THE BENGAL
BORDERLAND

THE BENGAL BORDERLAND

BEYOND STATE AND NATION IN SOUTH ASIA

Willem van Schendel

A

CONTENTS

FIGURES

PLATES

TABLES

ABBREVIATIONS

BDR   Bangladesh Rifles; the border guards of Bangladesh
BJP   Bharatiya Janata Party
BOP   Border outpost, usually manned by 20 to 25 border guards
BSF   Border Security Force, the border guards of India
CHT   Chittagong Hill Tracts
CID   Central Intelligence Department
CPI(M) Communist Party of India (Marxist)
EB   East Bengal
EBR   East Bengal Regiment
EP   East Pakistan
EPR   East Pakistan Rifles, the border guards of East Pakistan
IMDT   Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act of 1983
ISI   Inter-Services Intelligence, Pakistan's foreign intelligence agency
Nasaka Border Administration Force of Burma/Myanmar (also spelled Na Sa Ka)
PIF   Prevention of Infiltration Force
Re., Rs. Rupee, Rupees (the currencies of India and Pakistan)
SAARC   South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
Tk.   Taka (the currency of Bangladesh)
VHP   Vishwa Hindu Parishad
WB   West Bengal
WP   West Pakistan

NOTE

The modern history of the region explored in this book has been turbulent. The region has been named and renamed, and as a result there is a confusing multiplicity of geographical and political designations. The following explanation may help some readers.

East Bengal, East Pakistan and **Bangladesh** refer to the same territory, now the independent state of Bangladesh. In 1947 the region of Bengal was divided and its eastern part joined the new state of Pakistan. In 1971 it broke away from Pakistan and formed the independent state of Bangladesh.

India, Hindustan and Bharat refer to the same state, India.

Burma and Myanmar refer to the same state, currently known as Myanmar in official parlance.

Assam, a state (province) of India, gradually broke into several smaller states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland (See *Appendix Figure 2*).

The official spelling of many towns and districts has varied during the period under review, for example **Dacca/Dhaka, Calcutta/Kolkata, Gauhati/Guwahati.** For current spellings of district names, see *Appendix Figure 1*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1

STUDYING BORDERLANDS

On a border road in India, a truckload of border guards encounter a rickshaw. They quarrel over who has the right of way. The guards give the rickshaw-puller a beating and then open fire, killing five bystanders and wounding two. In protest, local political parties declare a general strike. Later, in Delhi, borderland Members of Parliament accuse the guards of habitually humiliating and assaulting the border population, but the Deputy Speaker concludes a fierce parliamentary debate with the words:

> We are proud of our [Border Guards] and other Forces. The Members cannot irresponsibly utter anything and everything on the Forces ... I will not allow you to say anything more ... Nothing will go on record.[1]

This is an everyday story from one of the world's many borderlands. It points to the complicated relationship between borderlanders and their rulers. This book explores that relationship. It looks at what happens when a border is imposed on an unsuspecting population, how a new borderland takes shape, and what relationships develop between borderlanders and their states.

Borders come about in many ways. Some are like earthquakes. When the earth's tectonic plates move, the ground heaves and roars. Houses crumble, trees snap and people run around in panic. A deep fissure suddenly separates one half of the landscape from the other. And then it is all over. An eerie silence hangs over a land that is forever scarred, broken, double. A little later, aid teams rush to the site; they comfort the victims and help them pick up their lives. In the media, seismologists explain that earthquakes are both inevitable and unpredictable. And then the world moves on. When the world's political tectonic plates move, they create fissures known as international borders. Many of these come about in ways that, for those who experience them, are just as overpowering, devastating and unpredictable as earthquakes. But there are no political seismologists and no border aid teams, and what happens during and after such upheavals is little known. The study of borders is a curiously neglected no man's land.

The Bengal borderland

This book deals with the territorial and human consequences of a border whose birth, had it been an earthquake, would have registered way up on the Richter scale. We look at the fissure itself – a huge territorial gash of over 4,000 kilometres – and at how it became part of the everyday lives of millions of people living near it. This border separating India, East Pakistan (Bangladesh from 1971) and Burma became the backbone of a new borderland to which I refer as the 'Bengal borderland' because it bisects and encircles a region historically known as Bengal (see Appendix, Figure 2). The story of the Bengal borderland is important for those who wish to understand social change in South Asia, but this book also aims at linking it to broader concerns in social theory, particularly to the study of borders and border communities, and to how we conceptualize social space.

In August 1947, the tectonic plates of South Asian politics shifted abruptly. British colonial rule in India came to an end, the colony was split and the Bengal borderland was born with such suddenness that nobody actually knew its exact location till several days later.[2] Nothing had foreshadowed its geographical position, and its creation took the people who now found themselves to be living in a borderland by surprise. As one of them recalled, it was a time of great confusion:

> "You should realize that the separation happened all of a sudden and people were not well informed. Many people thought that it was only temporary and that the two countries would one day be one again."[3] Only gradually did it dawn on most of them what it meant to be living near an international border. "They turned our world upside down ... Nobody asked us, we did not know what was happening till much later ... Our lives were amputated."[4]

This book explains how these borderlanders and their states coped with a new, previously unimagined reality. We will see that the border remained a highly emotive issue: even today, its very location is contested in many places and there are groups who refuse to accept its legitimacy. The new border created a volatile region, linking India, Bangladesh and Burma, that has experienced wars, border conflicts, regional revolts and many forms of everyday resistance.[5]

The story of this region does not support the idea that the world is becoming borderless as it globalizes. On the contrary, the Bengal borderland is increasingly being policed, patrolled, fenced and land-mined. And yet, throughout its existence, it has been the scene of large transnational flows of labour migrants and refugees, of trade in many goods, and of exchanges of ideas and information.

Most of these flows were unauthorized by the states concerned, indicating continual struggles between the powers of territorial control and those of cross-border networking.

The changing social geographies of the borderland were bound up not only with these struggles, but also with a multiplicity of identities, old and new, that borderlanders juggled in their efforts to make sense of their new situation and shape a future for themselves. These in turn deeply influenced borderland culture, the policies of the new states, and the transnational networks facilitating cross-border flows. All these reasons make the Bengal borderland an important example of a modern borderland: thoroughly modern in the sense that it was created less than 60 years ago, it reverberates with the tensions noticeable in contemporary borderlands all over the globe.

Why study borderlands?

For a long time social scientists showed no more than a limited interest in the study of borderlands. In recent years, however, a concern with the processes of global restructuring has led to a perceptible increase in research on borderlands all over the world. Today, the study of borderlands is providing new insights into the relationship between modern states and transnational linkages.[6]

Borderland studies can tell us much about states because borders form a clear link between geography and politics.[7] The state's pursuit of territoriality – its strategy to exert complete authority and control over social life in its territory – *produces* borders and makes them into crucial markers of the success and limitations of that strategy. The ubiquity of international borders in today's world is a testimony to the importance of state territoriality: a recent survey calculated that there are 226,000 kilometres of land border worldwide, more than five times the earth's circumference.[8] Territoriality is inherently conflictual and tends to generate rival territorialities. Hence, borders need to be constantly maintained and socially reproduced through particular practices and discourses that emphasize the 'other.' Territoriality actively encourages the 'zero-sum games' that characterize geopolitical, national and border conflicts.[9]

But borders are also reproduced by transnational reconfiguration. They play a central role in regulating transnational flows and are in turn deeply influenced by them. As social scientists turn their attention from the 'virtual' world of global investment and speculation to the 'real' world of cross-border linkages and inter-territorial economies, borderlands emerge as core objects of transnational research.[10]

Increasingly, this new interest in borders merges with work on identity, ethnicity, citizenship and culture. The study of border cultures (or cultural landscapes that transcend political borders) is necessary in order to shift the

focus from state strategies and global economic change to the people living in the borderland. Borderlanders' perceptions, practices, identities and discourses are central to the social reproduction, maintenance or subversion of borders. How do people in borderlands negotiate cultural elements to symbolize their membership in local, regional, national and international communities?[11] How do they juggle multiple identities in the midst of great change? How do these identities impinge on the formation of states, nations and transnational networks? Cross-border cultural landscapes cannot be 'inferred or deduced from a knowledge of the political and economic structures of the states at their borders', but are a matter of empirical research.[12]

Finally, studying the transformation of international borderlands in a period of global reterritorialization requires a historical approach. The historicity of borderland space is obvious. Whether borderlands are created with earthquake-like suddenness or not, their formal beginnings are usually well documented, and so is their formal demise. As spatialized social relations, borderlands may be long-lived; indeed, they may have an afterlife well beyond the states that created them.[13] During their existence, they are changing geographies, shaped and reconfigured by social struggles and negotiations whose outcome is not predetermined.[14] Mapping and comparing these transformations requires historical research.

At another level, the historicity of borderlands lies in their symbolic uses. They are often portrayed as the material embodiment of a state's (or nation's) history as encapsulating its struggle for sovereignty and self-determination.[15] As such, dominant historical narratives may sacralize borderlands and make them pawns in the 'performance' of sovereignty.[16] Borderlanders may develop counter-narratives (e.g. irredentist ones) in which the historical significance of the border that separates them is minimized. In other words, borderlands are often battlefields of historiography, of the politics of selective remembering and forgetting.

