

Of What Does Self-Knowing Consist? Perspectives from Bangladesh and Pakistan

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Abstract

Taking my cue from two novels, Mohammad Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangos* and Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know*, I posit that their respective senses of living in Pakistan or being from Bangladesh capture a shared intuition of not knowing enough to know oneself or one's place in the world. In this review, I ask, Can we speak of an inheritance of the colonial imperative to know when the need is not to know and rule others, but to know and rule oneself? Can we speak of an overturning or transfiguring of the colonial imperative to revise the central question for new nation-states to be, "Who are we, who have done all this"? Or, is that question too quickly dispossessed of agency and made to serve development goals and utilitarian ends? And if so, how are claims to self-knowledge asserted in the face of a constant arrogation of agency?

THROUGH THE THICKET

For a pathway through the thicket of recent writings on Pakistan and Bangladesh, I take my cue from two novels, *A Case of Exploding Mangos* by Mohammad Hanif (2009) and *In the Light of What We Know* by Zia Haider Rahman (2014). The first follows Ali Shigri, a Pakistani Air Force pilot, as he attempts to uncover what has become of his friend and beloved and then to avenge his friend's death by taking down General Zia ul-Haq, the military dictator of Pakistan. It evokes an environment of enforced ignorance and blind action as a series of stumbles in the dark, an image reinforced by Shigri's sojourn in the dungeons putatively maintained under the Lahore Fort. The second tracks the recollections of Zafar, a Bangladeshi brought up in Britain whose experiences and ruminations fill 500 pages, refracting critical events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries including Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence from Pakistan and its long shadow on diaspora Bangladeshis. It evokes a mood of restless examination of one's experiences to disinter in them a series of obscured contexts—historical, political, psychological. Although we cannot take these novels to represent either of the two nation-states of Pakistan and Bangladesh, they alert us to the possibility of the different preoccupations of their citizenry, the sense of living in shrouds versus the sense of examining oneself through the tears in the shrouds. It is important to acknowledge this difference to point to the possibility of a deliberate incommensurability maintained between Bangladesh and Pakistan: These two distinct nation-states are the product of an unhappy coupling as the wings of a once incongruous nation-state separated by the territory of India in 1947 and the 1971 war that ended this coupling.

Despite the danger of incommensurability, I suggest that the two senses of living in Pakistan and Bangladesh capture a shared intuition of not knowing enough to know oneself or one's place in the world. They are productively considered together to understand to what extent a shared colonial past or shared nationhood—or the violence of the first upon the second—informs this intuition. I follow Veena Das's (2003, p. 4) urging to link the colonial production of knowledge to knowledge produced under the sign of the nation so that we may discern “the complex pattern of interactions. . . between different kinds of geopolitical interests, national aspirations, and intellectual traditions.” I ask, to what extent can we speak of an inheritance of the colonial imperative to know its subjects so as to rule them? More specifically, what shape does this imperative take when the need is not to know and rule others, but to know and rule oneself? Can we speak of an overturning or transfiguring of this colonial imperative to revise the central question for new nation-states, asking instead “who are we, who have done all this” (Geertz 1973b, p. 240)? Or, is this question too quickly dispossessed of agency and made to serve development goals and utilitarian ends? How are claims to self-knowledge asserted in the face of a constant arrogation of agency?

With the problem of self-knowledge within postcolonial nation-states thus sketched, in this review I consider recent works primarily in history, anthropology, and sociology to ask the following additional questions:

1. What does the colonial enterprise of knowledge production look like in retrospect and, specifically, what hindsight has been afforded by postcoloniality?
2. What was the promise of the social sciences for self-knowledge of the nation-states, and what has become of it in Bangladesh and Pakistan?
3. How might we understand the rise of US-directed developmentalism as a striving for self-knowledge and the critique of this enterprise by political economy?
4. How do we fill the lacunae in the history and memory of the 1971 war as traces of the doubts and deceptions that track self-knowledge?

5. How are subsequent claims on speaking universally through Islam and women's rights both efforts at seizing agency and a possible arrogation of it?
6. What are the generative possibilities of looking awry or speaking otherwise to relearn modes of knowing oneself?

COLONIALISM IN RETROSPECT

Bernard Cohn (1996) is among the scholars most associated with nuancing the study of colonial power by revealing the centrality of knowledge production of the local (see also Dirks 2001, 2007; Das 2003). Yet, in terms of design and the ambitious land reforms put into effect to engineer the emergence of private property within Bengal (now divided between India and Bangladesh), Ranajit Guha (1996) shows the extent of colonial indifference to empirical matters on the ground. Instead, the 1793 Permanent Settlement of Bengal would serve as the laboratory for the antifederal ideas of British physiocrats. In the following century, Punjab (now divided between India and Pakistan) was intended to be the breadbasket of the region through the colonial construction of a network of canals making possible the irrigation and settlement of barren parts of the province. This region also fell victim to colonial concerns as did Bengal, this time to the interests of the military, which led the colonial government to prioritize the importation and breeding of cavalry horses over food cultivation within the canal colonies. This reprioritization was animated by the British sense of insecurity following the 1857 Indian Rebellion (Ali 1988).

Thus, a little closer to the grain of the colonial enterprise of collecting knowledge to better yield authority over its subjects we see that the British were either indifferent to local realities or preoccupied with their own insecurities in areas that were to become Bangladesh and Pakistan. Later historical developments show the British having to circumvent the very structures they had erected. Thus in the Bengal Delta (Iqbal 2010), they sought to limit the harm that came to be associated with the Permanent Settlement that bore their signature. This circumvention is most evident in British colonial efforts to exclude from the land settlement plan the *char* land that kept emerging within the rivers. In the context of land registration processes in the Punjab (Saumerez Smith 1996), colonial efforts at systematizing knowledge entailed setting up contradictions between each layer of abstraction such that, at a certain point in the history of colonial administration, officials were trafficking in discursive representations that produced India as an imaginary (Inden 2001).

