THE SPECTRAL WOUND

Sexual Violence, Public Memories, and the Bangladesh War of 1971

NAYANIKA MOOKHERJEE

FOREWORD BY VEENA DAS

THE SPECTRAL WOUND

This page intentionally left blank

THE SPECTRAL WOUND

Sexual Violence, Public Memories, and the Bangladesh War of 1971

NAYANIKA MOOKHERJEE * FOREWORD BY VEENA DAS

Duke University Press Durham and London 2015

© 2015 Duke University Press
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Designed by Courtney Leigh Baker
Typeset in Arno Pro by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Mookherjee, Nayanika, [date] author.
The spectral wound : sexual violence, public memories and the Bangladesh war of 1971 / Nayanika Mookherjee ; foreword by Veena Das.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8223-5949-4 (hardcover : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-8223-5968-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-8223-7522-7 (e-book)
1. Bangladesh—History—Revolution, 1971. 2. Rape as a weapon of war—Bangladesh. 3. Women—Crimes against—Bangladesh. I. Title.
DS395.5.M65 2015
954.9204'6—dc23
2015021378

Duke University Press gratefully acknowledges the support of Durham University (UK), Department of Anthropology, which provided funds toward the publication of this book.

Cover art: Rehabilitation Centre, Dhaka, 1972. © Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

TO ALL THE "WAR HEROINES,"
for their fortitude and affection

TO MA AND CHORDADAN,
for letting me fly and for their love and strength

TO TAREQUE MASUD (1956–2011),
for his spirit of critical interrogation and friendship

This page intentionally left blank

CONTENTS

Foreword * ix
Preface: "A Lot of History, a Severe History" * xv
Acknowledgments * xxi

Introduction: The "Looking-Glass Border" * 1

PART I

ONE. "The Month of Mourning and the Languid Floodwaters": The Weave of National History * 31

TWO. "We Would Rather Have *Shaak* (Greens) Than *Murgi* (Chicken) *Polao*": The Archiving of the Birangona * 47

THREE. "Bringing Out the Snake": *Khota* (Scorn) and the Public Secrecy of Sexual Violence * 67

FOUR. "A Mine of Thieves": Interrogating Local Politics * 91

FIVE. "My Own Imagination in My Own Body": Embodied Transgressions in the Everyday * 107

PART II

SIX. "Mingling in Society": Rehabilitation Program and Re-membering the Raped Woman * 129

SEVEN. The Absent Piece of Skin: Gendered, Racialized, and Territorial Inscriptions of Sexual Violence during the Bangladesh War * 159

EIGHT. "Imaging the War Heroine": Examination of State, Press, Literary, Visual, and Human Rights Accounts, 1971–2001 * 177

NINE. Subjectivities of War Heroines: Victim, Agent, Traitor? * 228

PART III

CONCLUSION. "The Truth Is Tough": Human Rights and the Politics of Transforming Experiences of Wartime Rape "Trauma" into Public Memories * 251

Postscript: From 2001 until 2013 * 264

Notes * 277 Glossary * 291 References * 293 Index * 309

FOREWORD * VEENA DAS

"When I asked the women directly whether I should anonymize their names in my writings, they said that I should use their own names because it is "our own *kotha* (words), *mela itihash* (a lot of history), *ja ma tomare ditesi* [what mother we are giving to you (referring to me as "mother," which is an affectionate term used for younger women by older women)]." Nayanika Mookherjee receives the gift of this mela itihash, and the question that animates the book before us is, how is she going to bear this knowledge? The gift of knowledge has been bestowed upon her with the contradictory injunctions—the imperative to tell the story and also to not tell the story. Such dilemmas are not new for anthropologists studying sexual violence in situations of war or riots, in the streets, or at home. How to navigate the delicate terrain between public knowledge and public secret in which sexual violence lies? Yet every time one touches the subject, one encounters it as a fresh problem, for no general solutions or abstract advice will do.

Mookherjee understands well that writing this history is like touching madness. She writes an account, weaving her experiences with the *birangonas* who were subjected to sexual and physical violence during the war of independence in Bangladesh in 1971 and later declared as "war heroines" into a text that never loses sight of the concreteness of these women as flesh-and-blood creatures—not some idealized "victims" whose stories will serve a larger purpose in the name of this or that ideology. The achieved depth of this book and the theoretical humility with which concepts are drawn from the

everyday make it a profound work—one that will linger in the reader's mind as the significance of the words used, the stories told, the lists provided, or the orphan phrases that appear here and there, will only reveal themselves in slow motion. There is no direct access to the experiences of the women through such routes as sentimental empathy—or through analogies with one's own experiences—for each woman appears in the singular, and it is in their singularity that the confluence of forces that are at once social (e.g., politics in Bangladesh) and existential (the ability or inability to bear the child of the rapist) is revealed. Though I cannot do full justice to the themes that emerge in the book in this short foreword, I hope the points I touch on will serve as an invitation for deeper reflection on the sexual economies of war and their dispersal into other forms of violence with which we all live now in one way or another.

Unlike the stories of rape and sexual violation told within a judicial framework as in truth and reconciliation commissions or in court trials, the stories of the four women birangonas (war heroines) did not come out in one go. The contradictory affects with which the term comes to be infused in the local context—war heroines to be honored or soiled women to be shunned—serve as a warning to wait and learn what questions to ask. Thus Mookherjee waited, immersing herself in the daily talks and the everyday socialities of the village. She was sometimes invited by one of the women's husbands to visit and hear their story—sometimes others pointed out to her a family they felt she should visit and hear about their suffering. After all, a long time had passed between the time of the *ghotona* (event, incident) and the time of the telling. The story had gathered in on itself not only the memory of the original event but also how it was unearthed, combed—the expression Mookherjee uses repeatedly—by different kinds of actors and traded for the different values it carried. Mookherjee's delicacy of touch is visible in the subtle ways she wards off pressure on the women from husbands or friends to "narrate" what happened. She allows the experiences of different kinds of violations (and not by the soldiers of the Pakistani army alone) to seep through the ordinary expressions they use, sometimes by listening to what they want her to "overhear" and at other times by her attentiveness to expressions that arise unbidden and evoke the sorrow or the terror of being brutally violated.

For the linguist anthropologist used to "capturing" the precise speech through the use of tape recorders and then analyzing it in terms of an elaborate semiotic apparatus, this mode of collecting stories might seem suspect. But to the women who were subjected to the glare of media in the commemorative events in 1992 of the *Muktijuddho* (the war of 1971) without fully understand-

ing why they had been brought to these events or what their presence was testifying to, it was the tape recorder and a foreigner wishing to record their "testimony" that would have been threatening. Mookherjee traces with great patience the manner in which media attention, including the pictures of the birangonas in newspapers, circulated back to the village and became a major source of shame for the women, who were seen to violate the local codes of modesty and protection through silence. The ethics of storytelling here is not easy to discern, for the stories that might seem to perform the task of criticism in one domain (say, that of national publicity) might become lethal for the impact they have on the one whose story is being told—here the bearer of the story is not a generic raped woman but a woman with this kind of family history, this kind of local politics, and it is her singularity that is at issue, not her place in the general scheme of things.

