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2 1971

Reassessing a forgotten national narrative

Muneeza Shamsie

In 1947, Pakistan was created as a unique country, on the basis of its Muslim identity as a unifying force, although its two major provinces, East and West Pakistan, were divided by 1,000 miles. The population ratio was 54:46. The larger population was in East Pakistan. The seat of government was in West Pakistan (Karachi, then Islamabad). The fragile, newly independent country faced many problems, including ongoing hostilities with India. Consequently, 'the demands of the military establishment on the state's meagre resources left little for development in the provinces' (Jalal 2014: 146). In December 1970, following political turmoil and martial law, Pakistan saw its first free and fair election. The results revealed a country deeply ethnically divided. The Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in East Pakistan, won a clear overall majority, but it had no support in West Pakistan. His election campaign was based on 'six points' demanding greater provincial autonomy due to East Pakistan's anger with West Pakistan's domination. But the bureaucratic military elite, dominated by West Pakistanis, considered this tantamount to treason. To complicate this, in West Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's party won a majority in Punjab and Sindh, the two most populous provinces, but in Baluchistan and North-West Frontier, a majority voted for Wali Khan's National Awami Party, which was willing to join Mujibur Rahman and form a government in Islamabad.

The military government of Yahya Khan refused to hand over power to Mujibur Rahman. The two most senior West Pakistani officials in East Pakistan, the governor, Admiral S.M. Ahsan, and the chief martial law administrator, Lt General Sahabzada Yaqub-Khan, urged a political solution, not a military one (Yaqub-Khan 2005: 280). Their advice was ignored, and they resigned in protest in early March. On the night of 25–26 March 1971, the army embarked on a ruthless military action in Dhaka.

In West Pakistan, there was great outrage at Bengalis' killing of non-Bengalis in East Pakistan. In September 1971, the expatriate Pakistani-American academic Eqbal Ahmed tried to set the record straight by publishing 'Letter to a Pakistani Diplomat' in the *New York Times*. He explained that he originally belonged to Bihar and most of his people had migrated to East Pakistan, where several 'were killed by Bengali zealots during the period immediately preceding the military's intervention' (Ahmed 2006: 416), but he was 'able to find neither a political nor an economic nor a moral justification for the current policy of military intervention'. He added that the white paper published in August 1971 by the Pakistan military authorities exaggerated

tenfold the number of people killed by the Bengalis and was 'obviously intended to justify trials and death sentences for opposition leaders' (Ahmed 2006: 419) in East Pakistan.

The conflict culminated in December 1971 with war with India and defeat for the Pakistani army. East Pakistan became independent Bangladesh. Ayesha Jalal writes: 'The army's campaign against Bengali resistance, a tragic mixture of human folly and capacity for brutality, was abruptly cut short by Indian military intervention and the disintegration of Pakistan' (1991: 312–313). Tariq Ali describes the military action of 1971 and its ethnic violence as 'shocking, shameful and one of the worst blots in our history'. He says, 'Jinnah's Pakistan died on March 26, 1971, with East Pakistan drowned in blood' (qtd. in M. Shamsie 1996: 91).

Defeat by the Indian army and the loss of half a country came as a shock to most West Pakistanis, thanks to a censored press and a policy of disinformation. Reports in the foreign media, such as the *Daily Telegraph's* lead story 'Genocide' by Anthony Mascarenhas, a Pakistani journalist, were condemned as lies and foreign propaganda.¹ In December 1971, a new truncated Pakistan came into being. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who now held the majority vote, formed a government. He established the Hamoodur Rahman Commission 'to enquire how the 1971 defeat came about' (Cilano 2011: 2). The Commission's report was submitted in 1974, but suppressed until 2000. Pakistan's literary response to 1971 was also very limited for years. Pakistanis 'simply wanted to be done with the events of 1971 and not be reminded time and again' (Zaman and Farrukhi qtd. in Cilano 2011: 6). The year 1971 passed into official and public amnesia.

In 2002, the then-president of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf, 'offered regrets for the war to Bangladeshis' (Cilano 2011: 2) during a visit to Dhaka, but this apology 'raises questions about the meaning of the past'. To this day, in textbooks used 'in a field called "Pakistan studies" Jalal sees the use of "bigoted narrative styles" that are in her opinion "consistent with the state's homogenising agendas of proclaiming a national culture by fiat"' (Cilano 2011: 30). The declassified Hamoodur Rahman Commission's report also revealed contradictions and elisions which gave 'an inadequate account of what happened', creating 'a narrative vacuum at the national level' (2011: 2). Today, Musharraf's 'regret' has slipped from public memory.

In marked contrast, as my literary history *Hybrid Tapestries* (2017) reveals, there has been a growing literary response to 1971 in Pakistani anglophone literature, particularly after 2000, creating a body of work possibly as extensive as post-9/11 Pakistani anglophone fiction, but little known. Cara Cilano's *National Identities in Pakistan: The 1971 War in Contemporary Pakistan Fiction* (2011) remains the only major critical work on the subject. This essay looks at the representation of 1971 in English-language fiction by Pakistanis and discusses the few twentieth-century works alongside those of a younger generation.

