Modern Asian Studies **37,** 3 (2003), pp. 551–584. © 2003 Cambridge University Press
DOI:10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Printed in the United Kingdom

'I Am Not *a Refugee': Rethinking Partition Migration*

MD. MAHBUBAR RAHMAN and
WILLEM VAN SCHENDEL[1]

In the wake of Partition—the break-up of British India in 1947—millions of people moved across the new borders between Pakistan and India. Although much has been written about these 'Partition refugees,' a comprehensive picture remains elusive. This paper advocates a rethinking of the study of cross-border migration in South Asia. It argues especially for looking at categories of cross-border migrants that have so far been ignored, and for employing a more comparative approach. In the first section, we look at conventions that have shaped the literature on Partition refugees. The second section explores some patterns of post-Partition migration to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), and the third uses oral evidence from cross-border migrants to present a number of case studies. The concluding section underlines that these cases demonstrate the need for re-examining historiographical conventions regarding Partition migration; it also makes a plea for linking South Asia's partition to broader debates about partition as a political 'solution' to ethnic strife.

I. Partition and its Refugees

Over half a century after Partition, our understanding of it is still boxed in by a number of set approaches. First, most writers tend to present Partition as *a unique event*, to be understood in terms of political processes taking place in late-colonial India. But how unique was it? What was unique about it? What parallels does it have with other

[1] Department of History, Rajshahi University, Bangladesh; and International Institute of Social History/University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands (vanschendel@pscw.uva.nl). Research for this paper was supported by a grant from the International Institute of Social History. This paper was originally presented at the Conference on Displaced People in South Asia, Chennai (India), March 2–4, 2001, under the Indo-Dutch Programme on Alternatives in Development (IDPAD). We thank an anonymous reader for detailed comments on an earlier draft.

0026–749X/03/$7.50+$0.10

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

cases of twentieth-century 'state divorce,' e.g. Ireland, the Ottoman Empire, Korea, Germany, Cyprus, Palestine/Israel, Yugoslavia, or Ethiopia? These questions have rarely been addressed till recently, e.g. in the work of Kumar, Iveković and Singh, who seek to develop a comparative perspective and are concerned with wider questions of social theory—especially regarding the causes and long-term effects of state fragmentation.[2]

Second, writings on Partition have focused on *Partition-in-the-West*,[3] notably the province of Punjab. In this way, Punjab has come to figure as a model of sorts, a shorthand for what Partition entailed, the prime case from which to draw general conclusions.[4] It is helpful for students of Partition to take a more serious look at how events unfolded in other parts of the subcontinent, and to reconsider the case of Punjab.[5] This is already happening, with new scholarship becoming available on Bengal,[6] but we still know little about other

[2] Radha Kumar, 'The Troubled History of Partition,' *Foreign Affairs*, 76:1 (1997), 23–34; Radha Kumar, 'Settling Partition Hostilities: Lessons Learnt, the Options Ahead,' *Transeuropéennes*, no. 19/20 (2000–2001), 9–28; Rada Iveković, 'From the Nation to Partition, Through Partition to the Nation: Readings,' *Transeuropéennes*, no. 19/20 (2000–2001), 201–25; Gurharpal Singh, 'The Partition of India in a Comparative Perspective: A Long-term View,' in: Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh (eds), *Region and Partition: Bengal, Punjab and the Partition of the Subcontinent* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 95–115. See also Thomas G. Fraser, *Partition in Ireland, India and Palestine: Theory and Practice* (London: Macmillan, 1984). For a discussion of a different strand of 'partition theory,' see Nicholas Sambanis, *Ethnic Partition as a Solution to Ethnic War: An Empirical Critique of the Theoretical Literature* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1999).

[3] In August 1947, two international borders were drawn through British India. The first separated West Pakistan (now: Pakistan) from India and the other, some 1500 km to the east, separated East Pakistan (now: Bangladesh) from India. In this paper, we refer to these as Partition-in-the-West and Partition-in-the-East, respectively.

[4] For many writers on Partition, the Punjab bias needs no justification. It is rare for authors to recognize it as a problem. However, Menon and Bhasin highlight the ambiguity in their path-breaking study of women's experiences during Partition: 'The choice of Punjab was obvious for personal and historical reasons both, and because it had been the site of maximum relocation and rehabilitation.' In a footnote they add that they had originally wished to include West and East Bengal but after initial interviewing and discussion they realised that 'the Bengal experience was so different that it merited a separate study.' For this reason their book covers only Punjab. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998), 12, 26n.

[5] For a recent overview of Partition historiography, see Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 1–28.

[6] On Bengal, see Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and her 'The Fash-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

provinces directly involved, e.g. Bihar, Assam, Sindh, or Rajasthan.[7]

A third problem is that in the postcolonial division of academic labour, Partition has often been treated as *a disciplinary divide*. Many historians have taken it as the final chord in the symphony of colonialism, the denouement of the nationalist movement, the end of an era. For some, it also marks the boundary of the historian's domain. Countless books have taken August 1947 as a 'natural' closing date; they have treated the formal transfer of state power as the clearcut end of a period and, in a sense, history. In similar vein, other social scientists have taken Partition as the beginning of their domain, the starting shot for economic, political, social and cultural analyses of contemporary South Asia. This division of academic labour was not a serious problem in the early postcolonial years but gradually a worrying chasm has opened up. As most social scientists kept on focusing on the present and many historians looked no further than the 1940s, the study of social change in the intervening decades came to be increasingly neglected. Today, the third quarter of the twentieth century is perhaps the least studied in the modern history of South Asia, a state of affairs that obstructs our understanding of long-term social change in the subcontinent.

In addition to the disciplinary gap, however, another academic gap has hampered the development of new insights. This is *the partitioning of academic communities* between the study of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Scholars in the subcontinent found themselves in one of these states and took part in the various discussions that developed in the reconstituted scholarly communities of which they were members. These communities were both influenced by and very active in creat-

ioning of a Frontier: The Radcliffe Line and Bengal's Border Landscape, 1947–52,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 33:1 (1999), 185–242; Ranabir Samaddar (ed.), *Reflections on Partition in the East* (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1997); Prafulla K. Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men: The Refugees and the Left Political Syndrome in West Bengal* (Calcutta: Naya Udyog, 1999); Willem van Schendel, 'Working Through Partition: Making a Living in the Bengal Borderlands,' *International Review of Social History*, 46 (2001), 393–421.

[7] On Bihar, see Papiya Ghosh, 'Partition's Biharis,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 17:2 (1997), 21–34. On Assam, see Sanjib Baruah, *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999). On Sindh, see Sarah Ansari, 'The Movement of Indian Muslims to West Pakistan after 1947: Partition-Related Migration and its Consequences for the Pakistani Province of Sind,' in: Judith M. Brown and Rosemary Foot (eds), *Migration: The Asian Experience* (Oxford: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 149–68. On Rajasthan, see Ian Copland, 'The Further Shores of Partition: Ethnic Cleansing in Rajasthan, 1947,' *Past and Present*, 160 (1998), 203–39.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ing new discourses regarding nation, citizenship, state and development that differed considerably between India, Pakistan and (later) Bangladesh. Strained relations between these countries have seriously hampered free academic exchange and dialogue ever since. The 'academic partition' also extended to foreign scholars studying the post-Partition subcontinent. As any international conference on South Asian studies will demonstrate, most opted for the study of just one successor society, and few indeed developed a research interest and expertise across Partition boundaries.

The study of Partition itself has been one of the principal victims. Over the past half-century, three rival nationalisms have fashioned and refined their own interpretations of Partition, and these are not compatible.[8] On the contrary, they have powered the confrontational politics that continue to dominate interstate relations in South Asia despite many attempts at reconciliation. Few historians or social scientists have been able to stay aloof from the dominant interpretation in their own country and they have, often unwittingly because of limited contact with their colleagues across the border, contributed to a veritable epistemological and historiographical minefield. It will take much intellectual effort to close this gap: it requires sustained dialogue, revisiting the most emotionally charged events, the unlearning of national reflexes, and the joint reworking of by now long-standing academic traditions. The effort is both urgent and important. Without it, the conceptual and political minefield that Partition represents in South Asian public and academic discourses will only become more convoluted.

The Study of Partition Refugees

Although the literature on Partition refugees is large, it still falls short of providing a comprehensive view of the spectacular population movements across Partition borders. Particular images of refugees have become crucial elements in the construction of Indian and Pakistani national ideologies, and the literature has reflected, indeed overexposed, these time and time again. Others, however, have hardly been explored.

[8] To give but a single example of this continual fashioning and refinement: over several years a prominent weekly in Bangladesh, *Holiday*, has been featuring a series of articles, entitled 'Mountbatten's India Bias,' that by mid 2002 had run to over 230 weekly instalments.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Let us consider the literature on Partition-in-the-East. In Eastern India, unlike in East Pakistan, the refugee became an important icon of national consciousness. There is a fairly large and varied literature on refugees who came into Eastern India, but there is an almost complete absence of writings on the large reverse flow of refugees into East Pakistan. It is not easy to explain this contrast, although three factors no doubt played an important role: the traditions of literacy and higher education that a group of early refugees to India brought with them, the Pakistan state's focus on refugees to West Pakistan, and a disinterest in the refugee problematique in post-1971 Bangladesh.[9]

Writings on refugees from East Pakistan to Eastern India are again focused in particular ways. First of all, they reveal an almost exclusive interest in refugees to the state of West Bengal.[10] Within that state, the focus is strongly on metropolitan Calcutta and on refugee camps. Most studies are concerned with the relationship between refugees and the state, both in terms of state policies toward the newcomers and in terms of the effects that refugees had on politics in Calcutta and the rest of West Bengal.[11] A second strand in

[9] Refugees to East Pakistan have been almost invisible in recent accounts published in both Bangladesh and Pakistan. For example, there is not even an entry on them in the indexes of the three-volume *History of Bangladesh*, published from Dhaka, or *The Journey to Pakistan*, published from Islamabad. Sirajul Islam (ed.), *History of Bangladesh, 1704–1971* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1992), 3 Vols; *The Journey to Pakistan: A Documentation on Refugees of 1947* (Islamabad: National Documentation Centre, 1993).

