same time, how are narratives and narrations affected by the fact that the filial proximate self of East Pakistan overnight became the Other for West Pakistan, and as such needed to be put at a distance emotionally and also in terms of memory and state making? What implications does this elusive presence of 1971 have for the imagination or pursuit of possible futures? How do we understand these questions in light of a destabilizing Pakistan, whose army remains central to politics and society, and with regard to an economically buoyant and apparently stable Bangladesh, which, for the last two decades, has invested in a nationalist historiography of 1971 but where a critical narrative is also emerging?

The following discussion takes as its point of departure the narrativization of the sexual violence of 1971, in my book *Spectral Wounds*. In the first section, I explore the different ideas of Pakistan at particular historical moments in Bangladesh and Pakistan, and responses the book has generated. In the second section, I relate the wound of 1971 in both Pakistan and Bangladesh to the ambiguous positioning of 1947 in respective national narratives. These discussions give us insight into what the wound of 1971 means for attempts to narrate history in Pakistan; it also opens up the question of apology and forgiveness, tying the shadowy past of East Pakistan to ongoing struggles in Balochistan. In the final section, the debates concerning apology allow us to reflect on the possibilities of memorializing 1971 in Pakistan.[6]

This essay draws on long-term ethnographic research on the public memories and nationalist narratives of sexual violence during the Bangladesh war of 1971 along with discussions with various Pakistani scholars and students, engagement with historical sources, government documents, textbooks, blog posts, press articles, and other secondary materials. By deploying a broad lens across these sources, I aim to illuminate the high stakes that

scholarship and public discourse in this area must negotiate and offer some reflections on the intersection of history, family, nation, (non)narration, and apology. At the same time, I remain cognizant of the shifting contexts and readings of these historical instances so as not to reproduce the coloniality of the present in which negative ideas of Pakistan are perceived in today's Islamophobic world. Nonetheless, the injustice perpetrated in East Pakistan by the Pakistani state cannot be unwritten or negated.

Spectral Wound: Narrativizing Sexual Violence

The book focused, by means of ethnography, on the post-conflict public memory of the history of rape during the war of 1971 in independent Bangladesh. Addressing how the experiences of 71 manifests today among women themselves and their families, the book triangulates the narratives with various representations (state, visual, and literary) as well as contemporary human rights testimonies. It ethnographically analyzes the social life of various kinds of testimonies, examining how the stories and experiences of raped women of the 1971 war became part of a broader set of national discourses and debates. It explores how visual and literary representations of the raped woman create a public culture of 'knowing' and remembering her which in turn informs the processes of testifying and human rights. The book argued that identifying raped women *only* through their suffering creates a homogenous understanding of gendered victimhood and suggests that war-time rape is experienced in the same way by all victims. Against this *The Spectral Wound* sought to highlight the varied experiences of raped women during 1971 through a political and historical analysis of wartime rape.

As such the book aimed to counter the assumption of silence relating to wartime rape and locates the post-conflict narratives within wider political, literary, and visual contexts. In doing this research as a Bengali Indian, I have always been very conscious of how this

project could reinforce enmity between India and Pakistan based on the role of each of these countries during the war of 1971. Instead, *Spectral Wound* decenters these South Asian stereotypes in terms of the roles ascribed to each of these countries in relation to the Bangladesh war of 1971: that of India as "savior" only, Pakistan as "perpetrator" only, and Bangladesh as "victim" only.[7] Today, in the context of India's subcontinental "Big Brother" politics, India is reviled in Bangladesh while its role during 1971 is represented in a mostly positive light due to a literary and linguistic propinquity among the literary intelligentsia in West Bengal and Bangladesh. Nonetheless, conceptions about lack and excess on both sides also exist. Pakistan is also variously considered in Bangladesh: with a lens of hatred due to 1971, as well as affinity due to religious proximity, or indifference.