What, then, is to tell one's story? Is it the same as being able to author it? In my own work on sexual violence, I have found it useful to think of the difference between speech and voice—for one does not always find one's voice in one's speech. Thus, Mookherjee shows how one of the women, Kajoli, tries to narrate what happened to her when she was raped but was interrupted again and again by her husband, who wanted to correct her on what really took place—for him, she did not know the events of the war well enough to be able to narrate them correctly. "All this time, Rafique was prompting her to speak louder and talk about the ghotona. Kajoli at this point told him that she should finish her work or she would not get paid. Rafique became quite annoyed, but I saw that Kajoli was reluctant to talk. I said I was tired myself, and we sat for some time in the courtyard chatting, and then I left." The power dynamics within the domestic are of a different order than the power dynamics through which national memory of the war was sought to be created through a visual archive of the photographs of birangonas or through the stories they were urged to tell. Yet in many instances, as in the case of the four women from Enayetpur who were taken to Dhaka without being given any explanation and thus found themselves unable to speak, it was the voice-over of the organizers through which their suffering was publicly told and displayed and their "demands" for justice were articulated. What happens to these women who are displayed as figures of abjection and desire, as they struggle to take back authorship that was wrested away from them, is rarely tracked into their everyday lives. In Mookherjee's analysis we see how the publicity strikes back at the women through the everyday evocation of *khota* (scorn) in the village as they and their families are stigmatized for having made their sexual violation public.

The story, then, is not a constant even when no one doubts that a rape occurred. It gathers other facts, gains weight or becomes frayed, waxes and wanes in intensity. In some cases women and their families want to trade the story of rape for material goods—money, government jobs, free education for their children. At other times the same families might heap scorn on the meager compensation they received or at promises of rehabilitation that are routinely broken. Other families might wish to hide the facts of sexual violation to avoid being expelled from the sphere of village sociality.

It was often alleged by various people in Bangladesh that women from respectable families who were raped never told their stories and that stories of rape were a ruse for poor women to extract something from the government. There were rumors about sexual violation of more powerful women—even the leader of the opposition and ex-Prime Minister, Khaleda Zia, was rumored to have been raped, or it was alleged that she had formed an alliance with a powerful general, putting her into the category of a collaborator. The nomadic lives of the stories that circulated were invariably accompanied by rumors, suspicion, doubts—there is an intensification of what I have elsewhere called the tempo of skepticism. But if the story was not constant, neither was the context.

First, there was the changing milieu of democratic politics and especially the opposition between the Awami League and the Bangladesh National Party, the two main parties whose rivalry gathered multiple meanings at the national and local levels. Ranging from such issues as what kind of Muslim country Bangladesh aspired to become, to claims over who was to be regarded as the true leader of the war of liberation, to issues that seeped down to the local level in terms of whose pictures were displayed in the house or what kind of patronage one was entitled to receive as a member of one or the other party, we see the astonishing reach of politics in every corner of life in Enayetpur and in the country in general. Second, there were multiple actors who emerged, each trying to place the specific issue of sexual and reproductive violence within the intense conflicts over identity—Bengali and Muslim—that kept changing shape. Thus the context was itself dynamic. One might have access to the context of one's life one day and lose it entirely another day. Thus women were able to read the politics of the family and of the village—the jealousy of a co-wife, the grief of a husband who had no other way to express himself except to refuse to sleep at home even though he did not abandon his wife after her rape—and all this affected the most quotidian matters such as the food one cooked and the most profound anxieties such as the possibility of being abandoned.

When it came to the ghotona—the event, incident of the rape—women struggled to understand what had made them so vulnerable. What role did their husbands' allegiance to Sheikh Mujib or to the *muktijoddhas* (liberation fighters) play in making them vulnerable to rape? As much as the sexual violence wounded them, the everyday politics of the village and the khota that burst out in everyday squabbles, in petty forms of revenge or insult, made the distant violence of the rape contiguous to everyday forms of violence. Mookherjee's masterful descriptions of village life lead us to ask: Do the slights, bitterness, betrayal, and perverseness that pervade intimate relations as well as lines of known enmity in the village give us a clue to how dramatic enactments of violence might be born out of the ordinary? How else to explain the sudden opportunities used by men to rape the daughter of a neighbor (a Hindu neighbor's daughter in one case) or to understand how *razakars* (collaborators who supported the Pakistani army) became the suppliers of women to the Pakistani soldiers? No general appeal to our humanity or to humanitarian reason will provide a therapy for such disasters here—but Wittgenstein's remark that the whole planet can suffer no greater torment than a single soul might help to orient us in this devastated landscape.

Perhaps the torment of this single soul is what makes Mookherjee trudge to other villages, to the offices of human rights organizations, and to the Muktijuddho Council or to search the massive literary and visual archive on the war to see how the story of sexual violation becomes also the story of the nation. Her analysis of the literary and visual archives blocks any sentimental, compassionate, or empathetic reading that can create a false sense of connection to the women or to the meaning of sexual violation for them. Mookherjee shows that a cultivation of suspicion toward the visual archive is not unwarranted, as in the example of the famous image of a soldier peering inside a loosened *lungi* (sarong) of a Bengali-looking man, which was read as a Pakistani soldier looking at the man's penis to see if he was circumcised and thus properly Muslim—though it turned out that the soldier was from the Indian army and was searching for hidden weapons carried by suspected collaborators. She does not, however, equate the mere cultivation of suspicion with criticism, as if that provided the resting point of the analysis—as if, once you have shown the misreading of a photograph or discerned its voyeuristic impulse, your task as a critic is over. Instead, Mookherjee lays out the full geography of the contradictions in the left-liberal secular intellectual discourse, in the practices of human rights organizations, in the obsessive politics of party rivalries, and in the hurts that families and villagers inflict on each other even as she documents efforts to provide succor, to impart justice, or to enshrine

the experience of the women as heroic in the national narrative of independence. This is one reason the book is fascinating in the details it unravels and also deeply disturbing, since it refuses to yield to our desire for criteria that would help us to unequivocally determine those who are virtuous and those we might detest. The form of criticism here is much more subtle than a simple search for the good. The obligation to respond to the violation that women suffered is an existential one, but the space it opens up is one in which we are encouraged to think of the birangona not as the haunted specter that would feed the imaginary of the nation but as one who has to make her life in the world in a mode of ordinary realism. Such realism is what we sense in the evocation of everyday forms of sustenance such as rice and cloth that women fear they might lose if their violation becomes public. But everyday life also nurtures aspirations that perhaps someone will open herself to one's pain. There is a poignant moment in the book when the four birangonas from the village give an account of their visit to the prime minister's house. They were given saris and money, but Sheikher Beti (Sheikh Mujib's daughter) did not have any time to talk with them. As Moyna, one of the birangonas mused, " 'If I had talked a bit with her about my sorrows, I would have kept it in my heart and remembered it again and again. The main thing was to cry with her and feel a bit light in the heart.' " In this movement between aspiration and disappointment, Mookherjee gives us a sign of what it is to inhabit life again. The *mela itihash, chorom itihash* (lot of history, severe history) is what Mookherjee was given—and it is that to which she has given her anthropological labor to produce this thoughtful account that is before us now and for which I am most grateful.