This ongoing qualification of the totalizing effects of colonial rule may be extended to the postcolonial period. For this period, Clifford Geertz famously notes, "Considering all that Independence seemed to promise—popular rule, rapid economic growth, social equality, cultural regeneration, national greatness and, above all, an end to the ascendancy of the West—it is not surprising that its actual advent has been anticlimactic. . . . [There is] a dawning realization that things are more complicated than they look, that social, economic, and political problems, once thought to be reflexes of colonial rule, to disappear when it disappeared, have less superficial roots" (Geertz 1973b, pp. 234–35). Yet to extend such naiveté of self-analysis to nationalism and postcolonial scholarship, as Geertz does, would miss the numerous instances in which the nation as "the proper subject of history" (Das 2003, p. 13) has been put in question, for instance in the scholarship on Pakistan (Jahan 1972; Jalal 1995; Mufti 1995; Gilmartin 1998; Khan 2010a,b; Devji 2013). The deconstruction of the nation is not as evident in the scholarship on Bangladesh, where one can discern two contradictory strands of writing: One attempts to introduce Bangladesh as a little-known nation to the world in an effort to "understand" it (Ali 2010, Lewis 2011), thus constructing it as a bound knowable entity, and at the same time a second strand, specifically studies of its porous borders, dismantles this very construction (van Schendel 2005, Cons 2013, Hussain 2015). In the case of border studies, of particular interest have been the enclaves of the

territory of Bangladesh that have been marooned within India and vice versa and that point to everyday experiences of extraterritoriality.

The qualification of colonial knowledge production and the consequent undermining of the absolutism of colonial rule have led to important revisionist accounts of the 1947 Partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. Yasmin Khan (2008) both indicts the haste with which the British withdrew from the public sphere, ceasing even to police, and evinces a curiosity about the diverse local organizations, neighborhood formations, and upwardly mobile groups that came to constitute something like local government in the lacuna left by the British. In a similarly eye-opening fashion, Vazira Zamindar (2007) draws attention to the diverse bureaucratic actions, procedures, policies, and errors by which a population was sifted and separated into two by the new nation-states (see also Naqvi 2010). Aamir Mufti (2010)'s own work explores the pain of partition as smuggled into Urdu lyric poetry, wherein the political finds articulation within a most private and subjective poetical expression.

Although partition also affected Pakistan's eastern wing with the migration of Hindus from East Pakistan into India, Joya Chatterji (2007) relates how fewer Muslims came from India to East Pakistan. In the reminiscences of East Bengali refugees in India, we learn of the specificity of the East Bengali *bhadralok* and the once tenor of Hindu everyday life in what would become Bangladesh (Chakrabarty 1996, Ghosh 1998). As Dina Siddiqi (2013) has explored, the fate of the Muslims, largely Biharis who came to East Pakistan at the time of partition, remain obscured because they were associated with the West Pakistani side during Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence. In one of those ironic fillips of history, they went from being Indian refugees to Pakistani inhabitants to stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh without ever having changed location.

To consider how the colonial legacy may have been both "exaggerated" and "underspecified," Matthew Hull (2012) poses a challenge to the scholarship that presumes a continuity of influence of the colonial enterprise on postcolonial self-understanding. Instead, Hull (2012, p. 6) argues for a consideration of how "colonial practices operate in new ways in the postcolonial era." This approach may also be rendered as conceding the capacity to generate newness to nation-states and their citizenry, whether for good or for bad (Khan 2012).

THE PROMISE OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES?

While providing a useful thumbnail sketch of the rise of the social sciences as a project of self-knowledge within Western modernity, Das (2003) notes how the social sciences in South Asia do not seem to display much curiosity regarding their origins. However, to simply criticize, she warns, is to miss the congeries of forces that produced the emergence and demise of the social sciences in specific sites at distinct moments. She further argues for the necessity of exploring what such moments can teach us about the aspiration to know oneself as a nation. Despite the present lack of serious study of the fate of various disciplines in Bangladesh and Pakistan (UNESCO 1976), I pick an event that has a trace within the larger history of anthropology to plot its possible ramifications through social scientific research in East Pakistan/Bangladesh and West Pakistan/Pakistan.

In 1954, the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss came from Paris to Pakistan at the behest of UNESCO "to assess the position of the Social Science Studies in the two parts of the country, and to make certain recommendations for their development" (Bessaignet 1964, p. X). Recollections of his far-ranging travels to Chittagong, Dacca, Demra, Karachi, Lahore, Narayanganj, Peshawar, Rawalpindi, and Taxila make fast tracks across *Tristes Tropiques* (Lévi-Strauss 1992). Lacking, however, is their analysis for an understanding of how he diagnosed "the East" as both sepulchral and future oriented. For instance, Lévi-Strauss (1992, p. 35) describes Dacca University in the 1950s as an "Oxford. . .that has succeeded in controlling the mud, the

mildew and the ever-encroaching vegetation,” new and continually antiqued. He enthusiastically prognosticated a rich future for social scientific research in East Pakistan with a focus on tribal and ethnic groups in Chittagong (Karim 1964). At the instigation of Lévi-Strauss, UNESCO, supported by the Ford Foundation, initiated efforts to teach and train investigators and to establish research centers on sociology and anthropology in East Pakistan (Bessaignet 1964).

The subsequent collection of essays by “scholars who are nationals of the country” (Bessaignet 1964, p. viii) provides an instructive account of the anxiety felt by East Pakistani scholars who worried that anthropology would consign them to the role of “primitive peoples” (Karim 1964, p. 5). As the tendency of anthropology to classify the non-West as Other was deemed “improper” in relation to Muslims, national scholars looked to sociology to provide “an idea of the whole,” that is, “a total sociology of Muslim society in East Pakistan” (Bessaignet 1964, p. iv). This turn to the social sciences, specifically sociology, marshals the concern for establishing the *longue durée* of Muslim society in East Pakistan in the face of colonial claims regarding the shallow roots of Islam in Bengal (Hardy 1972, Eaton 1996) as well as the skepticism in West Pakistan about the authenticity of its Muslim compatriots in its eastern wing (Zaidi 1970, Oldenburg 1985, Saikia 2011).

