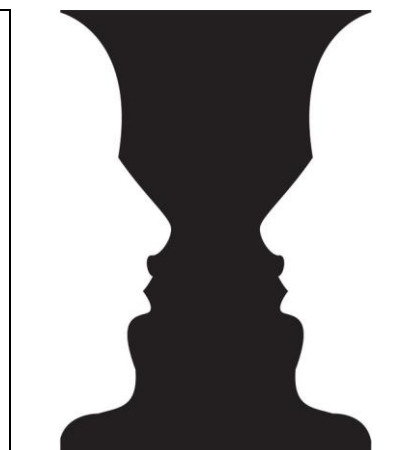


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An ‘infiltration’ of time? Hindu Chauvinism and Bangladeshi migration in/to Kolkata, India

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Abstract

*In the context of the growth of Hindu chauvinism (Hindutva) in India, this article explores the ways Bengali middle-class caste-Hindus have become increasingly anti-Bangladeshi and, in particular, increasingly hostile to immigrants into India from Bangladesh. The aim is two-fold. First, to show that a main reason for the increasingly anti-Bangladeshi sentiment is these Bengali Hindus’ particular experience of or, more precisely, their particular interpretation of, their own location in Indian history. This group, at times referred to as the *bhadralok*, had once seen itself, not without reason, as India’s national elite and has sought to re-establish that status. Second, it is suggested that the Bangladeshi immigrants represent an “infiltration” or “interruption” of time as much as territory, providing the temporal backdrop for anti-Bangladeshi resentment. In this case the temporality at issue is the postcolonial imperative of progress. The paper suggests that attention to issues of temporality can shed light on key aspects of nationalism — postcolonial nationalism and perhaps more broadly liberal nationalism — in relation to, among other matters, the legitimization of leadership.*

Keywords

Nationalism, temporality, democracy, Bengal, India, Bangladeshi, migration, Hindutva.

The original task of a genuine revolution... is never merely to “change the world,” but also – and first of all – to “change time”.

— Giorgio Agamben²

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Introduction: Spellbound by the border

In January 2003 two hundred and thirteen snake charmers found themselves entirely unwelcome: they had emerged in Cooch Behar, an enclave bordered by India and Bangladesh, and were refused entry into both countries.³ India's Border Security Force claimed that they were illegal Bangladeshi migrants and "gypsy" snake charmers entering the country to make money and, perhaps, trouble. The Bangladesh Rifles demanded proof the charmers were Bangladeshi and pointed out that they perform Hindu rituals and worship the goddess Manasa. As the snake goddess Manasa is said to be particularly popular among East Bengal Hindus (snakes are common in East Bengal and in East Bengali narratives) some in West Bengal, in turn, claimed that these were Hindu refugees suffering "ethnic cleansing" at the hands of Muslim fundamentalists in Bangladesh. This confirmed what they putatively already knew of the barbarity of independent Bangladesh and they insisted, accordingly, that the disputed group be allowed entry into India immediately: if they were Hindus they were, therefore, in actuality true Indians while, conversely, Muslims were "infiltrators" who had to be "pushed back" to Bangladesh. Yet others complained that the entry of any immigrants into India across this border was facilitated by West Bengal's CPI(M) party⁴ already accused of "appeasing" Muslims and collaborating with non-Bengalis in cynical efforts to boost their vote banks in the state. Then, in February, the charmers disappeared. There is still no clear account of where they went, whether they will return and, if so, in what guise.

² Giorgio Agamben "Time and History: Critique of the Instant and the Continuum", pp. 114-115 in his *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, trans. Liz Heron, London and New York, Verso, 1993. I would like to thank the anonymous referees of this article for their insightful comments and suggestions.

³ Ranabir Samaddar "Downwardly Mobile," *Hindustan Times*, May 8, 2003. There are about 123 enclaves, or *chitmahals*, in India and Bangladesh. These are territories of one country that are inside the territory of the other — including the world's only "third-order" enclave, i.e., a territory inside Bangladesh that is Indian but in turn includes within it yet another territory that is again Bangladeshi. Estimates are that there are 50,000-70,000 enclave residents in total. As they are geographically cut off from their "home" nations, they have also been cut off from many of the public services those nations are to provide. As this article is being written, India and Bangladesh are engaging in serious negotiations about resolving the issue of enclaves. The status of the residents will be a key point in the negotiations, e.g., if the Bangladeshi enclaves in India become part of India, will the residents become Indians? Will they be given a choice of citizenships and, if so, will they be allowed to stay where they have lived or might they have to migrate to join the integrated territory of the country of which they become a citizen? The lack of research on the history and culture of enclaves highlights how little Bengal has been considered within the literature on "borderlands" (though see van Schendel 2001) and as a fertile field for studying the times and spaces of nationhood, all the more in relation to migration and citizenship.

⁴ The Communist Party of India, Marxist (as opposed to another group that defines itself as Marxist-Leninist for example) that was in power in West Bengal at the time (2003), as it had been for decades. While proposals to "push back" are mortifying we should not forget the ubiquity of such agendas across many times and cultures. In the U.S., for example, proposals are often bruited about that approximately eleven million "illegal aliens" should be deported. The issue of illegal immigration may prove to be decisive in the upcoming presidential election in the U.S.

The larger conundrum that this incident exemplifies has certainly not disappeared. To the contrary, it has been invited to perform its own sort of sinister magic at, and for, the border: Bangladeshi immigration — or “infiltration” as it is named by those most opposed to it — has served as a mobilising tool for the Hindu chauvinist Sangh Parivar.⁵ The Parivar is a family⁶ of organisations that share, at the least, a vision that Indian nationalism is or should be Hindu nationalism; an ideology often called Hindutva. One of the scions of the family is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which won a sweeping outright majority in India’s 2014 General Election.⁷ According to these groups, as many as twenty million Bangladeshis reside in India — squatting at best and at worst supporting Pakistani sabotage. It is the Parivar parties that have proposed to “push back” these twenty million to Bangladesh, to strengthen border security, especially the fences and watchtowers along the long border between West Bengal and Bangladesh, and to issue to and require identity cards of those deemed to be in India legally.⁸ Indeed the border migration issue has been legitimated to the point that other parties seem to have at least nominally joined the bandwagon, including the leftist CPI(M) and the more centrist Trinamool Congress, which is currently in power in West Bengal.

My aim here is to explore the ways Bengali middle-class caste-Hindus have become increasingly anti-Bangladeshi and, in particular, increasingly hostile to immigrants into India from Bangladesh. My aim is two-fold, first, to show that a main reason for this more strident anti-Bangladeshi sentiment is the Bengali Hindus’ particular experience or, more precisely, their particular interpretation of their own “location” in the Indian nation’s historical trajectory or, better, its temporality. I suggest that for these Hindus the Bangladeshi immigrants represent an interruption or misdirection of time, the overlapping timespaces of the greater Kolkata municipal area, of West Bengal and of the Indian nation, as much as or more than an “invasion” of territory.⁹ Second I propose more broadly that attention to temporality may offer

⁵ In India, discourse about “terrorism” is often associated with discourse about “infiltration”, e.g., acts of terrorism are said to be carried out by infiltrators. Accordingly the label “infiltrator” is tantamount to the label “terrorist”. The rule has been that those coming across the border since the 1971 creation of Bangladesh would not be entitled to the status of “refugees”. Recently the BJP has suggested that the Matua – generally low-caste Hindus from Bangladesh – who arrived through 2004 would be afforded this status, and has stated explicitly that this group would be distinguished from “infiltrators” (about which more below). As the Matua have tended to support the Trinamool Congress party, the BJP’s actions can be seen as intended to woo the Matua vote away from this rival party. Indeed, early in 2015 a senior member of the Trinamool governing party announced that he was switching to the BJP, in significant measure so as to be able to better help the Matua.