Shaking off the 'iron grip' of the nation-state

The study of borderlands can play an important role in rethinking wider social theory, especially with regard to how we conceptualize social space. In the social sciences, it has long been customary to imagine the world as divided into distinct 'societies', 'cultures' and 'economies', and to think of these as fixed to specific territories. This is not surprising given the fact that the social sciences developed during the period in which the modern interstate system came into being. This is a system based on the territorialization of state power 'through which each state strives to exercise exclusive sovereignty over a delineated, self-enclosed geographical space.'[17] Consequently, the modern state employs a strategy of

territoriality, a spatial strategy to 'affect, influence, or control resources and people, by controlling area.' It is a form of enforcement that involves the active use of geographic space to classify social phenomena.[18]

This strategy of territorializing state power and sovereignty has proved to be very successful: during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a web of contiguous state territories spread to cover the entire globe.[19] Social scientists were so deeply influenced by this development that their work came to reflect a *territorialist epistemology* that entailed a

> transposition of the historically unique territorial structure of the modern interstate system into a generalized model of sociospatial organization, whether with reference to political, societal, economic, or cultural processes.[20]

Adopting this model had far-reaching consequences for how social scientists studied the world. Most of them took state territories as a 'preconstituted, naturalized, or unchanging scale of analysis', and their work tended towards a methodological territorialism that analysed all spatial forms and scales as being self-enclosed geographical units.[21] In this way, their social imagination was stifled by the 'iron grip of the nation state'; they fell into a 'territorial trap.'[22]

In recent years, a rebellion has been gathering against this state-centred epistemology and its commitment to 'received' units.[23] It opposes the idea that the modern state's territorial form can be a general model for societies, cultures and economies. Certainly, each state claims to produce a 'space wherein something is accomplished, a space, even, where something is brought to perfection: namely, a unified and hence homogeneous society.'[24] But this claim should not be confused with its realization. This is what social scientists do when they treat states as the conceptual starting point for their investigations, when they accept states as the rules of the game.[25] The inherited model of state-defined societies, cultures and economies has become highly problematic and social theorists are devising new models.[26] Studying borderlands – zones within which international borders lie– can be one way of challenging the inherited model, because the only way to study borderlands adequately is to understand them as much more than merely the margins of state territories. Borderland practices challenge the inherited model because they are based on ways of imagining power and space that differ from the 'heartland' practices that underlie much social science theorizing. Social scientists have tended to marginalize borderland practices, making them appear far more peripheral than they really are. As we shall see, borderland dynamics have a direct and fundamental impact on the shape of states, heartland practices and transnational linkages.

A borderless world?

In recent years it has become popular to herald the demise of the state and the emergence of a borderless, globalized world. The idea is that the geography of territorial states is being 'deterritorialized'. The forces of globalization – transnational flows of capital, people, goods and information – are progressively undermining the strategy of territoriality, the attempt to classify and control by means of geographical fixity, borders and enclosure. As a result, it is argued, new post-territorial geographies of networks and flows are supplanting the inherited geography of state territories.[27]

This deterritorialization thesis does not take sufficient account of the historical complexities of territoriality, nor of the fact that global flows cannot occur unless they are 'premised upon various forms of spatial fixity, localization and (re)territorialization.'[28] In other words, it is not a matter of pitching territorialization against deterritorialization or globalization, but rather one of understanding changing patterns of historical territorialization.[29]

In world history, the bundling together of territoriality and state sovereignty is a relatively new phenomenon. It received arguably its strongest impetus from the emergence of industrial capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and has been described as the geographical solution to a dilemma facing the emerging capitalist class: how to balance competition and mutual cooperation. Nation-states provided arenas in which this balance could be struck: they protected the interests of a national capitalist class and maintained control over the working class. Nation-states emerged as the 'basic building blocks of the advanced capitalist system,' and, in Neil Smith's powerful image, dramatically reconstructed the world as a giant 'jigsaw puzzle of national pieces.'[30] But this dispensation was not permanent. After the Second World War, the internationalization of markets and production processes rendered the national scale of economic organization 'increasingly obsolete'. The state found it more and more difficult to function as a gatekeeper state that provided both extraterritorial opportunities for national capital and security against the perceived social costs of internationalization, especially immigration.[31] It was only by means of a 'Ramboesque reaffirmation of national boundaries' (trade and immigration restrictions, currency controls, militaristic display, the United Nations) that states were able to extend the association of territoriality to state sovereignty up to the early 1970s. Then the pieces of Smith's jigsaw puzzle were thrown into the air, and new relations between economies, territorial polities and cultures came into being.[32]

The point being stressed by a number of theorists is that this did not imply a deterritorialisation of the world, but rather a new phase of territorialisation in which the link between territory and sovereignty became partially 'unbundled.'

Increasingly this process is being referred to as *re-scaling*, after the core concept of a new approach, geographical *scale*.[33]

The construction of scale

The concept of scale is of particular significance in the study of borderlands. Theorists of scale criticize the social sciences for generally treating space as self-evident, unproblematic, and unrequiring of theory, and for viewing 'history as the independent variable, the actor, and geography as the dependent – the ground on which events "take place," the field within which history unfolds.'[34] They deplore that social scientists have foregrounded time and society in their studies but have marginalised space. Rather than treating space as an equal partner to time and society, most social scientists have relegated it to a neutral backdrop of socio-historical relations, assuming space to be a fixed material essence waiting for humans to figure out how best to use it to economic or social advantage.[35] These theorists argue that occluding the spatial from social analysis is a serious mistake because space is not merely a material essence – on the contrary, its importance lies in its being socially constructed. Human life is unthinkable without spatial connotations and much of human life revolves around struggles over space. This social dimension of space is highlighted in studies of scales, the levels of spatial representation that we use constantly in our social analyses. For example, the local, national, or global scales that we are all familiar with are in no way natural or pre-given but are socially constructed. They are the result of human activities and are best understood as 'temporary stand-offs in a perpetual transformative ... socio-spatial power struggle,' or as provisional geographical resolutions of power struggles that are historically produced, stabilised and transformed.[36] These stand-offs (scalar configurations, or scalar fixes[37]) can be quite long-lived. They can become so stabilised as 'scaffoldings' of certain forms of power and control that we experience them as natural and permanent.[38] But they are always finite.

Theorists of scale recognize that geographical scales are produced, contested, and transformed through an 'immense range of sociopolitical and discursive processes, strategies, and struggles that cannot be derived from any single encompassing dynamic.'[39] Conversely, the study of these processes, strategies and struggles must pay more serious attention to their spatial aspects, including the historical variability of scales.[40] In this view, current changes in the world are linked to the emergence of a new scalar fix to replace the one that was dominant till the early 1970s. What is going on, then, is *not* the demise of the territorial but a reterritorialisation such as has not happened since the creation of the nation-state.

In this process, it is most unlikely that the national scale, and international

borders, will simply evaporate. The strategy of territoriality is alive and kicking, but it is no longer clustered primarily around the level of the nation-state. Transnational capital has largely replaced national capital and this is a root cause why the national level has lost its pivotal position as the pre-eminent geographical unit. The bundling of territory and sovereignty at the state level, which was the cornerstone of the previous scalar fix, is weakening. This has led states to develop 'concerted strategies to create new scales of state regulation to facilitate and coordinate the globalization process: at both sub- and supra-national levels.'[41] In other words, they are active agents in the regulation of transnational flows that always need to be grounded in spatial fixity and localization. State strategies of territoriality have proved adaptable; they are now employed more than before at levels other than the national, particularly at that of the sub-national (export zones, growth regions, metropolises) and at that of the supra-national (free trade zones, growth triangles, unions of states, international organizations and alliances). In other words, territoriality is being re-scaled by states that should be seen as active partners in global restructuring, and not as passive victims of deterritorialization.

At the same time, countervailing strategies by groups – corporations, advocacy networks, criminal organisations, international labour migrants – that are out to circumvent the power of territorial organisation, or to dismantle entrenched scalar morphologies, are also being re-scaled.[42] They too now manifest themselves at scales that are at once more global and more local than before. Since the early 1970s, the 'politics of scale' have been increasingly characterized by this 'jumping of scales,' thereby contributing powerfully to a reterritorialization of the world.[43] We can comprehend these developments only if we become more aware of how social processes work across scales. This requires that we are neither state-obsessed nor globe-entranced.[44]

Re-imagining the study of borderlands

These reflections on the need to escape the iron grip of the nation-state are, of course, extremely relevant for the study of borderlands. A 'borderland' is a zone, or region, within which lies an international border, and a 'borderland society' is a social and cultural system straddling that border.[45] Borderland studies have been deeply marked by the territorialist epistemology of the social sciences (the tendency to study the world as a patchwork of state-defined societies, economies and cultures) and its corollary, methodological territorialism (the tendency to analyse spatial forms as self-enclosed geographical units). This approach predisposes students of international borderlands to treat these not as units in their own right, but primarily as the margins of states, societies,

economies and cultures. The state territory is the implicit centre of gravity, the point of reference, and borderlands are seen in their relationship to that territory. For this reason, we know much more about how states deal with borderlands than how borderlands deal with states.[46] A reconfigured study of borderlands which takes both sides of an international border as its unit of analysis provides a powerful corrective to the current territorialization and state-centricity of the social imagination. Research on borderlands undermines 'lazy assumptions' that state and society, state and nation, or state and governance are synonymous or territorially coterminous.[47] It is important to realize that borders not only join what is different but also divide what is similar.[48] They create what Oscar Martínez has termed a borderlands milieu.[49]

Insisting on the historicity of social space is essential for the study of borderland societies. Borders are too often seen as spatial fixtures, lines in the landscape, separators of societies – the passive and pre-given ground on which events take place. But if we think of spatiality as an aspect of social relations that is continually being reconfigured, borders become much more significant. It is here that the strategy of state territoriality is dramatized and state sovereignty is flaunted. It is also here that many countervailing strategies contesting state territoriality are clustered. The struggle between these strategies continually reproduces, reconstructs, or undermines border regions. In other words, there is nothing passive about borders; in borderlands, the spatiality of social relations is forever taking on new shapes, and we need conceptual tools to analyse these transformations.

But this is only part of the story. Now that the global politics of scale themselves are undergoing major change, international borders have become crucial localities for studying how global restructuring affects territoriality, how global reterritorialization takes place. When people, goods, capital and ideas flow across borders, what happens to them and to those borders? The contributions of borderland actors (including states) to the present round of global restructuring, and the resultant reconfiguration of social relations in borderlands, are little understood. The rhetoric of 'globalization' suggests prime movers being located in centres of production and consumption, with flows moving between them. But these flows do not move in thin air and are not disembodied. We need to incorporate the social relations of transport and distribution, and their spatiality, in analyses of global re-scaling. And although borders *may* be localities of importance when it comes to production and consumption, they are *always* localities of importance when it comes to transport and distribution – another reason to take them seriously in studies of global restructuring.