PREFACE

"A Lot of History, a Severe History"

In late 1971, Bangladeshi photographer Naibuddin Ahmed took a photograph of a woman who had been raped by the Pakistani army during the Bangladesh war of 1971 (often referred to as Ekattor [1971]).[1] This photograph depicted the woman with her disheveled hair and her crossed, bangle-clad fists covering her face. Smuggled out of Bangladesh (M. Masud 1998), the photograph drew international attention to the Bangladesh war, through which East Pakistan became the independent nation of Bangladesh, and in which rape was common. Faced with a huge population of rape survivors, the new Bangladeshi government in December 1971 publicly designated any woman raped in the war a *birangona* (meaning brave or courageous woman; the Bangladeshi state uses the term to mean "war heroine"; see chapter 6 for various connotations of *birangona*). Even today, the Bangladeshi government's bold, public effort to refer to the women raped during 1971 as birangonas is internationally unprecedented, yet it remains unknown to many besides Bangladeshis. In 1994, the imam of Sarajevo of the Islamic Association in Bosnia made a similar (yet little known) fatwa (proclamation) that women who were raped in the war should have the position of a soldier, of a fighter (Skjelsbæk 2012, 98–99). Among many other images, Ahmed's photograph is iconic, symbolizing the horrors of 1971 and connoting the supposed shame and anonymity of the raped woman.[2] It is also one of the most oft-cited and widely circulated visual representations of the birangona. This image has been used on the cover of an English translation of a Bengali book on women's oral history of 1971 (Shaheen Akhtar et al.

2001b). In the spring of 2008, a photographic exhibition titled *Bangladesh 1971* displayed this picture at the Rivington Place Gallery in Shoreditch, East London, as the visual "trace" of the raped woman of 1971. In 2013–2014, a London-based theatre company Komola Collective[3] announced its intention to stage a play on the *Birangona*: *Women of War,* in the United Kingdom and Bangladesh based on the testimonies collected from a group of poor *birangonas* in Sirajganj. It included Ahmed's photograph on its poster to announce the play. Unlike Ahmed's photograph, where the raped woman uses her hair (as well as her fists) to cover her identity, the theater group altered this photograph to portray the birangona as looking out through her disheveled hair. In this version, she holds up her fists in protest above her mouth while revolutionary women emerge out of the folds of her sari. The connotations of shame and anonymity in Ahmed's image have been replaced by the birangona's demands for justice for the killings and rapes of 1971 (see figs. P.1, P.2, P.3).

The circulation of this photograph and of other visual portrayals of the raped women of the Bangladesh war of 1971 underlines the presence of a public memory of wartime rape. It also suggests the importance in Bangladesh of visually identifying the raped woman. In fact, on a number of occasions during my fieldwork, people narrating encounters with the "raped women" would refer to the photograph: "Have you seen 'the famous hair photograph'? The raped woman covering her face with her fist and hair? The women we saw looked very much like that. They had become 'abnormal' (mentally unstable) as a result of the rape." This comment also suggests that in the public memory of rape there exist visual ways of identifying the raped woman as "abnormal." Here real-life encounters with the "abnormal" birangona intertwine with similar portrayals of the raped woman in the existing literary and visual representations to arrive at a sedimented image of who a birangona is.

Images of the birangona are also complemented in contemporary Bangladesh by various testimonies of wartime rape by the women survivors themselves. Mosammad Rohima Nesa, Kajoli Khatoon, Moyna Karim, and Rashida Khatoon,[4] like many other women, were raped by West Pakistani soldiers in their homes during the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. When attempting to narrate their experiences of 1971 in the 1990s, they would say to me, "*Ha, amader mela itihash, chorom itihash ache*" (Yes, we have a lot of history, a severe history). They would refer to the "poison" of the 1971 "history" that they carry, the "spillages" and "excesses" of their experiences from the 1970s to the 1990s.

Four poor, landless women, they have lived since 1971 with their husbands and children in villages (Enayetpur and its neighbor) in a western dis-

FIGURE P.1. The birangona "hair" photograph. Courtesy: Naibuddin Ahmed.

FIGURE P.2. Autograph ABP exhibition: Ahmed's photograph in *Bangladesh 1971*, a major documentary photography exhibition at Rivington Place Gallery, London, April-June 2008. Courtesy: Autograph ABP.

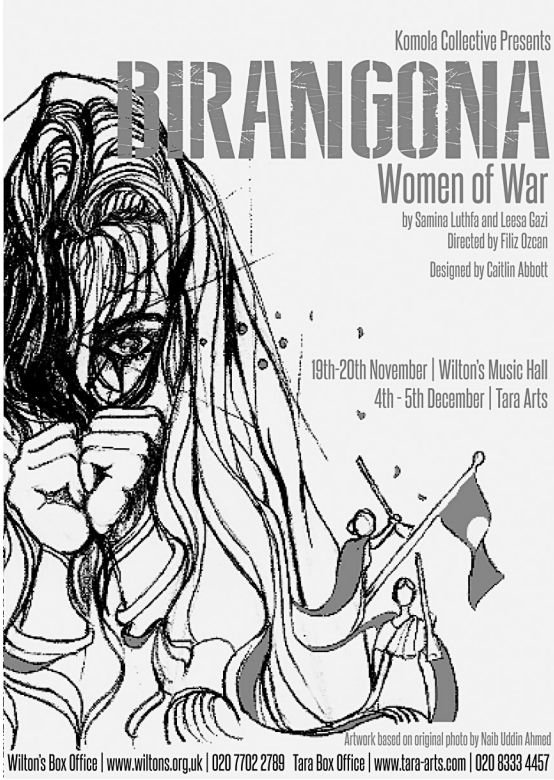

FIGURE P.3. Ahmed's photograph as part of the poster for the play *Birangona: Brave Woman*, staged in the United Kingdom and Bangladesh in 2013–14. Courtesy: Caitlin Abbott.

trict in Bangladesh where I spent eight months of my year-long multisited fieldwork. During my fieldwork, when I would return to Dhaka from Enayetpur, people—NGO activists, human rights lawyers, intellectuals, writers, journalists, academics, feminists who knew about my research—would invariably ask the following questions about the war heroines: Are they married? Do they have a family, children, *kutumb* (in laws)? Did their husband know of the incident of rape? My answer to these questions would amaze them: the poor, rural, and illiterate women continue to be married to their landless husbands with whom they were married even before 1971, *in spite* of the rape. These frequently occurring, repetitive questions point to a sedimented imaginary of the war heroine among the activist community. Just as the image in the hair photograph gives an idea of the birangona as "abnormal," various literary and visual representations have contributed to the perception that the war heroine's kin networks have abandoned her and her family has not accepted her as a result of the rape.

