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Once were warriors: the militarized state in narrating the past

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Military memoirs often seek to reproduce an authoritative understanding of warfare that delineate important strategies of the frontline. The soldier-narrator invokes a shared sympathy between the different, though connected, worlds of the soldiers and the civilians. This essay proposes that the complex processes of racial and gender identification experienced by the colonized resulted in the production of their own discourses about identity, and examines how colonial categorizations of difference inflected the racial and gendered construction of heroes and enemies in wars. Sifting through the military memoirs of four Pakistani Generals, this essay analyses how Pakistani genocidal masculinity was constructed and manifested during the independence struggle of Bangladesh. It inquires what myths and stereotypes contributed to the militarized performances of masculinity? Through an analysis of how the bodies of both Hindu minorities and women were symbolically used in the war to construct national identity, this essay proposes that militarization as a hegemonic masculine discourse was predicated on, and justified through, a range of ideological logics of order and chaos, of revolts and counter-insurgency measures that advanced and legitimized military action in 1971. This essay also argues that by offering their personal understanding of history, politics, and honour, these memoirs claim (and justify) the right to use violence.

Keywords: identity; military; race; masculine rule; genocide

The war of 1971 transformed the political dynamics of South Asia. It created a new state, Bangladesh, carved out of Pakistan, and intensified the bitter rivalry between India and Pakistan that would generate future crises in the region. Following a Pakistani military crackdown on 25 March 1971, the ‘War of Liberation’ (muktijudhyo) of East Pakistan/Bangladesh also became an international war, embroiling major powers such as the United States, China, and the former Soviet Union. Nearly ten million refugees crossed the border to India by the end of November 1971. India provided political and logistical support, including military training and supply of weapons and intelligence to the rebel soldiers (muktibahini). With India’s armed intervention the war ended on 16 December 1971.¹

In popular discourse in Bangladesh, the social construct of a hegemonic, highly organized, and dominant ‘Punjabi’ army primarily responsible for mass atrocities during 1971 has often been compared with the East Pakistani/Bangladeshi rebel soldiers, the nation’s freedom-fighters, constituting irregular civilian-soldiers, and, mostly, Bengali battalions of the Pakistani security forces. The Pakistan armed forces, whose role was to defend national sovereignty, fought guerrilla soldiers who were considered internal

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This title is adopted from Alan Duff’s novel published in 1990 and a subsequent film in 1994 that tells the story of an urban Māori family, the Hekes, and depicts the reality of domestic violence in New Zealand.

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aggressors by them but also ‘heroes’ saving their ‘motherland’ by pro-independence Bangladeshis. While the gendered dynamics of such discourses are now recognized, what has been overlooked is how the hegemonic masculine ordering of Bangladesh’s armed struggle has also been a racial process.

Both Frantz Fanon and Edward Said highlight the importance of the construction of the ‘other’ in our understanding of race and racial community in the context of colonialism. They insist that Europeans constituted themselves and ‘others’ through difference. Ann Laura Stoler describes this practice of differentiation as the ‘colonial bourgeois order’, suggesting that the French, British, and the Dutch ‘each defined their unique civilities through a language of difference’ that relied on racial purity and sexual virtue. Racial configurations through the politics of exclusion as a means of categorizing and ruling the colonized were central to British rule in India.

The complex processes of racial and gender identification experienced by the colonized also resulted in the production of their own discourses about race and identity. In this essay, I inquire how colonial categorizations of difference inflected the racial and gendered construction of heroes and enemies in the 1971 war. Sifting through the military memoirs of four key Pakistani strategists, I ask, what myths and stereotypes contributed to the militarized performances of masculinity? I demonstrate that militarization as a hegemonic masculine discourse was predicated on, and justified through, a range of ideological logics of order and chaos, of revolts and counter-insurgency measures that advanced and legitimized military action.

Drawing upon the published memoirs by retired Pakistani Generals, Siddik Salik’s Witness to Surrender, Rao Farman Ali Khan’s (hereinafter Ali) How Pakistan Got Divided, Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi’s The Betrayal of East Pakistan, and Khadim Hussain Raja’s A Stranger in My Own Country: East Pakistan, 1969–1971, this essay proposes that the ideology of the war perpetuated certain forms of militarized masculinities. I draw on these memoirs to explore the masculine and militarized character of national/racial identities assumed by the Pakistani state both preceding, and during, 1971, in order to show how Pakistani genocidal masculinity was constructed and manifested during the independence struggle of Bangladesh.

In her analysis of the genocide in Rwanda, Joeden–Forgey writes that revealing the ‘total social practice’ of genocide necessitates knowledge of the perpetrators, for this provides evidence of mentality, motivation, and also intent that is difficult to reconstruct after the occurrence, especially for the perpetrators themselves. Framing extreme violence in Rwanda as genocidal masculinity, she suggests that it is a phenomenon that ties the crime of genocide to the exertion of a particular genocidal concept of masculine power. In a similar vein, I argue that the military memoirs reveal how the mass atrocities in the 1971 war were not considered vicious acts, rather, strategic policies of the Pakistani military; who saw the war not as a fratricidal war, but rather as a jihad, a holy war, against infidels. I further argue that while the accountability of the military continues to be elusive and carefully masked in these accounts, there are indications of the senior command’s culpability in war crimes and crimes against humanity at that time. In addition to demonstrating hegemonic masculinity’s interplay with subordinate/less powerful masculinities and femininities during the war, in the final section of the essay, I discuss the particular targeting of Hindu minorities and women as the father-brother-warrior carried out targeted killings and mass rape as responsibility for inaugurating a new social order.