⁶ “Parivar” may be translated as “family”.

⁷ The BJP did not win a majority in West Bengal. However its share of the vote jumped significantly — enough that the BJP has, despite some subsequent setbacks in the state, identified West Bengal as a target for future elections. See footnote 5 regarding the Matua constituency.

⁸ Operation Pushback was started under the overtly secular Congress Party central government in 1992 (before the destruction of the Babri Masjid) albeit under pressure from the Sangh Parivar.

⁹ I use “timespace” rather than Bakhtin’s “chronotope” because the latter is often invoked in a fashion restricting it to language and literature. See Bakhtin 1982.

insight vis-a-vis what has usually been referred to as national identity — identity which has too often been taken to be a stable state-of-being rather than an on-going process — through examining the interruption that the immigrants represent for the so-called hosts. In this case the temporality is the postcolonial imperative of progress or national development, and the hosts' hopes for their own leadership in it, i.e., at the vanguard of progress.¹⁰ Although debates about “progress” have often informed the human sciences, the intersections between discourses of progress and migration as *temporal* phenomena have received less attention. Indeed I argue that the human sciences have often privileged spatial paradigms. Although I support the recent “spatial turn” in its goal of countering peremptory periodization and historical master-narratives I am chary of, consequently, conflating history with time and neglecting the latter.¹¹

To adumbrate: what is at stake is the Bengali middle-class caste-Hindu understanding of progress, and their own self-proclaimed privileged place in it.¹² This group had once been an elite in India and has long sought to re-establish that status, to render this status undoubted. These concerns provide the *backdrop* for contemporary anti-Bangladeshi resentment. The historical *background* is limned below.

With respect to and for Bengal

The 1905 and 1947 Partitions of Bengal significantly inform the sentiments of the Bengali Hindu class addressed here. This group has been known as the *bhadralok* — meaning “people who are cultivated/refined/respectable” — and it merits attention for at least three reasons. First, the *bhadralok* are not insignificant in their numbers and their influence (the two, of course, not necessarily correlated). Second they are crucial for understanding the career of modern nationalism in India; Partha Chatterjee calls them the “nationalist elite” [1993: 36]. I suggest that they saw themselves as the flagship and what I would call “futurity” of Indian nationality. They were the patrons of progress and would guide India into the currents of universal history, in the form of a modern and ostensibly liberal nation-state. In his important nationalist tome, *The Discovery of India*, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote that a dynamic, enterprising innovative middle class was a prerequisite for progress — and, in particular, for progress in a

¹⁰ Progress and development are often offered as paradigms for narrating history. In this article, I will see these more in the framework of temporality, per the Agamben epigraph at the outset.

¹¹ See Engel and Nugent 2010. I have examined elsewhere the interrelationships between migration discourses/regimes and the construction of a Hindu diaspora, itself part of global Hindu civilizing mission which links recognition with digitization.

¹² Pandey [1992], Chatterjee [1993] and others have eschewed writing in ways that reproduce grand- or master-narratives such as Progress in favor of more (Althusserian) post-structuralist modes of analysis. But it is another matter to maintain, as I do, that such narratives as progress continue to be produced and to inspire agendas.

newly-independent post-colonial nation-state.¹³ The *bhadralok* felt that they were precisely what was required.¹⁴ Third, this class's own sense of its pride of place as disrupted by the two Partitions is important to keep in mind in order to understand the growing resentment against Bangladesh and Bangladeshi immigrants. The second Partition, in 1947, is particularly salient because it not only separated East Bengal from West Bengal but now placed the former in Pakistan and the latter in India. In 1971 there was a bloody civil war in which East Pakistan, the erstwhile East Bengal, became, with the aid of the Indian military, the independent nation-state of Bangladesh, separate from (West) Pakistan. More of this history, which is germane to the issue of 'infiltration' today, is provided below.

Although Hindus have long been the majority population throughout India, in East Bengal they were the minority. According to census data the Hindu to Muslim population ratio in colonial East Bengal in 1901 was roughly 30% to 70%, in 1951 after Partition 20% to 80%, and in 1981, after the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent nation-state, 10% to 90%. Urban areas, such as Dhaka City had a higher number of Hindus than Muslims, a basis, perhaps, for the former's claims to a certain cosmopolitan standing. Indeed, until the 1947 Partition the elite of East Bengali society were predominantly Hindu.

The *bhadralok* emerged initially as a middle-level landlords and money handlers, a notch below the large scale and longer-standing aristocratic landowners within the British colonial hierarchy. They were constituted by the three upper castes of Bengali Hindu society: Brahman, Kayastha and Vaidya. They established themselves in the professions (law, education, administration) — opportunities provided by the British colonial regime ("the Raj") and were, accordingly, disproportionately employed in the administrative and judicial operations of the colonial state. Above all, they defined themselves as well-educated and, concomitantly, refined: refined in speech, comportment, the arts, clothing and food. Manual labor was anathema.

Scholars have analyzed the *bhadralok* as a caste [Sinha and Bhattacharyya 1969], in terms of Weber's notion of a status group [Broomfield 1968a and 1968b], and as bearing a distinct psychological profile [Chakrabarti 1990]. Most scholars, however, have agreed that the *bhadralok* can be described satisfactorily as a class, for some a rentier class, for others an administrative one [see Hashmi 1981, McGuire 1983].

In 1905 the British officially partitioned Bengal into East Bengal and West Bengal. This separated Muslim-majority areas, i.e., those in East Bengal, and contributed to a feeling of "common cause" among Bengali Muslims; the nationalist All-India Muslim League was founded in East Bengal in 1906. The Partition was

¹³ Nehru [1995: 499—515]. Nehru was a key leader of the Indian nationalist movement and the Prime Minister of independent India from its independence in 1947 till his death in 1964.

¹⁴ These status claims have roots in the so-called Bengal Renaissance. See also Meghnad Saha, *Meghnad Saha in Parliament* [1993] and Geraldine Forbes, *Positivism in Bengal* [1975]. Nehru, Saha and others saw science as broadly emancipatory and saw Independence as a moment of unleashing science's liberatory potential in India.

eventually reversed in 1911, largely through the efforts of the *bhadralok* — contributing to the sense, among some Muslims, that the *bhadralok* were not particularly sympathetic to Muslim concerns. Until 1911 Calcutta (the name was changed to Kolkata in 2001) had been the capital of the British empire in India.¹⁵ Along with the reversal of the Partition, the capital was moved from Calcutta to Delhi, and there it remains to this day. I have often heard members of the *bhadralok* class speak of both the 1905 partition and the 1911 shift of the capital to Delhi as attempts by the Raj to undermine *bhadralok* influence, and the first steps in a deliberate imperial strategy to diminish the prominence of Bengal within India.

In the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth the *bhadralok* had created a set of hegemonic representations in Bengal of Bengal and Bengali society. These representations asserted: (i) that Bengal was a “golden” land of beauty, unity and prosperity, (ii) that harmony and order prevailed between groups in the society, including among Hindus and Muslims and (iii) that Bengali was an ideal language for the production of “great literature” (in particular the Sanskritized Bengali, or *sadhu bhasa*, created and codified during the so-called Bengal Renaissance Renaissance). The importance of the Bengali language cannot be overstated; Indian nationalism in Bengal has often been characterised as a linguistic nationalism, given the standardization and celebration of Bengali promulgated by the *bhadralok*.