The phrase of the Enayetpur women—"a lot of history, a severe history"—further resonates with Shiromoni Bhaskar's representation and articulation of her experience of the Bangladesh war of 71. In 1998, Shiromoni, a famous Bangladeshi artist, acknowledged publicly that she had been raped during the war by Pakistani officials and Bengali collaborators. As a raped woman from a middle-class background, her testimonies and photographs have been central to various national commemoration programs on 1971. As a middle-class birangona, Shiromoni dismantled the prevalent stereotype that all birangonas are ashamed and invisible as a result of their rape.

This public memory contradicts the prevalent assumption that there is silence regarding wartime rape. It is incorrectly assumed by many that because Bangladesh is a "Muslim" country, the traditions and practices of Islam—and its assumed association with ideologies of gender, patriarchy, honor, and shame—ensure the preservation of silence about wartime rape (see, e.g., Brownmiller 1975, 1994; and chapter 6 on orientalizing rape). My ethnography highlights the various socioeconomic dynamics within which the ideologies of gender, honor, and shame are practiced among the birangonas. It shows that the public memory of wartime rape manifests in Bangladesh in three ways: first, the state category that designates the raped women as birangonas; second, an extensive archive of visual and literary representations dating back to 1971; and third, human rights testimonies of poor and middle-class birangonas since the 1990s.

To date around thirty to forty war heroines have publicly acknowledged their history of rape during 1971, including the previously mentioned four

women from western Bangladesh, whose testimonies and photographs have been part of a number of national commemorative programs. These testimonies started being collected by the Bangladeshi left-liberal activist community in the 1990s as evidence of the injustices and what many would consider to be genocide committed through the rapes and killings of 1971.[5] Within human rights narratives, there is a predetermined focus on documenting and presenting the birangonas' account as only a horrific one; inadequate attention is given to the way in which the war heroines themselves want to articulate their experience not only of 1971 but of the trajectory of their subsequent postconflict lives. In contrast, I show that focusing on the postconflict lives of the women not only gives us an in-depth account of the impact of wartime rape but also highlights the complex ways in which women and their families have dealt with the violence of rape over time. By giving due emphasis to the concerns of birangonas, one can also attempt to ethically document and care for the informants whose violent narratives and experiences are possible evidence of the occurrence of genocide in 1971. If we open up questions about the complex realities of experiences of wartime rape among the women and their families, we could locate their accounts within the local politics of wartime rape and the political economy of the women's postwar appropriation in the public sphere of Bangladesh.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has been difficult to write for various reasons and has taken a long time. Indeed, my debts are endless. Primarily, this study would have been inconceivable without the love, warmth, and hospitality that I received in Enayetpur. My sincere gratitude to the people in Enayetpur and particularly to Moyna, Kajoli, Rohima, Rashida, and their families and other birangonas with whom I worked. This is only a small attempt on my part to mirror their varied experiences. My thanks to Khokon Hossein for ably helping me as a research assistant.

The Richard Carley Hunt Fellowship of the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, New York, helped me to complete this book. I am also thankful for the award of the Felix Scholarship for funding my dissertation from which this book draws. Fieldwork was supported by the Central Research Fund of the University of London, the Emslie Horniman Scholarship from the Royal Anthropological Institute, and the SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London) Additional Fieldwork Fund. Funding from Durham University has also been significant for the book. I am grateful to Naibuddin Ahmed, Roshid Talukdar, Maleka Khan, Swapan Parekh, ABP Autograph, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Jill (Durrance) Sabella, Joanna Kirkpatrick, Geraldine Forbes, and Paul Greenough for granting permission to use their photographs and other documents from their personal archives. Sadly, Naibuddin Ahmed and Roshid Talukdar died in 2009 and 2011, respectively.

An earlier version of a section of chapter 3 appeared, in a different form, as " 'Remembering to Forget': Public Secrecy and Memory of Sexual Violence in Bangladesh," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12, no. 2 (2006): 433–50. An earlier version of a section of chapter 5 appeared, in a different form, as " 'My *Man* (Honour) Is Lost but I Still Have My *Iman* (Principle)': Sexual Violence and Articulations of Masculinity," in *South Asian Masculinities*, edited by R. Chopra, C. Osella, and F. Osella (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2004, 131–59). An earlier version of chapter 7, in a different form, appeared as "The Absent Piece of Skin: Sexual Violence in the Bangladesh War and Its Gendered and Racialised Inscriptions," *Modern Asian Studies* 46, no. 6 (2012): 1572–601.

An earlier version of a section of the conclusion appeared, in a different form, as "Friendships and Ethnographic 'Encounters' within Left-Liberal Politics in Bangladesh," in *Taking Sides: Politics and Ethnography* (A Nancy Lindisfarne Festschrift), edited by H. Armbruster and A. Laerke (Oxford: Berghahn, 2008, 65–87).

I am grateful to *Modern Asian Studies*, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Berghahn Books, and Women Unlimited (earlier Kali for Women) for publishing these earlier versions; the versions that appear in this book are significantly revised.

The scholarly roots of the book took shape from discussions with Prof. Prasanta Ray of Presidency College, Calcutta University, and Prof. T. K. Oomen, Prof. Avijit Pathak, and Prof. R. K. Jain of Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. In SOAS, Prof. Christopher Pinney and Dr. Caroline Osella not only were supportive supervisors but also have become important intellectual interlocutors and friends. Dr. Nancy Lindisfarne has also continued to provide invaluable succor and motivation throughout. Prof. Veena Das has been a huge support for the book, and I am grateful for her warmth and intellectual inspiration. Prof. Jonathan Spencer has encouraged me with discussions related to anthropology of politics. In Lancaster University, discussions with Prof. Jackie Stacey, Dr. Anne-Marie Fortier, Dr. Bulent Diken, Prof. Cindy Weber, Prof. Paolo Palladino, Prof. Michael Dillon, and students of various undergraduate and postgraduate courses have enriched the book further. My sincere thanks to the Anthropology Department in SOAS and Sussex for giving me the opportunities to teach and for various scholarly engagements.

I am also thankful for the feedback received for my presentations at the annual conferences of the American Anthropological Association and the Association of Social Anthropology, the Brick Lane Study Circle, the South Asian Anthropological Group, Ain-O-Shalish-Kendra, Bangladesh Rural Advance-

ment Committee University in Dhaka, Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) and South Asian studies seminar in Cambridge University, Madison Preconference on 1971, Rape in Wartime conference in Paris, Workshop on State and Self-making, SOAS and the anthropology department seminars in Jahangirnagar University (Dhaka), University of Manchester, Warwick, SOAS, University College London and Sussex.