Three further aspects of these early discussions are noteworthy, as they show how the social sciences were likely embedded in this national context. In East Pakistan, there was a need for greater historical and sociological knowledge of Muslim societies as well as a sense of a proper way of carrying out this research. In other words, social science was to be informed by normativity. The list of papers assembled in the collection by Bessaignet (1964) shows an overwhelming emphasis on the long-standing, settled roles within Muslim society, e.g., those of aristocrats or cultivators, rather than religious revivalists. This emphasis suggests yet another effort to overturn colonial literature, demonstrated by the colonial officer W.W. Hunter (1876, 1897) and his keen interest in the Muslim tendency to revolt as evidenced by the Fakir Uprisings or the Faraizi Movement in Bengal (Dasgupta 1992, Choudhury 2001). Finally, Bessaignet (1964) also indicates the arrival of a new force in town. As Bessaignet (1964, p. vii) writes, “Social research is no longer the disinterested pursuit that it once was. It is the by-product of social planning.” Knowledge production thus shifts to centers outside of the university such as at the Pakistan Academy for Village Development in Comilla under the guidance of Dr. Akhtar Hameed Khan [Rahim 2008 (1969), Chowdhury 1990].

Over time, the production of useful and authoritative knowledge on Bangladesh would be appropriated to nonuniversity settings, notably the Population Council, the International Center for Diarrheal Disease Research, and the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies. From the perspective of the history of anthropology, specifically medical anthropology, and the International Center for Diarrheal Disease Research’s significance for this history, it is noteworthy that Robert Glasse and Shirley Lindenbaum, established and prolific staff anthropologists at the center, came to their post to study and stem the spread of cholera in Bangladesh after studying kuru, an early form of transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (think of a human form of Mad Cow Disease) among the Fore in Papua New Guinea (Lindenbaum 2008).

Even if the studies of these new research institutions were occasionally structured on previous models of scholarship—such as the fieldwork-intensive village studies following World War II (Srinivas 1978)—the introductions of such studies repeatedly remind us that their aim was not the pursuit of knowledge but to uncover the power structures that inhere within villages so as to ensure that development aid was not appropriated by elites. John Thorp’s (1978) *Power Among the Farmers of Daripalla: A Bangladesh Village Study* performs a fine balancing act of the diverse interests in the village form current in his time. His village study of Muslim farmers in Bangladesh was similar to those conducted by anthropologists McKim Marriot and Ralph Nicholas, Thorp’s advisors at the University of Chicago who represented the anthropological interest in villages as intermediate forms between tribes and cities. Thorp’s study also presents a normative picture

of Bengali Islam in keeping with the interests of national scholars to establish East Pakistan as properly Muslim. Funded and published by Caritas Bangladesh, a nonacademic development-oriented Catholic organization in Bangladesh, the study also evinced interest in women in Bengali culture who had become increasingly important in light of development concerns about population control and its effects on economic growth. Yet, not all studies had development goals in mind and pursued knowledge of the *longue durée* of Muslims in Bengal with a focus on settled communities, intellectual movements, and ecstatic elements (Haq 1975, Karim 1980, R. Ahmed 1996, S. Ahmed 1996, Bertocci 2006, Uddin 2006).

Arjun Appadurai (1986, p. 358) has noted how certain concepts, such as “caste” and “communalism” in the case of India, serve as gatekeepers, such that particular sites become “a showcase for specific issues over time.” Although Bangladesh is a largely agricultural country and there are many insightful studies of its villages in transition (Bertocci 1972, Hartmann & Boyce 1983, White 1992), the concept of “village” appears to have become one, if not the, gatekeeping concept, whereby it is not possible to approach specific aspects of social life without first having to construct a picture of the village framing them. A few scholars suggest how a different, more comparative approach (van Schendel 1991) or one focused on a single issue, such as the event of a conflict (Roy 1996), gendered subjectivity (Kotalová 1993), or women’s voice (Wilce 1998), may be equally insightful of the dynamics of rural life in Bangladesh without fixing them within the village form.

Although the paucity of literature on the history of the social sciences is as true for Pakistan as for Bangladesh, the 1976 UNESCO report provides a reasonable outline of the institutional arrangements for the social sciences in that period. In contrast to the commitment to normative Islam within the sociology of Muslims in East Bengal/East Pakistan/Bangladesh, the report applauds the establishment of courses on Pakistan’s ideology and the history of the Pakistan Movement within its premier university—at that time, the University of Punjab. The report notes the loss of serious scholars through the migration of Hindus to India during Partition. However, it also underscores that “the Muslim struggle for an independent homeland was primarily a political movement for freedom from the domination of the Hindu majority in the subcontinent” (UNESCO 1976, p. 41), thus suggesting a more ideological bent within West Pakistan’s turn to the social sciences to which Geertz’s approach to the study of ideology may be productively applied. According to Geertz (1973b), the concept of ideology may be understood, not as indoctrination, but as the interplay of styles, symbols, and effects. Though much has been said about the failure of nationalism in Pakistan (Jahan 1972), by taking a more sidelong glance at its ideology as it operates in unsurveilled sites we may see the enduring elements of ideology as “cultural nationalism” (Toor 2005). The study of official historical narratives, school textbooks, and public and private media have been particularly generative of a critical analysis of Pakistan’s founding ideology (Aziz 2004, Saigol 2005, Nelson 2006, Naqvi 2011).

