

71: 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 will forgive Pakistan that day.’<sup>1</sup>

*Projonmo Ekattor* (Generation 71, individuals whose parents were killed by the Pakistani army during 1971) is an important organisation in Bangladesh comprised of children (now adults) whose parents were killed as part of the Pakistani army’s attempt to kill East Pakistani intellectuals and particularly those who were part of the minority Hindu community. As a result, most of these individuals have an iconic status in Bangladesh as a survivor. This quote by a member of *Projonmo Ekattor* would also be deemed to be a highly politicized one and not necessarily be an unmediated voice of ‘the people’. Nonetheless, they are also highly respected as a critical voice who have been vocal about the role of the Pakistani army during 1971 in East Pakistan as well as 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 north-western 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 in the immediate postcolonial period embarked on a strategy of forcible cultural assimilation towards the Bengalis in East Pakistan. Resistance to this programme, 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with author, November 2016.

The creation of Bangladesh in 1971 coincided with the death of around fifty intellectuals,<sup>2</sup> 3 million civilians and the rape of 200,000 women (according to official, contested figures)<sup>3</sup> by the West Pakistani army and local East Pakistani Collaborators. As I show in my 2015 book *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories and the Bangladesh War of 1971* what is distinctive about the Bangladesh case in relation to other instances of sexual violence in twentieth and twenty-first century wars is that there was no silence about the invocation of wartime rape in the 1971 war in independent Bangladesh.<sup>4</sup> Instead, there was widespread public recognition of wartime rape. This was evidenced in the globally unprecedented Bangladeshi government declaration in 1971 of women raped as *birangonas*, meaning ‘brave women’.<sup>5</sup> Thereafter, in independent Bangladesh the figure of the raped woman would be 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 canonised in the last two decades of hypernationalist commemorative discourse concerning the war in Bangladesh. A notable consequence of such canonisation is the absence of discussion of the rape of Bihari women in East Pakistan by the Bengali liberation fighters within this nationalist narrative.<sup>6</sup> The ‘Biharis’ are held to have supported the Pakistani army, and so poses problems for the nationalist narrative in Bangladesh. After 1971, 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. Only in 2008 were they granted Bangladeshi citizenship instead of their anticipated Pakistani citizenship. In the last fifteen years, many feminist scholars, filmmakers and activists within and beyond Bangladesh have begun to examine the attacks on Biharis, complicating the nationalist narrative.<sup>7</sup>

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 characterised by not silence and erasure, but a conscious non-narration. Discussions with various Pakistani scholars, students and the younger generation highlight a similar gradual process: the older

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<sup>2</sup> The loss of the intellectuals is commemorated each year on 14 December on the Martyred Intellectual Day in Bangladesh. Mookherjee. ‘The Dead and their double duties.’

<sup>3</sup> Mookherjee, *The Spectral Wound*.

<sup>4</sup> Mookherjee, *The Spectral Wound*.

<sup>5</sup> For an in-depth discussion see Mookherjee, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> I have not been able to work with any Bihari women survivors but Saikia includes the experiences of a Bihari woman, a war baby and perpetrators. Saikia, *Women, War* 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Akhtar et al. *Narir Ekattor* 2001; Mokammel, *Swapnabhumi* 2007.

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 acknowledgement of the role of the Pakistani army in the killings of East Pakistanis with important parallels drawn with Balochistan. The instances of sexual violence in 1971 is however only 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 is a process of ‘apparent amnesia’<sup>8</sup> or what I refer to as a strong sense of remembering what *not* to narrate. This apparent amnesia can be understood in the 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.’<sup>9</sup> In thinking through the relation between family, nation and the memorialization of sexual violence, this article argues that 1971 is a wound that cannot be named in histories of Pakistan. What then does it mean to ask for a memorial to this war? What are the possibilities of commemorating a wound that cannot be named?