In the aftermath of 1971: breaking the silence

Tariq Rahman's courageous story 'Bingo', published in *The Frontier Post* in 1975, was the first response to 1971 in Pakistani anglophone fiction, while Rahman was a serving officer in the Pakistan army. He had opposed the military action in East Pakistan, though he was never posted there and resolved to leave the army, which he did in 1978. Today he is a distinguished academic. The title 'Bingo' refers to the derogatory West Pakistani term for Bengalis in 1970–1971. The narrator, Safeer, and a Bengali cadet, Tajassur, are classmates at the military academy. Tajassur is popular with juniors, but scorned by contemporaries for his easy-going attitude towards drill and discipline and his eccentric interest in books. Safeer recalls that shortly before graduation, 'East Pakistan had started kicking up one hell of a row to get separated from West Pakistan. We called him [Tajassur] "Bingo", and "a traitor" and "Sheikh Mujibur Rehman's ADC"' (Rahman 1997: 313). Safeer and Tajassur are then posted to East Pakistan as second lieutenants. Soon,

‘the Mukti Bahini – i.e. rebel Bingo troops – had started to play havoc with our supply lines’ (1997: 317). Safeer never uses the words ‘parliament’, ‘election’ or ‘vote’, but sums up Mujibur Rahman’s ‘six points’ with the comment, ‘anything coming from a loony like Mujib must have been crap’ (1997: 317). In Sorayya Khan’s *Noor*, young Pakistani soldiers in East Pakistan dismiss Bengalis as ‘dim-wits’ (2003: 152).

The influence of obsolete, racist, and colonial textbooks is embodied in a commanding officer’s admiration for General Nicholson’s role in 1857 – in quelling the uprising – and his dismissive comment on the Vietcong as ‘a short statured people’ who ‘don’t seem to be a martial race’ (Rahman 1997: 316). Tajassur says, ‘I believe there are no martial races [...] People are forced to fight when they are exploited and transgressed against. And bravery is only good if it is used in a just cause’ (1997:316). Later Safeer tells Tajassur that ‘the Bingos’ want to divide the country and are ‘Pakistan’s enemies’ and ‘Indian agents’ (1997:318). Tajassur answers: ‘Listen, Safeer. This is all propaganda’ (1997:318). To Safeer’s horror, he speaks of army excesses, ‘and of exploitation and tyranny’ – and Tajassur soon deserts (1997:318).

Safeer’s matter-of-fact descriptions of shooting, killings, rapes, and the razing to the ground of entire villages, in which he takes part as a duty against ‘the enemy’, are truly chilling, as is his inability to distinguish between right and wrong, including the rape of a frightened girl, provided for him by his senior officer to celebrate his twenty-first birthday. Khan’s *Noor* (2003) provides a more graphic and shocking description of a young Pakistani soldier being encouraged by his superior to prove his masculinity by violating a Bengali woman (182). Khan’s research on 1971 for *Noor* underpins these texts.² According to Yasmin Saikia, ‘The Pakistanis hoped that the tactics of fear and extreme punishment and humiliation of Bengali honour would prevent further rebel recruitment of the Mukti. But this was not the case. Their ranks swelled’ (2011: 49–51). Safeer is captured by the Mukti Bahini and discovers Tajassur is a captain in the unit. He helps Safeer escape, sheltering him with his own family. But Safeer is ‘rescued’ by Pakistani commandos. They kill Tajassur, violate his sister, and their mother goes mad with grief: Safeer shoots her to put her out of her misery. He knows there will be no one to accuse him. This dénouement is a reminder of 1971’s horror, and the complicating, unrecorded narratives of civil war, men in opposite camps who had once served together – as had many Mukti and Pakistani soldiers – often honour that comradeship, despite the bitterness of conflict: a detail reinforced by Khan’s research too.

The violence that Rahman captures is exceptional for the Pakistani anglophone literature of that time; and predates the harrowing descriptions of Partition in Bapsi Sidhwa’s novels *The Bride* (1982) and *Ice-Candy Man* (1988): the difference is that, in 1971, the wanton killings and crimes were committed by a state institution – the army – in the name of law and order. Rahman’s critically acclaimed story did not raise any great public awareness in Pakistan. Interestingly, Aminatta Forna’s novel *The Memory of Love* (2010), revolving around the savage civil war in Sierra Leone, portrays a similar national silence, only to reveal, ultimately, equally terrifying stories. Forna’s use of a psychiatrist as a main protagonist draws parallels between the silence, memory lapses, and disorientation of individuals suffering from post-traumatic stress with those of an entire nation.

