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Ayub Khan and Modern Islam: Transforming Citizens and the Nation in Pakistan

YASMIN SAIKIA, *Arizona State University, Tempe, USA*

Pakistan is viewed today as a haven for fundamentalist Islamists. This essay probes the genealogy of Pakistan's Islamisation by focusing on the rule of President Ayub Khan (1958–69) and extends to the war of 1971 and the dismembering of Pakistan during Yahya Khan's presidency. I trace Ayub Khan's project of 'modernising Islam and the nation' by probing three sites: the transformation of the Pakistani military into a jihadist army; the re-writing of history to craft an Islamic identity; and the reformation of East Pakistani Bengalis to make them 'good Muslim subjects'. Ayub Khan's experiment was a failure, leading to the violent dismembering of the country in 1971, yet an ethical imaginaire of renewing the commitment to creating a humanistic moral community continues to be an ongoing quest in Pakistan, as reflected in my investigations of the oral testimonies of war veterans. Fulfilling these ethical concerns requires critical evaluation of the roots of Islamisation in Pakistan, beginning from the period of Ayub Khan's presidency.

Keywords: Ayub Khan; Islamisation; Pakistan Army; 1971 Bangladesh War; ethical imaginaire; oral history; national transformation

Foundation of Pakistan and Leadership

The alliances forged between disparate groups of Muslims brought together by anxieties about survival and marginalisation at the end of British colonial rule provided the impetus to demand the creation of Pakistan as a homeland for the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent for their socio-economic and cultural development. By the 1940s, different Muslim groups had come together under the banner of the All India Muslim League, led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, to found Pakistan. Shared membership of the Muslim League temporarily erased multiple local, ethnic, linguistic and other markers of difference. But Pakistan's identity became complicated soon after its foundation in 1947. The sudden death of Muhammad Ali Jinnah in September 1948 threw the country and leadership into crisis. Immediately, the concept of a homeland as an inclusive space for the Muslims of the subcontinent was threatened, and a new vision of Pakistan as a state with fixed territorial boundaries and an exclusive citizenry was circulated. By 1971, Pakistan had fragmented amid war and violence. From the beginning, however, two recurring questions have been of great concern to the

Senior research fellowships from the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation and Fulbright enabled me to undertake research in Pakistan and Bangladesh. I have benefitted from discussions in Dhaka (conference at BRAC University on 'Building a Field of Scholarship and Dialogue on 1971' organised by the 1971 Collective, 2011), in Lahore (Forman Christian College University and Lahore University of Management Studies, 2011 and 2012), in Delhi (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 2011), in the United States (Columbia University, 2011, and Harvard University, 2012) and in London (BrickLane Circle, 2012). I would like to thank the archivists and library staff at the National Documentation Centre and the Pakistan National Archives in Islamabad for help with primary sources. To the external reviewers and editor of *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, who worked with me through multiple iterations and revisions, I owe special thanks.

Transforming Citizens and

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nationalist Islamists. This essay probes the rule of President Ayub Khan (1958–1969) during Yahya Khan's 'Operation of East Pakistani Bengalis to make Islam the state religion' by probing the re-writing of the constitution to be an ongoing quest in Pakistan, as well as the role of war veterans. Fulfilling these ethical obligations in Pakistan, beginning from

Army; 1971 Bangladesh War; ethical

issues brought together by anxieties about colonial rule provided the impetus to Muslims of the Indian subcontinent for the 1940s, different Muslim groups had the Muslim League, led by Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The Muslim League temporarily erased the differences. But Pakistan's identity was in crisis. The sudden death of Muhammad Ali Jinnah's leadership into crisis. Immediately, the Muslims of the subcontinent were faced with fixed territorial boundaries and an identity that had fragmented amid war and violence. These issues have been of great concern to the

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leaders and people of Pakistan. How was a viable state to be created? And what was necessary to make the state Islamic? The relationship between the normative and the practical, between the ideal and history, and between religion and state, was never straightforward in Pakistan.

The struggle of 'Muslim Becoming' has been at the heart of Pakistan since its foundation.¹ The challenges to making Pakistan both a Muslim state and a modern nation were essentially political issues that became ideological. Abul 'Ala Maudoodi, leader of the religious party, Jama'at-e Islami (founded in 1941), backed the demand to make Pakistan a theocratic state soon after Jinnah's demise. Pakistani modernists, such as Professor Fazlur Rahman, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan and his wife, Begum Liaquat Ali Khan, were concerned that the use of religion as a state project would empower the *ulema* (Muslim scholars of Islamic theology) to intervene in politics. One crucial issue that both sides agreed on was a shared hope that the newly-founded Pakistan should be 'a good state'. While the desire to make Pakistan a good state was a lofty ideal, the problem lay in the method of doing so, and leadership was a most critical issue here. Who should lead Pakistan toward its goal of establishing a good state?

The military seized power in 1958 before these questions could be resolved. The military takeover radically undermined the original vision of Pakistan as a 'moral community'.² The removal of this ideal and its replacement with brute force as the basis for building Muslim Pakistan is a paradox and a process worth investigating. What circumstances enabled the military to assume the role of leadership and give shape to a hard-line, divisive Muslim identity for Pakistan? How did religion serve the military's agenda for control of state power? How did this impact upon the people of Pakistan, who were expected to become modern and Muslim through military disciplining? Were there any voices of dissent questioning the military's construction of identity? Decades after the first military coup in 1958, the architecture of identity for Pakistan as Muslim, human and modern remains an aspiration that cannot be realised unless the people of Pakistan reclaim their agency to effect change.