Several important village studies conducted in Pakistan with a primary focus on the Punjab further our understanding of power structures as well as social institutions of gift giving such as *vartan bhanji* (Eglar 1960), kinship relations (Alavi 1972a, Das 1973), and the transformative effects of labor migration (Lefebvre 1999). However, even more productive than studies of the concept of “village,” the focus on “public administration” and “tribe” has been generative in terms of the scholarship on Pakistan. For instance, the UNESCO report emphasizes the importance of developing public administration as a discipline, showing the clear influence of Duke University professor Ralph Braibanti (1966, 1969). Hull’s (2012) *Government of Paper* underscores this emphasis by showing the entrenchment of paper bureaucracy in Pakistani lives, in which civic politics is afforded mostly through negotiations over official documents.

Within the studies of “tribe,” of note is Frederik Barth [2004 (1965)]’s *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans* in which he attempted to qualify E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1969)’s theory of segmentary

lineage that claimed to explain the processes by which state-like actions, such as banding for war or dispute resolution, are undertaken in places where formal state structures have not evolved or been allowed to establish. Whereas Evans-Pritchard focused on descent and clan lineages as enforcing conformism across space, Barth emphasized the role of free choice within what is called acephalous or headless societies. Barth [2004 (1965)] generated considerable interest within anthropology, eventually involving Talal Asad (1972) and Akbar Ahmed (1976) contesting Barth's claims. This debate has been reproduced in David Edwards (1998), which reflects on the present political organization of Afghanistan through that of the Swat Pathans, now Pakhtuns.

Thus the decades of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s show an overwhelming emphasis on the rural and/or the tribal within social scientific research. An exhaustion with these preoccupations combined with the steady migration of people to urban centers and the explosion of political violence within them in both Pakistan and Bangladesh turned attention to urban forms and sociality. Historical accounts (Gilmartin 1989, Glover 2008) show how the British privileged the countryside over the cities, leading to cities such as Lahore becoming important sites for alternative anti-colonial politics and urbanism movements. The nature of violence unique to Karachi's political and social organization has been studied through communal life in an apartment building (Ring 2006), fun-seeking youth and their participation in the Muttahida Quami Movement party politics (Verkaaik 2004), and the emergent geographies of fear (Gayer 2014) and bystander politics (Ahmed 2011). Both Frank Spaulding (2003) and Hull (2012) have explored Islamabad's singular modernity, whereas Sharif Uddin Ahmed (1986) and Elisa T. Bertuzzo (2009) have focused on Dhaka's history and multifunctionality. Studies of Bangladesh have also included interesting turns to spaces that complicate the divide between the city and the countryside with calls for views from rivers (Iqbal 2014), *chars* (silt islands that form within rivers) (Baqee 1998, Khan 2015), coastal landscapes (Amrith 2013), and, as mentioned above, enclaves and borders (van Schendel 2005, Cons 2013, Hussain 2015; for Pakistan, see Haines 2012). Studies of Pakistan include ongoing critiques of the predominant focus of scholarship on the Punjab and the Sindh. The call to attend to other areas is met by an eclectic patchwork of scholarship that holds promise for new insights on Pakistan, on the particularisms that have often been elided in the more official religio-nationalist discourse. They attend to the contradictions of governance in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Amoore & de Goede 2011), megacity construction in Gwador, Balochistan (Jamali 2013), cosmopolitan sociality in the Chitral, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Marsden 2010), and the simultaneous valorization and denouement of martyrdom among Kashmiri refugees (Robinson 2013). Recent returns to the study of rurality in Pakistan and Bangladesh have been done with care to avoid reproducing representations of insular village structures, for instance, through a focus on peasant organization and politics in Pakistan (Akhtar 2006, Rizvi 2013); the nexus between the local cultivation of jute, global trade, and famine in colonial Bengal and postcolonial Bangladesh (Ali 2012); and the neoliberal underpinnings of the processes of land dispossession in rural Bangladesh (Adnan 2013).

POLITICAL ECONOMIC CRITIQUES OF DEVELOPMENT

As may have become apparent from the above discussion, the British departure introduced new actors and institutions into East and West Pakistan. Of these, we have encountered UNESCO, French anthropologists, the Ford Foundation, new development-oriented research institutes, US experts, and others. At the start, these actors seemed to promise an opportunity for once-sequestered colonies to participate in the global scene as sovereign entities. Over time, however, their novelty would wear thin, as they seemed to further enmesh preexisting dependencies and compromise individuals' ability to speak for themselves.

Economists Irving Brecher and S.A. Abbas (Brecher & Abbas 1972) write of the evolution of foreign assistance to Pakistan from the 1950s to the 1960s. What began as a haphazard distribution (for instance, to avoid humanitarian crises) would transition into an institutionally systemized funnel through a consortia of multicountry donors, with funds earmarked for specific ends as Western and socialist countries came to use aid “to achieve an international position commensurate with their country’s economic power and political interests” (Brecher & Abbas 1972, p. 70). From the onset, the United States was the largest donor to Pakistan, specifically West Pakistan, but it would give only bilateral aid tied to the acquisition of its products or services, largely in the realm of militarization (see also Alavi & Khusro 1971). By contrast, for the socialist USSR, industrialization was the overwhelming concern. With funding from the US Department of State and the Ford Foundation, Gustav Papanek (1967) of Harvard University was among those writing more positive analysis of the admixture of government and private enterprise. Providing a positive correlation between foreign aid and gross national product, such analyses would ultimately credit the Ayub Khan military regime for political stabilization and economic growth (Papanek 1967, Brecher & Abbas 1972, Naseemullah 2013).