My analysis of the military memoirs in this essay demonstrates how the control of women and religious minorities is central to nationalist projects, and further how official versions of history are often constructed by the political elite – whether a cultural, military
or religious elite – thus marginalizing women and religious minorities. Linked as it is with nation-state building processes, this control over history has contributed to both the silence and silencing of women’s and minority narratives within South Asia. By not documenting and addressing the experiences of those who suffer direct violence during conflicts, nation-states in South Asia have largely failed to resolve the continuation of violence in their post-conflict societies. Instead, these nation-states maintain an uneasy volatile condition, a brittle peace. Communal riots in Gujarat in 2002, attacks on minority communities in Bangladesh after the 2001 elections, protracted conflicts in Kashmir or deep-rooted conflicts in Sri Lanka are examples of the consequences of brittle peace within South Asia. Through its focus on the 1971 war, this essay demonstrates how the exclusion and silencing within national narratives produce a homogeneous, collective, and obscure history, and how this history also legitimizes discrimination by those integrated within this symbolic framework of understanding. My examination of the selective remembering of the 1971 war here raises questions about past injustices that necessitate an exploration of how the nationalist state silences many of its citizens’ (and also non-citizens who live on the borderlands) experiences of war in order to produce a hegemonic narrative of war. At the height of a national movement that continues following a birth of a nation, this hegemonic narrative also gains sacrosanct and moral authority in terms of new myths, symbols, and stories that validate the birth of a new nation. Thus, it is important to gain a better understanding of the relationship between gender and violence during war, and in its aftermath, in order to critically examine official histories, and nation-state building projects.

Multiple masculinities in armed conflicts

I begin with a brief theoretical overview of masculinities because theories on masculinity are critical to understanding how the 1971 war narratives can be approached from a racial and gendered perspective. As articulated in the introduction to this collection, masculinity is a complex articulation of practices, consciousness, and cultural representations that reproduce power differentials and inequalities. In his ground-breaking study, R. W. Connell defines masculinity as ‘simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage in that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experiences, personality and culture’.

The hegemonic conception of masculinities and hyper-masculinities embody the intersections of race, class, and sexuality; it is primarily understood as white, rich, and heterosexual. Drawing on Gramsci’s idea of hegemony to articulate power relations in societies, Connell argues that hegemonic masculinity can be conceptualized ‘as the configuration of gender practices which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women’. In other words, hegemonic masculinities express and organize male behaviour that is both rationalized and reinforced through structures of power. During armed conflicts, hegemonic masculinities also surface in violent and reactionary hypermasculine forms in a society. In situations of extreme violence, the hypermasculine, hegemonic productions of masculinities are intensely militarized as well. Feminists scholars of international politics have investigated how masculinities and violence are intimately connected in specific locations of power and how the complexities of violence reflect back onto the theorizing about gendered and racial hierarchy of difference. I consider below some such recent feminist contributions to explain how the masculine-militarized state manifested itself in the 1971 war.
Examining the institutionalization of the citizen-hero-soldier’s masculine rule and ownership of the state, Elisabeth Prügl argues that masculine rule is a ‘constellation of rules that unequally distribute privilege between women and men and that is supported by the authority of the state’. In the context of the capitalist and communist states in the German West and East, Prügl shows how states institutionalize various forms of masculine rule with different forms of entitlement, labour control, and identity. Prügl’s observations are pertinent to the 1971 war. During 1959–1960, the average income of West Pakistanis was 32% higher than that of their eastern counterparts. By 1969–1970, the per capita income of West Pakistan was 61% higher than that of East Pakistan. Moreover, there was a lack of entrepreneurial Bengali families in East Pakistan. This was because many major Muslim trading families had settled in West Pakistan at Partition; while the trading Hindu families and landlords (zamindars), of whom 75% were Hindus, had moved to West Bengal in India. Just 22 families from West Pakistan monopolized more than two-thirds of the country’s industrial assets, as well as 70% of its insurance companies and 80% of its banking institutions. Although West Pakistan was not developed in terms of its agriculture, the construction of the gigantic Mangla and Tarbala dams allowed for a huge amount of land to be served by the new irrigation system, and much of the West subsequently benefited. No such steps were taken for agricultural development in East Pakistan. However, the planning and construction of Kaptai dam, in the restive Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), without considering the human costs involved, displaced thousands of indigenous people, and produced further resentment in East Pakistan. In this context, the economic distribution in relation to cultivable land is even more revealing. The 1951 census shows that women constituted 47.7% of East Pakistan but only 2.4% of the labour force, while the corresponding figures for West Pakistan were 46.1% with only 1% women in the labour force. In addition, 25.6% of the rural population worked in agriculture. However, only 2% women were working in agriculture, primarily in family farms in East Pakistan, whereas the figures for West Pakistan were 20.1% and 0.7% for women, respectively. While women were under-represented and had unequal access to education, labour force, and agriculture in both parts of Pakistan, the difference in economic distribution between the two territories further contributed to women’s marginalization and economic vulnerability in East Pakistan. As Prügl observes, state projects codify gendered rules that distribute privilege differentially and contribute to reinforcing masculine rule. Gender inequalities also intersected with other forms of socioeconomic inequality and disparities between the two territories of Pakistan. Following Partition, the distribution of wealth between West and East Pakistan had different effects on women’s participation in the labour force and contributed to their limited access to employment opportunities compared to men.

Apart from the unequal distribution of resources between East and West Pakistan, the idea of civilized military and effective soldiering also played a significant role in establishing notions of hegemonic masculinity in 1971. A number of feminist scholars have suggested that modern statehood is signified by various practices of the soldier that are not identified as violence but rather legitimate use of force by the gentleman with power. Ruth Streicher observes that scholars who examined military masculinities have tended to focus mainly on prerogative practices of soldiering. In the context of the insurgency in Southern Thailand, Streicher proposes that the depiction of soldiers in uniform as civilizing garments ties the notion of performative soldiering to the idea of a performative state. The powerful function of a soldier’s outfit demarcates the boundaries of a gentlemanly state, which authorizes the soldier to use ‘civilized force’—emphasizing the distance from naked violence. The military memoirs considered in this essay include photographs and
descriptions of the military in social events that point to how the military uniform worn by the Pakistani soldiers functioned similarly as a symbol of institutional power. They streamlined the male body to emphasize masculine power, and the representation of both military socialization and privilege intensified class divisions between soldiers and civilians. The emphasis on army discipline and civility in these memoirs also make possible the coercive interactions between Pakistani officials and racialized Bengalis in a war without fronts and battle lines in a small country like East Pakistan/Bangladesh. The memoirs constitute the Pakistani military as disciplined soldiers attempting to control an ignorant, uncivil, and inferior population that had to be disciplined for the purposes of the gentlemanly state.