Scholarly Debates

The genealogy of Pakistan's Islamisation has been of great interest to scholars, spawning multiple perspectives and interpretations. Likewise, the challenges of nation-building have been argued and counter-argued by scholars seeking to understand how the concept of Pakistan was transformed from a homeland into a religious state. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who wrote *Pakistan as an Islamic State*, one of the first books to be published on the problem of Pakistan, argued that 'Pakistan would never have happened had it not been for the Muslim's ideal for a religious community, the inherent striving within the heart of Islam towards social self-expression'.³ Examining this argument further, David Gilmartin probed the transformation of Pakistan's meaning and history from that of a moral symbol to a territorial state.⁴ Like Ayesha Jalal, Gilmartin credits Jinnah with successfully generating a moral foundation of community and ordering relationships between the multiplicities of Muslims who came together after the 1946 elections.⁵ This moral foundation functioned only

¹ Naveeda Khan, *Muslim Becoming: Aspiration and Skepticism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

² David Gilmartin, 'Pakistan, Partition and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative', in *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. LVII, no. 4 (1998), pp. 1068–92.

³ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Pakistan as an Islamic State* (Lahore: Sheikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1951), pp. 32–3.

⁴ Gilmartin, 'Pakistan, Partition and South Asian History', pp. 1068–92.

⁵ Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

instrumentally because, after Partition, the newly-founded state of Pakistan underwent a sudden and clear shift, seeing 'its task as... imprinting its authority onto a new and intractable territory'.⁶ The shift from the moral to the territorial meant that different interest groups could enact their own assumptions of what Pakistan ought to be, with the result that a cohesive narrative for the nation never emerged, as Gilmartin concludes. His argument about the symbolic and structural transformation of Pakistan is very important, but it does not address the broader context of competition and negotiation between newly-formed India and Pakistan, which contributed to more divisive tendencies within Pakistan after 1947. According to Saeed Shafqat, the military emerged in this period as the only unified institution and became the dominant force.⁷ Scholarship has drawn attention to the civil-military alliances in Pakistan after the 1960s, which became crucial for maintaining Pakistan's integrity as an independent nation-state in opposition to India.⁸

Farzana Sheikh moves away from the single-minded focus on the civil-military nexus to foreground the country's crisis of national identity, suffered since its inception, due to a lack of consensus over the role of Islam.⁹ Sheikh concludes that the conflict between the practical socio-economic desires of the people and the establishment of a religiously-grounded state accounts for the difficulties in forging a national identity, opening a space for a renewed investigation into what Pakistan can become in the future. Anatol Lieven argues quite effectively that Pakistan is not a failed state, despite the exponential rise of Islamic fundamentalism. In his opinion, the policies of the United States, as well as those of the army that runs Pakistan, will be critical for future sustainability.¹⁰

The contributions of these and other scholars who have added to our knowledge of an evolving concept for Pakistan are immensely important, but I would like to temporarily shift the focus from these now-familiar lines of inquiry. Rather, I want to draw attention to the early years of the Pakistan military and its use of Islam for the aggrandisement of and monopoly over state power, while transforming the people of Pakistan—divided into East Pakistanis and West Pakistanis—into mutual enemies. The aim of this essay is to question the army's grandiose claims of being the protector of the nation and religion, as well as its methods that destroyed the Pakistan that Jinnah and the Muslim communities together had founded. This is essential if we are to re-think a new future for Pakistan, which is expressed as a fervent desire by most Pakistanis.

The military's aggressive imposition of its rule foreclosed the potential for Pakistan to become an inclusive space for the Muslims of the subcontinent. In order to probe the military's career of destructive success, I embarked on an oral history and archival research project in Pakistan, focusing on those who peopled the military and their quest for power. The Pakistan National Archives and the National Documentation Centre in Islamabad proved to be very important sources for archival research, supplemented by insights from oral history interviews conducted in Pakistan over a period of five years (2004–09), facilitated through multiple networks that I developed while there.

⁶ Gilmartin, 'Pakistan, Partition and South Asian History', p. 1091.

⁷ Saeed Shafqat, *Civil-Military Alliance in Pakistan: From Zulfikar Bhutto to Benazir Bhutto* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

⁸ Brian Cloughly, *A History of the Pakistan Army: Wars and Insurrections* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000); Stephen Cohen, *The Pakistan Army* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984); Husain Haqqani, *Pakistan between Mosque and Military* (New York: Carnegie Foundation for International Peace, 2005); and Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *A History of Pakistan and Its Origins* (London: Anthem South Asia Books, 2002).

⁹ Farzana Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Anatol Lieven, *Pakistan: A Hard Country* (Philadelphia, PA: Public Affairs, 2011).

The Military and Its Men: Oral Histories in the Mess

In my discussions with veterans of the 1971 Bangladesh war, before the period of President Ziaul Haq's rule (1977–87), the Pakistan Army was remembered as a 'colonial army'. Two topics were taboo in the officers' mess: politics and religion. Drinking was common among the officers and their women 'friends' were welcome in the mess. Class, ethnicity, clan affiliation, education and personal connections mattered for career development. The vast majority of the *sipahis* (rank-and-file soldiers) and non-commissioned officers were recruited from the Punjab, particularly from the agriculturally-poor and educationally-backward villages of Jhelum and the Salt Range. For these men, the military was their panacea, a means to overcome poverty and aspire to a future. There was also a small representation from the Northwest frontier. The commissioned officers belonged to different regions, including a small group from East Pakistan.

I recorded 123 testimonies of veterans of the 1971 war. Most of the interviews with retired officers were done in Lahore, Rawalpindi and Karachi. To interview *sipahis*, I lived in a village in Jhelum and travelled to nearby villages. As well, I met with police officers, intelligence personnel and civil servants who had served in East Pakistan during the war and engaged them in casual conversation that provided corroborating evidence and filled in gaps, where necessary. I met with high-ranking officers serving in the Pakistan Army and visited the National Cadet College. As a female researcher, I was treated with utmost respect and courtesy, and many engaged me in discussion about my research. In my estimation, the Pakistan Army is a curiously transparent organisation with an opaque image. The issue they discussed freely was the relationship with India, which they represented as mutual belligerence.