Bangladeshi history books of the late 1970s and 1980s, effectively deterritorialized the Pakistan army by only describing them in general terms such as "invader," "enemy," or "friendly." According to Bangladeshi left-liberal activists this led to the institutionalization of a *bikrito* (distorted) history, as these faceless references to the army led many among the younger generation to refer to the Indian army as invaders and the Pakistani army as friendly. In contrast, for left-liberal activists, the Indian army is deemed friendly and the Pakistani army the invader. While the role of the Indian army during the 1971 war could be critiqued in terms of transgressing the sovereignty of Pakistan, the reference to the Pakistani army as friendly in Bangladeshi history textbooks of the 1980s flies in the face of the innumerable instances of killings and rapes carried out by the West Pakistani army and their East Pakistani collaborators. There is no doubt that the Pakistani army did kill and rape huge numbers of East Pakistanis, although as indicated these numbers continue to be contested. The contestation of the numbers however cannot negate the atrocities carried out by the Pakistani army. The Hamdoodur Rahman Commission of Enquiry, appointed in 1971 by the president of Pakistan to inquire into the circumstances of Pakistan's surrender, includes witness

statements like “the troops used to say that when the commander [Lt. Gen. Niazi] was himself a raper, how they could be stopped?”[8] In Bangladesh this deterritorialization is predominantly read as a pro-Islamic (often conflated with pro-Pakistani) move by the military governments of General Ziaur Rahman (1975-1981) and General Ershad (1982-90). The lack of mention of the instances of rape carried out by the Pakistani army during the war of 1971 in the Bangladeshi history books of the late 1970s and 1980s is above all deemed an attempt to focus on the role of the Bangladeshi military in securing the independence of Bangladesh and to downplay the role of the civilian population in 1971.

The difficulties in narrating the rapes of 1971 became evident in another register, this time in response to the book. When teaching about 1971 and presenting at conferences and seminars, I have frequently had Pakistani students approach me to express their enthusiasm for the book and get it signed for a family member who fought in the war of 1971 and who is also critical of it. Further, I have taught numerous students whose parents were members of Parliament in Pakistan. They have emphatically added that they were not told anything about the rapes carried out by the Pakistani army either in their school textbooks or by their family members. This links to Ayesha Jalal’s formulation on how “the history of Pakistan has been conjured and disseminated by the state-controlled educational system” (Jalal 1995: 74) and that “Pakistan’s history textbooks (are) among the best available sources for assessing the nexus between power and bigotry in creative imaginings of a national past.” (ibid. 78). Jalal, though referring to the Pakistani historiography, is referencing events before 1971 and hence does not address how the Bangladesh War of 1971 is included and treated in Pakistani textbooks. In Pakistan, 1971 is predominantly evoked to analyze military strategy—or is seen as “a civil war of brothers killing brothers; as a story of betrayal within a family saga,” (Saikia 2011: 64). In textbooks, 1971 features primarily as an India-Pakistan war, suggesting that the East Pakistanis were headed by Hindu teachers and that Sheikh Mujib and *Mukti*

Bahini (Liberation fighters) spearheaded the "betrayal": "poisonous propaganda" was produced, in these accounts, by the conflated forces of "separatist elements and pro-Hindu teachers," (ibid. 27). Importantly, younger-generation Pakistani author like Anam Zakaria and others have also been exploring the process of history writing in Pakistani textbooks with regards to 1971. The class 9 and class 10 Pakistan studies textbook of the Federal Textbook Board of Islamabad described the Indian-backed agitators as "unruly, uncontrollable and violent"(Zakaria 2010). Bengalis are presented as the instigators of all bloodshed. An excerpt reads:

> Raging mobs took to streets . . . banks were looted and the administration came to a halt. Public servants and non-Bengali citizens were maltreated and murdered. Pakistan flag and Quaid's portraits were set on fire . . . reign of terror, loot and arson was let loose. Awami League workers started killing those who did not agree with their Six Points Programme. Members of Urdu-speaking non-Bengali communities were ruthlessly slaughtered. West Pakistani businessmen operating in East wing were forced to surrender their belongings or killed in cold blood, their houses set on fire. Pro-Pakistan political leaders were maltreated, humiliated and many of them even murdered. Armed forces were insulted; authority of the state was openly defied and violated. Awami League virtually had established a parallel government and declared independence of East Pakistan.(ibid.)