The memoirs discussed here elucidate how Bengali men, and the Hindu minority specifically, were constructed as racialized subjects during the war, and consequently subjected to violence. Bengali women, on the other hand, were targeted to alter ethnicity, which as feminist scholars have argued are genocidal practices. Genocidal masculinity includes two simultaneous processes: the politicization of gender by nationalist projects and the construction of minority identity and gender – both are inextricably linked to the construction of the ‘other’. Thus, this essay examines how the bodies of both Hindu minorities and women were symbolically used in the war of 1971 to construct national identity.

Context
From the outset of the conflict, Pakistan defined the situation as a military challenge rather than a political crisis. The Generals in charge did not believe that the Bangladeshi rebels could defeat the army or that India would send its ground forces to intervene in the war. Also, Pakistan thought that its allies, such as the United States and China, would counter any Indian threat. President Yahya Khan, as the supreme commander and chief martial law administrator of Pakistan, planned and conducted the war by heavily relying on a small group of advisers, all of whom were senior army officials. As such, Pakistan’s war policy was decided by a small group of army officials generating mistrust, personal and inter-service rivalries, and mismanagement.

Military memoirs published from Pakistan provide crucial details of Pakistan’s war strategies. Lieutenant-General Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi served as the last governor and the martial law administrator of East Pakistan. Major-General Khadim Hussain Raja was the General Officer Commanding 14 Division in East Pakistan. Major-General Rao Farman Ali drew the blueprint of Operation Searchlight that begun on 25 March throughout East Pakistan. The Bangladesh government estimates that during the 24-hour army operation between 25 March and 26 March more than 15,000 people died in Dhaka alone. While Raja was responsible for the military affairs in East Pakistan, Ali was in charge of the civilian affairs. Brigadier-General Muhammad Siddiq Salik was a Major during the war and served as a Public Relations Officer. While their memoirs (discussed below) do not provide a uniform or monolithic discourse of masculinity, protecting Pakistan’s integrity emerges as a key theme in the accounts. It provides the rationale to carry out genocide, not as a crime but as a responsibility of the armed forces. These texts illustrate that militarist values are often reproduced through discursive practices that perpetuate the idea of war as men’s business.

The memoirs reveal that senior officers of the Pakistani army felt responsible for ‘losing’ part of Pakistan and wanted to offer their versions of the events that took place. In The Betrayal of East Pakistan, from the outset, Niazi characterizes the war as a betrayal
of Bengalis, and, in *A Stranger in My Own Country*, Raja views the war as turning him into a stranger in his own land. Both Niazi’s and Ali’s (*How Pakistan Got Divided*) books demonstrate repeated attempts to exonerate themselves of all crimes committed during the war. Raja’s memoir reflects a misreading of the politics of East Bengal/East Pakistan/Bangladesh at that time. However, it was posthumously published due to contentious and sensitive remarks by Raja, for example, about the incompetence of senior Pakistani officials such as Rahim Khan and Niazi’s bragging to Raja about changing the racial profile of the nation. All four Generals blame politicians for the war and the division of Pakistan, and reflect on the war as an India–Pakistan conflict, although in varying degrees.

Of the four recollections considered here, Salik (*Witness to Surrender*) is the only author who expresses some remorse for killing Bengali civilians. In terms of the numbers of those killed there are disagreements. Pakistani government claimed 26,000 fatalities, a figure recognized by most as absurd. Pravda, the Soviet newspaper’s Dhaka correspondent, reported on 3 January 1972 that over three million were killed. Upon Mujib’s return on 10 January 1972, he also noted that three million people perished during the war. However, in Bangladesh, questioning the official figure and proposing proper measurement has long been considered anathema.

These memoirs provide little insight on mass killings, torture, and forced labour during the war. Salik’s book *Witness to Surrender* was the first published volume on the war from a Pakistani military perspective and attracted huge interest from Bangladeshi readers. Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose cite this text to support Pakistan’s claim that there was no genocide in Bangladesh. While Salik and Ali’s reflections indicate their deeper understanding of the politics that led to the conflict, similar to Niazi and Raja, they attempt to either absolve themselves personally or the army of any serious wrongdoing. Both Raja and Salik provide crucial insights into the military crackdown of 25 March that set off the war. However, the memories recorded in all four books are somewhat detached portrayals of a military strategy gone wrong, which do not recognize the human cost that accompanied Pakistan’s breakup. Bangladeshis, in contrast, remember 1971 as a narrative of extreme violence. As one muktijodhya recalled the time before his departure from Dhaka to join the war,

We saw army trucks rolling through the half-deserted streets carrying prisoners to work in military camps. Their heads were shaved and they wore no shoes and no clothes except for lungi, all to make their escape difficult.

These disparate accounts are hardly discernible in the fractured chronicles presented by the four Generals in their recasting of the political interplay between West Pakistan–East Pakistan–Bangladesh. Below, I summarize two major observations from my reading of the memoirs: the exclusivity of the military, civilized elite as opposed to the greedy, undisciplined political elite reinforced by the logic of militarized-masculine rule, and the intersections of racial and gendered politics as the armed forces attempt to protect the integrity of the Pakistani state in 1971 by purging out the ‘other’.

While in this essay I analyse books published by the Generals, it must be noted that a distinctive form of alternative saviour masculinity is also infused in Bangladeshi publications. Stories of manhood recreate the war of 1971. The nation receives the most deeply felt commitment of its citizens willing to sacrifice their lives, what we know as patriotism. A recent book titled *Maa*, for example, juxtaposes the representation of the nation with the mother. As seen in Partition narratives, the representation of the nation or community as a selfless and compassionate mother figure allowed it to be abstracted from the public
sphere of politics and self-interest, and constructed as an iconic subject of affection and
devotion. In Anisul Haq’s construction of Maa, both women and men in the Bengali
community have powerful roles to play, with mothers bravely raising sons to be model
citizens of the nation and the muktibahini heroes are the sole protectors of the nation.
Imagining the nation as a mother figure further provides a powerful underpinning for the
state to see itself as a patriarch, responsible for its citizens. The state in this sense is
essentially masculine, but also welcomes tenderness and emotion.