Most scholars commenting on the Pakistan Army present Zia and the Islamising mission of the 1980s as the worst phase of Pakistan's history.¹¹ Using the tool of Islamic Shari'a law, Zia made drastic changes to the state's secular Common Law. In particular, the Hudood Ordinance of 1979 discriminated against women in gender-related crimes, especially rape, and undermined the position of women in the public sphere. Zia is also criticised for transitioning Pakistan into a conservative Muslim state dependent on the diverse Sunni communities, which were constructed as unified, and which ultimately acquiesced to the dictates of the military government.

Although Zia's Islamisation discourses and policies are repeatedly isolated as a problem, they alone do not enable a historical understanding of the guiding principles of the military for initiating a religious orientation in the country. How and why did the military assume the lead role in Pakistan's Islamisation? When did this process begin and what was its impact? I sought answers to these questions during my research.

Oral histories with veterans revealed a curious tension beyond the discourse of duty and nationalism. In my discussions, there was a consistent language of *insaniyat* (humanity), which complicated the picture between the state's version and the people's understanding of what it means to be Muslim. This reveals a dichotomy between a singular homogenised Islamic identity versus a culturally-pluralistic, ethnically-diverse and humanistic approach that survives in popular customary Islam.¹² The recovery of *insaniyat* continues to be one of the main struggles in Pakistan.

¹¹ See Javed Burki, *Pakistan: Fifty Years of Nationhood* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 3rd ed., 1999); and Ayesha Siddiqi, *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

¹² Sara Ansari, *Sufi Saints and State Power: The Pirs of Sind (1843–1947)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Michael Boivin, *Artefacts of Devotion: A Sufi Repertoire of the Qalandariyya in Sehwan Sharif, Sindh, Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Jürgen Wasim Frembgen, *Journey to God: Sufis and Dervishes in Islam* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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To trace a conceptual frame for understanding *insaniyat*, which was undone in the war of 1971, it is necessary to investigate the rule of the first military dictator, Ayub Khan (1958–69), who laid the groundwork for a narrow state version of a defined Muslim identity. I focus on three aspects of Ayub Khan's formulation of identity for the Pakistani people: first, the explicit training of soldiers in the spirit of *jihad* (holy war) to imagine themselves as protectors of Islam; second, the re-writing of school history textbooks to inform students and children about a Muslim identity that was distinct and disconnected from their parents' Indic heritage; and, third, the establishment of a discourse to reform East Pakistani Bengalis to make them 'good Muslim' subjects. I do not see these three issues as having any organic connection; rather, I read them as indicators that highlight the power of the military-run state to impose a particular narrative of Islam on the people.

The interesting thing that emerges in respect of the first two issues—the making of a *jihadic* army and re-writing Pakistan's history—is a curious experiment by General Ayub Khan. He aimed to produce a new Pakistani Muslim identity as modern, purposeful and forward-looking, with a particular knowledge of a (constructed) shared historical and religious past. This was a bold proposition based on an imagined idea.¹³ However, the realities on the ground were quite different: the Pakistani populace was a diverse mix of ethnic, linguistic and sectarian groups, who were mostly poor, illiterate and divided. The 1947 Partition *émigrés* who had fled from India to places like Karachi and Lahore in West Pakistan, and Dhaka and Chittagong in East Pakistan, were displaced and rootless, while the local West Pakistani population lived under the oppressive control of landlords and *pirs* (Sufi mystics and shrine managers).¹⁴ The military government's agenda of reformulating a composite identity, instead of motivating a spirit of sameness, in fact highlighted the gaps between the groups. As well, the differing levels of integration in the project of central governance allowed for a selective cultivation of beneficiaries. Compared to West Pakistan, East Pakistan was given a smaller share of economic programmes and improvement. A new class of elites was created in West Pakistan, dominated by Urdu speakers. Such controlled and limited inclusion precluded the cultivation of a shared Pakistani identity. Thus, the change that was spoken of was never actualised and fissures started to show within the body politic.

The third goal of making the East Pakistani Bengalis into 'good' and 'pure' Muslims proved to be disastrous. In East Pakistan, people's growing distrust of Ayub Khan's 'managed development' cast them as the enemy in military circles. Plans to destroy the Hindu-like Bengalis became a reality in the war of 1971, and East Pakistan imploded, leaving Bangladesh in its place. In West Pakistani official circles, rather than face the state's failure to preserve the nation, the authorities suppressed discussion. Pretending that the loss of East Pakistan was insignificant, the military diverted public opinion from the lived experience to the state's preferred position of amnesia.¹⁵

The failure of the military's policy, however, cannot be overlooked by veterans of the 1971 war, who remain haunted by their memories of violence. More than four decades later, the vast

¹³ See Ayub Khan, *Friends Not Masters: A Political Autobiography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); Hamida Khuhro, 'Review of The Ayub Khan Era: Politics in Pakistan, 1958–1969', in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. VI, no. 2 (1972), pp. 248–55; and Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1983).

¹⁴ See Hasan Gardezi, 'Neo-Colonial Alliances and the Crisis of Pakistan', in *Pakistan Forum*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (1970), pp. 3–6; Raunaq Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure of National Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972); and Rehman Sobhan, *Basic Democracies, Work Programmes and Rural Development in East Pakistan* (Dhaka: Economic Research Bureau, University of Dhaka, 1968).

¹⁵ C.M. Naim, 'Afterword', in C.M. Naim (ed.), *Iqbal, Jinnah, and Pakistan: The Vision and Reality* (Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1979), pp. 177–90.

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and *Pakistan: The Vision and Reality* (Syracuse, p. 177–90.

majority of the 123 veterans I interviewed questioned the state's Islamic identity. They have the hard task of acknowledging their personal identity as Muslim, which lies buried and disengaged from the state's version of a Muslim identity for Pakistan.

For the *sipahis*, Islam was the religion they learned at home, mostly from their mothers. These illiterate rural women generally obeyed local Sufi *pirs* and visited shrines where the faithful intermingled without discrimination, solidifying their sense of a Muslim collective. The violence against co-religionists in East Pakistan produced deep anxieties for these men. Their gradual rethinking, based on an ethical dynamism formulated as *insaniyat*, which they now prioritise, opens up a new question: should there be a connection in Pakistan between being good citizens and being good people? The disclosures of these veterans make it clear that their adherence to the military's version of a good Pakistani Muslim has emptied them of their humanity. The search for its regeneration means facing up to their past actions in the violence of 1971.