Beyond trauma and amnesia

The need to move beyond trauma and amnesia in order to remember and forgive is central to Khan’s remarkable novel *Noor*, the first Pakistani anglophone novel to portray East Pakistan in 1971. The book juxtaposes Islamabad in the 1990s with the unravelling of suppressed memories of East Pakistan in 1971. Khan employs, as a catalyst, the subcontinental superstition that

the mentally challenged are endowed with clairvoyant powers: the uncanny drawings of Noor, a special child, 'different' from the others (doctors employ terms such as Asperger's Syndrome, Rhett Syndrome), unleash unexpected images of the past for Ali, her grandfather, and Sajida, her mother.

Sajida believes that she and Noor, her third child, have a special connection. Noor appears to her in a vision, long before she is born. Sajida and her husband Hussein, her erstwhile classmate, live with her foster father, Ali, an estate agent, at Ali's insistence. In 1971, Ali was a serving army officer in East Pakistan. He had rescued Sajida, a Bengali orphan of 'fiveandsix' (Khan 2003: 11). He adopted her and brought her up in Islamabad, with the help of his widowed mother, Nanijan. This appellation – maternal grandmother – represents an absence in Ali's home, embodying 'the narrative vacuum' (Cilano 2011: 2) of Pakistan, since Ali never married and Sajida has never known any mother in Islamabad.

Noor starts to paint from the age of five. The earliest paintings, of fish, remind Sajida that her father was a fisherman; another painting 'brought the cyclone back to Sajida' (Khan 2003: 103) – in which she believes her parents died. Noor unwittingly continues to produce brilliantly coloured images which exhume Ali's and Sajida's buried memories of 1971. Noor's drawings increasingly impel Ali to confront his memories, that he participated in more than military combat in East Pakistan. He recalls rape, the wholesale slaughter of Bengalis, and mass graves to bury them – one such muddy pit, included fresh, recently shot bodies of Bengali passers-by, where a little girl struggled through the dead, crying out 'Mukhtiar'. As Ali's confession unfolds, it transpires that that child was Sajida, and Mukhtiar her baby brother: Ali had killed her family. But Khan moves beyond guilt and recrimination to look at the possibilities of love and atonement, though 'the family is by no means fully consolidated at the novel's close; a shattered mirror cannot be put back together. It does, however, stand a chance of being reconstituted along different lines, with a different narrative to tell its story' (Cilano 2011: 65–66).

Masculinity, war, and violence against women

Khan often refers to gender, which, Cilano suggests,

hints at a genuine queering of conventional masculinity by having Ali's tour in East Pakistan last for the nine months it would take for a woman to gestate a baby. Ali's paternity then depends on his own corresponding and unnatural maternity.

(2011: 56)

On Ali's return to Islamabad in 1971, to exorcise his memories, he forces himself into a tub of boiling water, 'enveloped by steam' until 'his genitals were burned and blistered'. De-sexed, Ali's 'paternal body' becomes 'a metaphor for the violence carried out in the nation's name' (Cilano 2011: 56). He recalls the treatment of a young Bengali girl who 'didn't wear a sari blouse, a preference of the officer in charge' and who, having been violated by his superior, is then offered to Ali, who 'felt sick to his stomach', for which he is taunted: 'you are not a soldier' (Khan 2003: 182). The fact that Ali tries to oblige but his attempt to violate the girl ends in failure muddles guilt and masculinity. His attempt to 'blanch his memories' by self-inflicted torture becomes 'an act to stabilize himself for the larger good of his new "ready-made family" in Islamabad' (Cilano 2011: 56).

The discourse on patriarchy, masculinity, war, and violence against women is central to Khan's narrative, and also to Shahbano Bilgrami's *Without Dreams* (2007) Moni Mohsin's *The End of Innocence* (2006) and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2003). In *Noor*, Ali joined the army against

the wishes of his mother, with dreams of making his country proud, although she warned of imminent conflict in 1970–1971 and said: ‘war is an animal gone mad’ (Khan 2003: 70). The novel shatters another illusion when it transpires that the loving Nanijan, the family matriarch, was a battered wife: her husband would punch her, ‘slamming her against the display cabinet, knocking knick knacks from their places’ (Khan 2003: 176).

In *Without Dreams*, Bilgrami depicts silence as complicity, drawing parallels between the division of Pakistan in 1971 and Pakistan’s divisions of ethnicity, class, and gender. The novel links a family’s amnesia with that of Pakistan, when Haroon returns to Pakistan after nineteen years, but cannot remember how his father died. The teenage Haroon had in fact killed him. Haroon had toppled a bookshelf on his father to stop him beating Haroon’s beautiful mother, Tahira. Accustomed to hiding her bruises to avert social scandal, Tahira protects her son, too, by allowing Abdul, their Bengali servant boy, to be accused and jailed in his stead. She is unaware that her ‘vulnerability to violence prompts Abdul to connect her victimhood to his dreams and memories, allowing him to eventually recall his own mother’s vulnerability’ (Cilano 2013: 73) in East Pakistan, where she was violated and killed in 1971 by West Pakistani soldiers. In another ironic comment, Abdul had then come to Karachi with other poor Bengali migrants in search of employment.

