Migration, Gender, Refugees, and South Asia:
on international migration, and its implications for the study of cultural geographies
by Kavita Daiya
University of Chicago

This essay is an effort to take a preliminary step in rethinking the production of areas and cultural geographies through the changes effected and questions raised by gendered migration in the twentieth and twentieth first century. By no means comprehensive, this essay nonetheless posits the urgent centrality of mass migration, and its articulation with gender, ethnic violence, and the production of refugees, as both a subject of investigation and a technology for rethinking the production of particular areas, regions, and transnational cultural public spheres, as communities. Towards this end, I explore below some of the thematics whose linkages need to be explored, like gender, refugees, and migration, through the illustrative example of South Asia's mass migration of 1947, to suggest directions, spaces and sites of investigation.

Large-scale movements of voluntary and forced migrants have uprooted more than 150 million people worldwide. Correspondingly, there has been an increased amount of attention given in both scholarship as well as pedagogy to the complexities of these movements of people, caused by varied reasons ranging from economic opportunity, ethnic violence, to social and political persecution. Economic globalization and the end of the cold war have led to the steady rise in cross-border flows since 1990, when there were an estimated 120 million migrants. According to a report by the International organization of Migration (IOM), "As of the year 2000, there are an estimated 150 million international migrants…the 21st century is likely to continue to see large scale movements of people, both voluntary and forced." The top 10 receiving countries—the United States, India, Pakistan, France, Germany, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Australia, the United Kingdom and Iran-accounted for 55 percent of all international migrants in 1990, and continue to host large immigrant populations. The impact of this movement on the transformation of processes of creating cultural and ethnic community, the invention of diasporas and imagined nations, necessitates going beyond the focus on the borders and boundaries of nation-states which contain migrants, to examine the links amongst different "areas" or "regions" which send and receive flows of people.[1] Rather than focusing on particular nation-states, recent scholarship such as by Arjun Appadurai and Saskia Sassen has begun to examine this transnational movement of people in more global contexts.[2]

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[1] Herzfeld, Michael. *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-state*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

[2] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995; Saskia Sassen, *Guests and Aliens* (New York: New Press, 1999)

On South Asian migration

In the light of the resurgence of a transnationally linked communal violence since the 1960s in India, and the international rise of ethnic conflict in both Western and decolonized nations in the twentieth century,[3] an urgent issue that demands scholarly attention is ethnic violence, and how it effects particular temporary and permanent migration and displacement of both individuals as well as communities, in its articulation with discourses of national as well as cultural unity, purity, and collectivities. The case of South Asia is pertinent here: the largest migration of South Asians occurred in 1947, accompanying the partition of the sub-continent into two nations India and Pakistan on the basis on religion -on the basis of religious differences and anxieties about minoritization after independence. In the nine months between August 1947 and the spring of the following year, by unofficial counts, at least 18 million people - Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims - were forced to flee their homes and became refugees; at least a million were killed in communal violence. The scale and nature of violence that India's partition involved makes it one of the most violent events in the history of nation-formation. In the nine months between August 1947 and the spring of the following year, by unofficial counts, at least 18 million people - Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims - were forced to flee their homes and became refugees; at least a million of them were killed in communal violence.[4] Yet, until the last decade or so, this mass migration—its social, political and cultural impact--has received little attention. This migration has been approached largely in the mode of documentary historical scholarship which has tended to focus on two themes: a) the politics of Partition and the formation of the nation-state whose protagonists are the male, nationalist elite—namely, Nehru, Gandhi, Jinnah, and Mountbatten most often;[5] b) the regional impact of this violence and displacement in the partitioned states of Punjab and Bengal.[6]

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[3] Engineer, Asghar Ali, ed. *Communal Riots in Post-Indepedence India*. Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1984.

[4] This is the unofficial count, culled from the accounts of journalists and military officers who witnessed partition in 1947. See Patrick French, *Liberty or Death: India's Journey to Independence and Division*. (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997). By official counts, ten million people migrated and approximately 180,000 were killed. See Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947* (New Delhi: Macmillan India 1983). While this communal violence was unprecedented, a structural antagonism between Hindus and Muslims (where those religious affiliations slowly became congealed and politicized) had been initiated first by British colonialism (its political discourse and policy, as well as the changes in economic relations it effected) and by the growing Hinduization of nationalism. For a good account of this development, see Achin Vanaik, *The Painful Transition: Bourgeois Democracy in India* (London: Verso, 1990) 139-145.