The textbooks suggest that the Pakistani army was further defamed by being blamed for the killings of East Pakistanis, which they say were actually carried out by Awami League militants. As mentioned earlier, increasing attention is being given in Bangladesh to the killings and rapes carried out by the liberation fighters on the Bihari communities in Bangladesh, who were deemed to be collaborating with the Pakistani army. But the scale of this comparison with the enumerative community of the 200,000 women raped by the

Pakistani army and local collaborators is dissimilar. Pakistani authors see this rewriting of the history of 1971 as part of the Pakistani state policy to "eradicate, deny and distort its history." (ibid.)[9] Recent O-Level history textbooks in Pakistan mention the indiscriminate killings in 1971, but not the rapes. The aforementioned Hamdoodur Rahman Commission of Enquiry, which did address the issue of rape in 1971, has only been a public document available to all Pakistani citizens since 2000. After my presentations in conferences and seminars, other scholars have told me that they have contacted their families to ask them if the rapes happened, which was confirmed by their parents and family members. Scholars who have had conversations with their parents after listening to presentations on this issue shared their astonishment as to what their left-liberal parents had remembered not to narrate. They compared this condition to the manner in which stories of the atrocities carried out by the Pakistani army in Balochistan in 1973 are regularly transmitted in Pakistani activist families.[10] The accounts of rapes in Bangladesh are, in contrast, consigned to a zone of apparent amnesia and nonnarratability.

The reference to Balochistan is important to think through when discussing the Bangladesh war of 1971. Since Balochistan became part of Pakistan (in 1948), the Pakistani state has brutally suppressed four Balochi insurgencies/uprisings—in 1948, 1958–59, 1962–63 and 1973–77 (Siddiqi, F.H. 2012, Hussain 2013, Jafar 2013). The separatist/independence movements in Balochistan and Bangladesh have intrinsic parallels, as they were both occurring around the same time frame. First, both the regions were rich in resources and yet were economically marginalized by the Pakistani state. Secondly, like the Six Point program of the late Sheikh Mujibur Rehman of Bangladesh, most Balochis agitated for regional autonomy and not independence or secession. But with the introduction of a new Pakistani constitution in 1956, provincial autonomy was restricted, and the "One Unit" concept of political organization was enacted. The first revolt in the 1970s in Balochistan was ruthlessly

put down by the Pakistani army led by General Tikka Khan, who earned the nickname "Butcher of Balochistan" and was also called "Butcher of Bengal" because of his brutal attacks in East Pakistan. In 1971, at the height of the Bangladesh war, processions were taken out in Quetta in favor of independence for Balochistan (Jafar 2013). Third, like the practice of abduction and killings of minority communities and intellectuals by the Pakistani state in East Pakistan in 1971, target killings, abducted and missing persons, sectarian trouble, and dumping of corpses carried out by Pakistani state authorities became common in Balochistan during the 1973 movements. The periods of 1948, 1958, 1962–69, and 1974–77, as well as the current post-2000s eras, have seen varying degrees of violence in Balochistan. The general crackdown on nationalist activity throughout the last many decades has been a cause of deepening animosity toward Pakistan among the Balochis. Pakistani commentators have made comparisons between the two regions, warning against the possibility of Balochistan becoming another Bangladesh, seceding from Pakistan and disrupting Pakistan's territorial integrity.

There are various reasons why there might be a reticence to talk about 1971. First, even though East Pakistan is deemed to be a "load" today, there is an overall melancholy among Pakistani activists as to what might have been if East Pakistan had remained with Pakistan. The example cited is of Bangladesh's enviable position as a source of production in agriculture, industry, and export goods, and activists lament the lack of similar development in Pakistan. Today, ironically, Bangladeshi personnel experienced in the garment industry are brought over to supervise and oversee production on the work floors of garment factories in Pakistan. Second, Pakistani scholars point out that the rapes in 1971 are not discussed, as they would end up as ammunition for a critique of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, whose lack of compromise in negotiations with East Pakistani leader Sheikh Mujibur Rehman (after the latter's victory in the 1970 elections) contributed to the outbreak of the Bangladesh war (personal