The warmth I received in Bangladesh was overwhelming. The comforts of my stay in Enayetpur were ensured by the hospitality of my hosts in Enayetpur—the Chowdhurys and in Dhaka—Urmi Rahman, Shireen Hossein (Tonudi), Sharmima Rahman (Soma), Deedar Hossein, and Khaleda Khatoon, my hosts-turned-friends, provided me a home away from home. Particularly, the love and support of the employees of the NGO Nijera Kori, in Bhashkhal, gave me many new friends, precious among them being Shikha Saha. I value the academic discussions with and friendships of Dr. Meghna Guhathakurta, Suraiya Begum, Hasina Ahmed, and Dr. Sukumar Biswas of Bangla Academy. They, along with Rahnuma Ahmad, Shahidul Alam, Khushi Kobir, Akku Chowdhury, Mofidul Huq, Afsan Choudhuri, Hameeda Hossein, Shaheen Akhtar, Sara Hossein, Tareque and Catherine Masud, Tahmima Anam, Manosh Chowdhury, Ryan Good, David Bergman, Naila Zaman Khan, Dina Siddiqi, Naeem Mohaiemen, Bina D'Costa, Shahidul Alam Tuku, Taslima Mirza, Sayeed Ferdous, and Zobaida Nasreen, enabled the continuation of my fieldwork outside Bangladesh by sending me frequent packages, taking time to answer my innumerable queries, and above all strengthening our friendship.

Various individuals in different organizations also helped me in numerous ways. These organizations include Ain-O-Shalish-Kendra (ASK), Bangla Academy, Bangladesh Women's Health Coalition, Bangladesh National Women Lawyer's Association, Community Development Library, Bangladesh National Archives, Environment and GIS Support Project (EGIS), the Bengali newspaper *Prothom Alo*, and University of Dhaka Library. I acknowledge the support given by students of Jahangirnagar University and DRIK Picture Library: Khandaker Tanvir Murad Topu, Debasish Shome, and Nurunnahar Nargish, in finding and photographing various visual illustrations and following up on references to various literary works. Stephen Thomas of the Photographic Unit, Lancaster University, helped me to finalize these images. The music of Jazz FM's *Late Lounge* provided a productive ambience for "thought struggle" in the early hours of the morning.

The long process of writing this book has been made considerably easier and enjoyable by the support of friends and family. My thanks to Shruti Kapila, Greg Cameron, Jisha Menon, Lindi Todd, Andrew Irving, Nigel Eltringham,

Irfan Ahmed, Anuradha Chakravarty, Radha Roy, Ruben Andersson, akshay khanna, Anoshua Choudhuri, Anupam Banerjee, Binod Mukherjee, Swarnali Banerjee-Cochrane, and Ester Gallo. I lost two friends during the process of writing this book: Justine Lucas, who died of a terminal illness, and Tareque Masud, who died as a result of a tragic road accident. Their indomitable spirit and quest for life served as an example to all around them. The constant faith of my dearest sister, Abantika and brother-in-law, Saradindu, the love of my niece, Meghna, and the warmth of Ed and Ann Lacy have been invaluable. Given the theme and the nature of the material, as well as the multiplicity of sources that this book draws upon, I have found concluding it, challenging for various reasons. My *moner manush*, Mark Lacy, has endured patiently the completion of this book through engaging, encouraging, critical discussions, editing and by cooking me innumerable meals and giving me the space to finish it. His companionship, love, laughter, humor, and support are precious. The birth of our sons, Nikhil and Milon, made me realize the significance of all three "babies"—the book and our sons. Nothing would have been possible without the blessing, warmth, sacrifice, support, unstinting faith, and encouragement of Ma, who let me fly when I wanted to. This book is a testament to her love, strength, and spirit.

Thanks to Ken Wissoker, the editor at Duke University Press who took on this project. Thanks also to the anonymous readers for their comments and to Laura Helper-Ferris, Jade Brooks and Sara Leone for all the editorial help. To all these individuals, my warmest, heartfelt gratitude. Needless to say, I alone am responsible for any shortcomings that remain in this study. All efforts have been made to secure permissions. For further clarifications, please contact the author by email. I will donate all royalties received from sales of this book to the birangonas in Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

"The Looking-Glass Border"

There never had been a moment in the four thousand year old history of that map when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other after they had drawn their lines—so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free—our looking-glass border. —AMITAV GHOSH 1988, 233

Bangladesh is a country symbolized by its lack and excess. A prevalent stereotype of Bangladesh in India and in the West is that it is an "Islamic" country ruled by military governments and dominated by NGOs. Alongside the prevailing international image of grinding poverty, floods, and cyclones, studies have often linked Bangladesh to policies of population control, development, outsourced garment production, and now climate change. In 1972, reflecting on the bizarre donation of a shipment of used ski clothing sent by well-meaning residents of a Scandinavian country as part of the relief efforts after the 1971 war, a Bangladeshi relief worker in Dhaka rightly said, "I guess that for many people Bangladesh is a place of shadow geography—one of those countries you think is in the Himalayas but on the other hand might be Thailand's neighbor to the south" (Ellis 1972, 298).

Prior to 1947, the Hindu Bengalis constituted the dominant landowners in East Bengal, while Muslim Bengalis primarily worked as *munshis* (accountants) and landless peasants. After the formation of East Pakistan on the basis of religious identity, many Hindus moved to West Bengal in India and Muslim Bengalis to East Pakistan. Over the years, numerous Hindu Bengalis have also moved from Bangladesh to West Bengal as "refugees"; they have many stories about losing property. The attachment and distance between the two Bengals are aptly captured in Amitav Ghosh's "looking-glass border"—each place became an inverted image of the other. The writings of the Bangladeshi feminist writer Taslima Nasreen contributed to this image and further strengthened already existing negative stereotypes in West Bengal and India about the "Muslims" of Bangladesh. In 1993 she published *Lojja* (Shame), portraying the backlash of the majority Muslim population against minority Hindu communities in Bangladesh. This was in response to the right-wing Indian Hindu communalists' demolition of Babri Masjid at Ayodhya on December 6, 1992, and the subsequent massacre of minority Muslim communities in Mumbai in India.

In conjunction with this idea of lack, Indian Bengalis contradictorily identify Bangladesh as a place of excess—of hospitality, warmth, beautiful *jamdani* saris, and "good food" (especially of varieties of river fish, particularly the favorite Bengali fish, *hilsa/ilish*, delicious kebabs, and *biriyanis*). The shadowy lines between Bangladesh and West Bengal (India) not only separated the countries but created "a yet undiscovered irony" (Amitav Ghosh 1988, 233) highlighted by the paradoxical, yet inarticulable, undiscovered relationship of intimacy and distance, lack and excess between the two divided Bengals. Doing this research in Bangladesh as an Indian Bengali from Calcutta, West Bengal (the Indian part of Bengal), I often thought of Ghosh's "looking-glass border": this work made me relearn our own cross-border histories.