These representations were mutually reinforcing. The prosperity of the land was intertwined with the harmony of social relations. The rich Bengal land also provided for rich literature — a literature which, in turn, often sang the praises of “golden” Bengal and, especially in the 1930s, rural peasant life [see Greenough 1982]. Some of these hegemonic representations were undoubtedly forged in British orientalist and imperialist discourse about India, as appropriated and elaborated by nationalist leaders, e.g., Mahatma Gandhi’s claim that Indian civilisation existed as, and was best embodied in, its harmonious, self-sustaining villages.¹⁶ Some of these representations were also appropriated by *bhadralok* committed to the Indian nationalist cause. Indeed the *bhadralok* saw themselves as the guardians of a unified

¹⁵ I am somewhat suspicious with regard to the spate of relatively recent changes of the names of key Indian cities; the changes are, arguably, attempts to recuperate some presumed authentic and pure Hindu past, pre-Christian and pre-Muslim (pre-Mughal). The renaming of Bombay to Mumbai in 1995 was very much in the wake of growth of Hindu chauvinism, and the changing of Madras to Chennai in 1996 can, perhaps, be seen within this trajectory too. Some say that the changing of names, which has applied to states as well as cities, is merely a form of indigenization: Calcutta has long been pronounced “Kolkata” in Bengali, and the name change is just a better transliteration of the Bengali into English. However, given the important precedent set by Bombay where the name-change is clearly linked to Hindutva, broader debates about indigeneity, and the ever-important question “why now?”, I remain somewhat skeptical.

¹⁶ See for example Karl Marx “On Imperialism in India” and “On the Future Results of British Rule in India” in *New York Daily Tribune*, June 25 and July 12 1853, respectively. See also Gandhi, M. K. “Hind Swaraj” [Critique of Modern Civilization], *The Penguin Gandhi Reader*, ed. Rudrangshu Mukherjee, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1993, pp. 295.

Bengali society and territory which, they expected, would play a leadership role within an independent Indian nation. One still hears, on occasion, the claim from this class that “what Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow”, an adage first articulated in the early twentieth century by a (non-Bengali) leader of the Indian nationalist movement. For many *bhadralok*, Indian nationalism was indistinguishable from Bengali nationalism, the advancements of the latter paving the way for the former. Accordingly when it appeared that, concomitant to the independence of India, Bengal itself might be partitioned (or, worse, the whole of it go to Pakistan), some *bhadralok* sought instead to create a separate independent Bengali nation-state [Gordon 1990].

Sudipta Kaviraj (1995) demonstrates how a discourse of assertive nationalism was constructed by the *bhadralok*, one in which Bengal was the head and heart of a nationalism that claimed all of India under its purview. One genealogy of this assertive nationalism is in the derisive images that the British promulgated about the Bengali *bhadralok*, namely, that they were effete in comparison, for example, with the “martial races” such as the Rajputs and Maharattas. Many prominent Bengalis, including the eminent pro-Hindu nationalist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Swami Vivekananda, an early proponent of “muscular Hinduism”, shared in this very criticism of the Bengalis. But this ridicule also provoked a response, including one from Bankim himself. The Bengali *bhadralok* literati began to claim as their own the historical legends of the heroic Indian peoples, drawing much of their information from colonial sources such as Tod’s *Annals of Rajasthan*.¹⁷ Kaviraj calls this “the founding moment of conceiving a ‘national’ community, the historic beginning of an imaginative integration” [146]. He continues:

From one point of view, it simply shows the confidence of the educated Bengali’s chauvinism — a process in which the Bengali aggressively appropriates the other. Bengalis do not as yet see themselves as part of a larger whole; they simply append India to themselves. They go out on a great imaginative journey across the subcontinent opportunistically selecting episodes from other people’s histories and adding them entirely without reason to their own [Kaviraj 1995:146].¹⁸

Indian nationalism, for the *bhadralok*, was an expansive version of Bengali nationalism and, by extension, the advancement of India was to be actualized by the *bhadralok* themselves.

The independence of India from British rule on August 15, 1947 was accompanied by Partition, a division by the British of British India into India and Pakistan along a line drawn by Lord Cyril Radcliffe of the Boundary Commission. East Bengal would become East Pakistan, the eastern wing of newly established Pakistan; the state of Punjab was likewise partitioned to provide the western wing, West Pakistan. West Bengal would remain a part of independent India, albeit without a counterpart of sorts: there was no longer an East Bengal but an East Pakistan, and East Pakistan was to later become Bangladesh.

¹⁷ Tod’s *Annals of Rajasthan; the annals of the Mewar*. Isha Books, 2013 [originally 1832].

¹⁸ Limitations of space will not allow an excavation of Kaviraj’s use of “entirely without reason”.

A series of riots preceded and accompanied the 1947 Partition, though there remain questions of whether, in Bengal, these were “Hindu versus Muslim” or “rich landowner versus poor tenant” or “elite versus subaltern”. However the 1941 riot in East Bengal was presented by the popular press and other sources as overtly religious.¹⁹ Earlier riots had mostly involved looting but now there was a high rate of personal attacks — murders, forced conversions, the molestation of women, and other physical assaults — and now directed against all levels of the rival religion, i.e., whether rich or poor. From 1941, one might say, there was a high level of “vertical integration” within religious communities, where religious affiliation seemed to galvanize and supersede other axes of identity [Das 1991].

As the Partition was officially promulgated along religious lines, large groups of Hindus and Muslims suddenly found themselves on the “wrong” side of the border. Although in theory they were to remain where they were as protected minorities, a massive transfer of population ensued. Indeed it remains one of the the largest and fastest migrations in world history. Although the numbers are disputed, its scale and speed are staggering: perhaps as many fifteen million persons relocated themselves in a period of six months — mostly in Punjab, the other partitioned province, often accompanied by violent clashes between Hindu and Muslim and Sikh communities. Much of the Hindu community of East Bengal made its way to West Bengal. In 1947 344,000 Hindu “refugees” from East Pakistan arrived in West Bengal, most to Calcutta, more than twice that number came in 1948 and more than 1.5 million in 1950. According to the 1981 Census of India, more than 30% of Calcutta’s population originates in East Bengal. Significantly, less than 50% of the Bengali Muslim community migrated to East Pakistan; some Hindus advocated Muslims leaving West Bengal, and did not welcome the few Muslims who, at the time, chose in fact to migrate to India.²⁰

Political and economic tensions between Bengali East Pakistan and (largely) Punjabi West Pakistan emerged alongside the cultural domination of East Pakistan by West Pakistani leaders, especially with the latter’s attempts to suppress the Bengali language. East Pakistan’s Mujibur Rahman, who had advocated for some autonomy for the East, and his party, the Awami League, emerged as the victors of the 1970 general election in Pakistan, its first. This outcome was unacceptable to West Pakistan which then used military means to prevent Rahman assuming leadership, carrying out what most describe as genocide. This, in turn, intensified a sentiment for Bengali, or Bangladeshi, nationalism in East Pakistan. In 1971, after a war of secession in which millions perished, East Pakistan became Bangladesh. In the course of that war several million Bengali Muslims and Hindus took refuge in India, mostly in West Bengal.

¹⁹ As ever, the role of the popular press was significant in generating and punctuating narratives and time-lines. The “Great Calcutta Killing”, almost exactly a year before the Partition, is remembered for its violence and political significance, to be sure, but certainly also for this very memorable moniker and mnemonic, which was generated years after the event(s) by a Calcutta newspaper.