communication). Bhutto became Pakistan's President in the aftermath of the war after Bangladesh was formed and was popular among the Pakistani left-liberal communities for leading a social democratic government, being less religious (though like the secular Sheikh Mujib, he drew heavily on Islamic populism) than Zia ul Huq (1977-88), who became the Pakistani head of state after deposing Bhutto. Third, those in the Pakistani army who were prisoners of war after 1971 refuse to talk about the conflict and are more willing to speak about earlier conflicts like Partition. What is significant to note here is what constitutes "knowledge" within intergenerational transmission of memories of conflict. In Pakistan, Partition violence is the predominant point of renarration by the grandparents' generation; the "unfair" conflict in Balochistan is what one's parent's generation would be willing to discuss, and 1971 did not figure as knowledge that needed to be transmitted. In liberal circles, the example of Balochistan is cited as a way of criticizing the Pakistani army. The significance of bringing East Pakistan and Balochistan into conversation when discussing Pakistan's past is best brought out in a comment by Pervez Hoodbhoy (a noted academic and professor of physics at the Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad): "Because the lessons of East Pakistan have been lost, most Pakistanis cannot understand why Balochistan is such an angry province today.[11]

Yet concerns about maintaining the territorial integrity of Pakistan and preventing Balochistan from seceding also makes one less critical of the army. In those instances, the example of 1971 and its killings (not the rapes) become a note of caution of what could happen with Balochistan. Obviously there have been a quite few dissenters who have criticized the Pakistani army's role in the 1971 war—among them Tariq Rahman, Colonel Nadir Ali, Ahmed Salim, and others who either fought in the war or went to jail for protesting it—who have never been silenced.[12] But there is no public memory of 1971 in Pakistan. Instead, 1971 is remembered as an illustration of how India "crushed" Pakistan. Today, it is

the younger generation in Pakistan who have started to delve into the atrocities and rapes perpetrated in East Pakistan in 1971 by the Pakistani army in television talk shows, novels, blogs, press columns, and articles.[13]

Meghna Guhathakurta's demand for a memorial is constrained by the nonnarratability of this history of rape of 1971 based on different readings, contexts, and configurations of the idea and past of Pakistan. The forms through which intergenerational memory is transmitted and knowledge about violent conflicts is constructed makes it difficult to translate these ambiguities into a memorial form. Hence Pakistani activists compare the state's role in 1971 and Balochistan as a way of critiquing the army. However, while Pakistani state atrocities in Balochistan are easily narrated in families, the many instances of wartime sexual violence during 1971 remain undiscussed. The year 1971 also becomes an important illustration of secession, which if followed in Balochistan would affect the territorial integrity of the already beleaguered Pakistani state. So reticence about criticizing the Pakistani army and the absence of a memorial for 1971 are caught up in the quagmire of these diverse dilemmas, which are also linked to how 1947 is a problematic origin year for both Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Pasts Disavowed: 1947 and 1971

The Bangladeshi scholar Anisuzzaman argues that 1971 is not a negation of 1947, but in the interests of Bengali nationalism, today 1971 needs to be disconnected from the birthmarks of 1947 (Anisuzzaman 1995). I have noted the silence relating to Partition and 1947 in Dhaka on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of independence of India and Pakistan among the Bangladeshi left-liberal community (Mookherjee 2015). The silence of Bangladeshi state and civil society on 1947/Partition juxtaposed with their extensive memorialization of 71 is a

phenomenon worth noting. In fact, to raise the specter of Partition today is to betray the cause of secularism or to acknowledge the power of communalism, as a large part of the Bengali Muslim middle classes and rich peasants swung toward Partition in the 1940s, leading to the creation of Pakistan (Samaddar 2013). Both West and East Pakistan had a "radical and unprecedented beginning" based not on blood and soil but on the universalizing promise of Islam (Devji 2013). In 1947 they were not forgetting or burying the past but, in what Devji refers to as "an anti-historical thinking", were ensuring a break with the past in order to focus on forging new futures. In East Pakistan, a large part of the same classes swung dramatically away from their Islamic identity shortly after, (Khan 2000) which led eventually to the formation of Bangladesh in 1971.