The logic of militarized-masculine rule
In their memoirs, the Generals imply that it was the politicians and not the military that
were instigating the violence and that the politicians were responsible for the subsequent
crumbling of the state, thus overlooking the political-military symbiosis of Pakistan. It can
be hypothesized that, since the war was lost, the hypermasculine military elite had to place
the blame on other interest groups for the defeat. The reflection might have been different
if the Pakistanis had won the war or if the war continued for a protracted period. Mujib,
for example, is accused of conspiring with India resulting in Pakistan’s breakup and
Bhutto is accused of too much ‘greed’ for power. Niazi describes Bhutto as a ‘power
hungry’ and Mujib as a ‘defiant’ politician. Although Ali attempts to convince the
readers that his relationship with Mujib was cordial and Raja describes how Mujib
pleaded with him to negotiate a deal before his arrest, the memoirs portray a keen dislike
of the Awami League and Sheikh Mujib, in particular. Salik provides an anecdote of
Mujib’s ‘vindictive’ nature where an officer is cited to have said, ‘And Mujib is not liberal
enough to forgive and forget’.

Elsewhere, John Braithwaite and I have suggested that in Pakistan and Bangladesh the
military class is reproduced through an elite system of cadet schools. Bangladesh inherited
them from Pakistan, and the new cadet schools emulated these following Bangladesh’s
independence. These schools were modelled on Eton College in England. While main-
taining a low-profile façade, these are some of the wealthiest schools and highly compe-
titive to get into, though easier for military families with the right connections. Graduation
from these schools is the best route into graduating from the best universities. Both
Pakistani and Bangladeshi military officers are extremely well educated compared to
the officers of western militaries. For most of Pakistan’s history, the military has been
the safest path to wealth, status, and power. Politicians often respect senior military
officers as more educated, more sophisticated, urbane, and more informed in their under-
standing of the rest of the world. This respect for the good preparation that the military
class has for rule, in comparison to those who have come up through money politics, also
inflects the perceptions of ordinary people. When money politics becomes so incompe-
tent, so corrupt, and so debilitating that the people want change, a cleaner, more highly
educated, religiously pious general emerges as a politically credible option.

Understanding this symbiosis and dialectic between a distinct military class and a
political class is necessary for understanding the dynamics of masculine rule evident
during the war. Militarized states tend to control the flow of information crucial for
decision-making, and usually only a few military officers have a monopoly over defence
and security strategies. The idea of Pakistan, that is, a sanctified land for Muslims,
became the basis for constructing a collective identity for the ruling military elite in
1971, which was rigorously enforced through schooling, policing, and mass media. Ali
recalls the fear of Indian occupation following an Indian victory: ‘people were heard
saying that they did not want the Indian troops to replace Pakistani troops. At least
Pakistanis were Muslim brothers. In their memoirs, the Generals examine the war as Indian intervention in Pakistan’s internal affairs, and the betrayal of Bengali Muslims against the Islamic fraternity that had been achieved in 1947. In this sense, it was the objective of the military to uphold the principles of the idea of Pakistan when the politicians were ‘corrupt and vindictive’, as Salik insinuates in his recollection. Even as a counter-insurgency strategy, the selection of particular politicians and the formation of pro-Pakistani civilian peace committees by Niazi and Ali were calculated to counter Bengali agitations for the benefit of the state, and the military legitimately assumed the role of the protector of Pakistan’s integrity.

The masculine social norms in military institutions produced certain hierarchies where a civilized self-perception was important. Thus, all four Generals dismiss not only the politicians but also the East Pakistani civilians as weak and powerless. Their memoirs illustrate that a deep prejudice functioned as a ritual of differentiation between other ethnic groups residing in the western part of Pakistan and the Bengalis, which in turn sanctioned the distance of the ‘civilized’ Generals from the naked violence of 1971. In the modern military counter-insurgency process, the notion of race is embedded in a narrative of modernity. In the hierarchy of masculinity, the Bengalis are the ‘others’ and the ‘inferiors’ within. Raja, in his A Stranger in My Own Country, observes that Bengalis are ‘undesirable crowds’, ‘ruffians’ and ‘hooligans.’ He writes,

...the poverty I saw in the rural areas of East Pakistan was unmatched in West Pakistan. Most of the people in the village looked starved and famished. To make matters worse, they were either indolent or unemployed.

Akin to the arrogant colonial elites describing the ‘natives’, he goes on,

By temperament, the people were very volatile and easily excitable. Like most illiterate people, they were also very gullible. If you sneezed loudly enough on the streets of Dhaka or any other large town, you could collect a crowd of several thousands in a few minutes!

The dismissal of the Bengalis as a weak race functioned to quickly dismiss the role of the Muktibahini during the war. Thus, like numerous others accounts written by members of the Pakistani armed forces, the Generals claim that the military conflict was fought between the Indian and the Pakistani armies, thereby effectively delegitimizing the role of the Muktibahini. For the Pakistani Generals, even remotely recognizing that the Muktibahini had an important role to play in Pakistan’s military defeat would have been even more humiliating than being defeated by their Indian counterparts.