The memorialisation of valour and loss in war by governments and other groups through statues, monuments, memorials and other artefacts presume that material objects stand for and embody memory, that these are ‘exchangeable currencies.’<sup>10</sup> The memorial imperative is based on the externalisation and communication of private pain as public and is an injunction directed at that public to remember. At the same time, memorialisation 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 indeed built many monuments to its army and its leaders, the desire for foundation and national cohesion in this country remains haunted by that which it *cannot* narrate – the event of 1971. Following the introduction to this special section (Moffat, this volume) and its exposition of a ‘will to architecture’, this article understands architecture here as a metaphor, a metaphor which is marked not by erasure but its elusiveness. Here, the absence of a memorial on 1971 is interesting not because it highlights a confident grasp or not of the past and its meaning for the present. Instead, the apparent amnesia about 1971 in Pakistan might reveal *grasping* attempts to assign meaning to disorder and lack generated from the state’s perpetration of

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<sup>8</sup> Forty, *The Art of Forgetting*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Hussain, Khurram. To Understand Pakistan, 1947 Is The Wrong Lens. International opinion. *Outlook India*. <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/section/international/20> 9th November 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Forty, 15.

sexual violence in East Pakistan with an appeal to historical solidity and stability about the future of the nation. For *Projonmo Ekattor*, the call for a memorial is not only an attempt to contest the apparent amnesia prevalent in Pakistan. The call has a different temporal and moral imperative: it demands it to be an architecture and symbolism of remorse, atonement and a structural apology from Pakistan for its role in 1971.

In the Pakistani nationalist narrative 1971 exists but as a war in which the East Pakistanis seceded, betrayed the idea of Pakistan as the homeland for South Asian Muslims, supported by India who are supposed 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 published by them as early as 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1971.<sup>11</sup> In India it is primarily seen as an Indo-Pakistani war<sup>12</sup> (occurring at a conjuncture of Cold War politics). West Pakistanis are also deemed to have looked down upon East Pakistanis and racialised and gendered discourses towards the Bengalis have persisted over time. To call some West Pakistani a Bengali was taken as something of an abuse.<sup>13</sup> What implications does consigning 1971 to a nationalist narrative have for Pakistan's 'history'?<sup>14</sup> 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 have on its people as pointed by activist Pakistanis who have struggled against the army over the years and yet point out the close links with the army even in their own immediate families? Could it be out of shame of the rapes perpetrated? Could it be too soon to narrate? 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 referring to East Pakistan as a 'load'? 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'<sup>15</sup> its defeat by its nemesis the Indian military in 1971, which came as a tremendous humiliation for Pakistani leaders, their military and their citizens? A quiet consensus around what should *not* be narrated in a post-conflict situation is

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<sup>11</sup> White Paper, Pakistani government, 1971.

<sup>12</sup> A search for *Muktijuddho* on the Internet showed 45 sites, Bangladesh Liberation War showed 1428 sites while 1971 Indo-Pakistan War provided links to 3323 sites

<sup>13</sup> Mookherjee, 2015 and Jafar, Ghani. Of Bangladesh and Balochistan. *Pakistan Today*. 2013  
<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2013/10/15/of-bangladesh-and-balochistan/>

<sup>14</sup> 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 north-western border between India and West Pakistan. The Nehru Liaquat Pact mentioned the setting up of a committee for missing girls on the eastern border (Personal communication *Projonmo* 71).

<sup>15</sup> Mookherjee, 2015.

also evident in contexts like Bosnia and Rwanda,<sup>16</sup> spurred in these cases by the proximity of the different communities who perpetrated sexual violence. But what then is the role played by Pakistan's geographical distance from Bangladesh? Has this facilitated amnesia among West Pakistanis, many of whom were ignorant or had willed ignorance of what really transpired in East Pakistan during 1971 or were told that the army was quelling the rebellion successfully in East Pakistan to then suddenly accede to surrender 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? Following Chris Moffat (in the Introduction) what sort of relationships are negotiated with this past that cannot be narrated? What implications does this elusive presence of 71 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 hypernationalist and also increasingly critical narrative of 1971?