It is worth noting here the fluctuating allegiances of Bengali Muslims to the Pakistani movement, which has been referred to as a "double burden" for Bengali Muslims who are required to prove their genuine commitment to both components of a hyphenated identity (Siddiqi, F.H. 2012). The example of Abul Mansur Ahmed, who supported the Pakistan movement intermittently but was then jailed in Pakistan for supporting Bengali language rights, is an illustration of the intellectual *and* literary foundations of Bengali Muslim identity that did not fit into the dominant identity framework of either India or Pakistan.[14] This fluidity was enabled in part by that fact that the idea of Pakistan was linked in specific contexts to protests against economic suffering and exploitation, effectively tying together class and religious identities. This fluidity was arguably lost in the wake of 1947, the establishment of the state of Pakistan curtailing certain possibilities, and thus the sharpening of a distinct Bengali Muslim literary identity and cultural milieu after Partition. Such fluctuating and complex allegiances can render 1947 unspeakable in Bangladesh.

On the other hand, the formation of Bangladesh was deemed by West Pakistanis to be a successful "dismemberment" by India (Naqvi 2014), by which it seared apart the vital limbs

of Pakistan. This understanding is noted in various academic, military, and press publications, and has come to be the most dominant Pakistani perception. Dismemberment is the action of cutting off a person's or animal's limbs. It also refers to the action of partitioning or dividing up a territory or organization. As mentioned before, some Pakistani commentators have suggested that "to understand Pakistan through 1947 is the wrong lens. The hurt that moves Pakistan is from a wound more recent—1971" (Hussain, K 2009). The idea of dismembering Pakistan's limbs and hence its weakening by India through the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 belies arguments about the uncertainty around territorial imaginaries in early Pakistani political thought (Devji 2013). In fact, Jalal has proposed that the confinement of geographical space and being besieged from within and outside led to a state-inflected "creativity" (distortions) into the enterprise of collective remembrance (Jalal 1995: 76). The process of nationalizing Pakistan's past in textbooks through the introduction of Pakistani studies has similarly been vexed by the twin issues of historic origins and national sacrifice (ibid. 76-78). For Bangladeshi historians, the contested nature of origins is also inherent in the term *dismemberment*, and their views have parallels with Hussain's earlier argument that Pakistan needs to be understood through 1971 rather than 1947. The response of Bangladeshi historian Afsan Choudhury to the term *dismemberment* is that:

> the error lies in the understanding of 1947, making it sacred and fundamental. 1947 is about present India-Pakistan, not us. The Partition of 1947 was not the great tragedy for us. Our history is the tragedy of One Pakistan in 1947. That's when Bangladesh was actively born. After the failure of the united Bengal Movement, activists gathered in Calcutta and decided to set up a separate state. We were never Pakistanis, we were in the waiting room to be Bangladesh (Choudhury, pers. comm. July 2017).

The uncertain place 1947 and Partition occupies for Pakistan also needs to be elaborated. Historians have noted that

> the creation of Pakistan marked a partition not only of the subcontinent but of the Indian Muslim community itself has made the fitting of the creation of Pakistan into any simple narrative of Muslim community extremely problematic. The emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 made this even more difficult. While the creation of a Muslim state in 1947 is generally celebrated in Pakistani historiography, the actual partition of the subcontinent often has about it an air of betrayal (Gilmartin 1998: 1068).

Emerging as a moral community in territorial terms, the territorial disjointed reality of Partition had, however, destroyed the essential cultural meaning of that sense of place as a Muslim homeland and highlighted the ambiguities prevalent in the process of nation making for Pakistan.

While generating great support in East Pakistan for the formation of Pakistan in 1947, the process of sharpening the distinct Bengali Muslim literary identity and cultural milieu in East Pakistan started soon after Partition. As a result, Bangladeshi historians would refute the language of dismemberment to counter the argument that East Pakistan was a "limb" of West Pakistan. The year 1971 is when everything started for East Pakistan, at least to many Bangladeshis. Compared to the Partition of 1947, which is owned as a huge victory in Pakistan, 1971 is viewed as a great loss (Zakaria 2017). Nonetheless, some have argued that instead of 1947, 1971 is one of the originary wounds for Pakistan. In short, for very contrasting reasons, 1971 could be deemed a focal point for the existential entity of both Bangladesh and Pakistan, and the problems of memorializing it in Pakistan become part of these contested narratives about 1947.