Patriarchal violence against women is central to Mohsin’s *The End of Innocence*, which looks at the 1971 conflict from the distance of rural Punjab, culminating metaphorically with an unexploded bomb which falls in the vicinity during the war. The narrative, presented from the perspective of Laila, a privileged child, links the demise of a united Pakistan with the murder of Rani, an unmarried, pregnant girl – both in the name of ‘honour’ – and, Cilano argues, also ‘links Rani’s increasingly desperate situation with the violence and coming war in East Pakistan’ (2013: 79). Laila, admires and loves the teenage Rani, the family maidservant’s daughter, but cannot understand Rani’s romantic dreams, inspired by the Punjabi folk tale of Heer Ranjha. The worthless young man with whom Rani falls in love abandons her; and her stepfather kills her for her crime. Laila cannot forgive herself for her inadvertent, uncomprehending words which betrayed Rani. Laila’s liberal, aristocratic, landowning parents are among a minority of people in the area who are shocked by Rani’s death, as they also are by the military action in East Pakistan. They voice their concern ‘at the atrocities going on in East Pakistan’ to Colonel Butt at the nearby cantonment. He replies that ‘Civil war is not a polite sanitary affair. It’s like within a household. Between husband and wife, if you will!’ (Mohsin 2006: 105). Cilano points out that, in traditional Pakistani society, the man of the family is responsible for the family’s honour based on due obedience, this metaphor ‘effeminizes the East Pakistanis’ who need to be disciplined, and justifies the price Rani pays for her ‘sin’ (2013: 80). Rani is buried on 3 December 1971, the day that India invaded Pakistan, providing one of many ‘structural linkages’ (Cilano 2013: 80).

Marxism: an interlude

Shahryar Fazli’s *Invitation* (2011) takes history back to the 1951 Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case, in which the father of the narrator, Shahbaz, is accused, together with other left-wing officers, activists, writers, and trade unionists, of planning an alleged military coup; the episode enabled the authorities to clamp down on communist activities in Pakistan. Fazli juxtaposes that era with the expatriate Shahbaz’s encounter with the all-powerful 1970 military, particularly his father’s old friend, the retired Brigadier Imtiaz, who owns a nightclub famous for its cabarets. Shahbaz is looked after by his father’s one-time driver, Ghulam Hussain, in Karachi. But Ghulam Hussain is Bengali, and as the country veers into the crisis of 1970–1971, Shahbaz is sucked into

corruption and state violence, and betrays Ghulam Hussain, whose very ethnicity renders him suspect to the authorities. Tariq Ali's novel *The Night of the Golden Butterfly* (2010) encapsulates sixty years of Pakistan's history, including the demise of communism and the rise of military power and religious extremism. The narrator lives in exile, unable to forget that in the 1960s his Bengali friend Tipu, a fellow communist activist and student in Lahore, was betrayed and handed over to the military authorities, symbolising the betrayal of East Pakistan. The novel is an intertextual engagement with Ali's non-fiction work *The Duel: Pakistan on the Flight of American Power* (2008), which includes his bond with Maulana Bhashani (1880–1976) and his popular peasant-based movement in East Pakistan (after the 1970 cyclone, Bhashani withdrew from contesting polls).

Confronting the reality

There are few portrayals in Pakistani anglophone literature of Pakistan's immediate reaction to the 1971 surrender. In her creative memoir *Meatless Days* (1989), Sara Suleri writes:

something in our spirits broke in the war of 1971. It was not so much the country's severing that hurt as the terrible afterimages we had to face: censorship lifted for a flash, flooding us with photographs and stories of what the army actually did in Bangladesh during the months of emergency before the war, 'I am not talking about the two-nation theory,' I wept to my father, 'I am talking about blood.'

(1989: 122)

In a narrative replete with analogies, symbolism, and subtexts, Suleri links family history with that of the nation. Her narrative revolves around her sister, Ifat, and their Welsh-born mother, Mair, both killed in traffic accidents. She writes, too, of Ifat's impetuous marriage in Lahore to Javed, an army officer. After the surrender of 1971, he was one of 93,000 soldiers in East Pakistan taken as prisoners of war in India, but 'the country made quick provisions to forget the war in Bangladesh' (1989: 144). When the soldiers were repatriated after two years, they 'came back to a world that did not really want to hear the kind of stories they had to tell'. At home there came that horrific moment 'when he began to describe what he had felt during his first killing'. Terrified, Suleri wondered, 'How will Ifat do it, how will she make Javed's mind a human home again and take those stories from his head?' (1989: 144).

Amid cyclone, floods, and gunfire

In *Noor*, Sajida is haunted by memories of the cyclone in East Pakistan. The cyclone – one of the worst in recent history – struck shortly before the 1970 election; people died in their hundreds of thousands, millions were left homeless. The government's inability to cope and the criticism of its relief operations ensured Mujibur Rahman's sweeping electoral victory.