[10] For a rare study of refugees from East Pakistan in another part of northeastern India, see Gayatri Bhattacharyya, *Refugee Rehabilitation and its Impact on Tripura's Economy* (New Delhi/Guwahati: Omsons Publications, 1988). On East Pakistani refugees in Bihar, see Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff, 'Futurising the Past: Partition Memory, Refugee Identity and Social Struggle in Champaran, Bihar,' *South Asia Refugee Watch*, 2:2 (December 2000), 74–93. On East Pakistani refugees in the Andaman Islands, see Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, 'Exiled to the Andamans: The Refugees from East Pakistan,' in: Pradip Kumar Bose (ed.), *Refugees in West Bengal: Institutional Processes and Contested Identities* (Calcutta: Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, 2000), 130–41.

[11] E.g. Kanti B. Pakrasi, *The Uprooted: A Sociological Study of the Refugees of West Bengal, India* (Calcutta: Editions Indian, 1971); Chakrabarti, *Marginal Men;* Gyanesh Kudaisya, 'Divided Landscapes, Fragmented Identities: East Bengal Refugees and their Rehabilitation in India, 1947–79,' in: D.A. Low and Howard Brasted (eds), *Freedom, Trauma, Continuities: Northern India and Independence* (New Delhi, etc.: Sage Publications, 1998), 105–31; Ross Mallick, 'Refugee Settlement in Forest Reserves: West Bengal Policy Reversal and the Marichjhapi Massacre,' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 58: 1 (1999), 104–25; Abhijit Dasgupta, 'The Politics of Agitation and Confession: Displaced Bengalis in West Bengal,' in: Sanjay K. Roy (ed.), *Refugees and Human Rights* (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2001), 95–129.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

these writings brings out the voices and identities of a particular group of refugees to West Bengal, the Bengali *bhodrolok* (the educated upper and middle class), with their often traumatic and nostalgic memories of a lost homeland in East Bengal.[12]

Concentrating on refugees within these specific parameters, scholars have presented us with a partial picture of post-Partition population movements. Additional research is needed before we can say anything in general about Partition refugees in eastern South Asia, and such research is likely to focus on those beyond the compass of conventional refugee studies in this region. First, there were many who went from East Pakistan to parts of India other than West Bengal—greater Assam and Tripura, but also Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, the Andaman Islands and other parts. Second, there was the very numerous group of those who moved from different parts of India to East Pakistan.[13] Within each of these categories, as well as within the conventional category of migrants from East Pakistan to West Bengal, more research could be focused on refugees who settled in rural areas, on those who never became beneficiaries of govern-

[12] E.g. Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Remembered Villages: Representation of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of the Partition,' *Economic and Political Weekly* (10 August 1996), 2143–51; Gautam Ghosh, '"God is a Refugee": Nationalism, Morality and History in the 1947 Partition of India,' *Social Analysis*, 42:1 (1998), 33–62; Manas Ray, 'Growing Up Refugee: On Memory and Locality,' *Hindi: Language, Discourse, Writing*, 1:3–4 (October 2000–March 2001), 148–98. For the beginnings of similar research on refugee memories and identities in East Pakistan/Bangladesh, see Niaz Zaman, *A Divided Legacy: The Partition in Selected Novels of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1999); Tazeen M. Murshid, 'Nations Imagined and Fragmented: Bengal,' in: Willem van Schendel and Erik Jan Zürcher (eds), *Identity Politics in Central Asia and the Muslim World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 85–105; and Meghna Guhathakurta, 'Families, Displacement,' *Transeuropéennes*, no. 19/20 (2000–2001), 131–42.

[13] The total number of cross-border migrants is not even approximately known, and all existing figures, which run into many hundreds of thousands either way, should be considered as unreliable. On the one hand, there was under-enumeration because neither the Indian nor the Pakistani authorities had the capacity to monitor cross-border population movements. For example, the Government of East Bengal (East Pakistan) did not maintain any figures till April 1950. At the same time, however, political pressures in both countries led to an inflation of figures on refugees. In an attempt to overcome this, an agreement was reached to set up 'a machinery for joint check of migrant traffic on the East Bengal–West Bengal Border' in August 1950. However, the two governments soon fell out over this system, which anyway covered only rail passengers at four border stations (Darshana and Banpur, Benapol and Bongaon), and they continued to publish conflicting figures. See e.g. Government of East Bengal, Home (Political) Department, B. Proceedings (CR 3A–12/53) of July 1954. These and other records mentioned in this paper can be found in the National Archives of Bangladesh, Dhaka.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ment 'rehabilitation programmes,' on those whose class background was not *bhodrolok*, on those who migrated but later returned home, and on those who were not Bengalis. This paper presents some material on a particular sub-group of Partition migrants that has not received much attention so far: people who moved from India and settled in the borderland of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).[14]

II. Patterns of Migration to East Pakistan

Partition-in-the-East meant the imposition of a completely new international border in order to separate a territory known as East Pakistan from a territory known as India.[15] For the new states, establishing the border on the ground was as much a challenge as regulating the movement of people across it. The attitude of India and Pakistan regarding cross-border traffic in this region differed sharply from their attitude regarding the partitioned territories in the west. For over five years, neither state required cross-border travellers in the east to have documents proving their citizenship. It was not until October 1952 that passports and visas were introduced, and even then, few travellers used them. As a result, much cross-border travel, including settler migration, completely escaped the notice of the new states and was never systematically recorded.[16]

[14] According to Feldman, such neglect is not accidental because in both Indian and Pakistani narratives of Partition, the East Bengal/East Pakistani voice is erased: 'East Bental serves as a metaphor for a place that, like women, is constructed as other, invisible, different, and silenced in the real politics of the time.' This exclusion from the symbolic representation of Partition should be challenged, she argues, because the East Bengal experience can recast discussions of Partition in much the same way that feminist debates have exposed the contradictions and ambivalences inherent in received notions of e.g. nationalism. Shelley Feldman, 'Feminist Interruptions: The Silence of East Bengal in the Story of Partition,' *Interventions—International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 1:2 (1999), 169.

[15] In 1947, Bengal was partitioned. Its eastern part joined Pakistan as its eastern wing under the name 'East Bengal,' its western part joined India under the name 'West Bengal.' In 1954, East Bengal was officially renamed East Pakistan. In 1971 this area seceded from Pakistan to become the independent state of Bangladesh. In other words, the terms East Bengal, East Pakistan and Bangladesh all refer to the same territory.

[16] 'They shook violently the roots of the land,
And people were flung about who knows where,
None kept account of who perished who survived.'
From the poem 'Divided Bengal'; Taslima Nasreen, *Behula eka bhasiyechilo bhela* (1993), translated by Subhoranjan Dasgupta in Samaddar (ed.), *Reflections*, 290.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This paper explores what ways of categorizing cross-border migration might be useful for initiating further research. Categorization can be done according to various criteria, e.g. time of arrival, causes of dislocation, class, gender, religion, ethnic or language group, or post-arrival life course. In this paper we follow the categorization suggested by migrants whom we interviewed, and we group them by their reasons for crossing the border. The first thing that needs to be noted, however, is that it would be confusing to apply the term 'refugees' to all of them. The highly charged images of escape from life-threatening violence and insecurity that are so strongly associated with Partition refugees do not really apply to the first two of the categories below.

First there were *cross-border settlers* whose moves had little to do with the new border. The largest group among these was that of new brides joining their husbands in a nearby village that happened to lie across the border—the new border cut across well-established regions of marriage exchange.[17] Others who fell into this category were shifting cultivators who crossed the border in the course of their usual cultivation practices. Finally, parents often continued to send their children to schools and colleges in nearby towns even though these were now just across the border. Often these students would eventually settle in the country of their schooling.

Second, there were *cross-border labour migrants*. These moved across the border to be nearer their jobs, or they moved to avail themselves of new job opportunities that opened up after Partition. The near-disappearance of certain occupational groups from one side of the border attracted others who crossed the border to take their place. For example, when the members of a Hindu subcaste specializing in commercial vegetable cultivation moved a few kilometres from East Pakistan to West Bengal, they changed places with Muslims from West Bengal who moved a few kilometres to East Pakistan and learned the skills of vegetable cultivation and marketing.[18] Similarly,

[17] This pattern of migration was strongly gendered. In most of the borderland, village communities are dominated by landowning males who stay with their land and marry wives from nearby villages. Only occasionally do husbands settle in their wives' villages. For more details on the gendered nature of village exogamy in Bengal, see Md. Mahbubar Rahman and Willem van Schendel, 'Gender and the Inheritance of Land: Living Law in Bangladesh,' in: Jan Breman, Peter Kloos and Ashwani Saith (eds), *The Village in Asia Revisited* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 237–76.

[18] For more on this exchange, see Willem van Schendel, *Reviving a Rural Industry: Silk Producers and Officials in India and Bangladesh, 1880s to 1980s* (Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1995), 105–14.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the flight of many Hindus who had been holding office jobs in towns that fell to Pakistan created a huge demand for clerical and managerial skills that attracted educated Muslims from across the border in India. The composition of the category of cross-border labour migrants changed dramatically over the years. Increasingly, East Pakistan/Bangladesh became a pool of cheap labour for Indian employers, and millions of Bangladeshi labour migrants crossed the border into India.