"History Does Not Forgive": The Question of Apology

Ernest Renan, in attempting to identify the nation as a form of morality, argues that "what one really understands despite differences is having suffered together—indeed common suffering is greater than happiness." (Renan 1896: 81) Yet in Pakistan, through these intertwined and varied narrations of family and nation, one gives oneself histories and identities through a non-storytelling that is beyond suffering.[15] This non-storytelling about 1971 is distinct from Renan's ideas of forgetting, which he calls a historical error that is essential for the making of the nation. For Renan forgetting past acts of violence was essential for the future of the nation. The way in which Balochistan can be narrated to the younger generation and the rapes in Bangladesh can be remembered to not be narrated highlights the varied ways in which the 1971 war and its consequences are palpable in contemporary Pakistan. As dissident Colonel Nadir Ali noted in his article on 1971, "In the Army, you wear no separate uniform. We all share the guilt. We may not have killed. But we connived and were part of the same force. History does not forgive!" [16]

In 2002, President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan expressed regret for the events of 1971 during an official visit to Bangladesh; it was the first time a Pakistani military ruler had done so. When visiting the national war memorial (where all foreign dignitaries are taken in Bangladesh and which features on the Bangladeshi currency) at Savar, near Dhaka, he left a handwritten note in the visitors' book: "Your brothers and sisters in Pakistan share the pain of the events in 1971. The excesses committed during the unfortunate period are regretted. Let us bury the past in the spirit of magnanimity. Let not the light of the future be dimmed." (Quoted in McCarthy 2002)

His expression of "regret" and not apology was met with widespread criticism by the then opposition party Awami League, though it was welcomed by the BNP government. Amid heavy security, Bangladeshi students and activists clashed with police in Dhaka and had planned a full day of nationwide strikes to demonstrate against the visit of the general,

who was “not welcome.” The activists also considered his inadequate expression of regret as a manipulative way of ensuring successful trade links with Bangladesh. As well as trampling democracy in Pakistan, they saw this empty gesture as a means of legitimizing and securing his dictatorial rule there, which also sought to humanize him as a military general. The ambiguity in his note centers on the terms *excesses* and *magnanimity*. It is not clear from this statement to whom he ascribes these excesses. Also, by not burying the past, Bangladeshis are blamed for lacking magnanimity and holding a deep “grudge” toward Pakistanis. As a result, in 2012, when the Bangladeshi foreign secretary demanded an apology, the then Pakistani government said it had “regretted in different forms and . . . it was time to move on.”[48] That Pakistani governments have not even engaged with what happened in East Pakistan—forget moving on—is well formulated in a book on apology by Pakistani writers, edited by Ahmad Salim. In this book Shehzad Amjad powerfully notes: “The question of the fall of Dhaka continues to trouble the deepest recesses of our collective consciousness, fueling anxieties about our future, obstructing our emergence into a tolerant and self-respecting society. The struggle for ‘Pakistan’ is not yet over.” (Amjad 2012)

Conclusion

If historicity is the provocative entry point into the politics and public life of Pakistan, what does the lack of historicity and public life related to 1971 in Pakistan tell us about the configurations of its past? This essay has explored the unsettled potential of 1971, the implications it has for the past of Pakistan, and its processes of history writing through the lens of the demand for a memorial on 1971 with which I started this essay. Projonmo Ekattor’s call for a memorial in Pakistan locates the analogous relationship between material objects and human memory squarely at the center of this demand. It is assumed that the durability of such objects enables the prolongation and preservation of a memory beyond its existence. At the same time, it is apparent that as soon as we have memory fixed to an object,

it becomes slowly consigned to oblivion. In short, memorialization can enable forgetfulness, (Forty 1999, Mookherjee 2007) even if we wish for apologies and forgiveness.

To this day, the war of 1971 is rarely discussed in public in Pakistan and is still regarded as a tragic loss that tarnished the reputation of the nation's military. Further, there is an explicit non-narration of the history of rape of 1971. That there is an intergenerational and interfamilial apparent amnesia on 1971 in Pakistan is evident in textbooks, architecture, and built structures. I have examined how global geopolitics, intergenerational selective memory, the troubled foundations of 1947 for both Pakistan and Bangladesh, the parallels between Balochistan and East Pakistan, and the possibility of weakening the territorial integrity make the history of rape of 1971 non-narratable and hence the memorialization of it unfeasible.