The Military, Islam and the State from Above

After the creation of Bangladesh, Pakistan was reduced to half its size, undone internally by those same Muslim communities who had come together a few decades earlier to create the new nation-state. Scholars have not worked on analysing the mechanisms of the reversal involved in founding a Muslim nation and its dismemberment, propelled by General Ayub Khan. General Ayub Khan's period as president of Pakistan is particularly important because it inaugurated the rise of the military, backed by its use of religion. This was an elite project that closed the horizon to genuine unity between the geographically-divided people of Pakistan. Even today, the Pakistan Army controls the interpretation of its own performances in the 1971 war without allowing scrutiny. But one cannot deny that mixing religion with politics is a problem that continues to threaten Pakistan—an ideology that started during Ayub Khan's rule.

As early as 1947, there were signs of the Pakistan Army's ambitions. General Douglas Gracey perhaps unknowingly heralded this course during the first Kashmir conflict. His statement of October 1947, that Pakistan would 'fight to the last round' if attacked, despite knowing that it did not have the resources to do so and could not deploy troops on the eve of Kashmir's accession to India, created dissension in the army.¹⁶ Many officers took their own course of action and, in their desperation to seize Kashmir, allowed the Pathan tribal militias to run riot. Since then, the Pakistan military has used every political crisis as an opportunity to play a role in national and international politics.

At the moment of Pakistan's birth, the military saw a political opportunity in the public debates initiated by the Jama'at-e Islami.¹⁷ Maudoodi, who led the Jama'at, created a new dilemma by asking how could Pakistan be made Islamic while simultaneously rejecting the Muslim League?¹⁸ The military saw an opportunity to capitalise on the divisions between the Muslim League and the Jama'at. Liaquat Ali Khan, who headed the government of Pakistan and the Muslim League after Jinnah's death, prioritised party politics, which, in turn, increased tension between the centre and the provinces. The regional parties took advantage of the situation by appealing to a provincialism that further polarised the Pakistani people. The

¹⁶ India Office Collection Military Attaché Reports, IOR/WS/1/1187, India Office Collection, British Library. For an early history of the Pakistan Army during the confusing period of Partition, see Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁷ Weekly Police Abstracts of Intelligence, West Punjab, held at the National Documentation Centre, Islamabad, provide extensive information on the discussions to make Pakistan an Islamic nation from June 1946 onwards.

¹⁸ Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994).

Jama'at's rhetoric, which demanded the establishment of Shari'a law in Pakistan, exacerbated political rivalries and the military was able to take advantage by making strategic moves for improving its image as protector of the country.

Ayub Khan's appointment as commander-in-chief of the army in 1951 and Liaquat Ali Khan's assassination that same year were critical turning points. Pakistan entered into a state of political uncertainty and, during the next eight years, six prime ministers served without much success. As chief of the army, Ayub Khan capitalised on this political instability to enhance his own power. In 1954, his appointment as defence minister intensified his grip on state power. It was a dangerous sign as two offices, those of commander-in-chief of the army and defence minister, became combined in one person. In 1958, the abrogation of the 1956 Pakistan Constitution sealed the deal in favour of the military. Ayub Khan overthrew President Iskander Mirza and became Pakistan's first military dictator. Exhausted with the disputes between politicians, the Pakistani public welcomed the military coup.¹⁹ But they had no idea what was to follow.

The close relationship between the army and the Pakistan government during Ayub Khan's tenure as president (1958-69) was expressed in almost all fronts of governance, including economic development, foreign policy and crafting a Pakistani national identity. Ayub Khan aimed to teach the Pakistani people the ideal of nationalism and make the army the 'true' protectors of Islam and the nation. This was presented as 'benevolent despotism'. The collective identity of Pakistan as a Muslim nation and the state's Islamising efforts were intertwined.²⁰

From the beginning, the army had a calculated two-pronged approach to solidify its power: first, it wanted to edify the role of the military in the public view through a recognition of its services via award ceremonies; and, second, it wanted to transform the men in the barracks into heroes who upheld an Islamic identity, so imbuing the army with an unquestionable legitimacy.²¹ Thirty-six military honours and medals were created and award ceremonies became high-profile events. In 1960, General Headquarters expressed the view (and the Ministry of Defence agreed) that 'in Islam the philosophy of "*Jihad*" has been given the utmost importance and prominence, and that for this reason the services rendered by a "*mujahid*" (one who engages in *jihad*) in the face of the enemy, or an act of gallantry performed by a *mujahid* in the defence of a Muslim State are considered "*afzal*" (superior) to all other types of service'.²²

The military establishment did not reflect on the theological or moral issues of *jihad*. Rather, to impress on the soldiers that they had a special mission, regular lectures on nationalism based on religion became the norm. The government argued that 'for the soldier a firm foundation of facts upon which to build his actions with a deeper faith and a sterner resolve [had to be] revitalised' through training.²³ Various mediums of communication, such as the military communiqué, *Daily Hilal*, radio talks such as the Armed Forces Program, exhibits, lectures and discussions were put to work to instil the spirit of *jihad*.

The reach of the Islamising project that was begun in the barracks was extended into a public endeavour. A Commission on National Education, which was established in December 1958 to identify the 'basic weaknesses in the education system', recommended a 'revolution in attitudes'. The major objective of education reform was 'to prepare [young] people for

¹⁹ M.R. Kazimi, *A Concise History of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 197.

²⁰ Khan, *Friends Not Masters*.

²¹ 547/CF/60/1960, microfilm 2321, National Documentation Centre (henceforth NDC), Islamabad, Pakistan.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ 554/CF/60, microfilm 2321, NDC.