Foreign aid was not yet developmentalist. It provided countries limited leverage that they could not otherwise access from the open market (Brecher & Abbas 1972). Not until the transformation of the World Bank from 1959 to 1968, from a bank for the reconstruction of postwar Europe to a bank that saw itself as waging a war on poverty, was the era of developmentalism put into effect (Kapur et al. 1997, Goldman 2005). The difference from what came before in Pakistan to what development ushered in may be explained with reference to the above discussion on the promise of the social sciences for new nation-states. In East Pakistan, the desire was to know all the parts of society that had been kept obscured by colonialism, those that already existed but lay in wait for research and a commitment to normativity to reveal a meaningful whole, henceforth the proper subject of the nation. In contrast, within the development schema, the self that existed in the present did so in a state of underdevelopment, with only a future self and society capable of true self-knowledge. Consequently, it was better to play catch up than to waste time in search of knowledge that may be not only worthless, but also possibly self-deluding. This language of the imperative for useful knowledge aimed at a future self was already clearly present in both Bessaignet (1964) and the 1976 UNESCO report (UNESCO 1976).

There are as yet very few social scientific critiques of development in the context of Pakistan and Bangladesh (Dove 1994, Lewis 2004, Bhuiyan et al. 2005) and none that provide an alternative language allowing thought to exist apart from a developmentalist logic (for the limits of developmentalist discourse, see Chowdhury 2012). Presenting a potential alternative is Marxist sociologist Hamza Alavi (1972b), whose powerful discourse has been framed in the language of political economy. This ought not be surprising: To the extent to which the social sciences were supported in academic and nonacademic settings in Bangladesh and Pakistan, its leading disciplines have been political science and economics (UNESCO 1976). Although Alavi’s language may feel dated when he calls the Pakistani ruling class neocolonialist and claims they are in cahoots with the landed class, the industrialists, and the military, he is perspicacious in showing how the domain of the state overfills the space of the nation, edging out anything like a civil society or citizenry in Pakistan. Interestingly, Hull (2012) makes a similar argument. Thus, in Pakistan, politics is composed almost entirely of a military appropriating for itself the role of adjudicator of the remaining three groups (i.e., the ruling class, the landed class, and industrialists).

Recently, S. Akbar Zaidi (2014) has launched an attack on Alavi’s (1972b) theory of the overdeveloped as overly statist, which has led to a robust discussion on the political economy of Pakistan in the journal *Economic and Political Weekly*, but one from which sociologists and anthropologists remain missing. Yet what nevertheless satisfies is Alavi’s characterization of the ruling class in

Bangladesh: Taking pride in stewarding the country to independence, this ruling class is equally as eager as its Pakistani counterparts to make Bangladesh an overdeveloped state. Economist Rehman Sobhan (1982) extends Alavi's analysis to the aid-taking elite in Bangladesh, whom he calls the comprador class. Among emergent non-Marxist critiques of developmentalism are an examination of microcredit as a strategy of neoliberal self-governance (Karim 2011) and the corporatization of development agendas (Gardner 2012) in Bangladesh as well as an examination of the distortion of development through military participation in both the public and private sectors in Pakistan (Siddiqi 2007). The challenge remains how to think outside of the developmentalist paradigm or to determine whether doing so is possible or desirable. Alternatively, the task may be to engage in continuous immanent critique.

HISTORY AND MEMORY OF THE 1971 WAR

Whether developmentalism has meant the subtending of national sovereignty and knowledge production, Bangladesh retains, or rather continues to fight to retain, the right to speak for itself in at least one area, that is, in speaking of its experiences of the 1971 war. Scholarship on 1971 demonstrates how doubts and deceptions may track self-knowledge in both Bangladesh and Pakistan. Since independence, considerable effort has been devoted to the celebration of the nation (Siddiqi 2003) and memorialization of the war (Mookherjee 2011). Yet recent challenges to national as well as international accounts of the 1971 war underscore Donald Beachler's (2007) contention that there is a politics to genocide scholarship. Sarmila Bose (2011) argues that the atrocities have been exaggerated, whereas Naeem Mohaiemen (2011) provides a robust counter-response. The lack of will in Bangladesh to inquire systematically into the mass murders and rapes of the 1971 war as well as international indifference to Bangladesh in the aftermath of the war and the Pakistan state's outright dismissal of wrongdoing have made Bangladesh's claims to loss and suffering vulnerable to counterclaims.

An element of the tragic melancholic lies in Bangladesh's refusal to pursue the truth or its modes of doing so. The early days of the 1971 war saw the systematic killings of large numbers of Bengali intellectuals (see Volger 2010). As Nayanika Mookherjee (2007b) shows, this event more than any other, including the widespread killings and rapes, has been traumatic for nationalists, leaving them with a sense of the impossibility of achieving what Bangladesh could have been. This sense of impossibility makes a chimera of the positivist optimism of the social sciences and their promise for the nation-state. Yet, it is also at odds with and interrupts the developmentalist temporality of perpetual progress. Rather than legal recognition, this melancholic sense may require what Stanley Cavell (1969) calls "acknowledgment," which is more in the register of a spiritual rather than an intellectual effort to come to terms with the excesses of the war, to allow for meaningful restitution.

Recently, the standing government of Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of the founding father of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, claims to be meeting the popular mandate to prosecute and sentence to life imprisonment or death those deemed *vazakars* or collaborators with the Pakistani army and charged with war crimes during 1971 (Mookherjee 2010). This tactic is in lieu of charging the Pakistan army and is pursued under the rubric of the International Crimes Tribunal domestically constituted in 2009 (d'Costa 2013). There is a clear demand for such a tribunal, and not a truth and reconciliation effort, leading back to popular movements such as Jahanara Imam's Gono Adalat (People's Court) (Guhathakurta 2004, Mookherjee 2006) and the more recent Shahbag Movement (d'Costa 2013; <http://alalodulal.org/?s=shahbag&submit=Search>). However, lawyers and journalists have highlighted the legal discrepancies within the Tribunal's workings that make successful prosecutions phantom victories at best, unlikely to be accorded

legitimacy in the annals of history (Linton 2010, Bergman 2015). Others consider the Tribunal an extension of the state's ongoing efforts to deliver a blow to religious politics (Riaz 2008), as a large majority of those being tried are leading members of the Jamaat-i Islami, the political party started by Maulana Abul Ala Maududi in 1941 in undivided India.