The centrality of the Muslim body and the understanding of physical strength and virility constructed the dominant form of hegemonic masculinity and the warrior ethic of Pakistani soldiers. The military and masculine imagery of tall, lighter-skinned, tough, and muscular Punjabis in contrast to short, dark Bengalis of weak physique shaped the understanding of sexualities, genders, and social processes throughout the conflict in 1971. Raja, Niazi, and Ali observe that East Pakistan did not have a military tradition. Niazi writes, ‘Our opponents, the Bengalis, were not considered a fighting class by the British. They had no military traditions and background or war experience’. In the British colonial context in India Heather Street describes a similar attitude. She argues that the subtext of race was both fictitious and flexible ‘even as it used the language of fixed, immutable racial binaries’ and the martial race proponents were consciously creating race to serve the purpose of the colonial state. In fact, there was a fear that the Bengali
Army might be the downfall of British India. Militarily, the Bengal Army formed the largest of the Indian troops until 1857. As a consequence of the Sepoy Mutiny (the Indian mutiny) and following the recommendation of the Peel Commission, the structure, composition, and outlook of both the British and the Indian armies significantly changed, and the Bengal Army reduced to 65,000. Subsequently, under John Lawrence’s ruthless leadership, the British need to construct a loyal army was fulfilled by increasing the Punjabi army from 30,000 to 75,000 – this was crucial for recapturing Delhi.46

Raja observes that the ‘colonial attitude’ of the West Pakistani senior bureaucrats was responsible for brewing resentment in its Eastern territory, and that discriminatory practices in induction programmes in the military and the civil service existed. He also proposes that ‘less efficient’ Bengalis were given preference in hiring and promotion due to federal government’s policies.47 While all four Generals are careful in masking the prejudice of the hegemonic masculinity of the Pakistani armed forces compared to the ‘feminine’48 and ‘delicate’ East Pakistanis/Bengalis, they go to great lengths to argue that the Bengalis were not warriors, and that the Mukti Bahini was full of disorderly and rowdy students, Awami Leaguers, and political activists as well as a large number of Indians in disguise. The deployment of the racial logic of warfare against the militarily inept guerrillas, the backward enemy, who were purportedly unleashing unspeakable violence, enabled the production of the egalitarian civilized warrior who could then carry out genocidal purposes for the purposes of saving the state.

Finally, the celebration of certain virtues and qualities, in all four accounts, usually associated with men, uphold the notion of the army as displaying idealized masculinity and the logic of the masculine-military rule. The Pakistani soldiers are described as courageous, brave, disciplined, loyal, and willing to sacrifice their lives for their nation in the memoirs. Evidently, military-masculine ideology not only promotes aggressive masculinity; it also encourages certain childhood forms of discipline such as obedience without questioning. For example, in the context of the Japanese Imperial Army, Tsurumi Kazuko argues that the men in the Japanese military had been reduced to childhood roles through the use of humiliation, creation of fear, and deployment of arbitrary violence during training. Thus, while Niazi repeatedly reminds his readers that he was nicknamed a Sher (tiger), who, he laments, was used as a ‘sacrificial lamb’ by politicians against a ‘far superior enemy’ (meaning India), Salik, Ali, and Raja in their accounts reveal that they found Niazi’s emotional outbursts to be a dishonour to the Pakistani army.50 In December when it was clear that Pakistan’s defeat was imminent, Ali recalls that on a certain morning: ‘I heard a shriek, a cry and a sound of loud sobbing. I saw Niazi with his hands covering his face weeping’.51 Salik mocks Niazi, ‘the burly figure of General Niazi quaked and he broke into tears. He hid his face in his hands and started sobbing like a child….’52 Thus, while military training legitimizes and idealizes the performance of violence in warfare as manly behaviour, the ability to endure violence or accept defeat like a man is also considered necessary.

While to a large extent the accounts of the Generals continue to place emphasis on the honour and racial hardiness of the Pakistani soldiers, they also found it difficult to explain their defeat without claiming some sort of victimhood. The socio-political construction of loyalty, dedication, and commitment of the army in comparison to hostile civilians is important here. In a letter published in Dawn on 14 October 1972, the first national Chief of Air Staff of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), M. Ashghar Khan,53 observes, ‘The armed forces, by their involvement in an impossible military situation during 1971 were the victims of a great conspiracy. Their systematic humiliation since is a matter of national shame, which no patriotic Pakistani should countenance’. Ali writes, ‘the hostility of the
people were partly due to military action but mostly due to virulent propaganda against
the army’ and ‘even children laid mines to blow up vehicles of the army’.54 Reminiscing
about the last days of the war and why Pakistan lost its eastern wing, Salik notes,

they had no time for training to fight a conventional war...Worst of all, several of them had
no heart in the operations. There was no point, they thought, in laying down one's life for the
Bengalis who had chosen to side with the Hindus to kill their fellow Muslims.55

The civilians are projected, not as innocent bystanders who had to be eliminated, but as
the aggressive civilian-insurgent and the enemy. That the civilians were unarmed and
disorganized compared to militarily organized and armed Pakistani soldiers meant little in
the logic of masculine-military rule. The emphasis on a militarized masculine character
and patriotic ideology instilled hostility towards the enemy, whether civilians or guerrillas.

**Purging out the ‘other’ and genocidal masculinity**

The meanings ascribed to both race and gender are linked through a racialization process
where collective identities are constructed in fragmented and complex ways. Through the
process of racializing Pakistani society – Punjabis, Bengalis, Pashtuns, Balochis, and so
on – social/political groups were distinguished and subjected to differential and unequal
treatment. This process traversed public and private spaces and represented Bengali men,
women, and minorities in derogatory ways. Joeden-Forgey argues that power is manifest-
ed ‘historically within patriarchal systems, and is aimed at replacing patriarchy as a
governing gender ideology. It is a form of male domination that both rejects the old
patriarchy and embraces an expression of power based on killing rather than life-giv-
ing’.56 The omission, downplaying, and often denial of army atrocities in the Generals’
accounts speak volumes if analysed through the framework of genocidal masculinity. All
the accounts disguise the horrors of 1971 that the Bangladeshis experienced and recollect
instead the war as the army’s undertaking to restore order in Pakistan’s ‘lawless’ territory.
In context of the broad observations above, I propose that the construction of an enemy
and the elimination of those who are opposed to the interests and values of the social order
are of central importance in a genocidal struggle to protect the integrity of the masculine
state. Pakistan’s military regime believed that the national movement in East Pakistan was
an ‘Indian conspiracy against Pakistan’s integrity’.57 Justification went beyond the notion
that Hindus should leave for ‘Hindustan’ (India), where they belonged, leaving East
Pakistan pure. As the memoirs of the Generals demonstrate, the Pakistani military
believed that Hindus were responsible for the revolt and that as soon as the Hindu
problem was solved, the trouble would cease. As such, the construction of Hindus as
enemies and disloyal citizens resulted into an annihilation strategy of the Pakistani
military that could clearly be recognized as genocide, and a variety of rituals formed
the social practices within a meaning system governed by genocidal masculinity.