Third, we come to *border refugees*, people who left their side of the borderland out of fear, or because of discrimination or persecution. Many of these borderlanders settled not far from their old home, in a neighbouring district that was now in the other country. And unlike many refugees who moved from more 'interior' places to cross the border and settle down far from it, border refugees often maintained contacts across the border, with relatives and friends who stayed back.

Fourth, there were *refugees from the interior*. Together with the border refugees, these people most closely resembled the archetypal refugee of the literature, also encountered under a host of other terms: evacuee, displaced person, *bastutyagi, bastuhara, shoronarthi*, *Mohajir*, and so on. They usually settled in places where they had no previous contacts and where they were easily distinguished by their speech and conduct. In the literature, the dominant image of the refugee is that of the Bengali Hindu fleeing from East Pakistan to Calcutta in West Bengal. We need to broaden this image to include many other groups, particularly Muslims fleeing from Assam, Tripura, West Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and finding a new home in East Pakistan; and Hajongs, Chakmas, Garos, Bawms, Santhals and many other non-Bengali groups who left East Pakistan for India.

And finally, there were the *nationalists*, people who chose to join the new nation out of idealism. For example, North Indians moved to East Pakistan to join their Muslim brothers and sisters and to contribute to the welfare of the new homeland, Pakistan.

As we shall see, these categories were not mutually exclusive. The decision to cross the border was often based on a mix of calculated self-interest, idealism, fear and coercion. For example, just before Partition certain state employees were given the option to join either the Pakistani or the Indian state bureaucracy. '*Optees*' who chose to join the other state had to migrate and were given a new job across the border. They could be categorized variously as labour migrants, as refugees, or as nationalists.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In the study of cross-border settlement, it is essential to recognize that there were different groups with different motives, different histories of settlement, and different experiences of integration into their new social environment. The dominant view of post-Partition population movement has been too restricted, privileging the experiences and sensibilities of a particular subset of refugees and omitting those of many others. This has contributed to the impression that the migration that really mattered was that of *bhodrolok* refugees from East Pakistan to West Bengal.

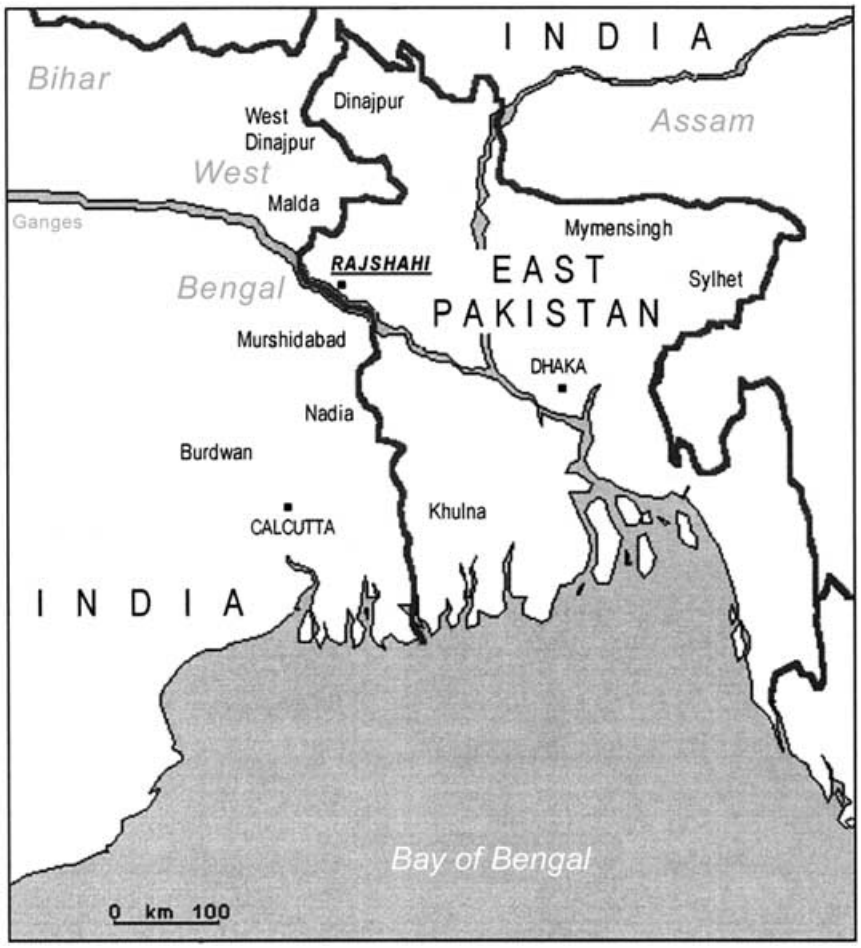
III. Settling in the Borderland

In order to begin broadening our understanding of cross-border migration, we explored the experiences of men and women who, in the wake of Partition, settled in a border district of East Pakistan (Bangladesh). We held extensive interviews in Rajshahi town and neighbouring villages. Rajshahi, the capital of a district with the same name, is a sizeable town in the far west of Bangladesh, located on the northern bank of the river Ganges (Padma), which here forms the border between India and Bangladesh (see Map 1).[19] After Partition, Rajshahi, like so many border towns, became a town of immigrants.[20] The backgrounds of the immigrants we interviewed varied considerably. Some had been wealthy and prominent before migration, others had been poor. Some were from neighbouring West Bengal and spoke Bengali (which was to become the national language of Bangladesh), others came from areas much further to the West (notably Uttar Pradesh and Bihar) and for them Bengali was a foreign language. Some had a history of displacement and resettlement before they finally reached East Pakistan, others went straight from their ancestral home in India to Rajshahi. Some migrated immediately after 15 August 1947, others did not cross the border till almost twenty years later. And finally, some cut all connections with India whereas others retained lively contacts there. In fact, those who settled in this borderland shared little more than their experiences of cross-border displacement and resettlement in the

[19] Rajshahi district shares an international border with three districts of the Indian state of West Bengal: Murshidabad, Malda and West Dinajpur.

[20] We use the term immigrants because some cross-border settlers and labour migrants were very emphatic in their rejection of the term refugee, which is commonly used when referring to post-Partition cross-border migrants. See Choudhuri Foyzar Rahman, quoted below.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press



Map 1. Rajshahi town and surroundings, after 1947

Rajshahi area. Nevertheless, they all participated in the process of cross-border settlement that resulted from Partition and profoundly shaped East Pakistan society.

As we have seen, population movements across the Partition border were complex and poorly monitored. The available evidence suggests that such movements also differed considerably in various sections of the 4,000 km long border between East Pakistan and India.[21] In the border areas close to Rajshahi, national and local fac-

[21] For example, the summer of 1951 saw a large influx of refugees from Assam into the East Pakistan districts of Sylhet and Mymensingh but this period is not connected with any increase of immigration into Rajshahi. See 'Reported influx of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tors combined to produce an overall pattern in which certain years stand out as turning points.[22] Obviously, the first of these is 1947, when a first wave of migrants entered East Pakistan. In 1950, riots in several parts of East Pakistan and India led to a new influx of settlers. The next marker occurred in 1952 when passports and visas were introduced, prompting some newly arrived settlers to return to India, and inducing some Muslims in India to cross the border and become Pakistanis. A one-day riot in Rajshahi town in 1962 was followed by similar riots across the border, leading to a renewed exchange of population. And finally, in 1965, war broke out between India and Pakistan, after which immigration into East Pakistan declined sharply. In effect, the different turning points also brought different groups of displaced people to Rajshahi. We present four important groups of cross-border migrants that have so far remained largely beyond the ken of refugee studies.

1. Instant Displacement: the 'Optees'

The first settlers to arrive in the borderland, usually within days of Partition (14/15 August 1947), were employees of the colonial state who, in the previous months, had been given the option to join the nascent bureaucracy of Pakistan.[23] These were known as 'optee Government servants' or 'optees'. In the words of one of them:

'Our migration had nothing to do with riots or life threats; we migrated simply because of the job. The job was here, so we had to come here and settle.' Often they came alone, leaving their families back home: 'You should realise that Partition happened all of a sudden, and people were not

refugees from Assam' (Government of East Bengal, Home (Political) Department, B. Proceedings (CR 2A1–1/51) of March 1954.

[22] In this paper we look at the migrants coming into East Pakistan. Simultaneously at least as many, if not more, people were moving in the opposite direction, leaving East Pakistan to settle in India. As we shall see, the two streams did not pass as ships in the night but often touched and influenced each other profoundly.

[23] Only certain categories of state employees were given the choice to opt for employment in either Pakistan or India, notably officials of certain grades in the central services (e.g. railways, postal services, customs, income tax). There was a separate scheme for officials in the provincial services of Bengal (e.g. the jute department) who could opt for employment in either East or West Bengal. Special regulations were made for the exchange of government servants between Assam and East Bengal but people who served in the provincial services of Bihar, the United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh), or Burma were not given a choice.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

well informed. Many thought that it was a temporary thing and that one day the two countries would be one again.'[24]

The confusion surrounding the break-up is epitomized by the fate of those who opted to stay home but were in fact forced to move. This happened to optees for Pakistan in the Muslim-majority district of Murshidabad. These people were confident that their district would be incorporated into Pakistan and they opted for that country in order to be able to stay. But a few days after Partition they realized that Murshidabad had been awarded to India and that their jobs had moved to Pakistan. All Pakistan optees in Murshidabad were then swapped against India optees from the Hindu-majority district of Khulna, which unexpectedly had been awarded to Pakistan. Suddenly, the administration of Khulna district was taken over by officials from Murshidabad, and vice versa. Subsequently, many displaced state employees from Murshidabad tried to settle in Rajshahi because this town is on the border with Murshidabad: 'You can see it from the river bank . . . and there were many companions from Murshidabad here.'[25]

Optees usually kept strong links with their relatives and friends back home in India and for many of them, opting for Pakistan was a calculated strategy: 'If danger threatened on this side [= Pakistan], I could go there [= India], and if there was danger over there, they could come over here.'[26] Since the border was open, they spent their holidays back home and continued to own land there. Travelling by train became more restricted when customs services, mostly manned by non-Bengalis, were introduced at the border stations—but although there was 'heavy checking of [Hindu] emigrants,' Pakistan government officials could pass unmolested. Through their continuing contacts, some optees became channels of further migration from their home villages in India to East Pakistan.