Crossing Borders

This research was triggered in 1992 by my outrage and despair as an undergraduate student in Calcutta, India, over the unfolding of intercommunal violence after the demolition of Babri Masjid, by Hindu communalists. Being confined at home during the imposition of curfew and depending on Doordarshan (the government TV channel) for news, I became aware of the power of political rumors as I heard of widespread instances of sexual violence in Gujarat during 1992, that of Hindu men raping Muslim women and Muslim men raping Hindu women (Agarwal 1995). These circulating accounts spoke

to me of how a woman's body becomes the territory on which men inscribe their political programs, a point that the violence against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 reconfirmed.[1] Also, news throughout the 1990s of the Japanese comfort women, the rapes in Bosnia and Rwanda, and the United Nation's declaration of rape as a war crime in the 1995 Beijing session—all these feminist concerns triggered and informed my research in Bangladesh.

In the first year of my doctoral work, I heard from a Bangladeshi student in London how women in Bangladesh were publicly talking about their experience of wartime rape. Drawing on various feminist theorizations of wartime rape (Brownmiller 1975, 1994; Stiglmayer 1994), I assumed that there would be silence about this issue at the Bangladeshi national level. I decided to visit Bangladesh for the first time in March 1997 to coincide with its twenty-fifth anniversary of the liberation war as part of a pre-fieldwork trip. On a warm, sunny morning, I landed in the smart Zia International Airport, named after one of the nation's *muktijoddhas* (liberation fighters), later the military president, Ziaur Rehman (1975–81), carrying a photograph of my host. Murals of the war could even be seen from the plane. Soon I found myself being driven through the streets of Dhaka to the upmarket diplomatic residential enclave of Bonani. On the way, I watched with curiosity and amusement as colorfully painted rickshaws, "baby-taxis," and expensive foreign cars vied for road space. The stretch from the airport was also interspersed with large cutouts of Sheikh Mujib, Sheikh Hasina, Yasser Arafat, Nelson Mandela, and Suleiman Demeriel (the Turkish prime minister). Huge banners welcomed these international guests coming to celebrate March 26, Independence Day, which would also mark the end of the yearlong celebrations of Bangladesh's twenty-fifth birth anniversary.

On the following morning, March 26 itself, I headed for a public meeting in the grounds of the Shaheed Suhrawardy Udyan (Martyred Suhrawardy Park), where newly elected prime minister and Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina would share the stage with Arafat, Mandela, and Demeriel. Hasina's observation of Independence Day would be particularly significant, for she was also the daughter of the charismatic leader and the assassinated first prime minister of independent Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rehman. Earlier, I had watched on television as Hasina, along with the three foreign dignitaries, placed a wreath at the Savar Smritisoudho (Memorial of Memories) just outside Dhaka, where the government first takes all international guests. Hasina showed them the mass graves to the beat of a military guard of honor; then the tune of the national anthem, "Amar Sonar Bangla ami tomai bhalobashi" (My golden Bengal, I love you), written by Rabindranath Tagore,

a non-Muslim (Brahmo), Bengali Nobel laureate, filled the air. Now, at Suhrawardy Udyan, in the presence of the international guests, Hasina lit the Shikha Chironton (Eternal Flame) at the site of her father's historic speech given on March 7, 1971.[2] Here Sheikh Mujib had called Bengalis to struggle for national liberation through a movement of noncooperation. March 7 is deemed by the Awami League to be the trigger for the liberation war. Hasina declared that the flame of Muktijuddher Chetona (spirit of Muktijuddho) would burn forever so as to bring to fruition her father's dream of Sonar Bangla (Golden Bengal). Sonar Bangla is a romantic and nostalgic visualization of "mother Bengal," with her prosperous lands and rivers inhabited by a peaceful, harmonious, agrarian community, a timeless and an apparently classless imagery. Sheikh Mujib himself had developed this scene of eternal tranquillity—which evokes sorrowful longing and emotion for one's homeland—as a political project to infuse pathos into Muktijuddho (Bangladesh Liberation war of 1971) and a passion for post–1971 nation-building. As I stood on the fringes of this crowded meeting, everyone around me cheered as Mandela, Demeriel, and Arafat acknowledged Bangladesh's liberation struggle. It was a momentous feeling.

I next visited the Muktijuddho Museum, where the air reverberated with the revolutionary songs of Tagore and Nazrul Islam (the national poet of Bangladesh). The atmosphere was festive, with children accompanying adults, young women dressed beautifully in saris, and men in *punjabis*.[3] Here exhibits decentered the Sheikh Mujib–focused celebrations and emphasized the role of common people in the liberation of 1971. The museum housed belongings of muktijoddhas and exhibited gruesome photographs of those who were killed and women who had been raped. In the museum café I met a mix of young and middle-aged people, many of whom expressed their hatred for Pakistan, saying that they refrained from buying clothes or fruit juices made there.[4] One of them added, "So what if we hate Pakistan because of 1971? Hasina might talk of Muktijuddho, but she has just returned from the Organization of Islamic Countries Conference in Pakistan. Also have you seen her wearing the 'headband' *hijab* [veil] just before the June 1996 elections? She cannot seem to decide what Bangladesh should be—Bengali or Muslim!" At the same time, Pakistan, especially its cricket team and players, is, however, much more popular among the younger generation in Bangladesh. So, in my first few days I witnessed vivid examples of the inherent contestations in the national celebrations of independence earned as a result of the Bangladesh war of 1971.

In the week following the Independence Day celebrations, the leading newspaper dailies I perused all featured the Awami League and Bangladesh National Party (BNP) leadership debate between Sheikh Mujib and General Ziaur Rehman (see chapter 1). Each newspaper proclaimed that its favorite had led the 1971 war. It was evident that the Sheikh Mujib–centric state celebrations were meant to offset the preceding BNP government's militarized commemorations. The celebrations featured Bengali songs and poets in order to emphasize a Bengali identity. The ethos of Bengali identity and the "spirit" of the war of 1971—of which the left-liberal communities considered Hasina to be the repository—centered on principles of secularism, democracy, and Bengali nationalism, as opposed to the emphasis on Islam and Bangladeshi nationalism of the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami (JMI). But the celebration and symbolism did not convince everyone: those with a fierce hatred for Pakistan's role in Bangladesh in 1971 strongly questioned the state's flirtation with Islamic and Bengali identity.

The research center with which I was affiliated employed leading Bangladeshi scholars from the different social science disciplines. Ranging from the lower middle class to the middle class, the scholars were not homogeneous, and tensions existed between the women feminists and other male intellectuals. But at the beginning of my fieldwork, everyone welcomed me warmly, referring to me as "the girl from Calcutta working on our 71," and I established long-lasting friendships with some of the feminist scholars, activists, and lawyers.