Adam Zameenzad's novel *Cyrus Cyrus* (1991) focuses on the lives of the poor and marginalised, albeit across several continents. His narrator, Cyrus, a Choodah (the lowest Hindu caste), a latrine cleaner and Christian convert in India, is falsely accused of murder. He flees with his family to East Pakistan where, overtaken by the tragedies of 1970–1971, only he survives. His agony at loved ones falling prey to natural disasters – snakes, crocodiles, and wild beasts during the cyclone and floods – pales in comparison to mankind's brutality: Cyrus' mother, sister, and brother are tortured and murdered in their *jhuggi* (mud hut). The fact that the assailants' identity and ethnicity remain unknown captures the savagery and hatred of 1971.

Cyrus' comment that he and his family were 'certainly not political [...] but we too were quite excited about the excitement, and vociferously and heartily agreed with whoever expressed an opinion' (Zameenzad 1991: 139) made them doubly vulnerable; and this is also a reminder that in countries with huge social disparities, the daily struggles of most people are for food, employment, and survival.

In *Cyrus Cyrus*, Zameenzad criticises politicians, the army, and Indian interference for the sufferings of 1971. He adds that the foreign press 'failed to see [...] the massacre of the Biharis and the Urdu-speaking, pro-Pakistan citizens of Bangla Desh by the Bengalis, though it rightly saw and rightly reported the genocidal waves of attacks by the Pakistan Army upon the Bangla-speaking people' (1991: 141). As Saikia says, 'The story of violence committed by the Bengalis is less well known and is poorly represented in the news media, except the Pakistani Urdu press' (2011: 59).

In nowhere land

Zameenzad's suggestion that language, Bangla and Urdu, defined loyalties in East Pakistan during the 1971 conflict conforms to widespread perceptions in Pakistan and Bangladesh that belie a more complex history. In the pre-Partition era, Urdu became a symbol of Muslim unity and was made the language of government in Pakistan, alongside English. The refusal to accept East Pakistan's demand that Bengali should be a national language led to conflict, riots, and the growth of Bengali nationalism. Bengali was accepted as a national language of Pakistan in 1956, rescinded in 1959, and reinstated shortly before the 1970 election. At the same time, a number of Bengalis, albeit an urban minority, were traditionally Urdu-speaking and included leading politicians. In 1971, many Urdu-speaking Bengalis identified with Bengali nationalists, which Bangladeshi novelist Tahmima Anam skilfully captures in her novel *The Golden Age* (2008). However, the Biharis, Urdu-speaking migrants from India to East Pakistan (mostly from the province of Bihar), 'were targeted as "the enemy" of the Bengalis' in 1970/71' (Saikia 2011: 50).

Aamer Hussein's nuanced story 'Karima' in the collection *Mirror to the Sun* (1993) 'draws upon Bihari history, but it does so in order to identify the silences enveloping the displacement that Biharis figuratively represent' (Cilano 2011: 103). This tale of dislocation and loss, takes Karima, a woman of Bihari origin, from Dhaka to Karachi, then London, and is reconstructed by a nameless Urdu-speaking British-Asian narrator. Though Karima was born in Dhaka and 'could speak Bengali like her mother tongue' (Hussein 1993: 63), at home she spoke Urdu. Her literate Bihari husband Badshah, a mechanic, had set up a small business, and so Karima didn't have to work, unlike most of her neighbours. Badshah longed to move to Karachi because 'that's where they speak our language, that's the real Pakistan. These Bengalis, he said, he couldn't really understand them' (Hussein 1993: 35). Karima is alarmed by the 'Punjabi soldiers [who] had come in from across the sea and begun to pillage around the edges of city' in 1971, but Badshah regarded them as friends who would rescue them 'from those marauding Bengalis' (Hussein 1993: 36). Karima's once-friendly neighbours taunt her: 'Dirty Biharis [...] go home or we'll come and get you' (Hussein 1993: 36). Four Bengali men enter her home and threaten her. Badshah comes at them with a broken bottle, shouting 'Pakistan Zindabad' [long live Pakistan] (Hussein 1993: 37). They set him on fire.

Karima escapes to Karachi with Shahzeb, her two-year-old son, and Badshah's family. Ironically, despite the national rhetoric of 'belonging' and 'unity', the Biharis find themselves different to Karachi's inhabitants, as is their Urdu and their appearance: the Biharis are smaller and darker and in Karachi they are known as 'Bengali log' [Bengali people] (Hussein 1993: 38). The Biharis are confined in an overcrowded camp, because Pakistan refused to accept

Biharis from East Pakistan after 1971, 'due to instability born of ethno-regional unrest' (Cilano 2011: 84). Karima reluctantly marries Badshah's younger brother, Rahim, in self-protection and has a child by him, but Rahim considers Badshah's son a financial burden. Both husband and wife finally find work, as a driver and an *ayah*, respectively, for a rich family. But when the employers take Karima to London to look after their disadvantaged son and her eldest, Shahzeb, dies, she runs away. She ends up living in London with a Bengali butcher and working as virtual slave labour in his shop: since they are not married, she dares not accompany him on his visits to Bangladesh, in case she is recognised. Her state of limbo embodies that of the Biharis, who find they belong nowhere and have nowhere to go.