[24] Interviews with Abdul Alim and Md. Hamidul Hok, Rajshahi, 1999. All quotes from interviews are our translations from the Bengali originals.

[25] Choudhuri Foyzar Rahman (interview, Rajshahi, 1998). Government employees from other districts also opted for Pakistan on the assumption that their district would be part of that country, e.g. Md. Talebur Ali, who had a job in Calcutta but whose home village was in Nadia district: 'My district was Nadia. People thought it would go to Pakistan. It was common knowledge that Nadia, Malda and Murshidabad would become part of Pakistan. I opted for Pakistan not because I dreamed of being a true native of Pakistan but because my home was going to be in that country. You had to make your option known about six months before Partition. When it transpired that my area was included in India, it was too late: I had to join my new job.' (Interview, Rajshahi, 1999).

[26] *Ibid.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Generally, optees did not face serious problems beyond initial inconveniences and disappointments.[27] Finding a place to stay could be difficult, and often it took several months for the first salary to come through. Some optees could not be provided with a job commensurate to the one they had had back in India, and their income dropped sharply.[28] But once these initial setbacks had been overcome, optees and their families could look forward to an easy integration into the Pakistani bureaucratic elite. Although many rued the loss of their ancestral environment, most acknowledged that they had made good: Partition had provided them with career opportunities that would have been hard to come by if India had not been partitioned. They were certainly displaced by Partition but they did not consider themselves ordinary refugees: 'I am *not* a refugee but an optee. Refugees are those who had to run away from there for some reason.'[29] Optees stressed the fact that they came by their own

[27] Mrs. Ali, the wife of Md. Talebur Ali, persuaded her husband to go to Rajshahi rather than Dhaka, the place where he had been posted. She argued: 'Dhaka is very far. You have to go by boat. Let's go to Rajshahi instead. I have relatives there and it is close to our home [in Nadia district, West Bengal] and Calcutta.' So they went to the railway station by palanquin, took the train to Ishurdi (Pakistan) and from there to Rajshahi where they arrived on 22 August 1947. Seeing that there was only a horse cart (*tomtom*) to take them from the railway station, Mrs Ali started crying and exclaimed: 'What sort of a place have we come to . . .? An uncivilised, backward place!' (*ibid.*).

Others were so disappointed that they returned to India. This happened with an uncle and cousin of Hasan Azizul Huq who opted for Pakistan from Burdwan (India): 'If they had stayed, they might have become really big officers in Pakistan. But surprisingly they did not stay long: one for six months, the other for a year. My cousin was transferred to Khulna, and returned home from there. And my uncle got very annoyed and irritated within three months, and returned to our village home [in India]. They just disliked staying here.' (Hasan Azizul Huq (interview, Rajshahi, 1999)).

[28] It was not always possible to match vacancies and incoming staff, partly because of retrenchment in various government departments, and this resulted in optees either ending up in 'posts which in normal circumstances their qualification could not obtain,' or remaining 'unabsorbable' for a long time. The release of security deposits and provident fund dues of optees would remain a contentious issue between India and Pakistan for years to come. See Report of the Subordinate Personnel Re-organisation Board (1949) (Government of East Bengal, Public Relations Department, B Proceedings (P&D1R–24/49) of June 1950); 'Absorption of officers and men of the Assam Police who opted for Pakistan in the East Bengal Police' (Government of East Bengal, Home (Police) Department, B. Proceedings (P3P–112/48) of September 1949); and 'Decisions taken at the 26th Chief Secretaries' Conference held at Shillong from 6th November to 8th November 1952' (Government of East Bengal, Home (Political) Department, B. Proceedings (CR 3C2–2/52) of April 1954).

[29] Choudhuri Foyzar Rahman (interview, Rajshahi, 1998).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

volition. In this they did not differ much from the larger group of labour migrants of which they were a state-assisted subset.

2. *Displacement by Education*

A second group of immigrants consisted of teenagers. The border separated many schools and colleges from their erstwhile catchment areas. Despite the imposition of an international border, people continued to send their children to schools in what was now a foreign country. A good case is provided by Hasan Azizul Huq, a youngster who belonged to an influential and well-established family in rural Burdwan (India) and who completed high school in 1954.

> And then I came to East Pakistan. Why? I think you can only say for personal or family reasons . . . the reason for my moving here was almost accidental. My sister's husband taught English at [a college in East Pakistan. He had taken the job] right after Partition when you did not have passports or visas. People cannot look very far into the future and he considered it one and the same country . . . They wrote: 'Let him come stay with us.' That is why I came. Had the letter arrived one week later, I probably would already have entered Burdwan Raj College—I do not think I would have come then. And really, when I came to East Pakistan, I had no thought at all of staying here. There was no reason to do so. Because we had a huge family . . . the land produced enough. So why go? Why leave? . . . And let me be clear, after 1947 the Muslims of that area did not experience any real trouble. Our family was an influential family.

So he took an Indian passport, went over to East Pakistan, and studied up to the M.A. degree at Rajshahi University. During these years, he visited his home three times a year.

> Then, after getting my degree, I went back home [to India] . . . My deepest wish was to become a teacher so I became a teacher at the village high school. I taught there for three months. Then I got into trouble. The school inspector asked:
> 'Where did this young man come from?'
> 'He graduated from Rajshahi University.'
> 'So what about his citizenship? It can't be Indian . . . How can you teach at the school, since you're not an Indian?'
> 'But I have an Indian passport! Are there any rules that a degree from Rajshahi University is not recognised in India?'
> 'No, that is not the problem.'
> 'So then you don't have any grounds for objection.' But still, after three months, I had to leave that job.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Shortly afterwards he got a job in a college in Rajshahi and settled there. Together with his sister and another brother, he persuaded his parents to join them in East Pakistan. None of his uncles or cousins came. 'And I'll tell you that some of them were at one time very keen supporters of Pakistan, and were part of the struggle for Pakistan . . . but it never entered their heads that they might leave their homes to *live* in Pakistan.'

It was not only that schooling in East Pakistan made it difficult to return to India but also that the labour market for university graduates was much better in East Pakistan at the time. As a result, many young Indian citizens who studied in East Pakistan eventually settled there and became Pakistani citizens.

3. Violent Expulsion: Riot Refugees

Even though popular images equate post-Partition migrants with victims of violence, the actual experiences of this group of migrants are only slightly better known than the two previous ones. Throughout the period between 1947 and 1965, victims of mass violence in India were arriving in Rajshahi. Episodes of ethnic cleansing ('communal riots') occurred frequently in both India and East Pakistan. Some of these riots were strictly local affairs, others spread over entire districts. Sometimes widespread disturbances occurred simultaneously in both countries. In Rajshahi, Muslim riot refugees arrived in particularly large numbers in the years 1950 and 1962, in the wake of large-scale disturbances in neighbouring West Bengal that coincided with similarly violent disturbances in East Pakistan. But sometimes refugees would appear as a result of terror in India that had nothing to do with events in East Pakistan.[30]

It is hazardous to generalize about these riot refugees. They came from many backgrounds, brought very different mixes of social, cultural and monetary capital, and followed diverse social trajectories in East Pakistan. The mix of people in consecutive refugee streams also differed. In this section, we examine the case of those who arrived in 1950. We give only two examples, the first presenting the

[30] One example was a wealthy family from far-off Uttar Pradesh who were forced to flee in 1954 and arrived in East Pakistan by airplane, carrying Rs. 200,000, five kg of gold and seven kg of silver. They settled in Rajshahi because they had previous business contacts there, and proceeded to set up a flourishing cosmetics industry (Nighat Parvin, interview, Rajshahi, 1999).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

case of non-Bengalis, a large group of refugees arriving in Rajshahi in 1950, and the second the case of displaced Bengalis.

Displaced non-Bengalis. The non-Bengalis who fled to Rajshahi in 1950 consisted of four groups: Urdu-speaking people from Calcutta, Nawabi families from Murshidabad, Urdu-speaking people from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and *Khotai* from West Bengal who spoke both Urdu and Bengali.[31] The case of Mokbul Ahmed is similar to many others, both in his experience of sudden devastating violence and in that of multiple displacements. In 1946 Mokbul, then a twelve-year-old, was living in a village in Bihar where his mother took care of the family land while his father earned income from a wholesale business and a stationery shop in a Calcutta suburb.

> It was a custom of our land that Muslims would not work on the land, and even a household's cows were not kept at home. Hindus would keep them and give us the milk, curd, *ghee*, etc., and they also worked the land as sharecroppers. And there was another Nawabi custom that Hindus, old and young, had to stand up in the presence of a Muslim. They had no permission to sit down.[32]

In 1946 these social arrangements, which in many ways mirrored *zamindari*–tenant relations in eastern Bengal, suddenly crumbled as crowds of people shouting '*Jai Hind*' began killing Muslims and driving them from the area.[33] Thousands of Muslim survivors gathered

[31] Actually, some of these immigrants spoke Urdu, others Hindi or Bhojpuri. In East Pakistan, state classifications of these immigrants tended to collapse these diverse linguistic and regional groups into a single category: they were all lumped together as Urdu-speakers whom the Pakistan state identified as 'Mohajirs' (after the companions of the Prophet Mohammad during his flight to Medina (the *Hijrat*)). After elections in 1954 in which many of them sided with the Pakistan state elite against the regional forces that drew the support of most Bengalis, they became known as 'Biharis.' This term was later used by the Bangladesh government to indicate those who sided with the Pakistan army in the war of Independence of 1971 and refused to accept Bangladeshi citizenship. These people termed themselves 'Stranded Pakistanis.' Many of those who entered East Pakistan as 'Mohajirs' and their descendants had meanwhile learned Bengali and integrated into the Bengali majority. This was easiest for the *khotai* (or *khottai*) who originated from the western border areas of the West Bengal districts of Murshidabad and Malda; they were bilingual but spoke a Hindi/Urdu dialect at home.