I was also increasingly unlearning my initial presumption—that the history of rape was absent from the metanarrative of the Bangladesh war. Instead, I found it continually invoked, especially in the state speeches and policies eulogizing the women as birangonas. I came across testimonies of rape in documents from after the war (from 1972 and 1973) and as the subject of museum exhibitions and voluntary narratives of birangonas in newspapers from the 1990s. I later found my way to the village of Enayetpur to conduct more in-depth fieldwork, specifically to talk to birangonas in their everyday lives today. Apart from the four women of Enayetpur (mentioned in the preface), I also worked with seven other women (from different parts of Bangladesh) who were raped in 1971: Chaya, Rukhshana, Afroza, Morjina, Bokul, Shiromoni, and Shireen. In Enayetpur, I was helped by Khokon Hossein, a young journalist who worked for a local newspaper. Wittily referred to in the village as the *shanghatik shangbadik* (ferocious journalist) for his keen journalistic aspirations, he facilitated my access to muktijoddhas in and around

Enayetpur for the purpose of interviews. At various local and national sites, I also interviewed and observed feminist and human rights activists and organizations, state officials, filmmakers, writers, and other producers of various literary and visual representations of the birangonas of 1971.

Spectral Wound is the result of this multisited fieldwork. It documents and analyzes the public memory of wartime rape perpetrated by the West Pakistani army and local Bengali men in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) during the Bangladesh war of 1971. It seeks to explore the following questions: How is the raped woman invoked in the public memory of 1971? What is the relationship between this public memory and the experiences of women who were raped in 1971? The book tries to counter the limited and orientalized understanding of the impacts of wartime rape whereby the raped woman is only understood to be an "abnormal," horrific, dehumanized victim, abandoned by her kin. It ethnographically analyzes the social life of testimonies, examining how the stories and experiences of raped women of the 1971 war became part of a broader set of national discourses and debates, bringing together testimonies and visual representations. It examines how these visual and literary representations of the raped woman create a public culture of "knowing" and remembering her that in turn informs the processes of testifying and human rights. The book argues that identifying raped women only through their suffering not only creates a homogeneous understanding of gendered victimhood but also suggests that wartime rape is experienced in the same way by all victims. *Spectral Wound* instead utilizes a political and historical analysis to highlight the varied experiences of wartime rape during 1971.

Addressing how the experiences of 1971 manifest today among women themselves and their families, this book triangulates the narratives with various representations (state, visual, and literary), as well as contemporary human rights testimonies. The book thereby examines the circulation of press articles, a range of oral accounts (interviews, discussion, observation, rumors, and gossip),[5] images, literary representations, and testimonies of rape among survivors of sexual violence, their families and communities, the left-liberal civil society, and different governments and state actors. *Spectral Wound* also reflects on the silence relating to the violation and rape of men and juxtaposes it with the public memory of the rape of women. This allows a theorization of the relationship between the nation, sexuality, and masculinity and identifies issues of demasculinization in the husbands of raped women.

Worldwide, the dominant understanding is that communities and nations consign sexual violence during conflict to oblivion and silence. It is understood to be a cost of war. In response to the assumed silence about wartime rape, feminists and activists have found it imperative to testify, to witness, to speak out, to "recover," to give voice to raped women's narratives. This witnessing is both a methodology and a politics, and feminists and activists characterize it as empowering, therapeutic, and liberating to those being given or finding their voice. Such activism has publicized the rapes of comfort women in Japan during World War II, the rapes in Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990s, and sexual violence in Darfur and Congo.[6]

But wartime rape was already part of public conversation in Bangladesh in the 1970s, immediately after the Bangladesh war, and it has continued to be part of public discussion since the 1990s. Along with designating the raped women as birangonas, the Bangladeshi government also set up various rehabilitation programs and centers for the women in 1972, organized marriages for them, and helped them enter the labor market to guarantee that they were not socially ostracized.[7] Whether successful or not, the effort by the new Bangladeshi government to publicly present women raped during 1971 as "war heroines" remains almost unparalleled. It is important to note that the Bangladeshi press did fall silent on the birangonas between 1973 and the 1990s, as did the government. The issue of wartime rape has, however, remained on the public stage, as a topic of literary and visual media (films, plays, photographs) since 1971, thereby ensuring that the raped woman has endured as an iconic figure. Real-life encounters with the birangona after the war have also contributed to the "knowing" of the birangona, as is evident in the following illustrations.

When I started my fieldwork in 1997, many personal accounts of war among a large number of people in cities, suburban towns, and villages featured "knowing" a woman who had been raped in 1971, "who lived next door," "in the same road," or "in the neighboring locality/village." The woman in question would always be remembered through her "disheveled hair," "her loud laughter," or her "quietness" or "muteness," or as "the one who stares into space" with "deadened-eyes." Ratanlal Chakraborty of Dhaka University said that he saw many women roaming different parts of Dhaka city like vagrants after the war, from December 1971 until February 1972: "Their dress and movements were proof for many of us who were definite that they were victims of the war and that they had nowhere to go" (S. B. Rahman 2002). In various personal

communications during my research, individuals from different class backgrounds would remember returning after the war and encountering a "raped woman." I cite here responses of three individuals:

> We were in Babur Road when we returned to Dhaka and there was a house across the road where we saw many women with their unkempt hair, coming out on the road, purposelessly. We could hear their laughter at night.
>
> When we returned after the war, there was a woman next door who looked unstable. . . . her hair was all over her face and she was always quiet—we knew she was raped.
>
> After the war, my father saw thousands of raped women standing still, back to back, against a truck. Not a hair moved among them and there was no sign of life in their eyes. They were mute, with deadened eyes like Qurbani, sacrificial cattle. Whenever I utter the word *birangona* I invariably think of that image. (Gazi 2014)

These postwar encounters with the raped women resonate powerfully with the famous "hair photograph" and the way various people referred to it to make sense of their own wartime encounter. It is telling that while the staging of the play *Birangona* draws upon the memory of the director's father (as mentioned earlier in the Preface), the theater company also chose the hair photograph on its poster to stand in for this memory of the birangona.

Alongside the figure of the birangona in these narratives is the figure of the *razakar*, a male collaborator. Local Bengalis and Bihari Muslims collaborated with the Pakistani army in the rapes and killings during 1971. Bangladeshis refer to them as *razakars*, which means volunteers or helpers in Persian and Urdu, but they use the term pejoratively, as the name Judas might be used in Europe or Mirjafar in West Bengal, India—insults based on historical figures of betrayal. Numbering around fifty thousand, razakars are deemed to be those who spoke Urdu, came to East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) during the 1947 partition, and were members of the religious reactionary parties like JMI (Salek 1977), Al Badr, and Al Shams (which formed "peace committees" during the 1971 war). Their collaboration with the Pakistani army resulted in the death of anywhere from 300,000 to 3 million civilians (these numbers are contested numbers, depending on who is articulating them), the death of around 18 to 50 "intellectuals,"[8] the rape of hundreds of thousands of women (these numbers also are contested, varying between 100,000 and 400,000), and 25,000 to 195,000 forced pregnancies.