The binds of redressing historical wrongs and ensuring justice through the Tribunal are explored by Mookherjee (2006, 2007a), Bina D'Costa and Sara Hossain (D'Costa & Hossain 2010), and Yasmin Saikia (2011), who show how the violence perpetuated on women has been either ignored, repressed, or oversymbolized to make testimony painful and even dangerous for the women concerned. M. Huq (2003, 2009) and S. Huq (2010) provide another perspective by showing how women seeking to be pious, culturally fulfilled, and politically conscientious suffer exclusion from the public sphere because of the long shadow of the 1971 war and the historically secular bent of nationalist discourse, including the hostility of its intelligentsia to Islam. Further recent developments in the scholarship on the 1971 war include historical writings that attempt to take Bangladesh's experiences out of a context of regional specificity to consider its creation as part of a global history of events (Aziz 2003, Raghavan 2013) and part of the shadowy history that haunts the United States without its explicit address (Bass 2013). *The Bangladesh Reader* by Megha Guhathakurta and Willem van Schendel (Guhathakurta & van Schendel 2013) is also very important in proliferating voices within Bangladesh to challenge the implicit presumption of the homogeneity of its people, perspectives, and aspirations.

Within the context of Pakistan, consideration of the 1971 war as having been perpetrated by its state and army remains unacknowledged within the nationalist literature and historiography (Memon 1983, Khan 2010a, Ali 2015). Instead, it is portrayed largely as a dismemberment suffered by Pakistan because of Hindu secessionist elements within East Pakistan and India's intervention in the war (Ahmed 2013a). However, Pakistani historian Syed Jaffar Ahmed (2013b) has recently compiled a list of primary documents, first-hand accounts, and analytical works on the 1971 war from the perspective of Pakistanis to encourage further critical work on the topic. Among such documents is the Hamoodur Rehman Commission Report (completed in 1974 but kept classified until *The Times of India* published parts of it in 1998), whose discursive analysis Cara Cilano (2009a) undertakes to show how authority for the decisions taken in the war was systematically diffused, though not as a mere obfuscation of the truth. Instead, she contends, because the event was so large and traumatic, involving both the division of the country and the dissolution of the idea of Pakistan, it could not be fully absorbed and reflected upon (Cilano 2009a). The suffering of Pakistani soldiers as India's prisoners of war further complicated a clear contextualization of self-blame from the Pakistani perspective. Yet as Saikia's (2011) analysis of the narratives of Pakistani military generals and privates involved in the violence of the war shows, there is a register of conscience in which self-blame and recrimination, even madness, occurs, but the question as to whether this register is sufficient to redress the wrongs of war is moot.

A further contention is that the 1971 war has not been forgotten in Pakistan but exists within society as a public secret (Khan 2010a). If so, a challenge for the scholarship on Pakistan is how to attend to such marginalized contexts, registers, and secrets while the quest to face up to the enormity of the event and the responsibility for it remains an ongoing struggle. Cilano (2009b) explores the stealthy presence of the 1971 war as an event within contemporary Pakistani fiction, whereas Sadia Toor (2005) examines its precursor in the language controversy in 1952. Kamran Asdar Ali (2010) speculates how in the aftermath of 1971 the Pakistani state took more ready recourse to violence in disciplining labor struggles, whereas Oskar Verkaik (2004) describes how Sindhi nationalists imagine a future Sindhudesh borrowing from Bangladesh's name while Mohajirs jockey with Bihari migrants from Bangladesh for space in Karachi. Concurrent with these struggles, Baluchistan renews its effort for self-determination begun in 1973 and inspired

by 1971 (Titus & Swidler 2000, Akhtar 2011). All these accounts show how 1971 continues to animate state actions, political and literary imaginaries, and everyday lives in Pakistan while yet awaiting a “real reckoning” (Mohaiemen 2011).

ISLAM AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS

In *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity*, Faisal Devji (2008) observes that the writings of jihadists often convey a disappointment with the language of humanism as a promise deployed, yet continually betrayed, by the West. Devji adds, jihadists do not wish to instantiate an alternative global vision, but rather to subvert the dominant political reality from within itself. However, the politics and practices of Islam in Pakistan have not been about this constant troubling of the status quo from within. Following Alan Badiou’s (2003) understanding of universalism as the presumption of the right to be done with the past and to found a newness, I claim that the literature on Islam in Pakistan suggests ongoing efforts to speak universally, for better or worse. A short survey of the literature (see also Marsden 2010) suffices to present the richness of analyses pondering Islam’s place in Pakistan, but I also take very seriously the counterclaim that Pakistan not be collapsed into Islam (Zaidi 2012, Ali 2015). How can Islam be kept in the mix without having it overdetermine the national context?

In contrast to perspectives that either subscribed uncritically to the idea of Pakistan as Islamic or saw the use of Islam in Pakistani’s statist discourse as cynical and politically motivated, newer literature has been much more attentive to the diverse and complex articulation of Islam with Pakistan. Historically, Gilmartin (1989) has shown a tension at the origins of Pakistan, pondered as the difference between the transcendental ideals of religion and the empirical realities that threatened to upend those ideals, *din* and *dunya* (see also Nelson 2011). Zamindar (2007) shows the many bureaucratic processes by which one population came to be sifted and sorted to produce a divide between Hindus and Muslims and between the Muslims of India and those of Pakistan. Some studies have provided important explorations of the law and its constitutive and coercive powers in producing Muslims and non-Muslims (Lau 2005, Ahmed 2010, Khan 2012, Qasmi 2014). Other studies have explored the philosophical coherence and creativity in the articulation of a new mode of being Muslim in Pakistan, one that exists at the level of a fugitive tendency toward the ongoing striving to be Muslim rather than those explicitly endorsed by the state (Khan 2012). Iqtidar (2011) portrays the Jamaat-i Islami as innovating a protean political existence within Pakistan that is alive to and incorporates dynamic elements from its competitors, creating intellectual and political frameworks for other religio-political groups and enabling a more positive relationship to the idea of individuated religious expression than has historically been the norm in the region. Marsden (2005) explores Islam in Chitral, an area outside of the usual scholarly foci to articulate the very cosmopolitan uptake of Islam as enabling a life of the mind, literary expression, conversation, and growth through travel. These studies are acutely aware of the problems of religious intolerance and sectarianism. Pinault (2008)’s commitment to the esoteric marginalia that fringes pious lives in urban Pakistan points both to the jockeying for religious pluralism and to the many therapies administered within Islam to engender health and well-being among its worshippers.