Hindus constituted the largest religious minority in Pakistan, with their numbers
representing 12.9% and 10.7% of the population in 1951 and in 1961, respectively.
Most of the Hindu population was in East Pakistan, where they constituted 22% of the
population in 1951 and 18.4% in 1961. In West Pakistan, they represented only 1.6%
(1951 and 1961) of the population. No census was held in 1971 because of the war.
However, official and unofficial sources claim that there was a decline in East Pakistan’s
Hindu population during 1961–1971 because of the exodus of Hindus during that decade.
It is estimated that Hindus constituted between 13% and 17% of the East Pakistani
population in 1971. Following Partition, the first series of communal violence against Hindus broke out in 1950, coinciding with similar violence targeting Muslims in West Bengal. This resulted in mass migrations of Muslims from India to East Pakistan and Hindus from East Pakistan to India. A serious political crisis between India and Pakistan was diffused by an agreement signed by Jawaharlal Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan in 1950. This agreement, commonly known as the Nehru–Liaquat Pact, was signed for the protection of minorities in both countries. However, sporadic riots continued to break out in both countries during the 1950s and 1960s, causing deep anxiety among the Hindus in East Pakistan and those who could afford started moving their families to India. For Pakistani leaders, this was perceived as a tactic of the Hindus: ‘keeping one foot in India and the other in East Pakistan’. Ali remarks, 

The [Pakistani] Government record would show that property worth 80 crores or more had been sold by Hindus during 1968-69. The Hindus had sent all this money to India and later migrated to join up with it.

Language offered the most significant opportunity for the Hindus to work together with the Muslims, in recognizing Bengali as the national language of East Pakistan. With political alienation caused by the central government of Pakistan, both the Muslim and the Hindu communities of East Pakistan decided to pool their resources for the nationalist movement. The West Pakistani elite treated this cooperation very suspiciously. Ayub Khan, the military dictator’s characterization is an example of this.

East Bengalis...probably belong to the very original Indian races. It would be no exaggeration to say that up to the creation of Pakistan, they had not known any real freedom or sovereignty. They have been in turn ruled either by the caste Hindus, Moghuls, Pathans, or the British. In addition, they have been and still are under considerable Hindu cultural and linguistic influence. As such, they have all the inhibitions of downtrodden races and have not yet found it possible to adjust psychologically to the requirements of the newborn freedom.

The unresolved past of Partition and the trauma and memory that incited hatred of Hindus and Muslims against each other indeed played a significant role in 1971. The Pakistani army, which was largely Punjabi, carried with it the memory and trauma of 1947. Raja reflects on the Indian Muslims as ‘victimised minority’ in a ‘predominantly Hindu India’. He recalls how, following Partition, the Biharis came to East Pakistan and that the Bengalis would use pejorative terms such as ‘Shala Punjabi’ and ‘Shala Bihari’. Ali’s reflections throughout the book reveal his prejudices against the Hindus. The anti-Indian prejudice, ‘a sentiment instilled early on in the army cadet colleges at Petaro and Hasan Abdal’, according to Pervez Hoodbhoy and Zia Mian have influenced the army’s mind set since the inception of the Pakistani state.

As discussed earlier, both Raja and Ali were the masterminds of the crackdown that was dubbed as Operation Searchlight. Ali writes,

University premises had remained an out-of-bound area even for Police on the excuse of sanctity of educational institutions. After March 7, student halls had been turned into guerrilla training camps where obstacle course, barbed-wire entanglements and other training aids had developed...Jagan Nath Hall which housed Hindu students was the most notorious for anti-Pakistan activities.
Raja records,

During the first day of rioting, two non-commissioned officers from my artillery, who looked obviously West Pakistani even out of uniform, were stabbed to death in the New Market Area... We traced the assassins to Awami League hooligans who, to escape the law, had taken refuge in the Jagan Nath Hall, a student hostel of Dhaka University. The hostels are sacrosanct, even during the Martial Law. Later one of the culprits was apprehended during the Operation Searchlight.

On the ground, army officers operated with the belief that killing Hindus and driving out Hindu survivors would help to save Pakistan. Troops were quick to identify minority Hindus. Boys and men experienced forced exposure to determine whether they were circumcised, so that the troops could identify and kill Bengali Hindus. Stories of Hindu boys and men being shamed, mocked, and ‘feminized’ by the army were quietly shared in private and safe spaces.

The secular nationalist movement resulting in the ‘War of Liberation’ appealed to both Hindus and Muslims alike. For the Pakistani army fighting on the ground, this was the ultimate betrayal of Bengali Muslims. One Major Bashir told the journalist Anthony Mascarenhas,

This is a war between the pure and the impure... The people here may have Muslim names and call themselves Muslim. But they are Hindu at heart... [W]e are now sorting [them] out... Those who are left will be real Muslims. We will even teach them Urdu.

The belief that the Pakistani state must protect the nation’s purity and the publicly declared intention of the military to make ‘true Muslims’ out of the Bengalis contributed to particular targeting of Bengali women regardless of their religion. The genocidal military regime of Pakistan in 1971 brought the reproductive functions of women to the forefront of its identity war. For Bengali women, the dangerous implication of being connected to a ‘Hindu’ identity meant indiscriminate and vicious mass rapes by the army and its collaborators. During the war, an estimated 200,000 Bengali women and girls were said to have been raped by Pakistani soldiers and their collaborators. Various official documents suggest that there were at least 25,000 cases of forced pregnancy during the war in 1971. Bengali women were targeted because of their reproductive capabilities, and to forcibly impregnate them with different genes. Some evidence indicates that members of the Pakistani armed forces and the para-militia boasted of impregnating Bengali women and making ‘pure Muslims’ out of Bengalis. While there are discrepancies in numbers, it is clear that repeated rape had been used to cause victims to become pregnant. Pregnant women were also forced to remain in captivity against their will so that they would have to carry babies to full term. Bengali and Bihari collaborators of the Pakistan army organized in three auxiliary forces, Razakars, Al Badr, and Al Shams, were also alleged to have used rape to terrorize the Hindu population, in particular, and to gain access to their land and property.