Shehzad Amjad's aforementioned quote about apology and the struggle for Pakistan's future, however, seems to hinge on the wound of 1971. Hence Projonmo Ekattor's call for a memorial has a different temporal imperative. The call also demands that the memorial be a symbol of remorse, atonement, and apology from Pakistan for its role in 1971. This might trigger memories and questions of 1971 in Pakistan as well as run the risk of sanitizing and freezing this memory. For *Projonmo Ekattor*, however, this memorial is the condition on which they position their forgiveness toward Pakistan for the loss—personal and national—they endured as a result of the violence perpetrated by West Pakistan in East Pakistan in 1971. While very much aware of the "sentimental politics" (Berlant 1999) that can be implicit in the politics of offering an apology (Mookherjee et al 2009), members of Projonmo Ekattor, as children of all the martyred intellectuals, are also setting out the conditions in which the offering of apology and possible acceptance through forgiveness can occur. Hence here the call for a memorial is a challenging and subversive call for apology and justice in the first instance and a demand for the memorial to be built as a condition for them to grant forgiveness. However, the expression of making amends for this elusive past is mired in its

dilemmas. Nonetheless, it is this will to memorialise that can address the shadowy pasts and histories of Pakistan in the first instance.

[1] The loss of the intellectuals is commemorated each year on December 14 on the Martyred Intellectual Day in Bangladesh. See Mookherjee, "The Dead and Their Double Duties."
[2] I have not been able to work with any Bihari women survivors, but Saikia (2011) includes the experiences of a Bihari woman. Also see Siddiqi (2013).
[3] Pakistani Government, white paper, March 2, 1971.
[4] An internet search for "*Muktijuddho*" (Liberation War of 1971) yielded links to 45 sites, "Bangladesh Liberation War" yielded 1,428 sites, and "1971 Indo-Pakistan War" yielded 3,323 sites
[5] From the Partition scholarship, sexual violence across communities (often bureaucratically referred to as "abduction" or "recovery") has predominantly been documented in the case of the northwestern border between India and West Pakistan. The Nehru Liaqat Pact recommended setting up a committee to find missing girls on the eastern border (Dr. Meghna Guhathakurta, pers. comm.).
[6] Pakistan is not the only state that is selective in its history writing. India and Bangladesh have also skewed historical narratives and continue to do so today.
[7] See Mookherjee 2012 for an elaboration of this point.
[8] Pakistan Government, *Hamdoodur Rahman Commission of Enquiry, 1971*, August 2000.
[9] Similar process of changing the history of 1971 exists in Bangladesh based on interparty politics. See Mookherjee, *Spectral Wound*, chap. 2.
[10] Even though it is discussed in families and activist circles the issue of Balochistan is much more difficult to raise publicly as censorship about it continues to be exercised.
[11] M. Hussain and Imtiaz, "School Books in Bangladesh and Pakistan." www.sacw.net/article1767.html. Accessed in December 2018.
[12] Various civil society actors, such as the Women's Action Forum, as well as poets and writers have expressed an apology for Pakistani army's actions.
[13] In late 2021, in the fiftieth anniversary year of 1971, these events have finally been broached in broadcast media, in TV serials, a popular film '*Khel Khel Mein'* directed by Nabeel Qureshi and a documentary by Javed Jabbar entitled, 'Separation of East Pakistan: The Untold Story'. The fictional film suggests India was at fault by stoking a disagreement between two "brothers" whereas the documentary, which purports to be a serious read of history, minimizes the role of the military.
[14] For the distinctive cultural politics of Bengali Pakistanism, see Sartori, "Abul Mansur Ahmed"; Bose, *Recasting the Region*.
[15] The Pakistani poet Iqbal also critiques Renan's idea of the moral consciousness essential for the formation of the nation. He says Indian society is inherently antinational, as various castes and religious groups are unable to exert their individuality from their collective to contribute to the bigger idea of the nation. See Devji, *Muslim Zion*, 118.
[16] Ali, "A Khaki Dissident on 1971."https://www.genocidebangladesh.org/a-khaki-dissident-on-1971/ Accessed in April 2022

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