Along a second strand of writing on Islam in Pakistan is the changing significance of Sufism for Muslim thought and practice. As the state of Pakistan dissolved traditional institutions (Malik 1996) and restructured the shrines of many popular saints (Ewing 1997), contemporary Pakistanis have continued to negotiate their normative and modernist commitments and their simultaneous attractions to “outmoded” modalities of spirituality (Ewing 1997, Rozehnal 2009). Fazlur Rahman (1982) describes the central contradiction of modernist thought as positively inclined toward both *ulama*-based knowledge and Sufistic practice, although the two were not always separate or exiled

from the political imagination (Gilmartin 2010). Although conversations about Islam in Pakistan have taken a dark turn of late with the emergence of the Pakistani Taliban, we need to keep in mind the diversity of thinking that Islam has produced in the context of Pakistan and its relation to self-knowledge.

Bangladesh is predominantly Muslim and has an implicit and now more visible commitment to Muslim norms (M. Huq 2003, 2009; Shehabuddin 2008; S. Huq 2010). Although the right-leaning Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Jamaat-i Islami boast many supporters, Bangladesh's experience of being part of Pakistan has undoubtedly led to a deep-rooted suspicion of Islam in the public sphere, including not only the nationalist intelligentsia, but also many of its citizenry. Within Bangladesh, the claim to universalism has been, not to found newness or speak otherwise than the West, but to contribute to the globalized discourse of human rights. It is noteworthy that Bangladesh has privileged women's rights over those of tribes/the indigenous who have seen the systematic dispossession of their land and identity (van Schendel 2002). Since the 1970s, women's empowerment has been very prominent in the development agenda and well supported by foreign aid (McCarthy & Feldman 1983, Feldman 2001); it has also sparked internal creativity, as evidenced by the success of its programs and policies (see Yunus & Jolis 2008). Assessments of the actual gains for women are always mixed (Shehabuddin 2007), but the literature on the lives of women in Bangladesh is rich. However, given the decades of research conducted, it could be richer still. In Bangladesh, the discursive turn from "ethnographic" to "qualitative" research has not served anthropology well.

Prominent studies of women's rights include those that sensitively explore women's senses of themselves "as belonging to others" (Kotalová 1993), women's complaints as a rich mode of self-expression (Wilce 1998), birth and fertility rituals in rural lives (Blanchet 1987), the traffic between kin relations and symbolic transactions that deny women their paternal inheritance (Rahman & van Schendel 1997), literary routes of women's dreams of romance (Huq 2003; for Pakistan, see Ali 2004, Marsden 2007), women's experiences of illness and madness (Callan 2012), as well as women's religious ecstasy (Bertocci 2006) and religious political activism (M. Huq 2009). All take seriously women's experiences in making Bangladeshi lives. The need to consider women as such and as part of the laboring classes, as striving for and having a class identity, has been underscored by Feldman (2009) and D.M. Siddiqi (2009). This need gains great salience in the aftermath of the recent collapse of the Rana Plaza causing the death of thousands of women garment factory workers.

Although upbeat about women's empowerment, more development-oriented writings communicate a sense of disappointment that Bangladeshi women's perspectives on their own lives appear opaque to them despite decades of education. Here I recall Judith Butler's (2005) insight that one's opacity to oneself does not imply deliberate ignorance or the hiddenness of one's unconscious from oneself, but rather the thickness of one's relationality to others. L. Karim's (2011) otherwise well-aimed critique of microcredit carries a whiff of disapproval that women allow themselves to go into debt on account of their family members, but her ethnography reminds us that self-knowledge and relationality inflect each other.

LOOKING AWRY AND SPEAKING OTHERWISE

Reading over my review, I realize that throughout I have smuggled in what I consider views from the margins, multiply conceived, to help elaborate the excitement and dangers in the pursuit of self-knowledge: spaces that are neither city nor the countryside, outmoded Marxist language, the melancholia of Bangladeshi nationalism, stammering references to the 1971 war in writings on Pakistan, the affirmation of Islam in Pakistan, the expressivity of women in Bangladesh. I do this

not to privilege these intellectual margins as such. Instead, it is to underscore the importance of always looking awry or transversally to thicken and complicate perspectives on these two nation-states. Literature, or more generally acts of creation, is productively studied as proffering modalities for such sidelong looks at oneself, at relearning new modes of self-knowledge. Here I have in mind the recent work of Mufti (1995, 2007, 2010), who intriguingly presents Muslims in South Asia as the inheritors of the “Jewish question” in the Europe of old, thereby inspiring us to read the likes of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and George Eliot to explore Muslim experiences of citizenship in both India and Pakistan. Kamran Asdar Ali (2015) contends that the literary writings of the Progressive Writers’ Movement are as important to the exploration of the passage of communism in Pakistan as are the archives of the Communist Party of Pakistan. Iftikhar Dadi (2010) shows visibility to be in a constant and creative conversation with the literary in what he calls “Muslim modernity,” a broad framework incorporating both Bangladesh and Pakistan. Finally, from conception, production, and distribution to viewing, the travels of Lotte Hoek (2013) with a B-grade “obscene” film in Bangladesh are the physical tracks that the desire for self-knowledge takes.