The left-liberal activist community stereotypically represents the razakar with a beard and a cap, as signifiers of "Islamic" identity.[9] Since 2009, the government has tried many of these collaborators at the controversial war crimes tribunal in Dhaka and has sentenced six to death. On December 12, 2013, one of those being tried for these war crimes was executed in the midst of jubilation as well as anger. Nonetheless, in independent Bangladesh, powerful razakars have gained political power. Some were cabinet ministers in the government led by Khaleda Zia and the BNP, in 2001. Some of them are Islamicists who belong to—or are politically closer to—JMI, the right-wing Islamic party.

The razakar and the birangona are iconic figures in the public memory of 1971: male and female, perpetrator and survivor, both public and both secret, both being memories of that past which are erupting and shaping the present. That in contemporary Bangladesh there is need for the razakar to be punished is powerfully shown through the following vignette. Heard in nearly all parts of Bangladesh, it establishes a direct relationship between the raped woman and the collaborator.

A razakar who once provided women to the Pakistani army falls prey to his own deeds. On a day when there are no women to provide, the Pakistani general rapes the razakar's own daughter. The daughter commits suicide after disclosing her father's betrayal to the villagers. I found this story in books published in the 1990s documenting the narratives of torture and violation of 1971. Syed Shamsul Haq's famous play, *Payer Aoaj Paoa Jai* (Footsteps can be heard; [1976] 1991), focuses on this account of rape, which I also found to be the content of various dramatized stage plays and televised serials. The ubiquity and consistency of this account of rape through its circulation through literary, press, and media accounts might suggest that this narrative enables people to imagine how a collaborator might have been punished, seemingly possible only by the rape of his daughter! The punishment meted out to the razakar through his daughter's rape also alerts us to the prevailing discomfort toward the birangonas' transgressed sexuality. The reactions to the "hair photograph" typify this discomfort.

The ceaseless exchange across national and cultural boundaries of this visual economy of the birangona in this public, and its intertextuality (the intertwined, circulatory traces of discourses, symbols, and images that cross-reference each other in different texts, contexts, and times) with witness accounts have significantly contributed to the efficacy of this representation of the raped woman as a horrific "wound." It is important for me to clarify my use of "wound," a psychoanalytically loaded term that has been all too easily

invoked to mean something painful that bears witness to a forgotten trauma and past injustice. This definition allows a seamless, ahistorical sliding of individual trauma into collective trauma. Instead, I use "wound" literally to refer to the physical and social injuries through which different Bangladeshi publics identify and thereafter circulate, know, and imagine the iconic figure of the birangona. This "hair" image has brought the horrific events of 1971 to the attention of an international public, the image standing in for the continual wounded history of Bangladesh.

Feminist Oral Historiography and Public Memory

My focus on the gendered narratives of sexual violence occurring during times of conflict builds on the theoretical, methodological, and ethical concerns emerging from the scholarship of feminist oral historiography relating to the partition of 1947 (Butalia 1998; R. Menon and Bhasin 1998; Das 1995) and women's experience in 1971 (D'Costa 2011; Saikia 2011). Drawing on testimonies and documents, these works alert us to the ethical pitfalls of uncovering these narratives. This is a concern of contemporary significance given the continuation of sexual violence during conflicts, including the current rapes perpetrated by the Indian army in its attempts to suppress resistance to its authority in Kashmir, in the northeastern states, and in Sri Lanka during the civil war. In fact, unconfirmed reports alleged that soldiers of the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka raped Rajiv Gandhi's "suicide bomber" assassin (Dhanu or Thenmozhi Rajaratnam).[10]

The history of partition is the poignant account of deep mental and physical violation of women, as is made clear by the rich scholarship on partition violence that was published in the 1990s: *The Other Side of Silence* (Butalia 1998), *Borders and Boundaries* (R. Menon and Bhasin 1998), and *Critical Events* (Das 1995). These works show how "non-actors are shaped by an epochal event and how their response enables a critique of political history" (R. Menon and Bhasin 1998, 16). Throughout this book, I draw extensively on Veena Das's (1995) theorization of the relation between language, body, pain, and the state via the lens of women affected by the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 and the partition of 1947. Through oral history narratives, Butalia highlights how partition divided families, how they rebuilt lives, what resources they drew upon, how the trauma of displacement and losing one's home shaped their lives, and the indispensability of "low-caste and low-status" jobs in the context of conflict. Butalia, Das, and Menon and Bhasin were the first to focus on the role of family violence and "honor killings" (as a mark of masculine honor)

of women during partition, Telling the stories of women who had resorted to violence by killing themselves, and how their families could only recall them as heroic martyrs (e.g., Butalia 1998, 62), their work shows how scholars and others usually conceptualize violence as male and patriarchal.

My work on the testimonial cultures of the public memory of wartime rape also engages with two academic books on the gendered account of the Bangladesh war that have provided a timely framework for debates relating to women's experiences of 1971: Bina D'Costa's *Nationbuilding, Gender and War Crimes in South Asia* (2011) and Yasmin Saikia's *Women, War and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971* (2011). From a feminist approach based in the disciplinary paradigms of international relations, D'Costa (2011) tracks in detail the trajectory of nationalism in Bangladesh, the sequence of events from 1947 to 1971, and the impact of the war on Hindu victims. Drawing on the hope of *insaniyat* or *manushyata* (the capacity to recognize the shared human condition), Saikia (2011) attempts to map out a transformative, empowering, responsible space in response to the violent narratives of 1971. Many of her respondents show an inner capacity for humanity in the midst of violence and war. Saikia includes the narratives of five women raped during the war, referring to them as "victims" and distinguishing them from liberation fighters. Saikia mentions other narratives and describes three women who were involved in providing various services during the war, two female liberation fighters, and two men—a Bengali liberation fighter who had also committed rape and a Pakistani soldier—who were the perpetrators of violence during 1971. Her work is important for its focus on the experiences of a Bihari woman, a war baby—Beauty—who struggles with her mother for a true account of the events of her birth and its focus on perpetrators.

I agree that as a supplement to existing women's history, oral histories can give a texture and quality to women's lives. Also, just as the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 became a trigger for an exploration of the violent, undocumented events of the partition of 1947 (Das 1995), similarly, in Bangladesh in the 1990s, feminists and human rights activists sought to document women's oral histories of their rape of 1971 and try the collaborators of the Bangladesh war. This created the conditions that enabled various women to narrate their violent histories of 1971 and their post–1971 life trajectories.

While drawing on oral histories and narratives of the women affected, following work by Das, Butalia, and Menon and Bhasin, I also draw on government speeches, documents, and interviews with social workers and other authorities who worked among these women. These invaluable archives of social memory have allowed me to think through how the state, when seeking