²⁰ This is a critical aspect of Partition history that has not been adequately researched. Another is the fact that self-segregation occurred in key cities, such as Calcutta and Dhaka, well prior to the Partition, e.g., Muslims moving to Muslim areas and Hindus to Hindu areas within the cities.

Though most were eventually repatriated to Bangladesh it is estimated that about one million people displaced from East Pakistan during the war remain in West Bengal today; a matter of resentment to some to this day, i.e., that “they” did not all go back.

Partition and its aftermath — including, for some, the later emergence of Bangladesh — remains the most controversial historical assemblage in South Asia today.²¹ It is, I believe, the event in the historical consciousness of Bengalis, both Hindu and Muslim, in India today. Most *bhadralok* see it as caused by what they see as an admixture of Muslim “backwardness,” “recalcitrance” and “parochiality” which lead Muslims to insist that South Asian Hindus and South Asian Muslims constituted two different nations on, in their view, spurious grounds.²²

Spaces, times, nations

Before delving more directly into the issue of Bangladeshi immigration into India, I air some of the relevant theoretical issues. My overarching argument is that space has been privileged over time in Western social thought, theory and science, and especially in relation to conscious human agency.²³ I would argue that human agency is fundamentally temporal, insofar as it entails the conscious formulation and apprehension of categories, values, and meanings through intentional and practical action.²⁴ Nationalism is a product of overlapping individual and collective agents.²⁵ As such excavating the times and spaces of Hindu nationalism could improve our understanding of the agents that are constituting anti-Bangladeshi sentiments and strategies.

According to Arjun Appadurai, migration is one of two “diacritics” of modernity-gone-global [1996:3]. Flows of people and images, animated by the other diacritic, media (especially electronic media), are central to how modernity has escaped the bounds of specific territories such as nation-states. These flows are the key components of globalization, for Appadurai, and they are eclipsing or at least curtailing the viability of national territories as authorities in our world. In turn Aihwa Ong suggests that the term “globalization” should be restricted specifically to market practices, namely corporate practices [1999], whether or not they are undermining

²¹ On “assemblage” see De Landa, Manuel (2006) *A New Philosophy of Society: assemblage theory and social complexity*, London & New York: Continuum.

²² “Backwardness” and “recalcitrance” are my translations of key terms and themes in Bhabani Prasad Chattopadhyay’s book *Desh Bibhag: Paschat O Nephathya Kahini*, Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd. The title may be translated as “Partition: The Story Behind the Scenes”. Publication date is not given but probably 1992.

²³ The privileging of space is accompanied by the privileging of vision over the other senses. See Ghosh 2015 pp 28-29.

²⁴ In speaking of the agency of humans I do not mean to indicate that it is a property of humans alone.

²⁵ The notion of overlap I use derives from R. G. Collingwood, as articulated in *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (Oxford, 1933); *The Idea of History* (Oxford, 1990), and *The New Leviathan* (Oxford, 1992). See Ronal Inden, *Imagining India* for a discussion of Collingwood’s relevance to the human sciences (Oxford, 1990).

the nation-state.²⁶ For understanding the arena beyond corporate practices she prefers the term “transnationalism.” This term retains, in her view, a more nuanced and accurate view of the world, one in which movements of persons bump “horizontally” against and thus challenge the boundaries of nation-states more than globalization does.

These discussions are about, among other things, the nature of community in contemporary times. And they are striking in being focused more on space than on time. Modernity is “at large” for Appadurai, and transnationalism horizontal and rooted for Ong. To me, references to “global” and “transnational” reflect perennial debates regarding the appropriate scale, or unit, of study in social science, with scale itself viewed in tacitly but decidedly spatial terms. Indeed these analyses of a supposed post-national present are, as suggested above, themselves extensions of the long-standing valorization of space over time in Western social science. Going back to Durkheim and Mauss’s *Primitive Classification* (1902) we find that time is a projection of space, and space, in turn, an epiphenomenon of social structure.²⁷ This privileging of space is also visible in key literature about nationalism and nation-states, such as Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* [1991] and Anthony Giddens’s *The Nation-state and Violence: Volume Two of a Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* [1987] — very possibly the two most influential analyses of nationalism in social science over the last decades.²⁸

In *Imagined Communities* Anderson endeavors to ask and answer what makes the national community possible and persuasive for its members. His analysis hinges, in large part, on an understanding of time, but he ultimately succumbs, I suggest, to the idea that space contains time. In my view his argument is a variant of the secularisation hypothesis in arguing that nationalism replaced religion as “a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together” [36, see also 84]. This new public (if we may call it that) was created above all else by print capital, a public characterized by a sort of anonymous intimacy by way of a new form of temporal consciousness.²⁹ For many scholars, the time of the nation-state is rationalized, a form of auditing to be resisted. Anderson, in contrast, sees homogenous, serial time as the

²⁶ Those corporate processes, in my view, are fundamentally information processes — an argument I elaborate elsewhere in describing the emergence of, and accoutrements of, an Indian translational elite that is actively promoting a Hinduized version of India as the “capital” of a “great global civilization”. See Ghosh 2014.

²⁷ At the risk of being repetitive: social science, like the state, has preferred to classify peoples in terms of putative attributes rather than focusing on their self-represented ideals and goals. *Primitive Classification* challenges Kant’s understanding of time as an *a priori* in human consciousness. But it also is faintly Kantian in that it shows that time is not an objective or cosmological given in itself.

²⁸ I am not taking up Ernest Gellner’s analysis (1983) that the nation-state is a product of industrialiation or Anthony Smith’s primordialist account (1986) as I see both Anderson and Giddens countering them effectively and, ultimately, in terms of intellectual influence and relevance to my concerns Anderson and Giddens are more important.

²⁹ In contrast to Habermas, Anderson’s public is not essentially or primarily a sphere of deliberative debate.

foundation for egalitarian nationalism, and as such a salutary development — until at least the project is co-opted and distorted by state-generated “official nationalism”. The new time consciousness includes new understandings of both *chronology*, i.e., of “cause” and “effect” and of *simultaneity* within historical consciousness — albeit “chronology” and “history”, here, not conceived in the manner that the spatial turn abjures, as hinted above. It is this temporality, in turn, which allows for the emergence of a new form of consciousness and, ultimately, for communion within, and the political baptism of, the masses. He writes of the conception of simultaneity:

What has come to take the place of the medieval conception of simultaneity-along-time is...“homogeneous, empty time,” in which simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross-time, marked not by refiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar. [1991:24, see also 194]

These temporal tectonics allow for the creation of *institutions* such as nation-states and republics [1991:81].

Power, moreover, is generally understood to be exercised through centralized political institutions, which, in turn, require the existence of some form of spatial enclosure in order to be effective, e.g., the “reach” of the state. In Anderson, as often, the discussion of freedom and obligation, rights and responsibilities, fraternity and justice presupposes, I argue, a territorially enclosed polity: these emerge only within such a spatial demarcation.³⁰ What these approaches lack, it seems to me, is the ways in which communities are also projects in time, and not just once at some pivotal point (at the advent of the social contract, or the admixture of print capital with vernacular language) but repeatedly and in various ways. That is, these accounts miss the sense of polity as a trajectory that is shaped and revised by human agents — agents that are themselves, also, temporal projects, because agency, with its attention to conscious intention, aspiration etc is, as noted above, temporal. In fact, though Anderson often uses the word “consciousness” what he is really describing are unconscious shifts. Foregrounding conscious action inclines one to attend to time more than space if one takes intentionality in-itself, not as a reflection of some underlying structure.