[5] For instance, see H. V. Seshadri, *Tragic Story of Partition* (Bangalore, 1982) and Hasan, Mushirul (ed.) *India's partition: process, strategy and mobilization* (Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994 [1993]).

[6] For example, see Soumitra De, *Nationalism and Separatism in Bengal: A Study of India's Partition* (Delhi: Vikas and Har Anand Publications, 1992); Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-47* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders & boundaries: women in India's partition* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998); Moon, Penderel, *Divide and Quit*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1961). An exception to these is J. Nanda, *Punjab Uprooted: A Survey of the Punjab Riots and Rehabilitation Problems*. (Bombay: Hind Kitab Publishers, April 1948).

More recently, revisionist historiography and anthropology, as well as state governments,[7] have begun to examine the experience of refugees and migrants, focusing particularly on the experiences of ordinary people, women and children, who were witness to violence and who became refugees of Partition. Recently, several historians and cultural critics have analyzed how the Indian nation is represented in popular literature, drama, and other public media, to reveal the gendered forms of nationalist identity in colonial and newly independent India.[8] Pioneering work in anthropology and feminist historiography by Veena Das,[9] Urvashi Butalia,[10] Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin,[11] has investigated women's and refugee experiences of the violence in 1947; they have also attempted to map out the complex forms of agency at work in women's negotiation of memory, nationality, and state ideology and functioning in its aftermath. However, these studies' focus on contemporary interviews and individual testimony as the primary form of evidence, need to be supplemented by studies of middle-class cultural production in the public sphere that negotiated this experience of displacement, in order to understand how these new cultural geographies enable us to rethink nationalism, and understand the public developments and discourses that shape the testimonies and memories of those interviewed. Recent studies of nationalism foreground how print media – novels, journals and newspapers – become key technical means for representing the nation, and so for constituting national consciousness. By institutionalizing a common language, and creating a public sphere that mediates between the state and civil society, these media generate mass reading publics that form a collective imagined community – the nation.[12] In addition to literature and journalism, film technology emerges as a powerful and popular means of representing the nation and its populations. Hence, mass media in the public sphere are key sites to examine and address the complexities and conflicts of migration, refugee status, and human rights.

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[7] Government of Pakistan. *The Journey to Pakistan: A Documentation on refugees of 1947*. National Document Centre, 1993.

[8] See Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*; Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid eds. *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989); Ravi Vasudevan, "Dislocations: The Cinematic Imagining of a new Society in 1950s in India," *Oxford Literary Review* 16: 93-124 (1994).

[9] Veena Das, *Critical events, an anthropological perspective on contemporary India* (Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). See also Das, *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia* (Delhi, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[10] Butalia, Urvashi, "Community, state, and gender: on women's agency during partition," *Economic and Political Review*, Vol. 28, no. 17, 12-24.

[11] Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, "Abducted Women, the State and Questions of Honour: Three Perspectives on the Recovery of Operation in Post-Partition India," *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia*, eds. Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996) 1-31. Also by Menon and Bhasin, *Borders & boundaries: women in India's partition* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998).

[12] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, New York: Verso, 1983); Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass, 1989). For a useful rethinking of Habermas' work on the public sphere in the twentieth century, see Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owel Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff, foreword by Miriam Hansen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). For a good account of how these media enable the production of anti-colonial nationalist discourse in South Asia, see Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: colonial and postcolonial histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

However, this mass migration, and its cultural impact still needs to be examined in a transnational context, without its centering within the boundaries of the nation-state, be it India or Pakistan. Further, the construction of categories and communities like 'refugees' and 'nation' needs to be reconceived in a less regional and more transnational context -- in relation to both, the history of post-Independence India, and the largely post-1950 history of global migration. Just as many Partition refugees eventually migrated to the USA or UK in the fifties and sixties, much of the recent writing on Partition and its effects has emerged from diasporic South Asian intellectuals who have migrated to the West. In an international context, this has led to renewed attention to the problem of ethnic violence and its attendant effect of internal displacement.[13]

In this, the particular study of the gendered nature of migration has begun to receive serious attention only in the last decade or so. The different experiences of female migrants, the different conditions under which they migrate, and their differential reception in the countries they migrate to have also now garnered increased attention. A significant new trend is the increasing number of female migrants, but these women are especially vulnerable to hardship, discrimination, and abuse. Women now make up 47.5 percent of all international migrants, and many females relocate abroad as principal wage earners rather than as accompanying family members. "They have limited access to employment and generally earn less than men and than native born women. Legally, many migrant women are vulnerable if their residence is dependent upon a relationship with a citizen or a 'primary immigrant,'" according to the IOM report.