Yet, what are we to do regarding the threat of the incommensurability between Bangladesh and Pakistan, complicatedly entangled yet affectively repelling each other? This incommensurability is present in the very elision of the study of East Pakistan as a shared period in the histories of both nation-states (Kabir 2013). Here I am reminded of the intriguing figure of the narrator of Zafar’s story in *In the Light of What We Know* (Rahman 2014), a nameless Pakistani American, who is arrogant, vulnerable, and disloyal, in turn, toward his Bangladeshi British friend but who nonetheless feels compelled to be his most faithful scribe. How do we understand him? Can he exist? Perhaps it is in such acts of ventriloquizing others, of speaking otherwise, that self-knowledge lies.

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Contents

Perspective

Some Things I Hope You Will Find Useful Even if Statistics Isn't Your Thing <i>George L. Cowgill</i>	1
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Archaeology

Pleistocene Overkill and North American Mammalian Extinctions <i>David J. Meltzer</i>	33
The Archaeology of Ritual <i>Edward Swenson</i>	329
Recent Developments in High-Density Survey and Measurement (HDSM) for Archaeology: Implications for Practice and Theory <i>Rachel Opitz and W. Fred Limp</i>	347

Biological Anthropology

The Evolution of Difficult Childbirth and Helpless Hominin Infants <i>Holly Dunsworth and Leah Eccleston</i>	55
Health of Indigenous Peoples <i>Claudia R. Valeggia and J. Josh Snodgrass</i>	117
Energy Expenditure in Humans and Other Primates: A New Synthesis <i>Herman Pontzer</i>	169
An Evolutionary and Life-History Perspective on Osteoporosis <i>Felicia C. Madimenos</i>	189
Disturbance, Complexity, Scale: New Approaches to the Study of Human-Environment Interactions <i>Rebecca Bliege Bird</i>	241
Fallback Foods, Optimal Diets, and Nutritional Targets: Primate Responses to Varying Food Availability and Quality <i>Joanna E. Lambert and Jessica M. Rothman</i>	493

Resource Transfers and Human Life-History Evolution <i>James Holland Jones</i>	513
An Evolutionary Anthropological Perspective on Modern Human Origins <i>Curtis W. Marean</i>	533
Anthropology of Language and Communicative Practices	
How Postindustrial Families Talk <i>Elinor Ochs and Tamar Kremer-Sadlik</i>	87
Chronotopes, Scales, and Complexity in the Study of Language in Society <i>Jan Blommaert</i>	105
Linguistic Relativity from Reference to Agency <i>N. J. Enfield</i>	207
Politics of Translation <i>Susan Gal</i>	225
Breached Initiations: Sociopolitical Resources and Conflicts in Emergent Adulthood <i>Norma Mendoza-Denton and Aomar Boum</i>	295
Embodiment in Human Communication <i>Jürgen Streeck</i>	419
The Pragmatics of Qualia in Practice <i>Nicholas Harkness</i>	573
Sociocultural Anthropology	
Virtuality <i>Bonnie Nardi</i>	15
Anthropology and Heritage Regimes <i>Haidy Geismar</i>	71
Urban Political Ecology <i>Anne Rademacher</i>	137
Environmental Anthropology: Systemic Perspectives <i>Yancey Orr, J. Stephen Lansing, and Michael R. Dove</i>	153
The Anthropology of Life After AIDS: Epistemological Continuities in the Age of Antiretroviral Treatment <i>Eileen Moyer</i>	259
Anthropology of Aging and Care <i>Elana D. Buch</i>	277

Anthropology of Ontologies <i>Eduardo Kohn</i>	311
Oil and Anthropology <i>Douglas Rogers</i>	365
The Post–Cold War Anthropology of Central America <i>Jennifer L. Burrell and Ellen Moodie</i>	381
Risks of Citizenship and Fault Lines of Survival <i>Adriana Petryna and Karolina Follis</i>	401
Siberia <i>Piers Vitebsky and Anatoly Alekseyev</i>	439
Of What Does Self-Knowing Consist? Perspectives from Bangladesh and Pakistan <i>Naveeda Khan</i>	457
Addiction in the Making <i>William Garriott and Eugene Raikbel</i>	477
Waste and Waste Management <i>Joshua Reno</i>	557
Theme: Resources	
Virtuality <i>Bonnie Nardi</i>	15
Pleistocene Overkill and North American Mammalian Extinctions <i>David J. Meltzer</i>	33
Urban Political Ecology <i>Anne Rademacher</i>	137
Environmental Anthropology: Systemic Perspectives <i>Yancey Orr, J. Stephen Lansing, and Michael R. Dove</i>	153
Energy Expenditure in Humans and Other Primates: A New Synthesis <i>Herman Pontzer</i>	169
Disturbance, Complexity, Scale: New Approaches to the Study of Human–Environment Interactions <i>Rebecca Bliege Bird</i>	241
Anthropology of Aging and Care <i>Elana D. Buch</i>	277
Breached Initiations: Sociopolitical Resources and Conflicts in Emergent Adulthood <i>Norma Mendoza-Denton and Aomar Boum</i>	295

Recent Developments in High-Density Survey and Measurement (HDSM) for Archaeology: Implications for Practice and Theory <i>Rachel Opitz and W. Fred Limp</i>	347
Oil and Anthropology <i>Douglas Rogers</i>	365
Resource Transfers and Human Life-History Evolution <i>James Holland Jones</i>	513
Waste and Waste Management <i>Josbua Reno</i>	557

Indexes

Cumulative Index of Contributing Authors, Volumes 35–44	591
Cumulative Index of Chapter Titles, Volumes 35–44	595

Errata

An online log of corrections to *Annual Review of Anthropology* articles may be found at <http://www.annualreviews.org/errata/anthro>