Aquila Ismail's loosely autobiographical novel *Of Martyrs and Marigolds* (2012) is perhaps the only Pakistani anglophone novel to portray the perspective of Biharis. Ismail, a Bihari, born and brought up in Dhaka, speaks Bengali fluently, as does her protagonist, Suri (like Hussein's Karima). In a memoir essay, 'Leaving Bangladesh', Ismail describes being rounded up with other Biharis in Dhaka and incarcerated in a camp. She escaped thanks to 'a family friend in the Bangladeshi army [who] took the risk of literally whisking us away at great peril to himself' (Ismail 2011: 139). Ismail developed this into her novel *Martyrs*.

Suri is in love with Rumi, a Bengali boy. She belongs to a cultured family which identifies with East Pakistan and criticises West Pakistan's policies. But in the political tensions of 1970–1971, they are tarred as 'non-Bengali' and 'West Pakistani sympathisers'; many 'Urdu-speakers' are killed. In the newly created Bangladesh, Suri realises that 'all those whose mother tongue was not Bengali had no place in this land whatsoever' (Ismail 2012: 2). In February 1972, she and her family and Bihari neighbours are herded out of their homes. The men and women are separated. The men are driven away in buses, the women are confined to a house; at night, some women are 'taken away' by the Bangladeshi soldiers. Suri and her women companions are sent by ship to a camp – a former juvenile home. There is no sign of the men. Rumi, now an officer in the Bangladesh army, helps Suri, her mother, and sister escape. His father helps her locate her father, in a jail, but Suri cannot find her brothers. Ultimately, she learns that when the men were taken away, the young were separated and killed by Bangladeshi soldiers bent on revenge. Suri and her surviving family are among the few Biharis to obtain a passage to unknown and alien Karachi.

Dreams of unity

Mehr Nigar Masroor's posthumously published novel *Shadows of Time* (1987) remains the only work in Pakistani anglophone fiction to span over a century, including the divisions of 1947 and 1971. She leads up to the rise of religious extremism during the Zia regime in the 1980s. The novel is also unique because it begins in Bengal in 1883 and provides an important portrayal of Bengal's leading role in the politics of Muslim identity, which becomes a foil to the post-independence derailment of the political process in Pakistan and West Pakistan's exploitation of East Pakistan.

Masroor tells the tale of the friendship in the late nineteenth century between Akbar, a Muslim aristocrat, and three Hindus in Calcutta, the then-imperial capital. She describes Bengal's political awakening, the birth of Indian nationalism, and the Partition of Bengal into Hindu and Muslim majority areas by the British to create schisms between the two communities. The rise of Hindu extremism, the establishment of the Muslim League in Dhaka, Bengal's leading role in the Pakistan movement, and the colonial resolve to create a new imperial capital in Delhi, thus marginalising Bengal, are all built into the narrative, as are enduring love affairs between Hindu and Muslim protagonists. The resulting intertwined bloodlines suggest a syncretic Indo-Muslim

society 'in sharp contrast [...] [to] the political, ideological and cultural stances, bent on purity and fundamentalisms' (Cilano 2013: 45).

Masroor's main protagonist, Maheen, grows up in Lahore. She is the daughter of Farhan, a Muslim League activist, whose family includes a Punjabi father, a mother from Delhi, and a much-loved Bengali uncle – Akbar. These interprovincial family bonds assert the ideals of a multi-ethnic, united Muslim Pakistan. This concept finds expression in Zaib-un-Nissa Hamidullah's story collection *The Young Wife* (2008), which includes fiction set in East Pakistan, where she was born, and West Pakistan, where she married. She says: 'Both wings are beloved to me' (Hamidullah 2008: xxi). Masroor wrote her novel while suffering from terminal cancer and may not have had time for further revisions. As Niaz Zaman points out, 'Masroor's reading of the politics of [pre-1947] Bengal and her moulding of it to fit her fictional characters is better than her use of political history in the later section of the book' (2000: 305).

The obstacles to freedom of cultural expression in Pakistan are central to the post-independence section, since Maheen concentrates on fostering the arts and classical dance (as did Masroor). But past 'Muslim ruler[s] had patronized all art forms in India', whereas 'in Pakistan the homeland required for the Muslims of India to live and grow' (Masroor 1987: 386). Maheen 'and other Lahore artists struggled in their respective fields but they received neither patronage nor encouragement' (Masroor 1987: 387). The marginalisation of Maheen's artistic vision embodies that of East Pakistan, including the Bengali language and the songs, music, and dance so intrinsic to Bengali culture.