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²⁴ Khan, *Fri*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1

²⁷ Sheila Mc
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²⁸ Altaf Gau
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²⁹ Khan, *Fri*

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University Press, 2009), p. 197.

itre (henceforth NDC), Islamabad, Pakistan.

sharing the burden of developing their country and defending it'.²⁴ The Education Commission formulated a plan to produce a large body of trained and disciplined men and women. There was no room for 'passivity and non-cooperation, indiscipline and non-acceptance of public authority. . . and the disruptive forces of regionalism and provincialism'.²⁵

Fazlur Rahman, director of the Central Institute of Research (founded in 1960, re-named the Islamic Research Institute in 1962), who advised Ayub Khan, emphasised that the new education policy should have an ideological orientation with a progressive outlook for facilitating modernisation. This meant developing a contemporary meaning of Islam 'to help make national life meaningful by giving a new moral orientation'.²⁶

In 1961, the Department of Awqaf set up an academy for *ulema* in Lahore. Beyond traditional Islamic learning, the *ulema* were encouraged to develop modernist views through interactions with civil administrators, economists and social scientists. In 1963, an institution of higher learning was set up by transforming the Bhawalpur *madrasa* (school), Jami'a Abbasiya (established in 1925), into an Islamic university, al-Jami'a al-Islamiya. Modelled after Al-Azhar University in Cairo, economics, history, geography, statistics and philosophy were taught alongside traditional Islamic subjects. The government's intention was to modernise the religious schools and bring them under the control of a central authority.

Interpreting a contemporary meaning for Islam required a re-thinking of history. To reinscribe differing collective memories, emphasis on an exclusivist Islamic past became necessary, which required the overwriting or deleting of Muslim connections with Hindu and Buddhist cultures in the subcontinent. Fazlur Rahman proposed 'the implementation of an Islamic history for Pakistan', which, he believed, 'would help Muslims to a sounder way of using the values of the past towards creating a better future'.²⁷

In 1959, a modernist state development programme, Basic Democracy, was launched. Eight thousand units of Basic Democracy were created for electing ten members who, in turn, elected the president. The justification for taking away power from the provincial legislatures and concentrating it in one centre was made on the grounds that 'unless the state is given certain protection and made strong it will not be able to protect the rights of the individual'.²⁸ In theory, the people and the state apparatus were meant to work together. In practice, the limited electorate made a few people very powerful.

Based on new measures of central control, economic and social developments were planned by five-year periods, and the newly-constituted planning bodies worked on a 'scientific' footing. Industrial development did make some significant progress, but it was not socially distributive, with East Pakistan in particular adversely affected. The 'collection of uneducated and inexperienced groups of persons. . . needed help, guidance and protection', which Ayub Khan sought to provide through the Bureau of National Integration.²⁹ Likewise, the interpretation of an Islamic ideology, he believed, 'should be left to the members of the legislature' working under his guidance. For him, theology was an intellectual project beyond

²⁴ Khan, *Friends Not Masters*, pp. 99–100.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

²⁷ Sheila McDonough, 'Fazlur Rahman's Response to Iqbal', in Earle Waugh and Frederick M. Denny (eds), *The Shaping of an American Islamic Discourse: A Memorial to Fazlur Rahman* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1998), pp. 69–70.

²⁸ Altaf Gauhar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Dictator* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 83.

²⁹ Khan, *Friends Not Masters*, p. 102.

the ability of religious scholars.³⁰ A modernised Islam was projected onto Pakistani civil society and was expected to provide the basis for making Pakistan a new nation. Ayub Khan believed that the ideology of Islam 'should be defined in [a] tangible form' so that 'we live by it in the context of the fast moving world of today'.³¹ He was hopeful that under his leadership, supported by the resolve and discipline of a well-trained army and an orderly and obedient citizenry, Pakistan would become a powerful and modern Muslim nation.³²

In 1965, Ayub Khan played the religious card in the presidential election by obtaining a *fatwa* (religious decree) that a woman could not become the head of a Muslim state, a measure designed to defeat Fatima Jinnah, Jinnah's unmarried sister, who was the Muslim League candidate. The system of legislative 'parity' or equality of the country's two wings, East Pakistan and West Pakistan (introduced in the 1956 Constitution and retained in Ayub Khan's 1962 Constitution), despite their unequal populations, enabled his victory. Ayub Khan remained president of Pakistan until 1969, when he was deposed in a bloodless coup by General Yahya Khan.

The Islamising policy of Ayub Khan had provided the ammunition to impugn the culture of East Pakistan as Hindu; thus, Yahya Khan's immediate problem was the political unrest in the country's eastern wing, culminating in war and the loss of East Pakistan. The military's loss in the 1971 war enabled the establishment of a civilian government led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Bhutto, too, became embroiled in the Islamisation agenda and created his brand of *Musawat-e Muhammadiya* (Islamic Socialism). But, in 1977, amid serious political unrest, the military was emboldened to take power again under the command of Ziaul Haq, whose dictatorial rule, combined with Islamisation, definitively altered the country's political landscape.

The difference between Zia and Ayub was in orientation, not ideology. Ayub Khan believed in a modern vision of Islam guided and controlled by the military. Zia transformed the Pakistan Army into an Islamic army supported by religious scholars and *ulema*, who asserted a traditional Islamic image. Both men sowed the seeds for future turmoil by deploying religion as a tool for nation-building.

Given that Pakistan was founded as a Muslim homeland, the yearning to create a Muslim identity was inevitable. From its very inception, however, sensitive to the anxiety that Pakistan lacked the antiquity of India, the military elite had tried desperately to establish a separate identity in order to generate a national taxonomy. Over time, this rigid and inflexible approach towards identity became violent. The army commanded a single version, which met with protest, most prominently in East Pakistan. In the war in 1971, India exploited the opportunity to transform an internal struggle into an international crisis and supported the Bengalis in their secessionist path to become independent.