Anthony Giddens captures in an important — but ultimately limited — way the sense in which nation-states can be understood in terms of the pursuits and practices of the conscious agents which constitute it. In Giddens’s theory of structuration “every social actor knows a great deal about the conditions of reproduction of the society of which he/she is a member” [1979: 5]. All actors, no matter how subordinate in the social structure, attain some degree of “discursive penetration” into the social system to whose reproduction they contribute. Thus “life is not experienced as ‘structures,’ but as *durée* of day-to-day existence, in the context of conventions

³⁰ In a later work Anderson insists he is endorsing only unbounded community. But by this he is not speaking (explicitly) against space and territory, but a form of consciousness, seriality, which can be bounded or unbounded. Also, in the same text he severely criticises “long-distance nationalism,” which implies that some form of spatial continuity is desirable for nationalism to live up to the promise it initially had for Anderson. See Anderson 2001.

ordered above all on the level of ‘practical’ consciousness” [1981:150] and protean narratives:

In the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a *reflexively organised endeavour*. The *reflexive project* of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet *continuously revised*, biographical *narratives*, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems. [Giddens 2007: 5, emphases added].

Giddens’s goal is to counter Marxist accounts by saying the state made the development of modern capitalism possible, not the other way round: authority, specifically the ability to establish surveillance, precedes the uneven allocation of material resources. The expanding administrative power of [European] absolutist states in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries provided for internal control, itself driven by the need for marshalling resources for warfare.³¹ However, and significantly, in the modern nation-state this is a “pacified” practical consciousness, rendered so primarily by surveillance. One might say, thus, that Giddens’s *durée* is in a significant sense pre-determined.

Despite Giddens’s apparent concern to include human agency in his approach, the human agent, individual or collective, is barely visible in his discussions of the nation-state proper: in *The Nation-State and Violence* agents are presented as a “population” always moulded, already pacified into enacting a practical consciousness and reproducing reflexive narratives which have already passed through the alembic apparatus of state administration.³² That is, though he does not ultimately rely on the ontology of the unconscious, as does Anderson, his own edifice is one of a consciousness that is already routinized, doxic, and temporally-tamed.³³ Thus the nation-state becomes, in Giddens’s usage, comparable with Durkheim’s vision of society as a “social fact”: an objective existence to which the wills of agents, especially individuals, must conform. True, Giddens distinguishes himself from

³¹ It would be worth examining in greater depth how Giddens’s sociology of state administration would have to be qualified in the face of neoliberal agendas today.

³² Moreover, from this perspective, what distinguishes each nation or ethnic group is its culture, which provides the “content” of group identity and individuality [Ibid.: 15]. Giddens, then, does not draw as sharp a distinction as Anderson does between nation-states (or, at any rate, nationalism) and other sorts of states and state ideologies/imaginaries.

³³ The commitment to social self-reproduction is connected to Giddens’s concern to produce an objective typology of states. Thus he, like so many others who have gone down the road of types and typologizing, reinscribes the venerable distinction between tradition and modernity. Giddens contrasts traditional a-historical, static societies to modern “hot cultures.” It is only the latter which exhibit historical consciousness, properly so called: “only in the modern West does ‘history’ become ‘historicity’: the controlled use of reflection upon history as a means of changing history” [212, see Dirks 1990]. He elaborates further: “A nation-state is a ‘conceptual community’ in a way which traditional states were not. The sharing of a common language, and a common symbolic historicity, are the most thoroughgoing ways of achieving this...” [219]. Hence “national pasts” and “national histories” supplant the stasis of “traditional societies.” Such distinctions and typologies are awkward if one sees politics as agentive and protean.

Durkheim who, he says, sees the nation metaphorically as a “body”, but Giddens ultimately does make the quintessentially Durkheimian move of making the nation-state commensurate with “society,”³⁴ and thus he too implicitly invokes the metaphor of the “social body” as a spatially-bounded entity, not an authentically temporal process.

Like Anderson and Giddens, Sudipta Kaviraj links a qualitative shift in temporal consciousness to the growth of nationalism, but in a different way, one which is more resonant with my concerns about the temporal and intentional components of agency:

It has been argued persuasively that modernity alters the nature of temporality. From a cyclical repetitive ontology of time, European theoretical thought and later popular consciousness emerges...into a conception of *future time as an opportunity, as a broad field of creative activity* in which natural and social things can be shaped according to *collective human desires*. ... [F]ormerly, time was not seen as *an opportunity in which well-conceived social or political projects could be carried through*. [1995: 164, emphases added].

Kaviraj sets aside, as I do here as well, questions such as how theoretical thought becomes popular consciousness (and vice versa) and how consciousness relates to subconscious or unconscious structures and dynamics. Still, Kaviraj implicitly points to something important that both Anderson and Giddens miss. Namely, central to the national community is the creation of collective projects. That is, in addition to and beyond the “need” for communion (Anderson) and/or the need for reproduction (Giddens) is that nation-states, as collective overlapping agents, seek to carry out projects to be proud of, projects that themselves, more than any other activity, bring the wills of the polity into coordination, and even coalescence. Now it must be underscored that the nation-state is not a single, total, homogenous and complete agent, a sort of large individual.³⁵ It is itself a collectivity with many overlapping and changing constituents and trajectories, and thus not comparable to a “body,” at least as the latter is usually conceived. We may pause here to reflect that Giddens is (was) on the verge of this agentive vision of the nation, but then reverts back to the position that agents within the nation-state are already pacified.

What, then, are the temporal constituents and horizons of nationalism? In the case of India, there is the imperative to maintain temporal communion in the interest of equality and fraternity (or at least the appearance thereof) as Anderson endorses and also reproduction-as-continuity which is Giddens’s analytical concern.

But I suggest that, perhaps above all, there is the imperious pledge made by post-colonial nation-states to produce Progress (note the capital ‘P’), however utopian an aim it may be, and this is often accompanied by questions and contentions

³⁴ On “society” versus “polity” see Inden 1990.

³⁵ In turn, individuals of any sort are only in-dividuals, i.e., non-dividables, on occasion: more often than not, individuals, too, have various “parts” which can be in competition as much as in concert, as has been noted in, among other areas, existentialism and psychoanalysis.

regarding who has the standing, and the understanding, to advance these agendas and achieve these aims. The ideal of popular sovereignty includes that all are equal, but within the discourse of democracy — which is, after all, a vision of *ruling and rulership* — there is, perhaps paradoxically, scope for the sense that some people are more equal than others. Hence discourses of popular sovereignty in postcolonial states, and perhaps in liberal nationalism more broadly, are invariably haunted by the question of who will build the bridge from the past through the present to the future. In sum, when the desire for democracy is intertwined with the imperative of Progress, there will typically be a contestation over who or which group is to *lead* Progress, who will be both authentic and avant-garde, who will enunciate and articulate the interrelations between, especially, the present and the future.

These are the leaders — usually self-proclaimed — who are often acutely aware of what they perceive as the Progress of other nations and communities, who are concerned with fulfilling destinies and arriving at the apex [see Fukuyama 1989]. In short, what I am seeking to delineate here is a problem that arises, I propose, within putatively liberal or, at least, democratic polities: how to establish and secure privilege among “the people”, who are constituted by temporal coincidence (Anderson) and continuity (Giddens) but most of all, in postcolonies, by trajectory (as indicated, perhaps unwittingly, by Kaviraj). Throughout the history outlined above and into the present, the *bhadralok* have sought to retain or regain their status as the first-among-equals, as an avant-garde for Bengal and for India. It is this agenda that is disrupted by the immigration of Bangladeshis and, in particular, Bangladeshi Muslims into Kolkata and West Bengal.³⁶

Bangladesh in Bengal, the world in the home

Under the welcome cover of the “war on terror” the Hindutva government in New Delhi has returned to one of its patented platforms: there are too many Bangladeshi nationals in the Indian nation.³⁷ As noted at the outset, this issue has been taken up with even in the left-leaning circles of West Bengal politics, in part, no doubt, to inoculate themselves from the charge that they are or were using these immigrants to bolster their vote banks.