[32] Mokbul Ahmed (interview, Rajshahi, 1999). For more on Muslims in Bihar, see Papiya Ghosh, 'Partition's Biharis,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* 17:2 (1997), 21–34.

[33] Not surprisingly, these displaced landlord families share memories of violence, an emotional attachment to the Lost Home, and a nostalgia for past prestige that are remarkably similar to those of landed Hindu *bhodrolok* who had to flee East Bengal after their tenants turned against them after Partition. More generally, such emotions have been described for many deposed and exiled gentries.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in the open fields, trying to protect themselves and sometimes attacking Hindu villages in search of food. Eventually some of them, including Mokbul's family, managed to escape to Calcutta. But in early 1950 riots broke out in Calcutta and they had to flee again.

> We were crying as we went. When we left . . . the local people took away the few bags we had, saying: 'You'll go to Pakistan empty-handed. You leave our country's property here!' . . . So they took everything from us. I remember very clearly that my grandmother had a hundred-rupee note hidden between the betel leaves that she had put into her mouth. In that way she saved it. And what pride was left to us was wiped away at [the last railway station in India]: we arrived penniless on a rail bogie in Ishurdi [in East Pakistan]. We got shelter in Ishurdi. We were lucky; other people ended up in refugee camps. The East Pakistan government had set up a refugee camp in a godown and gave them some rations.[34]

Government later also supplied housing estates to many non-Bengali refugees but life was quite tough for them.[35] One way or another, they had to earn an income. Some set up small businesses: roadside tea or food stalls, tailoring, bangle-making, *biri*-making, or barber shops. Others, especially women who could not get any other work, collected coal that had dropped off locomotives at the railway station, mixed it with dung and dirt, and sold it. Mokbul found a petty office job in Rajshahi and saw how the refugees were changing the life of that town. They introduced new types of food (e.g. kabab), new types of transport (e.g. the rickshaw) and new styles of dress. As they gradually found their feet, they also introduced new styles of economic organization. They formed *Anjuman Mujahirin Committees* that acted as savings co-operatives with regular compulsory contributions from the members. After two years, the committee in Rajshahi was able to set up a small co-operative saw mill that still exists, and later

[34] Mokbul Ahmed (interview, Rajshahi, 1999).

[35] The government felt it had a special duty to take care of non-Bengali immigrants and they were given facilities that were not available to Bengali immigrants. This sentiment is reflected in a radio broadcast by the Chief Minister of East Pakistan in 1956: 'May I address a few words to those countrymen of ours, who unfortunately, even in the tenth year of our independent nationhood, are still known as "Mohajirs." These were the men and women who have sacrificed most for the achievement of Pakistan and it was expected that they ought to have been happily settled and rehabilitated long ago. Instead, a large number of them are passing their lives in a forlorn condition in camps, railway wagons, huts, in filth, squalor and dirt and in subhuman conditions. It is our determination to rehabilitate them properly so that they may be integrated in the general mass of the people.' Ataur Rahman Khan (Chief Minister of East Pakistan), 'Our Policy and Programme' (Broadcast, Radio Pakistan, Dacca, 7 September 1956), printed in *One Year of Popular Government in East Pakistan* (Dacca: Government of East Pakistan, 1957), 20.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

they also invested in trucks, which had not been seen on the roads of Rajshahi before.[36]

Displaced Bengalis. Violence was just as important in inducing Bengalis to seek refuge in Rajshahi in 1950. Mohammad Zaman's family lived in Dinajpur, a district of Bengal that was divided between India and Pakistan. The Zamans lived in the Indian part and decided to stay: 'We'll stick it out in our motherland.' But things changed dramatically when two prominent Hindu families and their retinue of Namasudra (low-caste) followers—themselves displaced from Dhaka—settled in the area soon after Partition.

> They started oppression in the area. They would attack Muslim houses at night and loot and torch them. They also committed murders . . . I still remember how I stood on the roof of our house and watched the fire in distant Muslim villages, and how we were filled with a terrible fear for our own future—we faced complete uncertainty. And we had never expected that the people who led these riots could be so communal. They were non-locals . . . the local Hindus did not directly participate in the riots, I think.[37]

The riots of 1950 forced them to leave. First they sent the family's school-going children across to relatives in Dinajpur town (in East Pakistan) and later the adults followed. Mohammad Zaman came to Rajshahi to attend college in 1960, and stayed on.

4. Displacement by Exchange

When social tensions increased and people were contemplating migration across the border, they were often held back by their immovable property. This was especially true of land-owning cultivators who stood to lose everything: their main source of income, their

[36] In Rajshahi, most non-Bengali refugees were not from Bihar but from various parts of Uttar Pradesh. On non-Bengali immigrants to East Pakistan, see A.F.M. Kamaluddin, 'Refugee Problems in Bangladesh,' in: Leszek A. Kosinski and K. Maudood Elahi (eds), *Population Redistribution and Development in South Asia* (Dordrecht/Boston/Lancaster: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985), 221–36; Chowdhury E. Haque, 'Non-Bengali Refugees in Bangladesh: Patterns, Policies, and Consequences,' in: John R. Rogge (ed.), *Refugees: A Third World Dilemma* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987), 217–26; Sumit Sen, 'Stateless Refugees and the Right to Return: The Bihari Refugees of South Asia,' *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 11:4 (1999), 625–45, and 12:1 (2000), 41–70.

[37] Mohammad Zaman (interview, Rajshahi, 1999).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

old-age security, and their status.[38] Many Hindus in Pakistan, and Muslims in India, who were not forced off their land by outright violence, tried to stay on. But for many of them there came a moment when they decided they had to leave. For most in the Rajshahi area this moment was in 1962. It started with rumours that somewhere on the *chors* (islands in the Ganges, the border river), Muslims had fought with Hindus and Hindus had killed Muslims.

> It was a rumour: today you would hear that it had happened in Kanpur village, tomorrow that it had happened in Gourichor, and the day after in Guchchhigram—somewhere on the *chors*. Then it came to town. Respectable people did not do anything, they kept quiet. But the *mostans* (hoodlums), those who used to rob and steal, began setting fire to [Hindu] houses at night, taking everything outside and stealing everything they could lay their hands on . . . They cut off many Hindus' ears or fingers. The Muslims wanted to rob them of gold ornaments, those *mostan* types moved around town. They were local people from this neighbourhood . . . But the Pakistan government helped the Hindus very well. The government acted properly and sent its Reserve Force and, when that was not enough, the Army. Then a rumour spread that Santals [a non-Bengali community of Rajshahi district] were coming from their villages, shooting with bows and arrows, on behalf of the Hindus. When the Muslims heard this, they went to Dashra, a neighbourhood with many Hindus, and began to evict and destroy them.[39]

This one-day riot, in which about 2,000 Hindus of Rajshahi are said to have perished, acted as a catalyst for cross-border population movement. Many Hindus fled across the border and tried to mobilize local Hindus there against their Muslim fellow villagers. There was a lot of petty irritation,[40] and village riots broke out on the Indian side. Soon fear stalked the entire borderland, with many Hindu and Muslim villagers urgently wanting to settle across the border. The stage was set for a huge operation in which numerous Indian

[38] In the early years following Partition, property exchange had been largely the swapping of urban real estate and *zamindari* landlord entitlements between middle and upper class refugees. There is considerable evidence on the exchange of this 'evacuee property.' But land exchange between migrating peasants developed only gradually, becoming more frequent in the late 1950s and escalating up to 1965, when it came to an abrupt end.

[39] Shahjahan (interview, Rajshahi, 1998). This riot is known locally as the Dashra Riot; it also spread to villages near Rajshahi town.

[40] This consisted of 'trouble over cows and goats,' beating drums during Muslim prayer times, reviling Muslims, or filing false court cases (Abed Ali (interview, Rajshahi, 1998) and Haru Mondol (interview, Lolitahar, 1999)). For a detailed account of a village riot in East Pakistan in the 1950s that also developed from a quarrel over cows, see Beth Roy, *Some Trouble with Cows: Making Sense of Social Conflict* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Muslims and Pakistani Hindus would migrate by exchanging their property with each other. As one of them said: 'We came in a wave. Some had more courage than others and stayed back . . . We came out of fear. We came and took citizenship in Pakistan.'[41]

It is remarkable that this type of international migration has been almost completely ignored in studies of Partition. Judging by the evidence from Rajshahi and scattered information for other parts of West Bengal and Bangladesh, dislocation-by-exchange was quite important both in terms of the numbers of migrants involved and in terms of the effects it had on social relations. But how was it done? There were three crucial elements: finding exchange partners, crossing over, and taking possession of the new land.

Finding exchange partners. It was often difficult to identify possible partners to exchange land with. Usually the networks of previous migrants offered the best contacts but even then there were a host of problems to overcome.