Salik, Ali, and Raja record the military commander Niazi’s misogynist attitude. Before leaving Dhaka on 11th April and handing over the charge to Major General Rahim Khan, Raja visited Niazi to discuss present and future operations with him. Raja recalls,

In a very nonchalant manner, he put his hand on my shoulder and said: Yar, larai ki fikar nahin karo, who to hum kar lain gay. Abhi to mujhey Bengali girlfriends kay phone number
day do (Don’t worry about the war my friend, we’ll manage that. For now, just give me the phone numbers of your Bengali girlfriends).  

Raja also writes of another incident,  

[Enter] Commander East Pakistan General Niazi, wearing a pistol holster on his waist belt. Niazi became abusive and started raving. Breaking into Urdu, he said: Main iss haramzadi qaum ki nasal badal doon ga. Yeh mujhe kiya samajhtey hain (They don’t know me, I will change the race of this bastard nation).  

There were other times when Niazi threatened that he would change the race of the nation by letting his soldiers loose on women. Salik records a particular incident towards the end of the war, when Niazi visited a military hospital on 11th December, where ‘he was presented half a dozen West Pakistani nurses who pleaded for protection against the “barbaric Mukti Bahini.” He told them not to worry because big help was on the way. If help did not come, he said, “We ourselves would kill you before you fall into Mukti hands.” In their memoirs, Niazi and Ali denounce the stories of rape of Bengali women as exaggeration and propaganda against the Pakistani army, but go to great length to record the brutalities of muktibhini rapes in a sensational manner. These military memoirs reveal how violence – wrongful violence – is always projected onto the ‘other’, the muktibhini, in this instance. This bypasses any need for self-introspection and legitimizes the violence used by the Pakistani army with the aim of enlisting ordinary Pakistani citizens in the militarized masculine project of the state.  

After the war was over, the Bengalis also retaliated by targeting Bihari women and girls. The gendered narratives of the 1971 war reveal, first, that ritualized violence is inscribed on bodies by members of the ‘enemy’ community as a sign of conquest and humiliation of the ‘other’; second, both men and women from one’s own community perpetrate sacrificial violence in the name of honour. They are shocking also because of how men from both West Pakistan and East Pakistan/Bangladesh at that time clearly perceived women as possession, to be desecrated in a way similar to the ritualized sadism witnessed during the Partition riots; for instance, destroying temples and mosques, the force-feeding of beef or pork, or slaughtering of cows. Women were seen as critical objects in male constructions of their own honour. Each of these violent acts had specific symbolic meanings and physical consequences, identifying women’s bodies as territories to be occupied, marked or claimed for masculine rule.  

Conclusion
In the aftermath of Pakistan’s military defeat, there were a series of violent retributions for those, sometimes wrongly, accused of collaborating with the occupation. Many of those targeted fled to Pakistan, where often they were not welcome, and became embroiled in other internal conflicts of the nation-state. Thousands of non-Bengalis, mainly Biharis, were killed in a series of counter slaughters and more than a million, who had fled their homes, ended up huddled in refugee slum settlements inside Bangladesh where they received limited help and protection from the international community.  

Following independence, new ideologies of political nationalism and masculine rule in Bangladesh required that all those who belong, or want to, must be united through a common nation-building process as ‘Bengalis’. These homogenizing tendencies imposed new restrictions in the political space for other sub-national ethnic identities, posing
challenges to minority ethnic communities. On 15 February 1972, Manabendra Narayan Larma, the only representative of the indigenous community in the first government of Bangladesh met Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to advocate for the recognition of indigenous communities. It is said that Mujib advised, ‘you all should become Bengalis (tora shob bangalee hoiya ja)’, following which Larma refused to endorse the constitution. Several indigenous groups in Bangladesh, in particular in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region, are now in danger of assimilation into the dominant identity and for these indigenous groups the Bangladeshi security forces exhibit another form of hypermasculine and military rule.

Forty years on, Bangladesh set up the International Crimes Tribunal for the purposes of prosecuting those who have allegedly committed war crimes during 1971. While the Tribunal has generated much international interest and also criticism, the thin scholarship on the conflict is gradually increasing, ranging from innovative initiatives such as conversations about the war involving Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Indian analysts; visual media attempting to unlock contentious and often concealed narratives through films, blog-posts, fictions, and non-fictions; and, finally, academic publications delving deep into new directions questioning the truth or still multiple truths that framed 1971. Similarly, military memoirs published over the years from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are also providing crucial perspectives on the war.

The memoirs discussed in this essay sought to reproduce an authoritative understanding of the 1971 war and help to delineate important strategies of the Pakistani army. In addition, the accounts of suffering of both the ordinary soldiers and senior personnel in these texts assume a sympathetic connection between the reader and the soldier at war. Through these recollections, a sentimental view of the war is also created. The soldier-narrator invokes a shared sympathy between the different though connected worlds of the soldiers and the civilians. By offering their personal understanding of history, politics, and honour, these memories claim (and justify) the right to use violence. These four narratives further demonstrate that the multiple ideological connections of race and gender are central to the ways genocidal masculinity is masked in the conscious and practical strategies of the masculine rule of Pakistan that culminated in the 1971 war.