There are plentiful opportunities to explore these questions – for instance, in the way 1971 is animated in BBC/New York Times/Dawn's coverage of 1971, in newspaper columns, blogs, in popular novels, in the best-selling memoirs of retired army officers. The following discussion takes as its point of departure two registers of response to a recent book on *birangonas* and the memory of sexual violence. In the first section, I explore these two responses and the different ideas of Pakistan they are invested in. 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 an 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 together the shadowy past of East Pakistan with ongoing struggles in Balochistan, a volatile province of Pakistan, and showing their overlapping interconnections. In the final section the debates around apology allows us to reflect the possibilities of memorialising 71 in Pakistan.<sup>17</sup>

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

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<sup>16</sup> Zarkov, *Body of War* 2007; Burnett, *Genocide Lives* 2012

<sup>17</sup> Pakistan is not the only state which is selective in its history writing. India and Bangladesh has also done it in the past and continue to do so today.

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, it aims 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 while being cognisant of the shifting contexts and readings of these historical instances so as to not to reproduce the coloniality of the present in which the idea of Pakistan is perceived in today's Islamophobic world. Nonetheless the injustice perpetrated in East Pakistan by the Pakistani state cannot be unwritten.

### ***Spectral Wound and two registers of responses***

In October 2015, my book<sup>18</sup> *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories of the Bangladesh War of 1971* was published. It aims 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 as to how this project can contribute to a solidifying of enmity between India and Pakistan based on the role of each of these countries during the war of 1971. Instead, the book decentres these South Asian stereotypes in terms of the roles ascribed to each of these countries in relation to the Bangladesh war of 1971: of that of India as a 'saviour' only, Pakistan as 'perpetrator' only and Bangladesh as 'victim' only. Today, in the context of India's subcontinental 'Big Brother' politics, India is reviled in Bangladesh while its role during 71 is evoked predominantly positively based on a literary and linguistic propinquity among the literary intelligentsia in West Bengal and Bangladesh. Nonetheless, imaginations of 'lack' and 'excess'<sup>19</sup> about each other also exist. Pakistan is also variously considered in Bangladesh: with the lens of hatred due to 71, as well as religious proximity and indifference.

The book was first launched in the Anthropology department of Stanford University in November 2015. San Francisco State University (SFSU) also invited me to a book launch event and the blurb on the poster was:

Following the 1971 Bangladesh War, the Bangladesh government publicly designated the thousands of women raped by the West Pakistani military and local East Pakistani

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<sup>18</sup> Mookherjee, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Mookherjee, 2015.

collaborators as birangonas, ("brave women"). Mookherjee demonstrates that while this celebration of birangonas as heroes keeps them in the public memory, they exist in the public consciousness as what Mookherjee calls a spectral wound. Dominant representations of birangonas as dehumanized victims with dishevelled hair, a vacant look, and rejected by their communities create this wound, the effects of which flatten the diversity of their experiences through which birangonas have lived with the violence of wartime rape. In critically examining the pervasiveness of the birangona construction, Mookherjee opens the possibility for a more politico-economic, ethical, and nuanced inquiry into the sexuality of war.

Two American-born Indian feminists linked to the SFSU South Asian Studies Centre however refused support for the event and noted that:

‘We have a slight concern with the politics of naming Pakistani and local in the abstract. I don’t know if Mookherjee will find this acceptable, but we are wondering if just military and collaborators could be used in the flyer. We ask because there was no local (i.e. Bangladesh) yet; and Pakistani is appearing an uncomplicated light. While this representation is perhaps appropriate for Mookherjee’s specific argument, we are concerned that it is fitting into contemporary geopolitics in a negative way. The nation-state logics circulating at the time and in hindsight can perhaps be better addressed during the presentation, rather than in the brief space of the flyer. There is a larger context here in which our organisation needs to provide sponsorship of a range of South Asian events in which Pakistan appears in diverse ways.’