> Since nobody had a passport, usually one family member would sneak into the other country to collect information on the land to be exchanged. How good was it, what crops grew on it, were the land papers in order? And were the exchange partners to be trusted? Would it be possible to take possession of the land after they had left? Everything had to be investigated . . . If one party had more land, then they tried to find another party to exchange with at the same time. So it could happen that one Pakistani Hindu family exchanged with five Muslim families from India . . . Land exchange would not be complete until a party was able to find partners to exchange all their property with—and that could take time . . . If one brother could exchange his land in one village, the other brother could end up in a far-off area. In this way, families were torn apart, communities destroyed and kinship cut asunder. And those who could not find a good way of exchanging their land stayed back.[42]

Crossing Over. Once an agreement was reached and the necessary paperwork done—and this could take years—the moment came for the exchangees to leave their villages and cross the border.[43] This

[41] Ekramul Hok (interview, Rajshahi, 1998).

[42] Haru Mondol (interview, Lolitahar, 1999). Land exchange was allowed by the states of India and Pakistan up to 6 September 1965, when war broke out between them. The elaborate procedure included an exchange contract stating the property being exchanged, getting power of attorney from your home district, and registering and validating the land ownership with the officer in charge of property exchange in the other country. Property exchange included not only land but also ponds, houses, trees, cows, buffaloes, goats, chickens, and ducks.

[43] The terms used for property exchange and exchangee were either the English ones, or *binimoy* and *binimoykori*. Exchangees referred to the people among whom they settled as *bashinda* or *boshoti* (local inhabitants).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

was a tricky affair. The main fear was of being robbed. For this reason, exchangees often left stealthily at night, after making prior arrangements with fixers, boatmen and border guards who demanded much money. Sometime the crossing went well:

> Among the Hindus there is a caste called Chai who live on the *chors*, on both sides of the border. We had a good relationship with them. My father asked one of them, Omulyo, and the boatman Charu, to row us across the river, and they did so nicely in the dark of night. The neighbours were aware that we were leaving. All of them gradually came over here.[44]

But very often things went wrong:

> We did not have passports so we had to pay money to the Indian border guards. The river was in spate at that time. We took only quilts and mattresses, money and gold ornaments. On the way, however, the Chai robbed us of everything. We arrived completely penniless and empty-handed at the house of my cousin in Pakistan.[45]

> In 1962, a Muslim cultivator in a heavily patrolled Indian border village approached the Indian border guards and struck a deal. He paid them (Indian) Rs. 450, and at the dead of night five or six border guards arrived at the house to take his sons across. They took the boys to the border and then returned. As the boys were making their way into Pakistan, however, they were intercepted by Pakistani border guards. Negotiations followed. Since they were not far from home, many local villagers knew them, and a well-to-do acquaintance paid the Pakistani border guards (Pakistani) Rs. 500 for their release. The boys had to leave all their bags behind and arrived in the next town, and their aunt's house, only with the clothes they were wearing.[46]

If exchangees lost their precious land papers during the crossing, their situation was hopeless. But for those who managed to get through, the next step was to travel to the village where their new land was located.

Taking possession. Once exchangees arrived in their new village, their fate was uncertain. Many faced serious problems in occupying their new houses and plots of land because relatives of the old owners refused to move out, or other villagers challenged their right to the land, or simply resented their arrival. Such initial troubles were not unexpected: 'If a person from one place settles in another, he is always looked upon with a little suspicion and envy.'[47] Sometimes the

[44] Abed Ali (interview, Rajshahi, 1998).
[45] Haru Mondol (interview, Rajshahi, 1999).
[46] Intaz Ali (interview, Rajshahi, 1999).
[47] Ekramul Hok (interview, Rajshahi, 1998).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

problems could be resolved, as in the case of Mohammad Zaman's uncles.

> They had trouble with local people over land . . . who said: 'Why have refugees taken possession of the land?' And local Muslims even cut four-year-old trees that had just begun to produce fruit . . . So then my uncles informed the Hindu family with whom they had exchanged the land, and that gentleman came over all the way from Calcutta to sort everything out. It was a personal question, it had nothing to do with relations between Hindus and Muslims.[48]

Often there was concerted resistance by locals—both Muslims and Hindus—against newcomers intruding into their village.[49] As a result, some exchangees were never able to occupy their new land.[50]

[48] Mohammad Zaman (interview, Rajshahi, 1999).

[49] Cf. this case from another part of the India–Pakistan borderland that highlights borderland identities cutting across and eclipsing communal identities. The case is from Barthar, an Indian border village in the district of Cooch Behar. On 5 May 1950 Asiya Khatun was raped in her own house there. The perpetrators were some constables from the local border outpost that was located in the houses of two Hindu refugees from Pakistan. These were said to be 'notoriously anti-Muslim' and to instigate the border guards to harass Muslim Indians. As the news of the rape spread, local people got angry. According to one of them, Debendra Barman, villagers went around saying: 'Hindus and Muslims are brothers but some refugees have entered into some Muslim houses. We shall drive them away. You help us. Refugees are all *Bhatia* people [i.e. from Dhaka and Mymensingh]. Drive them away.' Early the next morning several hundred people, both Muslims and Hindus, gathered with bamboo clubs and then proceeded towards the houses of the refugees, planning to force them to leave the area. As they approached, the border guards opened fire on them, injuring both Muslims and Hindus (Government of East Bengal, Home (Political) Department, B. Proceedings (CR 5M–4/50), May 1955).

[50] 'So we made a deal—very stupid, you can't get more foolish than that!—and exchanged our cultivable land with [a gentleman in Mymensingh district] and our homestead land with [a gentleman in Khulna district]. We thought we'd make Khulna our home and the produce from Mymensingh would reach us "zamindari style"—what's the problem? Well, talk about problems: we did not benefit at all. We lost everything: respect, confidence, a safe place to live. You can imagine the situation. When we came over we realised that the dream that had initiated the migration—for all of us to live together—was impossible. My brother lived in Dhaka and had a small service job. My sister was in Norail because my brother-in-law was the principal of a college there. I was in Rajshahi. We all could manage OK but that dream of living together, we did not even get close to that prestigious situation. And furthermore, our land in Mymensingh was a complete loss. The common peasants there had such a desire for land, sharecropping, you understand these things. After the Tebhaga movement, attitudes had changed. And in our family we did not like to oppress or squeeze our tenants. And even if we had had that attitude, you simply could not get there. So within about five years, we stopped going there. Somehow we sold some of that land and deposited the money in the bank . . . Some people made good

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Most of them stayed on in Pakistan but some returned landless to their ancestral villages in India. In some cases, resistance by locals persisted for decades.[51] But where resistance against Muslim exchangees came only from local Hindus, the exchangees sometimes could get the upper hand and drive the resisters away, accelerating the process by which whole villages in East Pakistan changed their character from Hindu-dominated settlements to Muslim-dominated ones.

[The Hindu family from Pakistan with whom we had exchanged our land] moved first, and they left one person in charge of their old house. When we arrived, he said: 'Welcome, take it.' So we entered the house. But then the neighbours, who were Hindus, protested that we Muslims might eat meat and cause problems for them that way. They even took the decision not to allow Muslims to stay there. So we had to negotiate with them . . . and they realised that if they persisted there might be a riot. So they vacated their own houses! In the beginning we faced some problems with praying, but we turned a little place into a temporary mosque. Only Hindus lived in this village then. Later most of them moved away, and now there are only a couple of Hindu families left.[52]

Conflicts involving Hindus and Muslims did not always follow communal divisions, however, as exchangees from Burdwan district (India) found when they arrived in Khulna (East Pakistan) to claim their new house.

There was a problem there. Our exchange partners had given a gentleman, a school teacher, the responsibility to look after it till we claimed it. But he did not want to leave at all. He was just a caretaker, he had no deeds at all, but still he would not leave. So we had to live in one half of our house for three years. Then we gradually got the entire house . . . now we have it all. He was a Hindu. Over there I have not noticed communalism. The

when they migrated to Pakistan but we had the opposite experience. We were an extremely tightly-knit, warm family and look: my father who was 72 came over from India because of our ardent wish, looking forward to being with his children and starting a new life. Here he had no property, nobody knew him. Can you imagine how he, who used to enjoy such enormous confidence, ended his life as an anonymous person with no prestige at all? He never returned, there was no reason to after cutting his ties: he had no home there anymore, and there was no question of him getting his land back.' (Hasan Azizul Hok, interview, Rajshahi, 1999).

[51] As in the case of exchangees in the village of Fudkipara (Sardah, near Rajshahi) whose right to agricultural land in the northern part of their village continues to be challenged by the local people from the neighbouring village of Bhaduria. Even today, Bhaduria people steal the crops grown on these plots, and Fudkipara people try to sell these lands in order to buy plots in the south of their village (interviews with Fudkipara villagers, 2000).

[52] Mohammad Zaman (interview, Rajshahi, 1999).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

people who were against us in this case were Muslims, like the local Chairman who said: 'Why have all those Muslims come from India?' And to top it all, he was a supporter of the Muslim League! He disliked me. So he regularly incited that Hindu gentleman who occupied our house as a caretaker. That man was backed by a Muslim League Chairman! They did not want us to settle on this side of the border, it annoyed them.[53]

Displacement by exchange was a common phenomenon in the early 1960s, until the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 put a sudden stop to it: land exchanges that had not been properly registered by the first day of war were considered void.[54]

Land exchange and the landless. It is important to realize that land exchange also affected landless people. According to Haru Mondol, an exchangee who migrated from India in 1963, landless people in search of work faced no problems in crossing from Pakistani territory to Indian territory, and vice versa, before the riots of 1962. But during the heyday of land exchange (1962–1965), landless people:

did come over [to settle permanently] if they could find travel companions. Here they built a little hut near the house of old acquaintances or former neighbours [from India]. Some also squatted on government *khash* land, or on a small bit of land that relatives, old neighbours or acquaintances from back home gave them.[55]

Landless people came over out of fear and in the expectation of good wages and protection by their exchangee patrons. Some also hoped for support from the East Pakistan government but did not get any.[56]

IV. Studying Partition Migration

At the beginning of this paper we suggested that new research on Partition displacement may concentrate on migrants beyond the compass of conventional refugee studies. By taking as our focus

[53] Hasan Azizul Huq (interview, Rajshahi, 1999).