The admixture of anti-Muslim sentiment and Bengali-cum-Indian nationalism goes back to at least the nineteenth century. This is evinced in the muscular Hinduism advocated in the writings and preachings of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Swami Vivekananda mentioned above. This animus did not however target Bengali Muslims who were, for the most part, treated with a sort of *noblesse oblige*, as in Rabindranath

³⁶ Synthesizing analyses of (i) what a community is with (ii) how a community is produced with (iii) where the community wants to go would involve distinguishing different forms of difference, e.g., distinguishing among oft-conflated concepts such as otherizing, othering, alterity and abjection and, thus, related terms such as hybridity, creolization etc.

³⁷ According to the reputable *Deccan Herald* “several investigations [have] revealed that Bengal and Kolkata were being used as transit route by terrorists”, 3 September 2015.

Tagore's (1861-1941) novel *Ghare Baire* (*The Home in the World*) — though, it may be added, the casual conflation of “Bengali” with “Hindu” continues in common parlance today.³⁸ The period of anti-colonial nationalism generated, as one would expect, both new tensions and new accommodations between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal. Yet Partition, as a sign of extreme incompatibility [see Ghosh 1998], was not viewed as inevitable until just before its occurrence; in fact, though India and Pakistan became independent on August 15th the borders between them were not officially announced till days later, and confusion about borders perdured long after. Indeed the reality and permanence of the Partition of Bengal was not acknowledged, by many middle-class Bengali caste Hindus, until the late 1970s. Until that time their view was that the Partition was promulgated not by Bengali Muslims but in spite of them and was, hence, *temporary*. Over time, however, this kinder gentler view of the Bengali Muslim was set aside, and they were seen as an impediment to progress [Ghosh 2002 & 2007].³⁹ This was particularly the case for those migrants to Kolkata who were (taken to be) Bangladeshi. The reasons and motivations for this “host” class to be generating these resentments (akin to the French notion *ressentiment*) is thus, linked to their unique cultural constellation, one in which they saw themselves as the avatars of history, the flagship of progress for Bengal and for India, the two amounting to the same thing, in their view.

There are two registers to the anti-Bangladeshi resentment. The first focuses on the degeneracy of Bangladesh itself, the second on the Bangladeshis who come to India.

In 1988 Bangladesh changed its constitution to make Islam the official religion (the constitution of Pakistan was similarly changed in 1977) and this is seen by the *bhadralok* as an enormous step “backwards.” The difference between an Islamic state and a state that has made Islam its official religion is not recognized or given much credence by those middle-class Bengali Hindus with whom I raised the issue. In addition, accounts and rumours of the molestation of Hindu “girls” in Bangladesh continue to circulate, as do concerns about the persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh [Kanjilal n.d., Rai 1993]. From such a perspective Hindus who come from Bangladesh illegally are “refugees” and Muslims are “infiltrators.” Consider these newspaper accounts, one a letter and the other an article, both from 1989:

Sir,
Bangladeshi High Commission ... calls [the] report “Bangla Hindu Refugees Find no Shelter” baseless. ... But we all — including [Indian Prime Minister] Rajiv Gandhi —

³⁸ Tagore, a member of and a hero of the *bhadralok*, penned the songs that are, today, the national anthems of India and Bangladesh respectively — an indication, arguably, of the ways in which Bengali nationalism and Indian nationalism were indeed intertwined.

³⁹ There are groups in both India and Bangladesh, respectively, who advocate their country's territorial expansion at the expense of others, based at times on arguments about the natural contours of the polity and at other times on *lebensraum* sorts of arguments. Each nation accuses the other of nurturing deep-seated irredentist and expansionist agendas.

know better. The reason they are coming across the border: efforts to drive out Hindus and other minorities and make the country 100 percent Islamic. This is the result of the Partition and the reward for creating Bangladesh with the blood of Indian soldiers. ... Millions had to leave the erstwhile East Pakistan after the Partition, and millions more are being forced to leave Bangladesh. Eventually, there will be no one left in Bangladesh other than the Muslims. Then, perhaps, the Bangladesh rulers will declare their country secular. ... On top of this, Bangladeshi Muslims are regularly entering the north-eastern states of India.” Yours etc. Sasanka Sekhar Bhattacharya, Calcutta. [*Statesman* January 24 1989, letter entitled “Minority Plight.” See also *Juganthor* February 5, 1989. Note that the use of “etc” here is in the original text, not added by the present author.]

According to a report submitted by the state’s intelligence branch to the state’s home department recently, the Hindus in Bangladesh are being subjected to atrocities by the Muslim fundamentalists. Hindu women have been molested and their temples desecrated. [“Growing Problem of Hindu Influx,” *Statesman* February 16, 1989].

In the same year the pro-Hindu website *Hinduism Today* — aimed at “Recording the History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance” — wrote of Hindu refugees from Bangladesh:

For Hindus in Bangladesh, there is no law and order. Fundamentalist groups ... have unleashed a reign of terror to drive us Hindus out of Bangladesh. A refugee, advocate Chittaranjan Medha, left behind a successful law practice because local police had launched a massive drive against "Hindu secessionists..." The property of Hindus who flee the country can be seized under Bangladesh's "enemy property" law. Hence, Hindus who leave do so with little chance of ever seeing their homes again. [“Hindus Flee Bangladesh: Adoption of Islam as State Religion Prompts Exodus,” *Hinduism Today* April 1989, accessed 11 March 2014]

A more obstreperous group, the Nikhil Banga Nagarik Sangha (All Bengal Citizens Association) provides a long list of atrocities in Bangladesh against non-Muslims (without mention of comparable activities in India that, at times, have triggered a backlash in Bangladesh). The group has opposed closer ties between India and Bangladesh and, in its most strident moments, has spoken of liberating Bengal from Bangladesh; indeed the organisation’s name insists there is a polity called “Bengal”. Their web page is entitled “The Call of the Mother” and it shows the Bangladesh flag flanked (much like Bangladesh itself, and certain enclaves) by India on either side, with India here represented by a woman (mother) who is ostensibly Hindu. The moves, in Bangladesh, to de-Hinduize culture through, for example, de-Sanskritizing the Bengali language have not ameliorated these agendas.

In a book about Hindu migration from East Pakistan/Bangladesh to West Bengal in relation to Leftist politics in the latter, a member of the *bhadralok* class writes of the Bengali Muslim:

His mind is haunted by a *medieval past*. It is typically a romantic mind. The love of the irrational, *imperviousness to the present reality*, a brooding *medieval reverie* and

an intense passion for suicidal violence — all are ingredients of the romantic mind of the Indian Muslim. *Opposition to all change*, which is so marked a characteristic of the Islamic society in India, is in reality a defense mechanism of the romantic Islamic ego *clinging to the past*. It often takes the form of compensatory megalomania and violence. ...It is obvious therefore that *India cannot continue her forward movement towards modernity without pulverizing this change-resistant Islamic society* and releasing the [true] spirit of Islam and modernism from its toils [Chakrabarti 1990: 112, emphases added.]⁴⁰

As hinted above, the Communist Party-Marxist, the CPI(M), has been attacked as the party of Bangladeshis, and the party has responded by adopting at times an increasingly anti-immigration stance. Earlier, middle-class Bengali caste Hindus supported the CPI(M) as a way of delegitimizing the then-dominant Congress Party, which they had come to see as a corrupt and even colonial presence within India, the very embodiment of false nationalism, the party that had agreed to Partition – not the party of progressive leadership. Moreover, the CPI(M) held out the promise of restoring this class to its first-among-equals status.⁴¹ An aspect of this promise was the hope that the CPI(M) could restore the “Golden” Bengal that was sundered with Partition [see Greenough 1982]. Now, however, continuing to fight New Delhi is seen as a losing cause, and the CPI(M)’s promise of restoring Bengal is seen as hollow.