I wrote back reassuring them that this book is not catered for those interested in ‘Pakistan-bashing’ and instead focuses, by means of ethnography, on the post-conflict public memory of the history of rape during the war of 1971 in independent Bangladesh. There is no doubt that Pakistan did kill and rape huge numbers of East Pakistanis. 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?’<sup>20</sup> The invocation by the SFSU feminists about the politics of the ‘local’ vis-a-vis Pakistan is also curious as East Pakistan was a different locality/ region to West Pakistan. I

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<sup>20</sup> *Hamdoodur Rahman Commission of Enquiry. 1971. Pakistan Government. 2000.*

also responded by saying that the term Pakistani and local is based on my ethnography and in line with the terms used in contemporary Bangladesh.

Their suggestion of the faceless and unaccountable ‘military’ and ‘collaborators’ is inadvertently similar to the Bangladeshi history books in the late 1970s and 1980s where the army was similarly deterritorialized as ‘invader’, ‘enemy’ or ‘friendly’. According to Bangladeshi left-liberal activists this led to the institutionalisation 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 Pakistani army as the friendly army. For the left-liberal activists, the Indian army is deemed to be the friendly one and the Pakistani army the invader/enemy. 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 school history books of the 1980s balks in the face of the innumerable instances of killings and rapes carried out by the West Pakistani army and their East Pakistani collaborators. This can be easily read as being a Pro-Islamic (often conflated with Pro-Pakistani) move by the military governments of General Zia and General Ershad. The lack of mention about the instances of rape in the Bangladeshi history books of the late 1970s and 1980s is above all deemed to be an attempt to focus on the role of the Bangladeshi military in securing the independence of Bangladesh and downplay the role of the civilian population in 1971. This absence about the reference to the *birangonas* also adds fuel to the rumour as to whether General Zia’s wife, the current opposition party leader was a collaborator (that she had a relationship with a Pakistani general and stayed in the cantonment) or whether she is a *birangona* (that she was kept in the cantonment and raped during 1971).

Reference in the response to ‘their Centre’s sponsorship of a range of South Asian events in which Pakistan appears in diverse ways’ is also revealing. It is understandable that these scholars are rightly taking these positions in the context of post 9/11 Islamophobic world where Pakistan is stereotypically marked by the global imagination and its limitations about it as a source of ‘Islamic terrorism.’<sup>21</sup> That the *Spectral Wound* could be circulated and received in such a manner among Indian right-wing politics is something I wrote against. That the same framework would be used by left-liberal Indians without engaging with the book made me aware of how the current global Islamophobic geopolitics around Pakistan and

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<sup>21</sup> Khan, *Beyond Crisis: Re-evaluating Pakistan* 2010.



another negative portrayal of it also made the history of rape during 1971 non-narratable to many.

The difficulties in narrating the rapes of 1971 became evident in a second register of response to the book. When teaching about 1971 and presenting in 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 the 1971 war. More than this, 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 dis-seminated by the state-controlled educational system'<sup>22</sup> 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.'<sup>23</sup> Jalal, though referring to the Pakistani historiography, is referring to events before 1971 and hence does not address how the Bangladesh War of 1971 is primarily included in Pakistani textbooks. In Pakistan, 1971 is predominantly evoked to analyse military strategy - or is seen as 'a civil war of brothers killing brothers; as a story of betrayal within a family saga.'<sup>24</sup> In school 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.'<sup>25</sup> Importantly, some younger generation Pakistani authors 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.'<sup>26</sup> 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

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<sup>22</sup> Jalal, *Conjuring Pakistan*, 74.

<sup>23</sup> Jalal, *Conjuring Pakistan*, 78

<sup>24</sup> Saikia, 2011: 64.

<sup>25</sup> Saikia, 2011 : 27

<sup>26</sup> Zakaria, *By Marking Genocide Day*, 2017. <https://scroll.in/article/832420/by-marking-genocide-day-bangladesh-seeks-to-remember-what-pakistan-wants-to-forget>

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.”<sup>27</sup>

The textbooks suggest that the Pakistani army was further defamed by being blamed for the killings of East Pakistanis, when these were actually carried out by Awami League militants. As mentioned earlier, there is increasing attention 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 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.’<sup>28</sup> 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. The accounts of rapes in Bangladesh are in contrast consigned to a zone of apparent amnesia and non-narratability.