The study of borderlands and 'scale'

Borderland studies benefit from the endeavour to escape from the iron grip of the nation state not only because this endeavour provides a corrective to the current state-centricity of the social imagination, or because it highlights a dynamic site of transnational reconfiguration. Borderland studies can also refine the concept of scale. As we have seen, scales are ways in which we frame conceptions of spatial reality, and the outcomes of these framings have material consequences.[50] In an international borderland, geographical scales of various levels cut across each other. Borderlands obviously mark the national scale because two national units meet here, providing 'an already partitioned geography within which social activity takes place.' For example, citizenship based on a territorial definition of the nation separates people living on either side of the border, and provides them with an identity around which control is exerted and contested.[51] But an international border may also mark the border of other scales. The border between Greece and Bulgaria doubles as a border between the European Union and the outside world, just as, before 1989, it formed the border between the Socialist Bloc and the Capitalist Bloc. The border between Burma and Bangladesh separates two states but also two world regions, Southeast Asia and South Asia.[52] And the border between Mexico and the United States is often held up as marking the border between the North and the South (or the developed and developing world).[53] By contrast, a borderland may *not* be a partitioned geography when we consider other scales, e.g. a linguistic community (the Arab world), a production system (the *maquiladora* system on the U.S.-Mexican border), or an international military alliance (NATO).

For these reasons contemporary borderlands provide privileged sites for research on how particular scales become constituted. In borderlands, the struggle over scale redefinitions is always intense and highly visible, and the current worldwide re-scaling of the state makes borderlands even more salient research sites. Studying the politics of scale in borderlands forces us to be more precise about the concept of scale itself. Richard Howitt argues that we need to explore more carefully the genealogies and contents of the many spatial metaphors that have become prominent in the social sciences. Criticizing an overemphasis on the usual metaphors for scale – scale as size (as in map scale) and scale as level (as in a pyramid or hierarchy of scales) – he suggests that we think of scale primarily as a web of relations.[54] While some people have access to webs at different levels, or webs with a wider geographical span, others do not.[55]

Two sets of questions present themselves here. On the one hand there is the issue of how we imagine such webs to be bordered. What are the spatial limits

of scales? How do they come about, how are they maintained, and how are they overcome? The second set of questions has to do with how different groups imagine scale. Social scientists' geographical imaginations are important because they have an impact on their understanding of social, cultural and material realities, and, to varying degrees, ultimately on those realities themselves. But it is the geographical imaginations of groups involved in particular social struggles – *their* analysis of webs of relations of different levels and sizes in which they are involved, or from which they are excluded – that determine their strategies in a politics of scale. Research on scale has begun to engage with this issue, and this is essential because scale-literacy and theorizing about scale require an understanding of various alternative styles of 'scaling the world.'[56] Unfortunately, both the question of the bordering of scales and that of styles of scaling still tend to be looked at within national frameworks. Therefore, a focus on borderlands may provide powerful new insights into dynamics and complexities of scale that have not yet been explored.

The case of the Bengal borderland

The Bengal borderland provides a perfect case for developing a new style of borderland studies. First, to most people this is one of the world's most marginal places, the periphery of the periphery. Located in a poor, powerless and largely ignored part of the world, it forms the perimeter of societies that are themselves seen as of little consequence in world affairs. As a result, it has hardly been studied. Ignorance may not breed contempt but it certainly breeds prejudice. In this book, I demonstrate that the Bengal borderland is far from the sleepy backwater in a lost corner of the world that many imagine it to be. It is a dynamic site of transnational reconfiguration, a hotbed of re-scaling, and an excellent place to help us shake off a state-centric social imagination. It provides a strong case for re-imagining social space.

Second, the case of the Bengal borderland underlines the need for borderland studies to be historical. It provides us with an unusually crisp, laboratory-like situation. Here a largely unprepared population had to cope with a very sudden, and well-documented, imposition of an international border. Their society was brusquely partitioned and the resultant permutations show clearly the myriad individual and group strategies that go into the invention of borderlands, and thus they drive home the historicity of all social space.

Finally, the Bengal borderland demonstrates how borderland studies have to struggle with state simplifications, the tendency inherent in statecraft (and a fair bit of social science) to represent only that slice of social reality that interests the official observer.[57] The Bengal borderland figures very prominently in the fiery political rhetoric and historical imaginations of the adjoining states, but

these states have never felt the need to commission comprehensive empirical studies. As a state simplification, the borderland is considered to be 'known.'

It is therefore no surprise that public debates on the Bengal borderland in South Asia are replete with stereotypes that need to be challenged. For example, it is commonly assumed that the creation of the borderland, at the midnight hour of 14 to 15 August 1947, was essentially a question of drawing a North-South border through Bengal, that Bengal was cut in two, that East Pakistan was carved out of India, and that population dislocation was overwhelmingly the flight of Hindus from Pakistan to India. All of these are wrong, as the following chapters will explain. The unchallenged persistence of such basic misconceptions is a comment on the near-absence of critical academic research in this field.

This state of affairs is a result of the dominance of state simplifications, but also of the methodological territorialism and state-centred bias that are as strong among social scientists active in this region as anywhere else. In addition, the state elites of the region have displayed a pervasive concern with sovereignty, security and territorial control. They have kept the borderland fairly inaccessible and this also has dissuaded academics from studying it.

Accessing the Bengal borderland

The lack of academic research on the Bengal borderland cannot be blamed on a dearth of material. As two recent contributions, by Joya Chatterji and Ranabir Samaddar, have demonstrated, there is sufficient source material to develop a rich field of borderland studies in this region – to invent the borderland as a unit of research.[58] But there are no ready-made methodologies and we have to feel our way towards the best methods of accessing and interpreting the available material. Paul Nugent has suggested for another borderland that it is in the nature of the subject matter that the spotlight pans across a wide field.[59] I have based myself largely on archival records and on interviews in different parts of the borderland. In addition, I have used material in the public domain, especially newspaper articles, memoirs and books. It is also true, however, that much historical and contemporary information that would be freely available to students of borderlands elsewhere in the world, is treated as highly confidential and restricted by India, Bangladesh and Burma.

The strategies of territoriality employed by these states are remarkable for relying on measures of blocking information that are becoming rare in today's world. For example, in an age in which satellite tracking and remote sensing provide extremely detailed geographical information to states and armies around the world, inhabitants of this borderland (and other citizens of these states, including researchers) are still barred from getting even moderately accurate

maps of the border regions. Ranabir Samaddar described his experiences when he was doing research on transborder migration in West Bengal (India) in the 1990s:

> I was shown a number of maps which underscored the point being made by the [Indian security] officers that the Indo-Bangladesh border is no border at all given the terrain, ponds, rivers, small canals and rice fields which remain connected and interlocked. But the moment I asked, in all innocence, why should these maps not be published so that the people can see for themselves how difficult the job of border policing was, the officers shrank back. In fact, raising any questions about the maps or asking for a copy of a map raises suspicion. They wanted to know why exactly did I need it? Then followed the hedging advices, such as, oh, you can get that from Calcutta's X office or Y bureau ... I was advised to leave the maps out. Maps are a barred subject.[60]

In South Asia, such bureaucratic panic reflects an unbroken tradition of secrecy about maps going back to the establishment of the Survey of India in 1767. Even today the Indian Ministry of Defence sees itself as the 'owner of Indian geographic data' and enforces severe restrictions on their public use.[61] South Asian geographers have long denounced this policy as irrational, ludicrous and anachronistic, but to no avail.[62] Secrecy is particularly intense regarding border and coastal areas and it is not restricted to recent maps showing the location of the border.[63] Even pre-1947 survey maps of what is now the borderland are off-limits because this information is considered to be too strategically sensitive to share with the public. Of course, many of these maps are freely available abroad. The same reasons of state are invoked to block access to decades-old records and statistical data, and the national press is cautioned to 'exercise restraint' in reporting on border matters.[64] In addition, all three states have declared large parts of the borderland physically out of bounds for anyone but borderland residents and state personnel, plus a lucky few who are given a special permit. Since 1947, the public in South Asia has had no access to accurate maps showing a band of some 80 kilometres either way of the land borders. The borders that play such an important role in South Asian politics are, quite literally, left to the imagination.

These restrictions, which account partly for the undeveloped state of borderland studies in this part of the world, point to an official politics of forgetting, an elaborate attempt to obliterate the contested origins and nature of the border.[65] This politics of forgetting is clearly part of what Sankaran Krishna describes as 'postcolonial anxiety': a fear of national disunity and fragmentation that produces actions and policies that may in fact hasten precisely that very outcome.[66] Attempts to keep South Asia's borderlands under wraps – to retain

them as geographies of ignorance[67] – are being confronted with demands to democratize geographical knowledge. Predictably, it has been quite impossible to forget the Bengal border: it has remained a live – and at times violently explosive – issue surrounded by a whirlwind of disinformation, confusion and misrepresentation.[68]

Such restrictions and emotions make a study like this difficult but not impossible. Most of the archival material that I have used is accessible in the National Archives of Bangladesh. Here the confidential records of the Home Ministry of East Bengal proved to be an especially rich source for the period between 1947 and the mid-1960s. These records present not only the viewpoints of the Government of East Bengal (= East Pakistan, today: Bangladesh) but also those of its counterparts across the border: they contain many government documents, reports, letters and telegrammes from India (especially Assam, Tripura, West Bengal, Bihar) and Burma. In addition, it is possible to hear the voices of many non-state actors in the petitions, verbatim reports of interviews, letters, newspaper clippings, pamphlets and censored material that are included in these government records. Unfortunately, the quality and quantity of the archival records tapers off sharply in the late 1950s and few records are available for the period after 1965.