The reclamation of pre-1971 Pakistan and its loss run through *Bengal Raag* (2006) by Durdana Soomro and Ghazala Hameed, twin daughters of a Punjabi civil servant posted in East Pakistan. Narrated in the third person, the novel is filled with finely observed details which describe the carefree pre-1971 Bengal known and loved by fictional twins Gaity and Diya. Their father's postings take them to Chittagong and Dhaka; they also travel to the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Rangamati, and Cox's Bazaar. Their eldest sister, Aynee, marries a Bengali (as did the co-authors' sister, the Bangladeshi critic, Niaz Zaman). At the time of the military action in Dhaka, the twins are at college in Lahore and their father has been transferred to West Pakistan permanently. Their concerns and fears for their loved ones, particularly Aynee in Dhaka, amid tales of excesses by the army and the Mukti, are built into the plot and lead up to December 1971 – and the loss of the Pakistan they knew. Their account of 1971 has interesting links to Zaman's recollections in *Fault Lines* (2008: xiv–xvii).

In the new millennium: excavating memories of 1971

In the twenty-first century, a growing number of novels about 1971 'enact a specific relationship to history that posits the author as mediator of conflicting memorial legacies' (Kabir 2013: 62). These authors include those born after 1971, such as Bilgrami, Roopa Farooki, Mohsin Hamid, and Shamsie. Hamid's *Moth Smoke* (2000), explores themes of fratricide in a historical, political, and personal context. Symbolically framed by a tale of Mughal rivalry and Aurangzeb's execution of Dara Shikoh, his elder brother and the heir apparent, the plot, set in contemporary Pakistan, tells of the life-and-death rivalry between the corrupt, rich Aurangzeb (Ozi) and the poor, orphaned Dara (Daru). In 1971, Ozi's father, Khurram, had used his influence 'to obtain a cushy job as ADC in Rawalpindi' (Hamid 2000: 73). Daru's father, 'a quiet, courageous man, a soldier's soldier', served in East Pakistan 'and died of gangrene in a prisoner-of-war camp in Chittagong' (2000: 73–74); it later transpires that Daru and Ozi are both Khurram Uncle's sons. Thus, references to 1971 become integral to themes of illusion, rivalry, and twinning

which challenge narratives of Otherness. This extends to class, gender, and Indo-Pakistan rivalry resulting in the 1998 nuclear tests.

Confused bloodlines and/or twins run through several South Asian English novels, including Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Masroor's *Shadows of Time*, Farooki's *Half Life* (2010), and Shamsie's *Kartography*. Shobhana Bhattacharji writes that 'mirroring and twinning are used to offer alternative perspectives on Partition which left ragged, incomplete histories on both sides of the border' (2017: 389); this applies to 1971, too. The narrator of *Kartography*, Raheen, and her friend, Karim, 'share a crib as babies, know the contentment of sleeping spine to spine, finish each other sentences and eventually fall in love' (Bhattacharji 2017: 364). Their parents are close friends. To Raheen, the Civil War of 71 is a distant event, which occurred at the time when her father, Zafar, and Karim's mother, Maheen, swapped fiancé(s).

In 1985, Raheen and Karim's hometown, Karachi, is engulfed by ethnic violence, as was East Pakistan in 1970; similarly, a curfew is declared. Shamsie creates another resonance with the past when Raheen is shocked into the realisation that her parents, Yasmin and Zafar, migrants – *muhajirs* (refugees) (who came to Karachi from India in great numbers in 1947) are regarded in their close group as ethnically 'different'. She overhears Uncle Ali (Karim's father) declare, 'I am not a Muhajir', while discussing the current riots with landowning friends, Uncle Asif and Auntie Laila, who rail against 'those bloody Muhajirs' (Bhattacharji 2017: 38). Laila, belonging to an old Karachi family, goes a step further and expresses her resentment 'at the way Zafar and Yasmin talk about "their Karachi"? [...] "Who the hell are these Muhajirs to pretend it is their city?"' (Bhattacharji 2017: 38).

The reverberations of words, the prejudiced narratives they create, and thus complicity with brutality and violence, run through the book. Raheen realises that she had always known that Karim's mother, 'Auntie Maheen [...] was Bengali [...] because every so often aunts or cousins would arrive from Bangladesh to visit, bearing giftwrapped saris and a reminder that Auntie Maheen grew up in another language' (Bhattacharji 2017: 39).

This insight into Maheen's 'difference' provides a telling comment on the space that Bengalis who remained in Pakistan after 1971 had to negotiate. This is accentuated by Raheen's recollection of an incident at school, when she and Karim were little. Their friend, Zia, is so shocked to hear Karim say that his mother is from Bangladesh and so he is half Bengali that Zia starts to kick him and shout, 'He's not Bengali, he's not. He's my friend. Why is he lying?' (Bhattacharji 2017: 39–40). The consternation that follows among the parents of Karim, Raheen, and Zia culminates with Zia's father shouting at the *ayah*, and Zia trying to say that the *ayah* isn't responsible, whereupon 'his mother yelled at him to be quiet' (2017: 40). The incident highlights the refusal to ask questions and accept responsibility, and the collusion between 1971's verbal violence in West Pakistan and physical violence in East Pakistan.