Even those members of the middle-class who are avowedly unsympathetic to the Hindu right are increasingly resentful. The very existence of Bangladesh is represented as impeding the progress of Bengalis as a whole (with, again, “Bengali” connoting “Hindu” more than “Muslim”). In the course of an animated back-and-forth with me one gentleman asked:

Do you believe that the Indian Union or Indian Army had any business to go “Liberate” East Pakistan? It was done to promote [Indira] Gandhi from being a run of the mill politician to a reincarnation of Durga. And we [the Bengali Hindu middle-class] have been bleeding from the arse ever since. We should have let the two wings of Pakistan [fight] it out. It was an internal matter of the *Leres*. We should have just...maintained a tight border across West Bengal, Assam etc. *Leres* would still be fighting each other, thereby leaving India...to pursue Economic Development, the main object of living. We [would] have a much smaller Defense Expenditure allowing more investment developmental and infrastructural portfolios. ... [Do] you think that a Bangladeshi because he speaks some form of Bengali [is] on my side?! Do you think I give a damn for Pakis?! Get Real.⁴²

⁴⁰ “Romantic mind” here means one that is immature, detached from reality and unscientific. The “true spirit of Islam” refers to its egalitarian tendencies, which are seen as progressive.

⁴¹ This claim is among several that I regret I cannot elaborate here, for limitations of space.

⁴² Emphasis added. Communicated to the author in 2008, name withheld. *Lere* is a dialectical / local version of *Nara* meaning “shaved” or “bald”. It refers to Muslims being circumcised or, some say, to their supposed status as converts from the lower strata of the Hindu hierarchy: they were low caste and therefore shaved their heads, or they went from low caste to Buddhist and as Buddhists shaved their heads, before becoming Muslim. In any case, it is unquestionably a derogatory term. “Paki” is a pejorative term for “Pakistanis”. Here, as often, Bangladeshis are seen as (still) Pakistanis, i.e., despite

In his view the intervention in 1971 by the Indian army on behalf of the Bangladeshi freedom fighters was not — could not have been — in the interest of Bengal. It was not to prevent the genocide of Bengalis in the Eastern province; to the contrary, it was for the aggrandizement of Hindi-speaking Delhi-based politicians, and ultimately also to the profit of the backward, parochial leaders of Bangladesh.

The second register of anti-Bangladeshi resentment focuses on immigrants, so-called infiltrators and slums. Government and other reports do claim to show population growth in border states such as West Bengal and Assam over the past decade. The growth is presented as “disproportionately” Muslim with (informal) madrasahs being established and some villages becoming Muslim majority.⁴³ India has been particularly concerned that these immigrants will lend support to separatist movements in the Northeast.⁴⁴ Bangladesh itself is, of course, loath to admit that their citizens are voting for rival India — voting, that is, with their feet. It is said, rather, that there is a great deal of smuggling of Indian goods into Bangladesh (to the profit and advantage of the former nation) and that any migration is a consequence of that.⁴⁵

Bangladeshi immigration is accused of the alarming decline of Kolkata as represented in the degeneration of the city infrastructurally and, even more, culturally — though it is not clear, it must be said, that the two are separated so neatly in this context. On “infrastructure” as reported in a leading Calcutta newspaper:

Calcutta city and its neighbouring areas, which would encompass large areas of North and South 24 Parganas are the most affected by the endless influx. Some of the slums consist entirely of Bangladeshi immigrants. The crowding of the markets and bazaars, the encroachment on all roads, the parallel bazaars on the pavements in the various business areas are all the result of the Bangladeshi influx since Partition. Calcutta city can *never be reborn* as Shanghai has been, since the problem

the 1971 war of independence — in which India played a significant role — to establish the independent nation-state of Bangladesh. The attack on Bangladeshi Bengali in this quotation also suggests an exhaustion of the linguistic nationalism that had key roots in the Bengal Renaissance.

⁴³ “In some areas you can't find a Hindu family because the population mix has been so disturbed,” said Tarun Ganguly, a former editor of a leading Calcutta newspaper whose research organization, the Center for Social Research, studies West Bengal's ethnic demographics. “There is a fear here among Hindus that they are being swamped by the Muslims.”

⁴⁴ Some have demanded greater autonomy from India whereas others insist upon outright Independence.

⁴⁵ My own sense from visits to border area was that the Muslims of the area felt relatively free to travel back and forth between the two countries for commercial and other purposes. “Free” is perhaps the wrong word as, being illegal traffic for the most part, bribes were often involved. To my knowledge at least one person had a schedule whereby he would spend a week in Bangladesh, followed by a week in India, and so on, traveling on bicycle. Others, I was told, would commute everyday from one side of the border to the other, and then back again at night. See *Sunday Statesman*, Nov 27 1994, National section. Among the goods rumored to be smuggled to Bangladesh are cows for slaughter, another incendiary issue for the Hindu right given the sacred status of cows in Hinduism.

of slums, which account for about 30 per cent of the population of Greater Calcutta, and the encroachments cannot be solved in the foreseeable future.⁴⁶

Note, as in the earlier quotation above, the projection backward of the existence of Bangladesh to 1947, equating it with Pakistan, as if to say that the Independence of Bangladeshi in 1971 did not, in retrospect, change the unfortunate essence of that polity.

A gentleman reflecting on the state of Kolkata and West Bengal said with palpable anger:

Bangals arrive, naked, shivering in the cold as they stand by slippery sloppery hither bank of the Padma ...the Mollas having taken the gamcha off their ass. Kolkata and the nascent state of West Bengal, bleeding, fatally wounded yet offers them hospitality.... Do they reciprocate with loyalty? No! They oppose and persecute host Kolkatans culturally...keep giving their loyalty to a country that murdered and raped and drove them out, and build up the oppositional Left ... that has kept West Bengal out of the development and prosperity that has been since 1947 the central theme of the rest of the Republic of India, including [the] other truncated Province, the Punjab. There are Punjabi millionaires, not one in West Bengal. It has all been very very wrong.⁴⁷

Wrath against immigrants is certainly not an Indian prerogative. We see such sentiments in, as well, the U.S., witness the mainstream academic works of Kennedy, Schuck and Huntington.⁴⁸ One might argue, in fact, that the ills being identified and attacked here are the very products of Western modernity, playing out in India. Yet it seems to me that there is a difference in this situation. Namely, unlike Mexicans in the U.S. or Turks in Germany or Albanians in Italy, in this case there is at least some national/ethnic identification, or equation, between the hosts and the immigrants: both say they are Bengali. The fates of the two communities have and are seen as having long-standing, intricate and intimate relationships each to the other to the

⁴⁶ Emphasis added. *Statesman*, 27 November 2006, "Letter to the Editor".

⁴⁷ Emphases added. Communicated to the author in 2001, name withheld. *Bangal* here, in this statement, refers only to contemporary Muslim Bengalis from Bangladesh (it also applied to Hindus from East Bengal at one time) and is also used in a mildly derogatory fashion. *Gamcha* may be translated here as "last shred of clothing." The resentment expressed in the words "oppositional Left" refers to the idea, noted above, that Bangladeshis have bolstered the vote banks of the CPI(M). After many decades of rule, the CPI(M) was dislodged from power in the 2011 West Bengal state assembly election.