Borderlanders themselves provided the second major source of information for this book. In the course of many discussions and interviews over a period of fifteen years, they opened my eyes to many aspects of borderland life. My interest in the borderland theme began during fieldwork in West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh in 1988.[69] It developed further when I was doing research on the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Bangladesh).[70] Over the years, I visited dozens of localities on both sides of the border and I had numerous further discussions with borderlanders that took place in non-borderland localities. Md. Mahbubar Rahman and myself jointly took many of the interviews quoted in the text; others were conducted by just one of us.[71]

In the public domain, newspapers provided a crucial body of information. A large number of newspapers were published in all three countries during the entire period under review. Metropolitan newspapers (from cities such as Dhaka, Calcutta, Karachi, Delhi and Rangoon) provided rather uneven coverage of events in the borderland. Local newspapers from the borderland might have filled the gaps but it proved impossible to locate more than occasional copies because libraries rarely collected them systematically. Nevertheless, newspapers were an essential source of information, particularly for the period since 1965, and their coverage of borderland affairs improved over time.

These three bodies of information (archival records, interviews and newspapers), together with photographs and the published material listed at the end of this book, made it possible to write this study of the Bengal borderland.

But at the same time these sources were often fragmented and episodic; they put definite limits on what I could see and forced me to make clear choices.[72] For example, the first chapters of this book are more archive-based and focus on the earlier decades (1940s to 1960s) whereas later chapters draw more heavily on newspapers and interviews and tend to focus on the more recent past. Despite this overall chronological approach, the fragmented material lent itself more easily to a thematic account when it came to presenting detail. As a result, the book consists of thematic chapters that show chronological sequences to the extent that the available material allowed.

My decision to emphasize borderland perspectives also led me not to delve too deeply into several matters that come up with great regularity in the archival material, e.g. internal discussions between officials stationed in the borderland and their superiors in provincial and national capitals, or the evolving structure of state bureaucracies in the borderland. Some readers may be surprised that certain historical events that receive much attention in mainstream historiography are treated in rather a cursory manner in this book. Sometimes this is because there is still a lack of detailed information on how these events unfolded in the borderland (e.g. the Bangladesh war of independence in 1971) and sometimes because the available information suggests that their effects on the borderland were not particularly significant (e.g. many changes in government).

Despite its limitations, the material at hand allows me to present a fairly complex image of the Bengal borderland – a modern border landscape created less than 60 years ago – and its transformation during the current period of world reterritorialization. My intention is not just to show how this region evolved. In addition, I explore the ways in which borderlands may help us understand processes of territoriality and global restructuring, because 'some things can only occur at borders.'[73]

How the book is organized

The book consists of a number of chapters presenting substantive evidence on selected aspects of borderland society. These are prefaced by Chapters 2 and 3, which provide brief comments on the historiographical context. The story of the Bengal borderland has always been incorporated into the story of the break-up of British India and the creation of independent India and Pakistan, known as 'Partition.' Chapter 2 ('Partition studies') examines some conventions of this historiographical tradition: an emphasis on Partition as a unique event, a tendency to extrapolate from the historical experience of one particular province (Punjab), a periodization that takes 1947 as the end point of Partition, a strong emphasis on high politics, and a tendency to invoke the border as a

representation of Partition without actually studying the border as a lived reality. I argue that these conventions are problematic and should be reconsidered, and that the study of Partition needs to be advanced and enriched by bringing the border back in. Chapter 3 ('Radcliffe's fateful line') gives a brief introduction to the genesis of the border and the remarkable role of a single colonial official in deciding its location. The chapter goes on to examine three widespread misconceptions about the making of this border – that it bisected Bengal, that it provided a border to Muslim-majority areas, and that it separated Hindus (in India) from Muslims (in Pakistan).

The following chapters form two groups. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on state actions in the borderland, mainly in the early years of its existence. Chapter 4 ('A patchwork border') details the new states' efforts to inscribe the border in the landscape, and the insurmountable problems they faced regarding moving rivers, unsurveyed land and mapping errors. Their inability to agree on, demarcate and normalize many parts of the border ensured a subsequent history of border conflict, borderland volatility and diplomatic unease that continues to the present day. Chapter 5 ('Securing the territory') looks at how the new states took control of the borderland. It presents their main tools: an expanding bureaucracy, the use of paramilitary forces, and mechanisms for homogenizing the borderland population and for resolving interstate border conflict.

From Chapter 6, attention shifts more to the activities of non-state actors in the borderland. In Chapter 6 ('Defiance and accommodation') we explore how borderlanders dealt with the new reality of having an international border in their backyard. We look especially at what happened to local social, economic and cultural relations that had suddenly become 'international,' e.g. people who lived on one side of the border but who had a job, or owned land or a business, on the other. How did they cope? And how did agents of the new states react to borderlanders who chose to ignore or defy the border?

Chapter 7 ('The flow of goods') plots the ways in which borderland trade flows adapted to the imposition of the border and to subsequent state attempts to manipulate them. The chapter details the failure of these attempts and the emergence of a subversive borderland economy based on various forms of unauthorized trade. Instead of regulating cross-border trade, the states ended up being themselves increasingly re-scaled by unauthorised forms of trade flowing through the hands of borderlanders.

Chapters 8 and 9 consider the movement of people passing through the borderland. Chapter 8 ('Narratives of border crossing') presents three powerful state-centred narratives regarding cross-border migration – homecoming, infiltration and denial – and their ominous consequences for transborder migrants. Chapter 9 ('Migrants, fences and deportations') shows how state attempts to stop unauthorized cross-border migration failed. The tools employed

– fencing the border, identification cards and deportation – proved to be no match for the forces that were driving people to go abroad to make a living. Analysing cross-border migration requires us to acknowledge the immense Bangladeshi diaspora and to focus on the strategies of individual migrants, the networks supporting their international migration, and the roles of borderlanders and state personnel in these networks.

Chapter 10 ('Rebels and bandits') presents the considerable political and military challenges to state power in the borderland, and considers how the many borderland rebellions of the past 60 years have had a contradictory effect. One the one hand they have challenged the state strategy of territoriality but on the other, they have reinforced the border as a lived reality.

Chapter 11 ('"Rifle Raj" and the killer border') is concerned with border violence. Based on recent newspaper coverage, it examines the levels of violence, the factors involved, the perpetrators and the patterns of border violence that can be distinguished. This analysis of the 'violence of territoriality' has a narrow scope: for reasons of measurement, only acts of violence that occurred on, or very near, the actual borderline have been included.

Chapter 12 ('Nation and borderland') sketches ideological and symbolic struggles in the borderland. It looks at the imprint of the nation on borderland culture and at symbols of state territoriality. At the same time it explains to what extent symbols of borderland cultural unity have been used to resist the hegemony of the nation in the borderland. The chapter concludes with a brief exploration of how the borderland is imagined in nationalist discourse.

Finally, in Chapter 13 ('Conclusion: Beyond state and nation') we return to the themes outlined in this introduction, especially to the issue of how borderland studies can contribute to sociospatial theory. The links between borderland and time, borderland and politics and borderland and scale are briefly touched upon, as are those between the everyday transnationality of borderlanders' life routines and the larger issues of global re-territorialization.

Notes

1 This incident took place in West Bengal, India. For details, more references, and similar cases in Bangladesh, see chapter 11. 'BSF road-rage shooting kills 5 in Cooch Behar,' *The Statesman* (4 December 1999); '*XIII Lok Sabha Debates, Session II (Winter Session), Monday, November 29, 1999/Agrahayana 2, 1921 (Saka)* (available from: http://alfa.nic.in/lsdeb/ls13/ses2/17291199.htm); *XIII Lok Sabha Debates, Session II (Winter Session), Thursday, December 9, 1999/Agrahayana 18, 1921 (Saka)* (available from: http://alfa.nic.in/lsdeb/ls13/ses2/31091299.htm).

2 For details, see chapters 2 to 4. Some 1,500 km to the west a second borderland (now separating India and Pakistan) was created at the same time.

3 Abdul Alim (born c. 1935), interviewed by Md. Mahbubar Rahman in the border town of Rajshahi in January 1999. My translation (as in the case of all other interviews in

Bengali quoted in this book).

4 Anonymous inhabitant of the border town of Tlabung (Demagiri), interviewed by Willem van Schendel, December 2000.

5 In official parlance, Burma is currently known as Myanmar. Because of the longer-term view we take here, and because the term Myanmar is fiercely contested by the democratically elected government-in-exile, I refer to the country as Burma throughout this book.

6 In their excellent overview of border studies, Donnan and Wilson speak of a 'burgeoning literature on borders.' Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson, Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1999), xiii. Cf. Michael Rösler and Tobias Wendl (eds.), Frontiers and Borderlands: Anthropological Perspectives (Frankfurt am Main, etc.: Peter Lang, 1999).

7 D. Rumley and J.V. Minghi (eds.), The Geography of Border Landscapes (London: Routledge, 1991), 2.

8 If this figure, calculated by Foucher, is correct, and if we take the depth of the borderland to be an arbitrary 10 km on either side, the world's borderlands cover an area of 4,500,000 km². Foucher measured the length of the world's borders at the scale of 1/250,000. He also counted 264 'dyads,' or stretches of border shared by two contiguous states. Michel Foucher, Fronts et frontières: Un tour du monde géopolitique (Paris: Fayard, 1991), 15.

9 James Anderson and Liam O'Dowd, 'Borders, Border Regions and Territoriality: Contradictory Meanings, Changing Significance,' Regional Studies, 33:7 (1999), 598.

10 Anderson and O'Dowd, 'Borders, Border Regions,' 600.

11 In a non-exhaustive list, Alvarez distinguishes 16 different identities among people living on the U.S.-Mexico border; he speaks of the lives of border people as 'a life-long trajectory of accommodation and negotiation' and 'constantly shifting and renegotiating identities.' Robert R. Alvarez Jr., 'Toward an Anthropology of Borderlands: The Mexican-U.S. border and the Crossing of the 21st Century,' in: Rösler and Wendl (eds.), Frontiers and Borderlands, 228-229.

12 Donnan and Wilson, Borders, 10-12.

13 For examples, see John W. Cole and Eric R. Wolf, The Hidden Frontier: Ecology and Ethnicity in an Alpine Valley (New York: Academic Press, 1974); and Daphne Berdahl, Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland (Berkeley etc.: University of California Press, 1999).