The story of Zafar and Maheen in 1971 is central to the plot of *Kartography*. Both regarded Karachi as their home and they got engaged while the post-election political crisis was escalating. But Maheen begins to be regarded as 'the enemy' because she is Bengali. She is abused in the street by strangers. She receives obnoxious telephone calls. Ali urges them to leave the country and says that Zafar is regarded as 'treasonous' by many. Ali laments that the 'country has turned rabid' and that drawing-room conversations condone the rape of women in East Pakistan 'to improve their genes' (Bhattacharji 2017: 173). Zafar is taunted as a 'Bingo lover' at the tennis courts and beaten up. His repudiation of Maheen takes place shortly afterwards. He confesses the details to Raheen twenty years later: he comes home to find that his neighbour, Shafiq's brother has been brutally murdered by the Mukti Bahini. Zafar bursts out (and Maheen overhears): 'How can I marry one of them? How can I let one of them bear my children? Think of it as my civic duty, I'll be diluting her Bengali bloodline' (Bhattacharji 2017: 210). His sense

of shame and his apology are lost on Raheen. She flees from the house, repulsed. Her anger and trauma embody that of the nation, but unlike Pakistan, she is gradually forced to re-examine the past, confront it, and forgive, with the help of her mother and Maheen – and the letter her father wrote to Maheen long ago:

What happens when you work so hard to forget a horror that you also forget that you have forgotten it? It doesn't disappear – the canker turns inwards and mutates into something else. In this city, that we both love and claim – even though our families' histories lie elsewhere – what will this canker become?

(Bhattacharji 2017: 179)

My brother, my enemy

Roopa Farooki is unique among the writers discussed here as she is the daughter of a Bangladeshi mother, Nilofer Farooki, and a Pakistani father, Nasir Ahmed Farooki (an early post-independence Pakistani anglophone writer). Her novels *Bitter Sweets* and *The Flying Man* include intermarriages between East and West Pakistanis. Her fourth, *Half Life*, explores the friendship between Anwar, a Punjabi army officer, and Bangladeshi poet Hari Hassan, who 'has been in the thick of the civil war between East and West Pakistan' (2010: 11). They had been at Oxford together. Family relationships, secrets, and the emotional upheavals caused by an absent father are central to the novel. Farooki removes the impediments of visas by placing her protagonists in the South Asian diaspora: Britain, Singapore, and Malaysia. The narrative moves between three people; the dying Hari Hassan, in Malaysia; a Singaporean academic, married to an Englishman, Dr Aroona Ahmed Jones (Roony), who is researching Hari; and Jazz (Ejaz Ahsan), her erstwhile lover in Singapore. Roony and Jazz's relationship collapses when a DNA test reveals they are siblings. The theme of intertwined bloodlines is given an added twist when Hari Hassan turns out to be the pen name of Jazz's estranged father. Unknown to Jazz and Rooney, Hari Hassan has a secret. In pre-Partition Calcutta, during the Second World War, he fell in love with a young woman, who died expecting his child. He has lived with the guilt ever since. Anwar visits Hari in Chittagong, shortly before the outbreak of civil war. He believes he can help Hari atone for the past: Anwar asks Hari to marry Anwar's pregnant cousin, Zaida: the child born to her is Jazz (and no, Anwar is not the father).

In hospital, Hari is visited by Anwar's son, Khalid, after Anwar dies. The exchange of letters between Anwar and Hari, referring to 1971 and Anwar's diaries, captures the shock, despair, and horror of West Pakistanis who did not support the military action and provides an interesting intertextual engagement with E.M. Forster's words, 'If I had to choose between my country or my friends, I hope I would have the guts to betray my country'. Anwar had 'heard of the atrocities third-hand in the direct comfort of senior ranks' and 'now found himself with the blood of multitudes on his hands' (Farooki 2010: 199). He wrote to Hari:

I have the choice of betraying my country, or betraying all that I hold good. I do not have the strength to betray my country, and so I am betraying my integrity, and my friends. I will always be your brother, but now I am your enemy.

(2010: 199)

Hari never knew if Anwar received his letter, so he published his answer, addressed to a nameless Pakistani:

My brother enemy. There will always be a place for you in my heart, but there is no longer a place for you in my country. The green and pleasant land is red with the blood of brave men, broken women and innocent children, and the calls for vengeance will not and should not be silenced. My brother, my enemy. It is time to stop fighting and go home.

(2010: 11)

Farooki's dual Bengali-Punjabi inheritance adds to the richness of her narrative and to the sensitivity with which she writes of human frailty and family histories amid the bitter divisions of 1947 and 1971. As Shamsie says:

We act as if history can be erased. Of course we want to believe that – the cost of remembering may break our wilted spirits. But if we believe in erasure we tell ourselves it is possible to have acts without consequences. The finger squeezing the trigger becomes a thing apart from the bullet that speeds along the sands, which becomes a thing apart from the child looking down at his blood pumping out of his heart. And that child, that bullet, they become things way, way apart from our lives, here, in rooms where we look upon our own sleeping children.

(2003: 180)

Notes

- 1 See Muneza Shamsie's memoir essay 'When We Were Young' (2013).
- 2 See Soraya Khan (2015), where she describes her research including the unravelling of buried memories by former soldiers.

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