Much public debate in Bangladesh has focused on labelling the violence in 1971 as genocide. Sharmila Bose has argued against calling it Bengali genocide, drawing attention to the exaggerated numbers of deaths and evidence that Bengalis, too, were involved in local violence in the war.³³ By contrast, Nayanika Mookherjee lends support to the label genocide by reading the violence in 1971 as ethnically and religiously driven.³⁴ I have argued

³⁰ Fazlur Rahman, 'Some Islamic Issues in the Ayub Khan Era', in Donald P. Little (ed.), *Essays on Islamic Civilization* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), pp. 284-303.

³¹ Gauhar, *Ayub Khan*, p. 82.

³² Nadia Ghani, *Field Marshall Mohammad Ayub Khan: A Selection of Talks and Interviews, 1964-1967* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 142-70.

³³ Sarmila Bose, *Dead Reckoning: Memories of the 1971 Bangladesh War* (London: Hurst & Co., 2011).

³⁴ Nayanika Mookherjee, 'Mass Rape and the Inscription of Gendered and Racial Domination during the Bangladesh War of 1971', in Raphaelle Branche and Fabrice Virgili (eds), *Rape in Wartime: A History to be Written* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 67-78.

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elsewhere that labelling violence is not enough; attention to the lessons learned from violence is critical for analysing what happened and enabling a future beyond the horror of war.³⁵ The causal link between the un-making of Pakistan in the military's project, the re-writing of history, and a particular notion of religion for justifying violence are important considerations in understanding the irreversible path of destruction that I address in the next section.

History as Resource

As early as 1948, the Pakistan government constituted a committee to write a new history emphasising Pakistan's connections with West Asian and Central Asian Muslims.³⁶ Drawing on the old colonial myth of Punjabis and Pathans as martial races, Ayub Khan forged a new narrative of West Pakistanis as the progeny of successful and fierce military men. This was an empowering contrast to the representation of Hindu civilisation as weak and sedentary and constituted by peasant agriculturalists, as evident in East Pakistan. The Bengalis were seen to represent 'all the inhibitions of down-trodden races' that 'have not yet found it possible to adjust psychologically to the requirements of the new-born freedom'.³⁷ Therefore, they were to be ruled as 'lesser Muslim' subjects.³⁸

A recently declassified 'top secret' document entitled 'Pakistan Nationalism' was created by the order of Ayub Khan in 1961; it directed all government offices and the army to follow a policy of Islamising the armed forces and the public. A narrative was created for this purpose that officials were ordered to 'comply with' and deliver in the form of 'lectures at frequent intervals'. Establishing the history of Pakistan, the document declared:

It would not be quite logical to say that the notion of Pakistan came into being only with the establishment of Pakistan on 14 August 1947. Its roots go very deep into our history. In fact, it was a concept which evolved and emerged in course of time, as a result of the inevitable and unalterable forces of history. . . . Amongst the first settlers of course were the Arabs who came with trade convoys, or with the armies of Mohammad Bin Qasim, and found a footing in Sind. The impress of the stay of these Arabs can still be recognised on the religion, culture and language of the Sindhi people.³⁹

This constructed Arabic past notwithstanding, Ayub Khan recognised that Pakistan had to also claim its legacy from the successful Muslim dynasties of the Gangetic Valley. A connection between the Muslim history of Sindh (in the Indus Valley) and later Muslim dynasties (along the Gangetic Valley, in present-day India) was forged by declaring the Mughals as intermediaries who had brought 'heterogeneous regions within the folds of one single authority'.⁴⁰ The document concluded: 'it is not wrong to assert that it was the Mughals who for the first time provided the subcontinent with a tangible concept of Nation and Nationalism'.⁴¹ This was claimed as Pakistan's legacy.

³⁵ See Yasmin Saikia, *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

³⁶ 18/CF/49/183, NDC.

³⁷ Khan, *Friends Not Masters*, p. 187.

³⁸ Rafiuddin Ahmed, *Understanding the Bengal Muslims: Interpretive Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

³⁹ 'Pakistan Nationalism', 559/CF/60, microfilm 2321, NDC.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

The document urged its readers to reflect that 'not only had the Muslims been the rulers and the Hindus the ruled', but that 'they were diametrically opposed to each other'.⁴² This set the tone for a perpetually inimical relationship: 'The populations had intermingled freely for centuries, yet basically and inherently they had remained foreigner to one another... and did not... create a common bond'.⁴³ The Hindu communities were represented as ungrateful and conniving, so compelling Jinnah in 1940 to demand an independent homeland for Muslims.

'Pakistan Nationalism' organised the Pakistani people's identity around five themes: Islam,⁴⁴ love of the homeland; Muslim culture (presented as distinct from other cultures); unity (arising from a common history of the Muslim people); and, finally, discipline. Identifying discipline as a basic principle for all to follow, the army was upheld as the model. 'Like a military unit', the document stated, 'the backbone of any human society is discipline... The absence of discipline can only lead to chaos and anarchy (and the ills of our Society before October 1958 were to a large extent caused by this lack of sense of discipline)'.⁴⁵ Making Pakistan into a disciplined Islamic nation became the military's new project, during which the 'murder of History' was committed.⁴⁶

The Bengalis were identified as lacking in discipline and of harbouring a lukewarm loyalty to Islam. Their language was viewed as Hindu-like, with an excess of words loaned from Sanskrit. Their food and clothes were not 'truly Islamic' and they had Leftist proclivities. The document was explicit about the dangers this posed:

The slightest weakening of the Central authority, the slightest wobbling of our creed will give the [Bengalis] the opportunity... to break away from Pakistan... and form an independent communist state with a population of seventy to eighty millions and with vast economic, industrial and mineral resources.⁴⁷

The military feared that if East Pakistan was lost, 'West Pakistan will become a comparatively small country with a small population like any other Middle Eastern country'.⁴⁸

The project of Islamising the Bengalis was initiated through changing public understandings of the past and reminding Bengalis of the 'great privations they had undergone at the hands of the Hindus over a long period of their history'. The Bengali language, although accepted as an official language in 1956, was undermined in favour of Urdu, a 'Muslim language'. In rural areas and primary-school education, *ulema* were appointed to teach Islamic subjects and ideals to children and the appointment of Bengali Hindu teachers was discouraged.⁴⁹ In 1965, Ayub Khan ordered that East Pakistan's history was to be re-written to contrast the successes of the Muslims with the weaknesses of the Hindus.⁵⁰ However, the Bengalis did not readily accept the prioritisation of Islamising the nation at the cost of

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Ayub Khan declared: 'The raison d'être of Pakistan was its [Islamic] ideal... Without an Islamic way of life Pakistan is no more than a mere wasteland'. President's Address, 28 Nov. 1958, Radio Pakistan, Pakistan National Archives, Islamabad, Pakistan.