14 Anssi Paasi, Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border (Chichester, etc.: John Wiley & Sons, 1996).

15 'A claim to sovereignty on the part of an institution is a special type of claim to authority: a claim to being the highest authority for some defined group or area. Like all claims to authority it is rarely established and uncontested.' Joe Painter, Politics, Geography and 'Political Geography': A Critical Perspective (London, etc.: Arnold, 1995), 17, cf. 40-42.

16 For a case study, see A. Kemp and U. Ben-Eliezer, 'Dramatizing Sovereignty: The Construction of Territorial Dispute in the Israeli-Egyptian Border at Taba,' Political Geography, 19 (2000), 315-344.

17 Neil Brenner, 'Beyond State-Centrism? Space, Territoriality, and Geographical Scale in Globalization Studies,' Theory and Society, 28 (1999), 47. For an institutional approach to the emergence of a system based on territorial states in post-feudal Europe, see Hendrik Spruyt, The Sovereign State and its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

18 Anderson and O'Dowd, 'Borders, Border Regions,' 598, quoting Robert David Sack,

Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 21-34. See also John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

19 The Treaty of Westphalia (1648) recognized 'the existence of an interstate system composed of contiguous, bounded territories ruled by sovereign states committed to the principle of noninterference in each other's internal affairs ... This bundling of territoriality to state sovereignty is the essential characteristic of the modern interstate system' (Brenner, 'Beyond State-Centrism?' 47). The system was, however, far from perfectly constituted. For a case highlighting the limitations of the strategy of territoriality in two modern states, see Willem van Schendel, 'Stateless in South Asia: The Making of the India-Bangladesh Enclaves,' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 61:1 (2002), 115-147.

20 Brenner, 'Beyond State-Centrism?' 48.

21 Brenner, 'Beyond State-Centrism?' 45-46.

22 John Agnew, 'The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory,' *Review of International Political Economy*, 1:1 (1994), 53-80; John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge, *Mastering Space: Hegemony, Territory and International Political Economy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 78-100; Peter Taylor, 'Embedded Statism and the Social Sciences: Opening Up to New Spaces,' *Environment and Planning A*, 28:11 (1996), 1917-1928; cf. Brenner, 'Beyond State-Centrism? 40.

23 Pandey speaks of 'received unities.' Gyanendra Pandey, 'Voices from the Edge: The Struggle to Write Subaltern Histories,' in: Vinayak Chaturvedi (ed.), *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), 281.

24 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 281.

25 Josiah Heyman describes states as 'aggregations of rules for social and economic action and the bureaucratic organizations required to implement these rules; for short, states are the rules of the game.' Josiah McC. Heyman, 'The Mexico-United States Border in Anthropology: A Critique and Reformulation,' *Journal of Political Ecology*, 1(1994), 51.

26 Brenner, 'Beyond State-Centrism?' 40.

27 Brenner, 'Beyond State-Centrism?' 60.

28 Brenner, 'Beyond State-Centrism?' 62.

29 For two critiques of globalization and deterritorialization, see Frederick Cooper, 'What is the Concept of Globalization Good For? An African Historian's Perspective,' *African Affairs*, 100, 399 (2001), 189-213; Gearóid Ó Tuathail, 'Borderless Worlds? Problematising Discourses of Deterritorialisation,' in: Nurit Kliot and David Newman (eds.), *Geopolitics at the End of the Twentieth Century: The Changing Political Map* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 139-154.

30 Neil Smith and Ward Dennis, 'The Restructuring of Geographical Scale: Coalescence and Fragmentation of the Northern Core Region,' *Economic Geography*, 63 (1987), 160-182.

31 'The "gatekeeper state," the task of which is to provide extraterritorial opportunities for national territory-based capital (thus intensifying the process of globalization) while, somewhat paradoxically, providing security against the perceived social costs unleashed by globalization – especially immigration.' Joseph Nevins, *Operation Gatekeeper: The Rise of the "Illegal Alien" and the Making of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 178.

32 Cf. Anderson and O'Dowd, 'Borders, Border Regions,' 600-601.

33 An important source of inspiration for this approach is the work of Henri Lefebvre, especially his *De l'État* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1976-78, 4 volumes) and *The*

Production of Space. For an overview, see Sallie A. Marston, 'The Social Construction of Scale,' *Progress in Human Geography*, 24:2 (2000), 219-242.

34 Neil Smith, 'Contours of a Spatialized Politics: Homeless Vehicles and the Production of Geographical Scale,' *Social Text*, 33 (1992), 61, 63.

35 Allen presents this criticism vigorously in this sentence in an overview article: 'The normative discourse of social science has violently relegated those things spatial to its semiotic refuse heap where dead and vacuous signifiers lay wasting as victims of being fully and essentially "understood".' Ricky Lee Allen, 'The Socio-Spatial Making and Marking of "Us": Toward a Critical Postmodern Spatial Theory of Difference and Community,' *Social Identities*, 5:3 (1999), 250, 252, 253.

36 Erik Swyngedouw, 'Excluding the Other: The Production of Scale and Scaled Politics,' in: Roger Lee and Jane Wills (eds.), *Geographies of Economies* (London: Arnold, 1997), 169.

37 Neil Smith, 'Remaking Scale: Competition and Cooperation in Prenational and Postnational Europe,' in: Heikki Eskelinen and Folke Snickars (ed.), *Competitive European Peripheries* (Berlin: Springer, 1995), 59-74.

38 For a schematic history of scalar fixes since the late 19th century, see Neil Brenner, 'Between Fixity and Motion: Accumulation, Territorial Organization and the Historical Geography of Spatial Scales,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 16 (1998), 459-481.

39 Brenner, 'Between Fixity,' 461.

40 'Starting any geographical analysis from a given geographical scale (local, regional, national) is deeply antagonistic to apprehending the world in a dynamic, process-based manner ... The theoretical and political priority, therefore, never resides in a particular geographical scale, but rather in the process through which particular scales become (re)constituted' (Swyngedouw, 'Excluding the Other,' 169).

41 Brenner, 'Beyond State-Centrism?' 66.

42 See e.g. Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998); David Kyle and Rey Koslowski (eds.), *Global Human Smuggling: Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). For other examples, see Kevin Cox, 'Spaces of Dependence, Spaces of Engagement and the Politics of Scale, or: Looking for Local Politics,' *Political Geography*, 17:1 (1998), 1-23.

43 According to Neil Smith's original formulation of this concept, to jump scales is 'to organize the production and reproduction of daily life and to resist oppression and exploitation at a higher scale.' (Smith, 'Contours,' 60). Crucially, such struggles not only use scales but also influence them: 'These struggles change the importance and role of certain geographical scales, reassert the importance of others, and sometimes create entirely new significant scales, but – most importantly – these scale redefinitions alter and express changes in the geometry of social power by strengthening power and control of some while disempowering others' (Swyngedouw, 'Excluding the Other,' 169).

44 'Until recently political geographers remained intellectual prisoners of the first stage of geopolitics in the 1890s, but now seem to have begun to see the past in terms of the workings of processes across scales. In my view this seems likely to become an important feature of a non-state obsessed but equally non-globe entranced political geography.' John Agnew, *Making Political Geography* (London: Arnold, 2002), 139.

45 Cf. J.R.V. Prescott, *Political Frontiers and Boundaries* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987), 13-14. Prescott distinguishes the boundary (the line that demarcates state territory),

the border (areas fringing the boundary) and the borderland (the transition zone within which lies the boundary). Since it is not clear when the 'border' merges into the 'borderland', I use the latter term as defined here, and reserve the term 'border' (and occasionally 'boundary') to refer to the line demarcating state territory. Cf. Donnan and Wilson, Borders, 45.

46 For a fuller treatment, see Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel, 'Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands,' Journal of World History, 8:2 (1997), 211-242.

47 'The discourse of transnationalism is based on a productive critique of the inherent imperfections of traditional representations of nations, states and cultures as geographically discrete and politically pacific. It suggests a radically different definition of space and occupancy in which entities other than those defined by, contained within, or tantamount to states and nations become significant elements of human experience ... Studying communities which live across borders, survive despite them, routinely cross them and constantly network around them has become an indispensable aspect of the discourse.' Dan Rabinowitz, 'National identity on the frontier: Palestinians in the Israeli education system,' in: Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (eds.), Border Identities: Nation and State at International Frontiers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 142; cf Anderson and O'Dowd, 'Borders, Border Regions,' 602-603.

48 Tobias Wendl and Michael Rösler, 'Introduction: Frontiers and Borderlands: The Rise and Relevance of an Anthropological Research Genre,' in: Rösler and Wendl (eds.), Frontiers and Borderlands, 2.

49 He suggested that the borderlands milieu is shaped by transnationalism, social separateness, otherness, ethnic conflict and accommodation, and international conflict and accommodation. Oscar Martínez, 'The Dynamics of Border Interaction,' in: Clive H. Schofield (ed.), Global Boundaries: World Boundaries, Volume I (London: Routledge, 1994), 8-14.

50 'The construction of scale is not simply a spatial solidification or materialization of contested social forces and processes; the corollary also holds. Scale is an active progenitor of specific social processes. In a literal as much as metaphorical way, scale both contains social activity, and at the same time provides an already partitioned geography within which social activity takes place.' (Smith, 'Contours,' 66). Cf. Katherine T. Jones, 'Scale as Epistemology,' Political Geography, 17:1 (1998), 27; Marston, 'The Social Construction,' 221.

51 Smith, 'Contours,' 66, 75.

52 Willem van Schendel, 'Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Jumping scale in Southeast Asia,' Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 20 (2002): 647-68.

53 Cf. Peter Andreas, Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2000).

54 He emphasizes the need to recognize 'scale as a Relation – a factor in the construction and dynamics of geographical totalities – rather than simply as a product of geographical relations (a handmaiden to 'real' causal factors) or simply as a matter of size and level.' Richard Howitt, 'Scale as Relation: Musical Metaphors of Geographical Space,' Area, 30:1 (1998), 56.