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Notes

1. India took 2500 sq miles of West Pakistani territory as damages and held 93,000 Pakistani prisoner of wars (POWs) until 1973. One of the Indian terms for return of the POWs was return of land beyond the current line of control that had been recently occupied by Pakistan in Kashmir.
2. Haq, Maa.
3. See D’Costa, Nationbuilding for a detailed discussion of how the pervasive veneration of the nation as female places emphasis on women’s primary role as mothers. It legitimizes state control and regulation over women’s bodies and sexuality that perpetuates a masculine state’s domination of women. Also, see Akhter et al., Narir Ekattur; Mookherjee, “Gendered Embodiments”; Saikia, Women, War; and Sinha, Colonial Masculinity.
4. Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks.
5. Said, Orientalism.
7. For details see Hall and Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation*, 45–56.
11. Maruska, “When Are States Hypermasculine?”
16. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
21. Ibid., 471.
22. For details see D’Costa, *Nationbuilding*.
24. Muntassir Mamoon interviewed Niazi and Ali before their death. He believes that their accounts provide distorted versions of history. Niazi also notes that both Salik and Ali’s books were factually incorrect. Mamoon, *The Vanquished Generals*, 61.
25. Brigadier Bashir Ahmad, who worked closely with Raja in 1971, believed that this book was a genuine account of the events that took place during the war. Personal conversation with the author in Islamabad, June 2013.
26. Also noted in *Purbodesh*, 23 December 1971; The Pravda article was republished in the *Bangladesh Observer*, 5 January 1972.
27. Sisson and Rose, *War and Secession*. Sarmila Bose also follows a similar line of argument in her recent book *Dead Reckoning*.
30. For *Maa*, nation is a project of identity. *Maa* portrays a strong woman who has strong moral ethic and courage, whose only weakness is her son. We are frequently told how handsome and fair Azad is, debunking the myth of dark and short Bengalis that the Pakistani books describe. The muktibahini, guerrilla soldiers in *Maa* shed tears, reveal their fear, but also their courage.
31. In my interviews carried out in Pakistan with retired senior military officials and bureaucrats in 2007 and 2013, many confirmed this general opinion in Pakistani security circles. Further, India had indeed carried out a massive, covert intelligence operation and sub-conventional warfare long before the military offensive that began in 3 December 1971. See, for example, Uban, *Phantoms of Chittagong*.
34. Religious identity is deeply embedded in Pakistan’s national identity as the state was carved out of India in 1947 in the name of a distinct Islamic identity. Religion has a more diffuse presence in Pakistan, as politicians, the military elite and other powerful actors demonstrate their political legitimacy by stressing their personal religiosity.
35. Braithwaite and D’Costa, *Cascades of Violence*.
37. Some of these individuals are now on trial before the International Crimes Tribunal, Bangladesh.
38. Mocking Bengalis as the non-martial race could be traced to during British period in public speeches and writings. See, for example, Syed Ahmed Khan’s views described in Lelyveld, *Alighar’s First Generation*, 308; and Khan, *Friends Not Masters*, 187. Similar views also exist about Bangladeshi peacekeepers as being less competent than their Pakistani and Indian counterparts.
39. Raja’s book includes photographs of elegant dining in the military barracks, descriptions of fancy parties, his holidays in tea gardens, and hunting (Raja, *A Stranger*, 106). Both Raja and Niazi include self-photographs and photographs of other Pakistani officers in smart uniforms in their memoirs.

41. In common Bangladeshi parlance, the Pakistani army was usually dubbed as the Punjabi army. Also, it is important to note that the Punjabis and the Pashtuns were labelled by the British as martial races. In 1947, the Pakistani army consisted of 77% Punjabis and 19.5% Pashtuns. See, for details, Jafferlot, History of Pakistan, 69.

42. For example, Salik describes Colonel Osmani, the commander of muktibahini, as ‘a small, worn-out man. The only white feature on his sun-burnt face was the bush of a white moustache on his upper lip. A fellow officer often described him as ‘a man attached to a pair of moustaches’” (Salik, Witness to Surrender, 12).

43. The Bengali representation in the Pakistani army was just 7.4% in the rank and file and 5% in the officer corps in 1963 (The Government of Pakistan, National Assembly Debates, 8 March 1963).

44. Niazi, The Betrayal, 54.

45. Streets, Martial Races, 10. Mrinalini Sinha notes the contrasts in imperialist thinking between the ‘manly’ Punjabis and the Pashtuns and the ‘effeminate’ Bengalis and the more ‘settled’ peoples of other regions of British India, or between virile Muslims and effeminate Hindus. Sinha also argues that masculinity has no priori context or origin, but rather acquires its meaning only in specific practices, see, Sinha, Colonial Masculinity.


47. Raja, Stranger in My Own Country, 107–8. Also, important to note here is that Raja and Yahya Khan differed in their views about reforms in the army, including raising all Bengali-manned battalions.

48. I am not implying that the notion of femininity does not encompass its own power dynamics, but, rather, pointing to the stereotyped association of masculinity with strength, and femininity with emotion and weakness.


50. Niazi, The Betrayal, 115. Throughout his book, Niazi repeatedly claims that the numbers of the West Pakistani troops were quite low and that they had less weapons and ammunitions. However, during the nine months of war, there were 80,000 Pakistani soldiers deployed under the Eastern Command. These forces were augmented by an additional paramilitary force of 25,000, a civil armed force of 25,000, and another auxiliary paramilitary force (the Razakaars, Al-Badr, and Al-Shams) of 50,000. In December, there was an additional 250,000 Indian Allied Forces – the Mitrobahini, which led the offensive against Pakistan and lost more than 8000 soldiers in the war.


55. Salik, Witness to Surrender, 117.

56. Ibid., 78


58. Author interviews with Jama’at activists in Pakistan and Bangladesh.


60. Khan, Friends Not Masters, 187.

61. Raja, A Stranger, 8.

62. Ibid., 6, 15. For an excellent analysis of the persecution of Biharis, see Siddiqi, “Left Behind By The Nation.”

63. Ali, How Pakistan Got Divided, for example, 85–8, 154–5.

64. Hoodbhoy and Mian, “Pakistan.” Anti-Pakistani sentiment is also evident in Indian security circles, especially compounded by the Kashmir crisis.

65. Ali Khan, How Pakistan Got Divided, 85


69. Brownmillar, Against Our Will. For other accounts, see D’Costa, Nationbuilding

70. Sobhan, “National Identity.”


73. Ibid., 98
74. Salik, Witness to Surrender, 201.
75. Braithwaite and D’Costa, Cascades of Violence, Chapter 1.
76. For example, films such as Rubaiyat Hossain’s Meherjan, Masud and Masud’s, Mukir Gaan and Narir Ekattur, and Yousuf, Blockade; fictional and semi-fictional accounts such as Shaheen Akhter’s Talaash and Philip Hensher’s Scenes from Early Life; see note 3 for academic publications.

References


**Films**