[54] As a result, many people continue to live on unregistered land. During the revisional land settlement in Rajshahi district in the 1970s, the records were made in the name of Hindu owners who had left for India, adding a note in the remarks column to the effect that the present occupant was the Muslim exchangee. We came across one case of an exchangee who had paid over Tk. 30,000 in bribes over the years in order to get his land registered. In late 2000 the Bangladesh Parliament (Jatiyo Shongshod) passed a bill that regulates that 'vested property' will be returned to its real owner. This has created much excitement among exchangees who feel that they may yet lose their land.

[55] Haru Mondol (interview, Lolitahar, 1999).

[56] Haru Mondol (interview, Lolitahar, 1999).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

migrants who left India for East Pakistan between 1947 and 1965, we have tried to contribute to this broadening of the field. Basing ourselves on personal accounts of migrants rather than on state-produced material, we have aimed at shedding some light on categories of migrants that so far have remained in the shadows.

Beyond Conventional Dichotomies

The stories of these migrants challenge the historiography of post-Partition migration in Bengal in two important ways. First, it is clear that elite (*bhodrolok*) migration—which has turned into an icon of Partition displacement in national narratives—cannot be used as a *pars pro toto* for the large and complex set of cross-border migrations of which it is a subset. Very different forms of migration also resulted from Partition. The impact of cross-border peasant land exchange in West Bengal and Bangladesh appears to have been especially significant, and yet the historiography is largely silent about this issue.

Second, the stories of these migrants challenge an important convention in the historiography of post-Partition migration to East Pakistan. This historiography has been based on a simple dichotomy: on the one hand, there were Bengali Muslims who came in by choice, or propelled by violence, and who integrated into local society without many problems. On the other hand, there were Urdu-speaking 'Mohajirs/Biharis/Stranded Pakistanis,' who stayed aloof from local society, were given privileges by the Pakistan state, turned against the movement for Bangladesh, acted as auxiliary forces to the Pakistan army during the war of 1971, and continue to be punished for this choice. This dichotomy suits the nationalist style of history-writing that has been dominant in Bangladesh since the 1970s but it obscures the categories with which migrants themselves live.[57] In their accounts, the emphasis is on the circumstances giving rise to cross-border migration rather than on linguistic or regional

[57] On nationalist historiography in Bangladesh, see also Willem van Schendel, 'Bengalis, Bangladeshis and Others: Chakma Views of a Pluralist Bangladesh,' in: Rounaq Jahan (ed.), *Bangladesh: Promise and Performance* (Dhaka/London: University Press Limited/Zed Books, 2000), 65–105; and Willem van Schendel, Wolfgang Mey and Aditya Kumar Dewan, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Living in a Borderland* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2000), 3–4, 297–302.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

characteristics. For example, in Rajshahi the categories of 'optees' and 'riot refugees' embrace both Bengalis and non-Bengalis.[58]

The elegant simplicity of conventional categorization also obscures to what extent migrant identities could change over time. This is particularly clear in the case of the 'Biharis,' a term now current in Bangladesh for Muslims of various non-Bengali backgrounds. This category is both internally divided and blurred at the edges. We have already alluded to the fact that these immigrants speak different languages, not just Urdu. There are also strongly-felt regional differences:

> The way you Bengalis call us 'Biharis'! I think if Mother were alive, she would have strangled you for it! She used to say: 'I am *not* from Bihar. Those who are from Bihar are Biharis. I am from Uttar Pradesh, from another state!' . . . All those barbers from what people call the Bihari Colony [in Rajshahi town] are actually not from Bihar, they are all from U.P. Today, anybody who speaks Urdu in Bangladesh is called a Bihari. We keep mum but my mother was always protesting about that. She would get hopping mad.[59]

Among non-Bengali immigrants in Rajshahi, clear distinctions are made between Biharis, Uttar Pradeshis, Calcuttans, Nawabi families from Murshidabad, and *Khotai* (from the western reaches of Murshidabad and Malda districts in West Bengal).[60] These distinctions, which existed from the time of their arrival in Rajshahi, became extremely important as history unfolded and the movement for Bangladesh gathered speed. Those who were Urdu-speakers from Bengal (i.e. from Calcutta, Murshidabad, or Malda) managed to distance themselves from the others: 'During the war [of 1971] they were Biharis, and after the war they became Bengalis. They integrated with the Bengalis.'[61] But among the others there was also a range of different positions regarding the movement for Bangladesh. In the words of a Bengali immigrant:

[58] The principal reason why the category of 'exchangees' was almost exclusively Bengali was that only the governments of West Bengal and East Pakistan, and not those of Bihar or Uttar Pradesh, allowed land exchange.

[59] Nirghat Parvin (interview, Rajshahi, 1999).

[60] Non-Bengali migrants to East Pakistan also included small groups of Muslims from South, West and North-West India but we did not come across these in Rajshahi. Cf. Kamaluddin, 'Refugee Problems,' 222.

[61] Md. Sofi (interview, Rajshahi, 1999).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

[The non-Bengali immigrants] kept aloof from the Bengalis because the Pakistan government treated them as special and kept them as an allied class. That's the reason that they were against us in the 1971 war and supported Pakistan. One of my Bihari friends was from Bhagalpur . . . and another from . . . Chhapra. They had experienced the riots themselves and could not forget them. They were very tough concerning the Hindu question. They used to scoff at me by calling me 'Bengali, Bengali,' and we had a lot of arguments. They did not continue their studies but joined the Pakistan army and moved to West Pakistan. I haven't heard from them since.
I have a Bihari student . . . who married a Bengali girl and became integrated into our society. Amazingly, in 1971 they were with the Freedom Fighters, and this family is now in a very good position in Rangur, nobody will touch them.[62]

Clearly, the current fashion of treating 'Bengali' and 'Bihari' as antonyms in the study of Bangladesh society is an obstacle to a proper understanding of post-Partition migration to East Pakistan. It does not allow us to see the ways in which the identities of immigrants shifted and transformed as they found various niches in East Pakistan society.

This is also true of Bengalis who migrated to East Pakistan. The idea that they formed a homogeneous category and integrated easily into local society is far too simplistic. There are many places where exchangees became a distinct social category and still stand out from the local population. Initially, exchangees often stuck together to protect their interests. Setting up their own village mosque, *madrasha*, or market was an important strategy in creating a sense of community. In many borderland villages, social boundaries between locals and exchangees persisted, together with negative views about the other group. For example, members of three exchangee families in Charghat *thana* (Rajshahi district) had entered into 96 marriages since settling in East Pakistan; among these marriages, over two-thirds were with other exchangee families.[63] There are also indications that exchangee community formation continues to have an important impact on local politics in several parts of rural Bangladesh.

Over time, immigrant identities changed in ways that were both locally specific and connected with the process of Partition. These transformations did not necessarily fit standard theories of immig-

[62] Mohammad Zaman (interview, Rajshahi, 1999).
[63] Interviews with migrants in the villages of Fudkipara, Yusufpur and Karigorpara (Charghat thana, Rajshahi district, 2000–2001).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

rant assimilation. Ansari's observation on Partition immigrants in Sindh (Pakistan) is pertinent to both Bengali and non-Bengali immigrants in Bangladesh: 'a particular group can be totally assimilated in political and economic terms but by choice have minimal interaction in the social sphere.' In the case of many non-Bengali (and some Bengali) immigrants, her observation on their self-perception also holds true: they 'generally saw themselves to be the embodiment of the new state [Pakistan]. If anything, they expected local society to adjust to them rather than adjustment being the other way around.'[64] The emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, however, rendered this self-perception highly problematic and dangerous. Non-Bengali immigrants were faced with a stark choice: to opt out of the new Bangladeshi nation altogether as 'Stranded Pakistanis,' or to assimilate and Bengalize themselves as best they could.[65] Today, the category of 'Biharis'—internally divided and blurred at the edges to begin with—has permutated and split so often that it retains no analytical cogency. It should be abandoned for the sake of deepening our understanding of Partition migration.

Beyond Punjab

Most major studies of Partition migration highlight events in one particular region, Punjab, and as a result we know more about what Partition meant there than in any other province. Among the reasons for this orientation on Punjab are the swift, bloody and almost complete expulsion of minority populations from both its parts immediately following Partition, the fact that the seats of government of both India and Pakistan came to be located in this region, the comparatively large state effort at supporting and rehabilitating refugees here, and the high proportion of educated and vocal refugees who were able to represent the plight of Punjab refugees in the media, literature, government policies and academic research.

[64] Sarah Ansari, 'The Movement of Indian Muslims,' 164–5.

[65] 'The stranded Biharis of Bangladesh represent the ultimate paradox of Partition . . . After the breakup of Pakistan, about a million Biharis were left in Bangladesh spread over sixty-six refugee camps. Approximately half a million (539,669) persons opted for Pakistan. Of these, less than half (163,072) were repatriated through a process of lengthy negotiations' (Murshid, 'Nations Imagined,' 99–100). It is unknown how many non-Bengalis remained outside 'Bihari' refugee camps after the war of 1971; our interviewees in Rajshahi were amongst them.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In this paper, we have shown that cross-border migration in the Rajshahi area differed substantially from what happened in post-Partition Punjab. It consisted of a number of quite distinct population movements, each with its own time scale, and the overall picture is not one of a swift, bloody and almost complete exchange of minorities. Here migration flows that were swift (optee migration) were not bloody, bloody expulsions certainly occurred (1950, 1962) but did not follow swiftly upon Partition, and there was never an almost complete exchange of minorities. Furthermore, specific types of cross-border migration flourished here till the mid-1960s (property exchange) and beyond (labour migration, displacement by education, marriage migration) that have not yet been described in detail for other parts of the Partition border.