55 'While the rich and powerful revel in their freedom and ability to overcome space by commanding scale, the poor and powerless are trapped in place.' Swyngedouw, 'Excluding the Other,' 175.

56 See e.g. John Agnew, 'The Dramaturgy of Horizons: Geographical Scale in the

"Reconstruction of Italy" by the New Italian Political Parties, 1992-95,' *Political Geography*, 16 (1997), 99-122; Philip F. Kelly, 'Globalization, Power and the Politics of Scale in the Philippines,' *Geoforum*, 28:2 (1997), 151-171.

57 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 3.

58 These two contributions can be considered as the first building blocks towards a field of border studies in the region. Both deal with one particular section of the border, the West Bengal-Bangladesh stretch. Joya Chatterji, 'The Fashioning of a Frontier: The Radcliffe Line and Bengal's Border Landscape, 1947-52,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 33:1 (1999), 185-242; and Ranabir Samaddar, *The Marginal Nation: Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal* (New Delhi, etc.: Sage Publications, 1999).

59 Paul Nugent, *Smugglers, Secessionists & Loyal Citizens on the Ghana-Togo Frontier: The Lie of the Borderlands Since 1914* (Oxford: James Curry / Athens: Ohio University Press / Legon: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2002), 115.

60 Samaddar, *The Marginal Nation*, 109.

61 In 2003 the Survey of India protested against the Ministry of Defence's ruling that no fewer than 43 types of detail had to be deleted from maps that the Survey was preparing for civilian use. These included such basic and seemingly innocuous items as contour lines and the intersections of latitudes and longitudes. Officials of the Ministry of Defence were not fazed by the argument that knowledge of contours was essential ecological information in preparing realistic development and infrastructural projects. They countered: 'Allowing contour lines on maps will endanger the country's security ... If the matter is of military consequence, it has to be controlled.' 'Civilian maps to get "flatter",' *The Times of India* (18 February 2003).

62 See e.g. Ravi Gupta and Sanjay Kumar, 'Rules on Mapping Technologies in India Heading Nowhere!' *GISDevelopment* (November-December 1998); S.V. Shrikantia, 'Restriction on Maps in India: An Anachronism That Needs Removal,' *GISDevelopment* (March-April 1999); S.M. Mathur, 'Restrictions on Survey of India Maps: Logic and Rationale,' *GISDevelopment* (July-August 1999); and many other articles in the same magazine. See also: http://www.gisdevelopment.net/policy/india/technology/index.htm. Cf. Mark Monmonier, *Spying with Maps: Surveillance Technologies and the Future of Privacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

63 'All topographical and geographical maps of the Survey of India (and maps derived from them) on the scale of one-million or larger of areas roughly 80 km wide inland along the coast and along the international borders ... are not available to the general public.' Mathur, 'Restrictions'; cf. Shrikantia, 'Restriction.'

64 E.g. the Ground Rules on border management state that 'much harm is caused by alarming reports which are occasionally published in the press. We recommend that the press on both sides be persuaded to exercise restraint and not to publish material which is likely to inflame the feelings of the population on both sides.' *Ground Rules Formulated by the Military Sub-Committee of the Indian and Pakistan Delegations* (20 October 1959), reprinted in Avtar Singh Bhasin (ed.), *India-Bangladesh Relations: Documents – 1971-2002* (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2003), V, 2741-2742. A historian from North Bengal University, presenting a research paper on the merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal (1950) and challenged because of a lack of references, replied that 'the Government of India is still not allowing any access to these sources.' 'Cooch Behar's merger,' *The Assam Tribune* (2 July 2003).

65 Anderson and O'Dowd, 'Borders, Border Regions,' 596.

66 Sankaran Krishna, *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka and the Question of Nationhood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 240-241. The break-up of East Pakistan (Bangladesh) and West Pakistan is a case in point. Discussing India, Abraham and Pandian argue: 'What is most troubling is the all-too-easy recourse to invoking the sacred cow of national security when in trouble and the even greater ease with which so many intellectuals and commentators swallow this line ... What we mean in practice by national security are usually the activities of one or another Government Ministry or agency which is keen not to have its activities scrutinised by the public.' And: 'What one must question is the colonial mentality that suggests that an airing of one's shortfalls leads to a decline in the nation's well being. It could rather be the opposite. It is only a confident nation that allows free expression on all matters, with the assurance that the outcome will lead to a stronger public and greater legitimacy for the state.' Itty Abraham and M.S.S. Pandian, 'Autonomy of Scholarship and the State,' *The Hindu* (15 August 2001).

67 Cf. Willem van Schendel, 'Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Jumping Scale in Southeast Asia,' *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* 20 (2002), 647-68.

68 For example, several national newspapers in India, reporting on a border incident with Bangladesh in April 2001 in which 19 border guards got killed, published maps showing the place of the incident several hundreds of kilometres from its actual place of occurrence.

69 See Willem van Schendel, 'Easy Come, Easy Go: Smugglers on the Ganges,' *Journal of Contemporary Asia,* 23:2 (1993), 189-213; Willem van Schendel, *Reviving a Rural Industry: Silk Producers and Officials in India and Bangladesh, 1880s to 1980s* (Dhaka / Delhi: University Press Ltd. / Manohar Publications, 1995); Baud and Van Schendel, 'Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands.'

70 See Willem van Schendel, 'The Invention of the "Jummas": State Formation and Ethnicity in Southeastern Bangladesh,' *Modern Asian Studies,* 26:1 (1992), 95-128; Willem van Schendel, Wolfgang Mey, and Aditya Kumar Dewan, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Living in a Borderland* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 2000).

71 Some of this material has been used in previous publications, e.g. Willem van Schendel, 'Stateless in South Asia: The Making of the India-Bangladesh Enclaves,' *The Journal of Asian Studies,* 61:1 (February 2002), 115-47; and Md. Mahbubar Rahman and Willem van Schendel, '"I Am *Not* a Refugee": Rethinking Partition Migration,' *Modern Asian Studies,* 37:3 (2003), 551-584. Shahriar Kabir and Willem van Schendel jointly conducted one interview cited in this book.

72 For an introduction to discussions regarding the *necessarily* fragmented nature of evidence pertaining to histories of 'subaltern' groups, see Pandey, 'Voices from the Edge.'

73 Donnan and Wilson, *Borders,* 4.

2

PARTITION STUDIES

The demise of colonial India, followed by the phoenix-like emergence from its ashes of the new states of India and Pakistan, is commonly known as the Partition. There are two reasons why any study of the Bengal borderland must start from this event. First, the border was created at that moment, so Partition coincides with the birth of the Bengal borderland. And second, the border has always been looked at through the lens of Partition (for a map of the borderland, see Appendix Figure 1).

In the Indian subcontinent, the word 'Partition' conjures up a particular landscape of knowledge and emotion. The break-up of colonial India in 1947 has been presented from vantage points that privilege certain vistas of the postcolonial landscape. The high politics of the break-up itself, the violence and major population movements it caused, and the long shadows it cast over the relationship between India and Pakistan (and from 1971 Bangladesh) have been the topic of much myth-making, intense polemics and considerable serious historical research. As three rival nationalisms were being built on conflicting interpretations of Partition, most analysts and historians were drawn towards the study of Partition as a macro-political event. A second trend in the literature has focused on Partition as a cultural and personal disaster, the fissure of two major regional cultures (Punjab and Bengal) that were divided between the successor states, and the suffering of millions of uprooted refugees and their descendants.

These viewpoints hardly exhaust the possibilities of coming to terms with the complexity of Partition. It is necessary to develop alternative perspectives to do justice to the plethora of experiences that together form Partition. Studying the Partition borderlands and their inhabitants provides a particularly important additional perspective because, as David Ludden has pointed out:

> The pain of partition was very unevenly distributed and afflicted a small proportion of the total population [of South Asia]. For most people, partition was a national trauma that affected people far away in other regions. Non-border regions had little disruption ... Almost all the pain fell on three historical regions that partition divided between India and Pakistan: Punjab, Bengal and Kashmir. In each region the new international borders were unprecedented; their local details were also quite arbitrary.[1]

The pain of Partition fell disproportionately on the new borderlands. Here disruption was overwhelming and almost all people were directly and personally affected. The borderland experience of Partition was immediate and acute and therefore differed from the experience of Partition in other parts of South Asia. This makes a borderland perspective indispensable as a component of any rounded view of Partition. This chapter, far from being an overview of the huge literature on Partition, merely comments on a few conventions in the historiography that I have found problematic when looking at Partition from a borderland angle.

One of a kind?

One convention in the study of Partition has been to analyse it against a rather restricted, regional backdrop. The voluminous literature is strikingly unanimous in presenting Partition as a unique event, a monument to political processes that took place in late-colonial India.[2] But how unique was it? What was unique about it? These questions have rarely been addressed until quite recently. Radha Kumar, Rada Iveković and Gurharpal Singh are among the first to develop a comparative perspective, bringing in wider questions of social theory – especially regarding the causes and long-term effects of state fragmentation.[3]

Comparing partitions.   Obviously, the collapse of older polities and the redistribution of political spoils is an unavoidable phase in the age-old process of state formation. If we follow Aaron Klieman, who defines partition simply as the act of dividing into two or more units an area previously forming a single administrative entity, the Partition of India takes its place among numerous other moments of state reconstitution, and many of its apparently unique features have their historical counterparts.[4]

But most observers think of partition as a more restricted category. For Robert Schaeffer it is not only a division but also a devolution of power. He excludes the disintegration of dynastic states or the redistribution of territories between imperial powers (e.g. the absorption by the British and French Empires of territories formerly belonging to the Ottoman Empire). Instead, he reserves the term partition for situations in which 'political power was not merely redistributed between great powers but transferred to and divided between indigenous successors.'[5] Twentieth-century partitions that fit this description occurred as by-products of three developments: decolonization, democratization and the Cold War. These developments should not be understood separately because each of them was associated with the emergence of the new interstate system in the world.[6] The Partition of India bore the imprint of the intertwining

of these three processes of decolonization, democratization and the Cold War.[7] In their intense concern with territoriality and sovereignty, Pakistan and India reflected the moment of their birth. As the British handed over power to their former subjects and installed two new state elites in territories henceforth known as Pakistan and India, the inhabitants of these territories demanded to be treated as citizens and to be given the rights that had been promised to them during the anticolonial struggle. At the same time, the Cold War descended upon the world, providing the state elites of India and Pakistan with a completely novel structure of political and military opportunities, resources and limitations.

