

# **Genealogies of 'War-babies' and the Bangladesh war of 1971**

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- Nayanika Mookherjee is an Associate Professor (Reader) of Socio-Cultural Anthropology in Durham University. She has published extensively on anthropology of violence, ethics and aesthetics. Recent publications include co-editing (with Christopher Pinney, 2011) the *JRAI (Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute)* Special Issue: 'The Aesthetics of Nation' and her book *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories and the Bangladesh War* (2015, Duke University Press, Foreword by Prof. Veena Das). She is the guest editor of the *JHS (Journal of Historical Sociology)* 2013 Special Issue: 'The Self in South Asia,' the 2015 *Journal of Material Culture* Special Issue on Aesthetics, Politics and Conflict and a set of Commentaries on Apology (*Critique of Anthropology*). Currently, she is working on her manuscript *Arts of Irreconciliation* (contracted with Stanford UP). As a British Academy Mid Career Fellow she has started new research on conflict and transnational adoption. Related publication include:
  - Mookherjee, Nayanika 2015. 'Forced Pregnancy', humanitarian access to reproductive rights and locating 'life' within the powers of 'death' in Veena Das and Clara Han ed. *An Anthropology of Living and Dying in the Contemporary World*. California University Press (Invited Publication): 130-142.

# The Spectral Wound

THE SPECTRAL WOUND

- Mookherjee, Nayanika 2015. *The Spectral Wound. Sexual Violence, Public Memories and the Bangladesh War of 1971*. Foreword by Veena Das. Durham N. C.: Duke University Press. 352 pages, 42 illustrations.
- <https://www.dukeupress.edu/the-spectral-wound>

*Sexual Violence, Public Memories, and the Bangladesh War of 1971*

NAYANIKA MOOKHERJEE

FOREWORD BY VEENA DAS

Rehabilitation Centre, Dhaka, 1972. Photo © Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

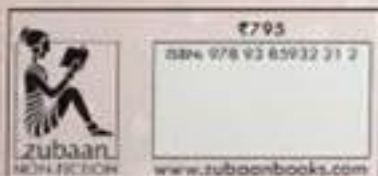
Following the 1971 Bangladesh War, the Bangladesh government publicly designated the thousands of women raped by the Pakistani military and their local collaborators as *birangonas* ("brave women"). Nayanika Mookherjee demonstrates that while this celebration of *birangonas* as heroes keeps them in the public memory, they exist in the public consciousness as what Mookherjee calls a spectral wound. Dominant representations of *birangonas* as dehumanized victims with disheveled hair, a vacant look, and rejected by their communities create this wound, the effects of which flatten the diversity of their experiences through which *birangonas* have lived with the violence of wartime rape.

"Nayanika Mookherjee has made visible a scene of gendered violence in the Bangladesh War of Liberation that travels beyond its specific context to historical, theoretical, and lived realities that are global in range and scope."

—GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SEIVAK, author of *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*

"Nayanika Mookherjee has produced a brilliant profile of a society grappling with the impact of war centered on rape and its memory. Dealing with rape in war is a political act and memories serve many causes, from the nationalist to the personal. Mookherjee looks at the issue through the lenses of class, culture, and politics, making it one of the most comprehensive and perceptive studies available, as she investigates from within what it means to become an outsider and the socio-political mechanisms that make it happen."

—AFSAN CHOWDHURY, editor of *Bangladesh 1971*



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*Sexual Violence, Public Memories,  
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ZUBAAN ACADEMIC

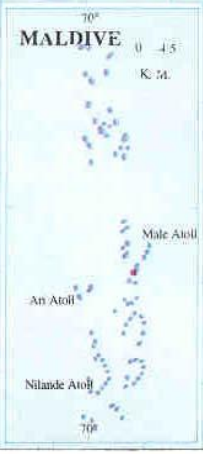
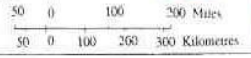






### SOUTH ASIA POLITICAL

- LEGEND**
- International Boundary
  - Disputed Boundary
  - Capital City
  - Main City/Port
  - Railways
  - Rivers
  - Lakes
  - Swamps



**SRI LANKA**  
Colombo  
Moratuwa  
Galle

**I N D I A N  
O C E A N**

Andaman and Nicobar Islands (India)

Guif of Thailand  
Phuket  
Songkhala

‘I remember the face of a woman during her ‘delivery pain’ and even though she was in great agony she did not make a single sound. It felt like the main thing for her was to be free from ‘the thing’ (i.e. baby). Most of the girls did not even want to look back at the babies after they were born. Unlike Bengali babies they were very big and healthy’ (Akhtar 2001:240).

Akhtar, S, S. Begum, H. Hossein, S. Kamal and M. Guhathakurta eds. (2001). *Narir Ekattor O Juddhoporoborti Koththo Kahini* (Oral History Accounts of Women’s Experiences During 1971 and After the War). Dhaka: Ain-O-Shalish-Kendro (ASK).