When looking for general understandings of Partition, we need to recognize that what Feldman calls 'the silence of East Bangal'—the absence of the experiences of East Bengal in the construction of Indian and Pakistani narratives of Partition[66]—poses a serious problem. Over the years individual academics have had perfectly understandable historiographical and personal reasons for not including (East) Bengal in their studies of Partition.[67] The unfortunate effect of these personal decisions has been, however, a strikingly unequal production of knowledge on Partition-in-the-West and on Partition-in-the-East, and a marked tendency towards 'Punjabocentrism' in general statements on Partition. What we have tried to demonstrate in this article is the need to be very cautious: at least in the case of Partition migration, the Punjab experience cannot be employed as a model, a shorthand for what Partition entailed, the prime case from which to draw general conclusions.

[66] Feldman, 'Feminist Interruptions,' 169.

[67] In his influential article on rewriting the histories of partition, Mushirul Hasan explains that he excludes Bengal on the basis of its difference from Punjab; his article 'does not cover the historical writings on the Bengal province, especially Bangladesh, where the histories of partition are being written differently since 1971.' Gyanendra Pandey points to the extent of his linguistic abilities, and the very vastness of his subject, as the main reasons for focusing his study on the Punjab, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, and for excluding Bengal. Mushirul Hasan, 'Memories of a Fragmented Nation: Rewriting the Histories of India's Partition,' *Economic and Political Weekly* (10 October 1998), 2662; Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 18. Cf. Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, 12, 26n.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

'Some say they are all from South Asia'[68]*: Overcoming National Historiographies*

A refashioned study of Partition migration can play a significant role in moving beyond the national mind-sets that are still so dominant in studies of Partition. Exploring new ways of categorizing cross-border settlement and juxtaposing regional experiences are among the first issues to be tackled. By looking anew at the complexities of cross-border migration—in terms of groups involved, reasons for migration, histories of settlement, continuing cross-border linkages, shifting identities and layered memories—new studies may strengthen cross-border dialogues among researchers. These in turn may encourage transnational 'South Asian' rather than national academic agendas, and so provide constructive links between the intense, but largely antithetical, public debates on post-Partition identities in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan.[69]

This paper has looked at post-Partition migration from the vantage point of a single locality. The future of innovative research in this field may well lie in focusing on similarities, contrasts and interlinkages in migrants' experiences on *both* sides of the border, and on oral evidence that can still be collected today.[70] And reflecting on the uses and limitations of such evidence may be one way for historians, anthropologists and other social scientists with an interest in Partition to work towards overcoming the 'disciplinary gap' between them. New forms of cross-border co-operation may be particularly helpful in this process.

[68] 'At the tail end came a wagonload of refugees.
Some say the are all from South Asia,
Others claim they are a bunch of spies.'
From the poem 'At the border'; Alokeranjan Dasgupta, *Jhorche Katha Atas Kanche* (1985), translated by Subhoranjan Dasgupta in Samaddar (ed.), *Reflections*, 206.

[69] 'If partition is not to be viewed as the end of South Asia's history, after which only the histories of separate nation-states have mattered, then historians must continue to search for a narrative of partition that defines it not just as a product of a deal between the Congress, the British, and the Muslim League, but as a key moment in a much longer and ongoing history linking the state and the arenas of everyday conflict.' David Gilmartin, 'Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative,' *Journal of Asian Studies*, 57:1 (1998), 1092.

[70] For examples, see Meghna Guhathakurta, 'Understanding the Bengal Partition through Reconstructing Family Histories: A Case Study,' *Journal of Social Studies,* 76 (1997), 57–65; her 'Families, Displacement'; and Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Comparing Partition Migrations

The cases in this paper can be placed in the wider context of population movements in the wake of 'state divorce.' A first task is to analyse the various types of cross-broader migration after the partition of South Asia, and to gain a better sense of how these combined to shape a range of South Asian localities in specific ways. Clearly, the spatial effects of post-Partition migration were spread very unevenly: one village might experience a complete exchange of population, the next might be hardly touched. Refugee camps and housing estates ('colonies') sprang up in certain places but not in others. Cross-border labour migrants settled in neighbourhoods close to employment opportunities. And in some places, migrants marginalized locals and took over political and economic power.[71] Although such spatial patterns, and the social and political transformations resulting from them, have been studied in detail for some localities, the evidence is still fragmentary and more systematic comparisons are needed before we can grasp the variegated effects of migrations on post-Partition South Asia.

A second task is to break out of the 'insularity' so far evident in the historiography of the partition,'[72] and to relate South Asia's partition to other historical cases. This can be done at several levels. The breakup of states is a normal part of the process of state formation and, in this sense, partitions and reconfigurations of states have

[71] Locals did not always take this lying down. Inhabitants of the Indian state of Tripura, which filled up with Hindus fleeing East Pakistan, saw post-Partition immigrants not primarily as fellow Indians being cast out of Pakistan and in need of help but as Bengalis moving into non-Bengali areas and taking over. Protests took organized form right from 1947 when Seng-krak, the first anti-refugee and anti-Bengali political union, was organized. Seng-krak was soon outlawed. It was followed by a host of successors, e.g. Paharia Union (1951), Adibasi Samiti (1952), Tripura Rajya Adibasi Sangha (1953), Adibasi Samsad (1954), East India Tribal Union (1956), Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS; 1967), Seng-krak (revived in 1967), Tripura Sena (c. 1968), Barki Halam (1974), Tripura National Volunteer Force (TNVF; 1979), and Army of Tripura Peoples' Liberation Organisation (ATPLO, 1980). After 1980 widespread violence between Bengalis and non-Bengalis engulfed the state, and in the course of this civil war, which continues unabated today, many new organizations have cropped up (e.g. All Tripura Tribal Force (ATTP, c.1985). For details, see S.R. Bhattacharjee, *Tribal Insurgency in Tripura: A Study in Exploration of Causes* (New Delhi; Inter–India Publications, 1989), 127–34; Harihar Bhattacharyya, 'The Emergence of Tripuri Nationalism, 1948–50,' *South Asia Research*, 9:1 (1989), 54–71; Panjoubam Tarapot, *Insurgency Movement in North-Eastern India* (Delhi: Vikas, 1996), 174–80.

[72] Singh, 'The Partition of India,' 96.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

occurred throughout history. But only some of these have led to massive relocations of people, and it is these that can help us in better understanding the South Asian case.[73] Considerable bodies of literature have sprung up about cross-border migrations resulting from these other partitions, and their methodologies and analyses could enrich the study of Partition migration in South Asia, just as the wealth of studies on South Asia could inform future research on other partitions.[74] A more limited type of comparison could focus on partition as a 'parting gift of Empire,' a twentieth-century legacy of colonial rule. Within this more restricted category of imperial partitions, it is easy to recognize similarities. For example, Said's point about Israel and Palestine is of direct relevance to South Asia today:

> So let us see these new partitions as the desperate and last-ditch efforts of a dying ideology of separation, which has afflicted Zionism and Palestinian nationalism, both of whom have not surmounted the philosophical problem of the other, of learning how to live with, as opposed to despite, the other. When it comes to corruption, to racial or religious discrimination, to poverty and unemployment, to torture and censorship, the other is always one of us, not a remote alien.[75]

Unlike Said, however, we see little evidence that the 'ideology of separation' is moribund. Partition as a political 'solution' is very much alive and kicking, whether imposed by superpowers (Yugoslavia), as an outcome of imperial decay (the Soviet Union), as a result of regional war (Ethiopia), or by mutual consent (Czechoslovakia). There are those who argue that the remedy is

[73] Aristide R. Zolberg, 'The Formation of States as a Refugee-Generating Process,' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 467 (1983), 24–38.

[74] As a single example of these other partition literatures, we take the one dealing with the forced relocations of populations when the Ottoman Empire ended and modern Turkey emerged. There are many similarities between the fate of South Asian refugees and that of e.g. about 1.3 million Greeks who, after the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), were abruptly forced to leave their ancestral homes (in the Black Sea region, Anatolia and the Aegean coast of Turkey) to be resettled in Greece. Importantly, the literature on the Greek–Turkish expulsions reverberates with many of the themes that power current writings on refugees in South Asia: identity, territory, memory, and the challenge to overcome (hyper)-nationalist readings of their history. For introductions, see e.g. Dimitri Pentzopoulos, *The Balkan Exchange of Minorities and its Impact upon Greece* (Paris and The Hague: Mouton, 1962); Renée Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); and Michel Bruneau (ed.), *Les Grecs pontiques: diaspora, identité, territoires* (Paris: CRNS Éditions, 1998).

[75] Edward Said, 'Partition as a Parting Gift of Empire,' *Dawn* (22 November 1999).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

worse than the disease.[76] Others suggest that there is sometimes no other escape from ethnic war and genocide.[77] Such arguments can be judged properly only by empirical study and in a long-term perspective. For this reason, listening to the experiences and voices of post-Partition migrants in South Asia is highly relevant to contemporary policies: these are people who had a 'solution' forced upon them, and in its wake they sought, and sometimes found, their own solutions.

[76] 'Unsurprisingly, nothing, but nothing, has been solved by Partition: all across the subcontinent, its bloody legacy lives on in dismembered families, forced migrations, material and cultural dispossession, ethnic ghettoization and enclaves, communal riots, so-called illegal immigration, wars, and the continued state of insecurity from low-intensity conflicts.' Sankaran Krishna, *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka and the Question of Nationhood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 239.

[77] Chaim Kaufmann, 'Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars,' *International Security*, 20:4 (1996), 136–75.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X03003020 Published online by Cambridge University Press