A third way of studying the Partition of India is by placing it in a more restricted comparative framework. Edward Said has drawn attention to partition as a 'parting gift of Empire,' a legacy of imperialism, 'as the unhappy cases of Pakistan and India, Ireland, Cyprus, and the Balkans amply testify, and as the disasters of 20th century Africa attest in the most tragic way.'[8] 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.[9]

Linking the literature on the partition of the subcontinent with work on other major twentieth-century partitions appears to be a major challenge confronting us. A moot question will be to what extent such partitions are best understood as parting gifts that European empires bestowed around the globe or as regional processes propelled primarily by local forces.[10]

Above all, comparative partition studies will break the habit of viewing the fragmentation of colonial India as *sui generis*, a peerless event, too horrendous to be bracketed with other events in world history. Essentializing Partition (with a capital P) presents the same pitfalls as, for example, essentializing the Holocaust (with a capital H): they are somehow placed outside history and it becomes unthinkable, even sacrilegious, to juxtapose them with other partitions and holocausts. This precludes the historical inquiry and understanding that is indispensable if we are to find ways of preventing such events from recurring in the future.

One into four.   A comparative approach to Partition should also be applied within South Asia itself, for even if we look only at the subcontinent, the Partition of 1947 is not one of a kind, a peerless, unique event. The dismantling of the enormous colony of British India, stretching from Iran to Thailand, involved three separate moments of partition (*Figure 2.1*). The Partition of 1947 stands between the creation of a separate colonial state of British Burma in 1937 and the collapse of the state of Pakistan (and emergence of Bangladesh) in 1971. Over a period of 34 years, the colonial state was carved up and its four pieces appropriated by four different state elites. In their eagerness to present the Partition of 1947 as a unique event, however, writers have tended to ignore its embeddedness in this longer-term process, thereby marginalizing the relevance of the first (Burma) and third (Bangladesh) partitions. A proper
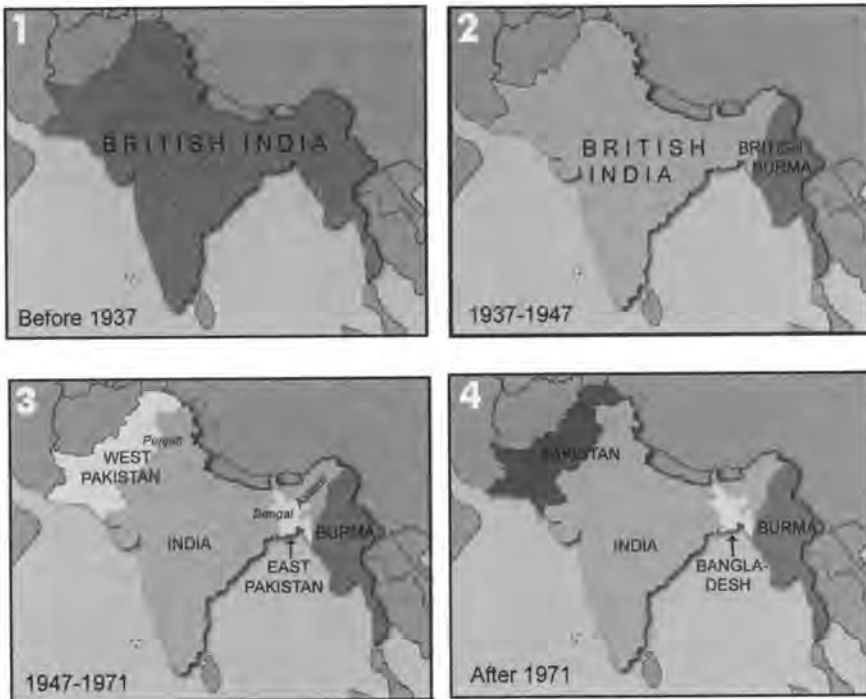
Map 1: Till 1937, British India stretched from Iran to Thailand.
Map 2: In 1937, it split into two colonies: British India and British Burma.
Map 3: In 1947, British India split into India and Pakistan (the divided regions of Punjab, Assam and Bengal are in italics).
Map 4: In 1971, Pakistan split into Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) and Pakistan (formerly West Pakistan).

Figure 2.1: **One into Four – State fragmentation in Southern Asia.**

understanding of major themes in the Partition of 1947 – for example the concept of homeland, the process of territorial division, the dislocation of populations, and the political use of violence – requires us to recontextualize it by comparing it with both its precursor and its successor.[11]

Moreover, Partition threw up a number of territorial issues that have not yet been settled. The best known of these is the status of Kashmir, but the following pages reveal a host of smaller and less well known, but no less inflammable, territorial disputes between India and Bangladesh, and between Bangladesh and Burma. It may be argued that the process of Partition, in its narrowest political and geographical sense, will not be complete until these outstanding issues have been resolved by the post-Partition states.

Beyond Punjab

Another peculiarity of most major studies of the Partition of 1947 is that they highlight events in one particular region, Punjab, and as a result we know more about what Partition meant there than in other provinces.[12] In the absence of similarly detailed knowledge of Partition elsewhere, Punjab has come to figure as a model of sorts, as shorthand for what Partition entailed, as the prime case from which to draw general conclusions.[13] It is helpful for students of Partition to take a more serious look at what was happening in other parts of the subcontinent and to reconsider the case of Punjab.[14] This is already happening, with new scholarship becoming available on Bengal,[15] an area with twice the population of Punjab,[16] but other provinces directly involved, e.g. Bihar, Assam, Sindh, or Rajasthan, have so far received little scholarly attention and remain marginalized in accounts of Partition.[17]

Research on these regions is bound to lead to a reappraisal of standard assumptions about Partition. For example, there were two partitions creating two huge borderlands – one between India and West Pakistan ('Partition-in-the-west') and another some 1,500 km to the east between India and East Pakistan/Bangladesh and Burma ('Partition-in-the-east'). Some of the best-known stereotypes on Partition-in-the-east are that it was essentially a question of establishing a North-South border through Bengal (ignoring the much longer border in the North and East, and the fact that Assam was also partitioned), that Bengal was cut in two halves (in reality it broke into 4 large parts and 197 small ones), that East Pakistan was carved out of India (ignoring the simultaneous surgery creating a novel and isolated 'Northeast India'[18]), that population dislocation in the east was primarily the flight of Hindus from East Pakistan to West Bengal (ignoring both the large flows of Muslim refugees coming into East Pakistan from West Bengal, Bihar and Assam, and the movement of refugees from East Pakistan to Tripura and Assam), and that population

dislocation in the east was much smaller than in Punjab. The unchallenged persistence of such basic misconceptions reveals the lack of balance in Partition studies and points to the need for comparative work within the subcontinent.

Closing a disciplinary divide

In the postcolonial division of academic labour, Partition has been treated as a disciplinary divide. 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 many, it also marks the boundary of the historian's domain. Countless books have taken August 1947 as a 'natural' closing date and have presented the formal transfer of state power as the clear-cut end of a period and, in a sense, of history. In similar vein, other social scientists have treated Partition as the beginning of their domain, the jumping-off point for economic, political, social and cultural analyses of contemporary South Asia. This division of 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.

   This is particularly clear in the study of Partition. Here sophisticated analyses of processes leading up to the crisis of August 1947 continue to provide fuel for lively and important debates among historians. But we do not have equally careful recent studies analysing what happened *after* that date. For example, if we want to understand how government institutions were reconstituted in partitioned Bengal, or how a new political culture developed, we have little more to go on than the fragmentary evidence contained in the memoirs of administrators – the rich unpublished records of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s lie largely forgotten and unexplored.[19]

Reassembling a partitioned academy

In addition to the disciplinary gap, however, a second academic gap has hampered the development of new insights. This is the partitioning (or 're-scaling') 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.[20] These communities were both influenced by and very active in new discourses

regarding nation, citizenship, state, history, memory and development that differed considerably between India, Pakistan and (later) Bangladesh.[21] Strained relations between these countries have seriously hampered free academic exchange and dialogue ever since.[22] The 'academic partition' also extended to foreign scholars studying the post-Partition subcontinent. As any international conference of South Asian studies will demonstrate, most opted for the study of just one successor society, and very few indeed maintained or developed a research interest 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.[23] 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 longstanding academic traditions. Such a 'counter memorial reading' of the events surrounding Partition 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.[24]

A social history of Partition

As already mentioned, the primary concerns that have given direction to Partition studies so far are the high politics leading up to the split, the violence and major population movements it caused, the long shadows it cast over the relationship between India and Pakistan (and from 1971 Bangladesh), and the price that regional cultures had to pay. Surprisingly little is known about the effects of Partition on the social life of tens of millions who were neither top politicians nor cross-border refugees. In this sense, Gyanendra Pandey's remarks on India are equally applicable to Pakistan and Bangladesh:

the historians' history of Partition has, in India, been a history of crisis for the Indian nation and the nationalist leadership. It has been a history of the machinations that lay behind this event, and the lessons to be drawn by the nation for the future. This is not a history of the lives and experiences of the people who lived through that time, of the way in which the events

of the 1940s were constructed in their minds, of the identities or uncertainties that Partition created or reinforced. Even as a history of crisis for the Indian nation, therefore, this history is inadequate.[25]

If we are to make sense of how 'the people who lived through that time' have shaped post-Partition societies, we need to pay much more attention to the *social* history of Partition. This requires a reconsideration of the historical sources that have informed Partition studies so far. Students of Partition have been like miners returning time and again to a few particularly rich seams: high-level official records (most famously the ones published in *The Transfer of Power*[26]) and the private papers, correspondence and memoirs of prominent politicians and bureaucrats. The possibilities offered by other source material have been much less diligently explored. As a result, the voices speaking from low-level and local records, newspapers, and oral and written testimony by ordinary people are rarely highlighted.[27] Convincing social histories of Partition cannot be constructed without foregrounding these voices.