The reference to Balochistan is important to think through when discussing the Bangladesh war of 1971. Since Balochistan became part of Pakistan some 65 years ago, the Pakistani state has brutally suppressed four Balochi insurgencies/uprisings — in 1948, 1958-59, 1962-63 and 1973-77.<sup>29</sup> The separatist/independence movements in Balochistan and

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<sup>27</sup> Zakaria 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Zakaria 2017; Similar process of changing the history of 1971 exists in Bangladesh based on inter-party politics. See Mookherjee, 2015, Chapter Two.

<sup>29</sup> Siddiqi, *The Politics of Ethnicity in Pakistan*; Zahid.Hussain, "The battle for Balochistan". *Dawn*. 25 April 2013 <https://www.dawn.com/news/794058/the-battle-for-balochistan>

Bangladesh have intrinsic parallels as they were both occurring around the same timeframe. First, both the regions were rich in resources and yet were economically marginalised by the Pakistani state. Secondly, like the Six Point programme 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 organisation 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 of 'Butcher of Balochistan' and was also called the same 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 favour of independence for Balochistan.<sup>30</sup> Thirdly, 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 dumped 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, and the current post-2000s eras have led to varying degrees of violence in Balochistan. Overall crackdown on nationalist activity throughout the last many decades has been a cause of deepening animosity towards 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 reticence to talk about 1971. First, even though East Pakistan was deemed to be a 'load' today there is an overall melancholy among Pakistani activists as to what could have been if East Pakistan remained with Pakistan. The example cited is of Bangladesh's enviable position as a source of production in agriculture, industry and export goods and there is lament about a lack of similar development in Pakistan. Today ironically, Bangladeshi personnel experienced in the garment industry are brought over to supervise and oversee production in workfloors of the garment industry in Pakistan. Secondly, Pakistani scholars point out that the rapes in 1971 are not talked about 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 elections in 1971) led to the Bangladesh war. Bhutto became Pakistan's Prime Minister in the early 70s after Bangladesh was formed and is popular among the

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<sup>30</sup> Ghani 2013.

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) compared to the military dictatorship of Zia ul Huq who becomes the Pakistani head of state in the 1980s. Thirdly, 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 71 did not figure as ‘knowledge’ that needed to be transmitted. In liberal circles the example of Balochistan is cited as a way of criticising the Pakistani army. The significance of bringing East Pakistan and Balochistan in conversation when discussing Pakistan’s past is best brought out in Pervez Hoodbhoy’s (a noted academic and Professor of Physics at the Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad), comment:<sup>31</sup>

‘Because the lessons of East Pakistan have been lost, most Pakistanis cannot understand why Balochistan is such an angry province today.’

Yet concerns about maintaining the territorial integrity of Pakistan and to avoid Balochistan from seceding also makes one less critical of the army. In those instances, the example of 71 and its killings (not the rapes) become a note of caution of what can happen with Balochistan. Obviously there have been a quite few dissenters and critiques of the Pakistani army’s role in the 1971 war like Tariq Rahman, Colonel Nadir Ali, Ahmed Salim and others who either fought in the war or went to jail for protesting the war, who have never been silenced. But there is no public memory of 71 in Pakistan. Instead, 1971 stands in as an illustration of how India had ‘crushed’ Pakistan. Today, instead, 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 chatshows, novels, blogs, press columns and articles.

Overall, the demand for a memorial by *Projonmo Ekattor* is constrained by the non-narratability of this history of rape of 1971 based on different readings, contexts and configurations of the idea and past of Pakistan. In the context of an Islamophobic world the accounts of rape during 71 reiterate this problematic ‘barbaric’ image of Pakistan which South Asian scholars and activists want to resist. On the other hand, the forms through which

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<sup>31</sup> Husain et al. ‘What do school books in Bangladesh and Pakistan say about 1971 war?’

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 71 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 remains non-narrated. 71 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 criticising the Pakistani army and the absence of a memorial on 71 is caught up in the quagmire of these diverse dilemmas which is also linked to how 1947 is a problematic origin for both Pakistan and Bangladesh.