⁴⁸ Kennedy [1994] and Schuck [1998] indicate that immigration is tolerable only if it is the "right" sort, that is, if immigrants adopt American culture, values and social contracts as their own – returning, one might say, to the melting-pot model of immigration. It is, one must add, unclear that the melting pot model was anything but a model, both sociological and ideological, expressing the interests of key elite segments of the host population. In this regard, I would suggest that Kennedy and Schuck are, in essence but unwittingly, pointing to and lamenting the decreasing capacity of the nation-state to create/police citizenship and 'nationalize' immigrants – and, perhaps, even their "own home-grown". See Das 2001.

point that, in popular discourse, it is not always clear that they are two separate communities at all.

Thus the quotation above, with its report on hospitality and loyalty, also encourages us to nuance the case about animosity towards Bangladesh and Bangladeshis. The Bengali Hindu middle classes also rely on Bangladesh and Bangladeshis in a number of ways. First, they do so politically and economically. There is some truth to the allegation that the CPI(M) aggrandizes its vote banks, cadres etc. through Bangladeshi immigrants, even if it denounces this in public (though it is not clear this party alone does this). Second, these immigrants do provide for cheap labor; recall the aversion of the *bhadralok* to manual labor.

What is more, the Hindu middle class has an ambivalent relationship with Bangladesh and Bangladeshis for other reasons. One, Bangladesh represents the only nation-state where Bengali is the official language. Both Giddens and Anderson suggest that shared language is central to national consciousness, albeit for different reasons. This was particularly the case among middle-class Bengalis, for whom the Bengal Renaissance of the nineteenth century — a cultural, reformist movement driven by literary production which generated what might be called a sort of Hindu Humanism — figured centrally in their pride. Bangladesh is in this sense the only nation of the/a Bengali people, and the *bhadralok* therefore cannot abandon it altogether, at least not easily.

From this perspective the movement of goods to and from the Bangladeshi border takes on a certain significance for middle-class Bengali Hindus. Although, as noted, smuggled goods usually go the other direction across the border, Kolkata covets some of the goods that come from Bangladesh:

Whatever be the feelings — sweet or sour — between *epar* and *opar Bangla* [between this side and that side of Bengal], there are very few women on this side of the border who would not get ecstatic over a Dhakai jamdani [saris from Dhaka] or even hesitate to splurge a fortune to possess one. ...Jamdani is a variant of the fabled Muslin for which *Bangladesh was famous in ancient times*. ... And keeping alive this antique art are the weavers of Rupgonj for whom it's a way of life; a recognition of their craftsmanship and a visual link with a *lost but glorious past*.⁴⁹

In some sense, perhaps, the existence of Bangladesh and Bangladeshi migration both undermines and reinforces the aspiration of middle-class Bengalis to be the guardians and guarantors of the collective weal, the Commonwealth. The West Bengal-Bangladesh dispute has the quality of a family quarrel. And indeed is it not family members who seem most capable of provoking the strongest emotions in us, both positive and negative? The Bangladeshi immigrant is seen, one might say, as the

⁴⁹ From “Across the Border: Jamdani Sarees from Bangladesh, which were displayed in Calcutta recently, never fail to catch the fancy of the ladies on this side” by Susmita Bannerjee. *Telegraph Sunday Magazine*, “Focus” section 2 Oct 1994, Calcutta, emphasis added. In this passage, Bangladesh is projected back to “ancient times”, and West Bengal and Bangladesh presented as, in a sense, two sides of the same coin, *Bangla/Bengal*.

wayward twin which interrupts the *bhadralok* and sets back, again and again, the latter's expectations and imaginations.

Closing questions in lieu of conclusions

Bengali middle-class caste-Hindus, the *bhadralok*, have become increasingly anti-Bangladeshi and, more specifically, increasingly hostile to Muslim immigrants into India from Bangladesh. I have argued that these changes are animated, in significant measure, by the *bhadralok's* self-proclaimed presumptions and aspirations regarding their own position in the Indian nation's trajectory-cum-temporality. Their hope for hegemony is impeded by many factors, but the so-called infiltration of Bangladeshis is one, an unwanted intermission in their nationalist narrative as much as, or more than, a transgression of territorial integrity. However, this also offers us a unique standpoint for seeing, critiquing and perhaps developing the ways that nationalism could be seen as an on-going process. Proclaiming the importance of process over stasis has become a shibboleth in the human sciences, but too often without an exploration of what process might actually mean in specific cultural and historical contexts and in specific theoretical terms, as I have sought to move towards herein.

I suggest that attention to the temporal dimensions of, in particular, postcolonial nationalisms allows us to see them as collective processes. From this perspective, "a nation" would appear more like a process of "socialization" or, better, a particular sort of activity like "a meeting". If, as I suspect, one of the conundrums of the Indian polity (and perhaps any community significantly informed by liberal and/or democratic principles) is how to establish and apportion leadership or, more cynically, how privilege is to be secured in a putative democracy, then those seeking to lead, to initiate, to prefigure the future, must, arguably, insist on temporal distinctions within the polity. There may be subconscious and unintentional aspects of these temporalities, but we must excavate those aspects that are conscious if we are to see the actors involved as agents — for if we do not, we cannot counter those we see as dangerous or empower those we see as progressive ('progressive' in a truer, not reified, sense). We are all familiar with claims by some that others are "backward" and are quick to dismiss these as reifying history. But, as Agamben suggests in the epigraph, we have missed that the matter is not just historical but also temporal, and that temporality is entwined with agency in ways we might want to consider and empower, not discard, a consideration that would occasion clipping the umbilical cord between history and temporality. In fact, these temporal distinctions, fundamental to liberal democracy — and perhaps democracy more broadly, *precede the processes by which formal political representation is established*; the latter presupposes the former in legitimizing leadership.

Finally please indulge the following speculations: it must almost certainly be the case that the time of our time is different from the time of even a short time ago. What may be called for, then, is an examination of the ways in which the agendas born in liberalism, such as claims to be the vanguard, are differently punctuated by

various temporalities, such as that of our transnational/globalized world. If, indeed, India is now enthralled by the obsession with acceleration, how does this impact the agenda of progress and contestations over leadership? Is Virilio right in suggesting that, with acceleration there is “only the mental confusion of near and far, present and future, real and unreal...”? Should we adopt Bauman’s even more grim assessment of migration’s entwinement with temporality:

People who come closest to the momentariness of movement are now the people who rule. And it is the people who cannot move as quickly, and more conspicuously yet, the people who cannot leave the place at all, who are ruled. Domination consists in one’s own capacity to escape and the right to decide one’s speed — while simultaneously stripping the people on the dominated side of their ability to arrest or constrain one’s own moves or slow down their velocity (Bauman 2000b:179)

Perhaps it can be said, at the least, that studies attuned to temporality could contribute to tempering some of the more utopian and ecstatic claims made regarding the emancipating potential of a globalized or even transnational, world, itself usually viewed in spatial terms with migration being a central part of that imaginary.⁵⁰ Perhaps, we should be more cautious about presuming and celebrating the appearance of some transnational public space (or sphere) and, to the contrary, be heedful of the ways such claims can turn time into enclaves, thereby muting the past, enervating the present, and foreshortening the future.

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⁵⁰ For a discussion of the idea of the imaginary see Ghosh 2015 pp 11-32.

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