Conclusion: Bringing the border back in

A crucial way of enriching the study of Partition is to look at its foremost territorial representation: the newly created international border.[28] Obviously, that border divides the three countries as much as it connects them. So many of the political problems between these countries have originated in the borderland, that one Pakistani observer in the 1960s was moved to comment ruefully: 'Our relations with India will improve only if by some miracle of modern science we could physically get away from its border.'[29]

Understanding and unravelling the post-1947 realities of Partition requires an intimate knowledge of the borderlands that were created and the permutations they experienced. The role of borderlanders in the shaping of post-Partition societies, economies and states remains almost completely unexplored.

First, it is essential to stress the fact that *Partition happened here*. There is no doubt that the break-up of colonial India was felt all over the subcontinent, ripping apart communities, bringing trauma to many individuals, and leading to a 'division of hearts.'[30] It inscribed itself in innumerable lives and this process was at least as calamitous in the borderlands as anywhere else. But in the borderlands Partition also inscribed itself indelibly in the landscape. It was here that South Asians learned first-hand what it meant to be allocated to different modern states and to be separated by international borders. It was here that the earthquake occurred, fissuring the land and making permanent scars that can never be ignored. The physical signs of Partition continue to exert an

overwhelming influence over everyday life in the borderlands, and this makes them crucial sites for students of Partition.

And yet, border studies in South Asia is a weak field in terms of the quantity of work done as well as in terms of the methods applied and the conceptual range covered. There is much scope for developing a comparative perspective by linking work on the Partition borders with the general field of border studies.[31] The peculiarities of the Partition borders can best be explored by comparing them with borders and borderlands elsewhere, not least those resulting from other late-imperial partitions such as in Ireland or Palestine/Israel.

Second, systematic comparisons between different *parts* of the Partition borderlands hold much promise. Not only were two huge borderlands created – one between India and West Pakistan and another some 1,500 km to the east between India and East Pakistan/Bangladesh and Burma – but we will also see that these borderlands consisted of sectors that differed enormously from each other. If we wish to make general statements about the borderland, we can do so fruitfully only if we know much more about these differences.

Third, in the case of the Partition border, the gap between the academic disciplines has led to a startling contrast. Historians have provided us with detailed accounts of the bureaucratic and political processes leading up to the decisions of the Boundary Commissions (for Punjab and for Bengal/Sylhet) but they have been almost completely silent about what happened after those decisions were made public. Social scientists who take up the story from 1947, on the other hand, have treated the border as an unproblematic given, a *fait accompli*, the outer skin of new nations, the margin of new states. Hardly anybody has bothered to study how the decisions of the boundary commissions were implemented on the ground, explore the long period of uncertainty and confusion, or look at the border as a social reality that was shaped by borderlanders themselves over the decades following 1947.[32] It is possible to narrow down this gap by using information that is available and by employing the research techniques of both historians and other social scientists.

Fourth, writers on the Partition border have usually been unable to free themselves from partisan positions when it comes to interpreting disputes, incidents and the cross-border movement of people and goods. Understanding the borderland as a social reality requires, however, that we move beyond such positions. National discourses and received wisdoms do not travel well across the border, and creating the preconditions for reassessing such discourses and wisdoms is an urgent task. A first step is to consider them in the light of the historical evidence that is available on the Partition borderlands.

Fifth, a study of borderland society – rather than merely a study of the border – allows us to begin constructing the social history of those in whose backyard an international border suddenly appeared in 1947. Being a borderlander was

as important a way of 'living the Partition' as was being a cross-border refugee: henceforth there was no way you could imagine your life without direct reference to the trauma of 1947. Taking this as a critical event that shaped both the identities and the actions of borderlanders, we can explore how Partition led them to initiate new social arrangements. These arrangements could point towards undermining the border and maintaining cross-border connections but also towards strengthening the border as a social, economic and cultural divide. The social uses made of the border varied enormously according to location along the border, the age of the border, and the social, economic, ethnic, religious or gender group to which borderlanders belonged.

Finally, it is necessary to consider carefully how and why scholars on Partition and its aftermath have come to imagine the borderland as a denigrated, residual and distant space.[33] We have routinely marginalized the borderland and privileged political, economic and cultural processes emanating from centres of state power. The following pages will demonstrate that the Partition border strongly influenced how such 'central' processes actually unfolded and, even more signficantly, that political, economic and cultural processes emanating from the borderland deeply affected the centres of state power.[34] Since its sudden birth in 1947, the 4,000 km long borderland between India, East Pakistan/ Bangladesh and Burma has left a deep imprint on each of these states and on their uneasy coexistence. Border disputes, the movement of unauthorized migrants across the border, smuggling, border rebellions, and interstate war are just a few of the problems that have persistently dogged the rulers of these states and forced them continually to engage with the borderland in both material and symbolic ways. In borderland studies, such engagements have been described as the 'border effect' on state formation.[35] By studying this interaction in the case of Partition borderlanders and state power holders we can enrich not only borderland studies but also analyses of economic policy, security, nation building, law enforcement and diplomacy in South Asia.

Bringing the border back in requires a consideration of how it was created. The next two chapters take up this task. Chapter 3 looks briefly at how the border was conceived and at the necessity of qualifying some common assumptions about its birth. Chapter 4 details how the border was actually established on the ground.

Notes

1 David Ludden, *India and South Asia: A Short History* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002), 226.
2 For an analysis of the construction and collapse of such 'sites of memory,' see Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1997).
3 Radha Kumar, 'The Troubled History of Partition,' *Foreign Affairs*, 76:1 (1997), 22–34;

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) and Gilles Bertrand (ed.), 'La partition en question: Bosnie-Herzégovine, Caucase, Chypre,' *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée Orientale et le Monde Turco-Iranien*, 34 (2002), 137–233. 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, DC: The World Bank, 1999).

4 Aaron S Klieman, 'The Resolution of Conflicts Through Territorial Partition: The Palestine Experience', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22:2 (1980), 281. For example, if we consider Partition as 'the unintended outcome of an unsuccessful effort by a minority to secure a more federal political dispensation and the unwillingness of the party of the majority ... to countenance [it],' we discern tensions between centralization and decentralization that have undone many other states. And if we consider Partition as 'a consciously developed and deliberately deployed spatial strategy of eliminating real or imagined differences', we recognize a classic trend among politicians to seek a territorial solution to intense ideological conflict. Quotations are from Sankaran Krishna, *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka and the Question of Nationhood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 239; and Sanjay Chaturvedi, 'The Excess of Geopolitics: Partition of "British India"', in: Stefano Bianchini, Rada Iveković, Ranabir Samaddar and Sanjay Chaturvedi, *Partitions: Reshaping States and Minds* (forthcoming), 119–53. Cf. Stanley Waterman, 'Partitioned States,' *Political Geography Quarterly*, 6:2 (1987), 151–70.

5 Robert K Schaeffer, *Severed States: Dilemmas of Democracy in a Divided World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 6.

6 Schaeffer, *Severed States*, 2.

7 Schaeffer (*Severed States*) treats these processes as following each other and dominating successive phases – decolonization partitions being followed by Cold War ones and democratization ones in the second half of the twentieth century – but it is also possible to observe them interacting in different mixes in individual partitions.

8 Edward Said, 'Partition as a Parting Gift of Empire,' *Dawn* (22 November 1999). See Fraser, *Partition in Ireland*.

9 Said, 'Partition.'

10 The last Viceroy of India was clearly concerned about this question when he manoeuvred to 'divert odium from the British' and 'avoid turning a day of rejoicing over Indian and Pakistani freedom into one of mourning over disappointed territorial hopes.' The same dilemma is expressed in WH Auden's poem 'Partition'. In the following fragment, 'you' is Sir Cyril Radcliffe, the chairman of the Boundary Commissions:

> The only solution now lies in separation.
> The Viceroy thinks, as you will see from his letter,
> That the less you are seen in his company the better,
> So we've arranged to provide you with other accommodation.

We can give you four judges, two Moslem and two Hindu,
To consult with, but the final decision must rest with you.

See HV Hodson, *The Great Divide: Britain - India - Pakistan* (New York: Atheneum, 1971) and WH Auden, *City without Walls and Other Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).

11 Each of these three moments could be teased apart in the way suggested by Pandey for the 1947 event. He speaks of three partitions taking place simultaneously: the achievement of Pakistan as a homeland for South Asian Muslims, the splitting up of the Muslim-majority provinces of Bengal and Punjab, and the mass migrations and mass violence that occurred. Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 21–44.

12 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. Cf. Md. Mahbubar Rahman and Willem van Schendel, '"I Am *Not* A Refugee": Rethinking Partition Migration', *Modern Asian Studies*, 37:3 (2003), 551–84.

13 For many writers on Partition, the Punjab bias needs no justification. It is quite rare for authors even to recognize it as a serious problem. In three recent publications, however, the authors do struggle with it. Menon and Bhasin highlight the ambiguity in their groundbreaking 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 realized that 'the Bengal experience was so different that it merited a separate study.' For this reason their book covers only Punjab. Similarly, and equally problematically, Mushirul Hasan excludes Bengal on the basis of its 'difference' from Punjab. His influential article on rewriting the histories of partition 'does not cover the historical writings on the Bengal province, especially Bangladesh, where the histories of partition are being written differently since 1971.' Finally, in his book *Remembering Partition*, 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. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998), 12, 26n. Mushirul Hasan, 'Memories of a Fragmented Nation: Rewriting the Histories of India's Partition', *Economic and Political Weekly* (10 October 1998), 2662; Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 18.

14 For an 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. For a comparison of the differential way in which the Indian authorities treated refugees entering the country from West Pakistan and those entering from East Pakistan, and the claim that the latter were discriminated against, see Joya Chatterji, 'Right or Charity? The Debate over Relief and Rehabilitation in West Bengal, 1947–50', in Suvir Kaul (ed.), *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India* (Delhi: Permanent