### **Pasts disavowed: 1947 and 1971**

The Bangladeshi historian Anisuzzaman argues that 71 is not a negation of 47, but in the interests of Bengali nationalism, today it has to be clear of its birth marks.<sup>32</sup> I have noted<sup>33</sup> the silence relating to Partition and 1947 in Dhaka on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence of India and Pakistan among the Bangladeshi left-liberal community. 15<sup>th</sup> August is today formally marked at the national level in Bangladesh as a day of mourning and August as a month of mourning to commemorate the assassination of Sheikh Mujib and his family. Alongside, it is also a day to celebrate the birthday of Khaleda Zia - the leader of the opposition party, Bangladesh National Party (BNP).

The silence of Bangladeshi state and civil society on 1947/Partition juxtaposed with their extensive memorialisation 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 (Samaddar 1995), as a large part of the Bengali Muslim middle classes and rich peasants swung towards Partition in the 1940s, leading to the creation of Pakistan. Both West and East Pakistan had a 'radical and unprecedented beginning'<sup>34</sup> based not on blood and soil but on the universalising promise of Islam. They were not forgetting or burying the past but focusing on forging new futures in 1947, based on what Devji refers to 'an anti-historical thinking.' In East Pakistan, a large part of the same classes swung dramatically

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<sup>32</sup> Anisuzzaman, *Identity, Religion and Recent History*.

<sup>33</sup> Mookherjee, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Devji, *The Muslim Zion*.

away from their Islamic identity shortly after,<sup>35</sup> 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 the ‘double burden’<sup>36</sup> for Bengali Muslims who are required to prove their genuine commitment to both the components of a hyphenated identity. 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 which did not fit into the dominant identity framework of either India or Pakistan.<sup>37</sup> 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’<sup>38</sup> by India, 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, Pakistani commentators<sup>39</sup> have suggested that ‘to understand Pakistan through 1947 is the wrong lens. The hurt that moves Pakistan is from a wound more recent – 1971.’ 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.<sup>40</sup> In fact Jalal<sup>41</sup> 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

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<sup>35</sup> Khan, ‘Class, Clientalism, and Communal Politics in Contemporary Bangladesh,’ 572.

<sup>36</sup> Siddiqi 2013

<sup>37</sup> For the distinctive cultural politics of Bengali Pakistanism, see Sartori, Abul Mansur Ahmed 2007; Bose, Recasting the region 2014

<sup>38</sup> Lubna Ejaz Naqvi, A True Perspective: Dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971. *Dispatch News Desk*. 14 December 2014 <https://dnd.com.pk/true-perspective-dismemberment-pakistan-1971/84333>

<sup>39</sup> Hussain, Khurram. To Understand Pakistan, 1947 Is The Wrong Lens. International opinion. *Outlook India*. <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/section/international/20> 9th November 2009.

<sup>40</sup> Devji, Muslim Zion

<sup>41</sup> Jalal, *Conjuring Pakistan*, 76

remembrance. The process of nationalizing Pakistan's past in school textbooks through the introduction of Pakistani studies has similarly been vexed by the twin issues of historic origins and national sacrifice.<sup>42</sup> 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 than 1947. The response of Bangladeshi historian Afsan Choudhury to the phrase '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.'<sup>43</sup>

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.'<sup>44</sup> 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 a lot of support in East Pakistan towards the formation of Pakistan in 1947, the process of sharpening of the distinct Bengali Muslim literary identity and cultural milieu in East Pakistan starts 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. 71 is where everything starts 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 in Pakistan.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, some have argued that instead of 1947, 1971 is one of the originary wounds for Pakistan. In short, for very contrasting reasons, 1971

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<sup>42</sup> Jalal, *Conjuring Pakistan*, 76-78.

<sup>43</sup> Personal Communication with author, July 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Gilmartin, *Pakistan*. *Journal of Asian Studies* 1998: 1068.

<sup>45</sup> Zakaria, 2017.

could be deemed to be a focal point for the existential entity of both Bangladesh and Pakistan and the problems of memorialising it in Pakistan becomes part of these contested narratives about 1947.