⁴⁵ 'Pakistan Nationalism', 554/CF/60, microfilm 2321, NDC.

⁴⁶ K. K. Aziz, *The Murder of History: A Critique of History Textbooks Used in Pakistan* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1993).

⁴⁷ 'Pakistan Nationalism', 559/CF/60, microfilm 2321, NDC.

⁴⁸ 551/CF/60, microfilm 2321, NDC.

⁴⁹ 216/CF/65/488, microfilm 2495, NDC.

⁵⁰ 30/CF/65-19, microfilm 2478, NDC.

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⁵¹ 22/CF/196

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neglecting more urgent economic, political and social issues. Their lack of support for the programme of Islamisation only increased the army's suspicion of them.

The government directed the Ministry of Education to create special desks to monitor the 'agitational activities of the students' and to 'keep a general watch of the material that found their way to colleges and universities [that] is likely to influence the attitudes of the students'.⁵¹ The governors' conference held in Rawalpindi in June 1965 concluded that the vice-chancellors of all universities and the chairman of Primary and Secondary Education in East Pakistan should carefully select all reading material and monitor the instruction in classrooms 'for promoting among students real understanding of the Islamic Ideology of Pakistan'.

Finally, to establish Pakistan's history as distinct from India's, in 1966, Ayub Khan ordered that the term 'Partition' should be dropped from the official lexicon, and the phrase 'achievement of independence' was mandated instead.⁵² History was divided into 'Pre-Independence' and 'Post-Independence' periods, imbuing Pakistan with an official history as a separate Muslim nation prior to 1947.

Operation Searchlight: Beyond the Violence

In parliamentary debates throughout the 1960s, representatives from East Pakistan questioned the government's policies. They were particularly upset with the economic development schemes, complaining that the government had set up a form of 'internal colonialism' benefitting just 22 families in West Pakistan. The West Pakistani public was largely ignorant about the people of East Pakistan, thus enabling a narrow national imagination. In an attempt to stem the political tide of unrest on assuming office as president, General Yahya Khan agreed to hold national elections in 1970. The November elections produced shocking results in West Pakistan. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of the Awami League won a landslide victory in East Pakistan, but Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of the Pakistan People's Party won the majority in West Pakistan. In the military's view, the political impasse could only be solved by enacting violence on East Pakistan. This plan was a by-product of Ayub Khan's Islamisation index, which had reduced Bengalis to not-so-good-Muslim subjects and so deserving of violent treatment. Moreover India's support for Bengali secession convinced the Pakistani military that it must crush the 'Bengali revolt' to protect Pakistan as a whole.⁵³

For nine months, from 25 March until 16 December 1971, East Pakistan was engulfed by war. West Pakistani troops, with the support of the Al-Badr and Al-Shams groups (constituted by local Bengali and Bihari militias), fought against nationalist Bengalis. In turn, the nationalist Bengalis, with the assistance of the Indian Army, created a local militia called Mukti Bahini (Liberation Army) to fight the Pakistan Army. The violence that followed between the multiple 'enemy' groups undid the tenuous balance between East Pakistan and West Pakistan. Islam could no longer serve as a unifying factor to keep Pakistan together.

It is precisely this un-making of Pakistan in the name of Islam that lingers in the minds of veterans even today. Some ponder what the outcome might have been if the ethical values of religion had guided them, and had the sense of Bengali 'betrayal' not been couched in religious terms. Several others continue to believe that they did not commit violence, but 'performed duty and made sacrifices' to save Pakistan. Their failure in the war hardens their

⁵¹ 22/CF/1965, microfilm, 2496, NDC.

⁵² 348/CF/66-5, microfilm 2544, NDC.

⁵³ Radio Pakistan News (26 Mar. 1971), National Archives of Pakistan, Islamabad.

conviction that they did not use violence to force the 'irrational' Bengalis to correct their ways. The tension between being a good Pakistani and a good Muslim remains unresolved.

In the published supplementary report of the Hamoodur Rahman Commission that probed the excesses of the war, Jahanzeb Arbab is identified as a repeat offender and perpetrator of mass violence.⁵⁴ In an interview at his home (presumably his first ever interview), General Jahanzeb made no attempt to evade responsibility for ordering the deaths of Bengalis, which he recalled with chilling frankness. For instance, he began by recounting the first order he gave (as a brigadier in 1971) that entailed the mass killing of Bengalis in Santahar, a railway town in northern East Pakistan. In his opinion, Bengalis had killed 'over 17,000 Biharis'. He felt no remorse for his action and justified it as an 'act of revenge because the Bengalis were deceiving the Pakistanis and they had to be taught a lesson'. Regarding the gender violence during the raid on hostels at Dhaka University, he maintained 'no one raped anyone. Those who complain about it were looking for trouble'. In response to the violence against civilians that he had ordered in Joydevpur in June 1971, he claimed that it was against 'armed rebels who were ready for combat against the army. No innocent people were killed in that instance'.⁵⁵

However, the Pakistanis did not have a monopoly on violence in 1971. Indian and Mukti Bahini men, too, raped, looted, killed and traumatised innocent people, mostly Urdu-speaking Biharis and West Pakistani families living in East Pakistan. A doctor in Karachi, who was a teenage girl during the war, shared some of her traumatic experiences with me. The loss of dignity and the gendered nature of the dehumanisation she suffered continue to haunt her. Her father, who was an engineer in the Karnaphuli Paper Mills in East Pakistan, was killed by Bengali subordinates in his own office. She, along with her mother and sister, were shocked when they were turned over to local Mukti Bahini volunteers by their Bengali manservant. The Mukti Bahini repeatedly 'visited our house and insulted and humiliated us... running their rifle butts across our bodies and threatening to rape us as they pleased'. After several days of torture, the women were rescued by the Pakistan Army. 'Even today', she recalls, 'the Bengali servant haunts me'; but, she confesses, neither she nor her mother nor sister 'has dared to revisit the memories of shame'.⁵⁶

The violence erupting on all sides forced people to migrate, leading to a huge influx of refugees into India. This provided India with the opportunity to intervene in East Pakistan on 'humanitarian grounds'.⁵⁷ On 26 November, India launched a frontal attack against the Pakistan Army. Within twelve days, the war was over and, on 16 December 1971, the Pakistan Army surrendered to India.

The war exposed the failure of using religion to develop a singular identity to impose unity over diversity in East and West Pakistan. The military's religious engineering was undone in the domain of war and defeated, at least temporarily, until the next phase of Islamisation commenced under General Zia. Yet, instead of assessing the disastrous outcomes, the Pakistan Army and state overlooked the causes and consequences of the war. New school history books were written, emphasising the war as a battle of enmity against India.⁵⁸ Soldiers and children,

⁵⁴ 'Tragic Events of 1971: Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report', *Dawn* (14 Aug. 2000), p. 3.

⁵⁵ Personal interview with General Jahanzeb Arbab (no permission given to share or reproduce entire quotes), 22 Mar. 2005, Karachi, Pakistan.

⁵⁶ Private interview (no permission to share beyond personal use), 16 Mar. 2005, Karachi, Pakistan.

⁵⁷ Indira Gandhi's speech at Columbia University, New York, on 6 Nov. 1971, enunciated the policy of war that was to soon follow.

⁵⁸ See the criticisms of these textbooks by Mubarak Ali, *A Page from History* (Lahore: Fiction House, 2004); and Aziz, *The Murder of History*. For a seminal study of textbooks in Pakistan, see A.H. Nayyar and Ahmed Safim, 'The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan' [<http://www.uvm.edu/~cnvprog/madrassah/TextbooksinPakistan.pdf>, accessed 14 Sept. 2013].

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once again, were the consumers of this state propaganda. As recently as 1999, General Musharraf urged the people to dismiss the past: 'Something happened 30 years ago. Why do we want to live in history? As a Pakistani, I would like to forget 1971'.⁵⁹ The tensions between the state's order to forget and a persistent public memory of the war resurface every year on 16 December, the anniversary of the surrender to India. There are two dominant narratives that veterans produce in the public domain: one mourns the loss of East Pakistan and the other bemoans Pakistan's defeat in the war due to India's aggression.⁶⁰ The trauma of 1971 haunts Pakistan even today. The 'moral anxiety'⁶¹ of the survivors, articulated in print and television media, revives the inner tension that plagues the national ideology: can Pakistan be a good as well as an Islamic nation?

Conclusion

Aligning the core ambiguity of Islam's universalism and diversity with the need to formulate a particularistic Pakistani identity was one of the initial challenges for Pakistan. In an ambitious drive to create a modern Islamic nation, the military dictator, Ayub Khan, divided Pakistanis into 'good' and 'bad' Muslims, marking the Bengalis for reform and punishment. Public education policies aimed at constructing an Islamic history amplified this antithetical taxonomy. The military's use of religion to promote enmity with India proved tragic; Pakistan lost half its territory and people amid war and violence. Yet, the phenomenon of blaming others for an internal problem, and the lack of capacity to reform, is a malaise from which Pakistan continues to suffer.⁶² The military sacrificed the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on the altar of a misconstrued religious nationalism. This approach runs counter to Islam's ideals, which promote a human collective constituted by both 'near or faraway neighbours'.⁶³ A renewed understanding of Islam, not in terms of the state, but through the ethics of interdependent human relationships, is crucial for Pakistan.

How can Pakistan seize this opportunity to create a different and humanistic Muslim identity? This challenge echoes scholarly ruminations, such as Abdullahi An-Naim's argument for a 'kinder, gentler Islam', or Mohammad Arkoun's emphasis on Islamic reasoning to provide the freedom to think beyond 'margins and center'.⁶⁴ The willingness to work with culture and lived experiences, alongside a commitment to the core concept of Pakistan as a moral community, are critical. But first the military and its culture of violence must be interrogated and exposed. The Pakistani people are capable of undertaking this task, yet, defining their pathways of identity remains both a quest and a challenge for Pakistan.

⁵⁹ Ahmed Faruqi, 'The Enigma of Military Rule', in *Defence Journal* (Nov. 2000), [http://www.defencejournal.com/2000/nov/enigma.htm, accessed 21 June 2010].

⁶⁰ For example, see the newspaper articles by Masood Mufti and Col. Nadir Ali [http://www.viewpointonline.net/a-khaki-dissident-on-1971.html]; the essay by Dawood Ahmed, a second generation Pakistani-British man [http://tribune.com.pk/story/307145/rethinking-the-big-lies-from-1971]; and the discussion forums [http://www.defence.pk/forums/military-history-strategy/26732-atrocities-1971-civil-war.html]. All websites were accessed and checked for verification 15 Sept. 2013.

⁶¹ Robert Jay Lifton, *The Problem of Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

⁶² Akeel Bilgrami, 'What is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity', in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. XVIII, no. 4 (1992), pp. 821-42.

⁶³ Franz Rosenthal, 'The Stranger in Medieval Islam', in *Arabica*, Vol. XLVI, no. 1 (Jan. 1997), pp. 35-75.

⁶⁴ Abdullahi An-Naim, 'A Kinder, Gentler Islam', in *Transition*, Vol. 52 (1991), pp. 4-16; and Mohammad Arkoun (Robert D. Lee, ed. and trans.), *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994).