### **‘History does not Forgive’: The question of apology**

Ernest Renan,<sup>46</sup> 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.’ Yet, in Pakistan, through these intertwined and varied narrations of family and nation, one here gives oneself histories and identities through a non-storytelling which is not just about suffering.<sup>47</sup> This non-storytelling about 71 is distinct from Renan’s ideas of forgetting which he terms as a historical error and essential for the making 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 71 war and its consequences are palpable in contemporary Pakistan. A dissident Colonel Nadir Ali noted in his article on 71<sup>48</sup>:

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!

In 2002, President Pervaiz Musharraf of Pakistan during an official visit to Bangladesh to discuss expanding trade links with Bangladesh expressed ‘regret’: the first by a Pakistani military ruler. 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."<sup>49</sup>

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. Amidst

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<sup>46</sup> Renan, “What is a Nation,” 81.

<sup>47</sup> 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 anti-national as various caste and religious groups are unable to exert their individuality from their collective to contribute to the bigger idea of the nation. Devji, *Muslim Zion*, 118.

<sup>48</sup> Ali, Nadir. A Khaki dissident on 1971. *Viewpoint online*. Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> March 2011.

<http://www.viewpointonline.net/a-khaki-dissident-on-1971.html>

<sup>49</sup> McCarthy, Rory. Musharraf faces storm. *The Guardian*. 2002

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/jul/30/pakistan.bangladesh>



heavy security, Bangladeshi students and activists clashed with police in Dhaka and had planned a full day of nationwide strikes to demonstrate against the general's visit who was 'not welcome.' They 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 a means of legitimising and securing his dictatorial rule there which also sought to humanise him as a military general. The ambiguity in his note centres around the term excesses and magnanimity. It is not clear from this statement who he ascribes these excesses to. Also, by not burying the past Bangladeshis are blamed for lacking magnanimity and holding a deep 'grudge' towards Pakistanis. As a result, in 2012, when the Bangladeshi foreign secretary demanded an apology, Pakistan said it had "regretted in different forms and ... it was time to move on".<sup>50</sup> That Pakistan had 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:

The question of the fall of Dhaka continues to trouble the deepest recesses of our collective consciousness, fuelling anxieties about our future, obstructing our emergence into a tolerant and self-respecting society. The struggle for 'Pakistan' is not yet over.<sup>51</sup>

### **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 71 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 centre 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, memorialisation enables forgetfulness<sup>52</sup> and violence in society needs forgetting than forgiving.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The Apology Issue. *Dawn*. 10 November 2012. <https://www.dawn.com/news/763045>

<sup>51</sup> Amjad. 'We Owe an Apology'. 2012

<sup>52</sup> Forty, "Introduction"; Mookherjee, *Dead and their Double Duties*, 2007.

<sup>53</sup> Renan, "What is a Nation."

To this day the war of 1971 is rarely discussed in public in Pakistan and is still regarded as a tragic loss which 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 71 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 makes the history of rape of 1971 non-narratable and hence the memorialisation of it unfeasible.

Amjad's aforementioned quote about apology and the struggle for Pakistan's future however seems to be hinged on the wound of 1971. Hence *Projonmo Ekattor's* call for a memorial has a different temporal imperative. The call is also demanding the memorial be a symbolism of remorse, atonement and a structural apology from Pakistan for its role in 1971. This might trigger memories and questions of 71 in Pakistan as well as run the risk of sanitising and freezing this memory. For *Projonmo Ekattor* however, this memorial is the condition on which they position their forgiveness towards 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'<sup>54</sup> that can be implicit in the politics of offering an apology<sup>55</sup> members of *Projonmo Ekattor* (Generation 71 – children of all the martyred intellectuals) are also setting out the conditions in which the offering of apology and acceptance through forgiveness can occur. Hence here the 'architectonic desire' (Moffat, Introduction) 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 architecture which can address the shadowy pasts and histories of Pakistan.

## **Acknowledgements**

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<sup>55</sup> Mookherjee, *The Ethics of Apology*, 2009.

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