Further, in the study of migration, it is important to examine both the specificity of those migrants who are refugees, and their cultural and political reception, experience, and impact. Recent work on refugees and human rights like Jacqueline Bhabha[14] and Liisa Malkki[15] has begun this important work to understand the social processes by which migrants become refugees, and refugees' experiences in forging new relations of diaspora, assimilation and cultural and national belonging.[16] In addition, this elides the problem of internal displacement, within nation-states, that comprises a significant part of the wolr'd smigration, yet receives less attention given its confinement within a particular nation-state's borders. Since the end of the Cold War, increasing numbers of people have been forced to leave their homes as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, and systematic violations of human rights. Whereas refugees crossing national borders benefit from an established system of international protection and assistance, those who are displaced internally suffer from an absence of legal or institutional bases for their

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[13] Some of these studies include Valentine E. Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Pradeep Jeganathan, 'After a Riot: Anthropological Locations of Violence in an Urban Sri Lankan Community' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1997).

[14] Jacqueline Bhabha, "Embodied Rights: Gender Persecution, State Sovereignty and Refugees" in *Public Culture* (1996).

[15] Malkki, Liisa H. *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

[16] Susan Forbes-Martin, *Refugee Women* (Women and World Development Series) (London: Zed Books, 1992).

protection and assistance from the international community. Recent scholarship like Roberta Cohen and Francis Mading Deng's *Masses in Flight: The Global Crisis of Internal Displacement*[17] analyzes the causes and consequences of displacement, including its devastating impact both within and beyond the borders of affected countries. It sets forth strategies for preventing displacement, a special legal framework tailored to the needs of the displaced, more effective institutional arrangements at the national, regional, and international levels, and increased capacities to address the protection, human rights, and reintegration and development needs of the displaced. Finally, mass human trafficking has emerged as a trend in China, while smuggling networks have been uncovered in Europe, including Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain and the Czech Republic. According to this report, "Many trafficked migrants find themselves forced into prostitution and/or effective slavery to pay off their debt to the traffickers or otherwise dependent on jobs where they suffer severe exploitation and abominable working conditions." The United States is by far the largest recipient of international migrants, with about 25 million foreign-born residents at the end of the 1990s. At the same time, this does not include the populations of illegal immigrants which is harder to account for: unauthorized migrants in Europe—including ethnic Albanians from Kosovo, Kurds from Iraq and Roma (gypsies) from eastern Europe—were estimated at three million in 1998, up from about two million in 1991. This figure does not include illegal migrants in the rest of the world, and points to the centrality of ethnic conflict as a leading cause of displacement and migration. Hence, attention to international migration must needs attend to the problem of ethnic conflict and violence in a transnational perspective, as well as to the political economy of globalization, in conjunction with an examination of the cultural production of locations of community that transcend national borders, as many scholars have begun the work of.[18]

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[17] Roberta Cohen, Francis Mading Deng, *Masses in Flight: The Global Crisis of Internal Displacement* (Brookings Institute, 1998). See also Doreen Marie Indra, ed., *Engendering Forced Migration: Theory and Practice* (Refugee and Forced Migration Studies, Vol 5) (Berghahn Books: 1999).

[18] Homi Bhabha, *location of culture* (London: Routledge, 1993); Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on a South Asian World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

Migration and the formation of Immigrant Communities: an Historiographical Essay

By Sarah Gualtieri
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Introduction

Migration has long been a topic of historical and sociological inquiry, particularly in the United States, a nation built by immigrants, and in its most utopian formulation, conceived as a refuge for them. Theories dealing with the immigrant experience emerged in the early twentieth century in the wake of the massive wave of "new immigration" from Southern and Eastern Europe. The Chicago School of Sociology formulated many of these, by far the most powerful and the one which would generate intense historical debate, was assimilation: the notion that immigrants would over time lose their "old world" traits and allegiances and become "American." While the pace of assimilation, as well as the nature of the society into which immigrants integrated were construed differently, the basic premise that immigrants moved along a trajectory towards greater homogeneity with an Anglo-American core endured for decades. In this way, assimilation was fundamentally a teleological model undergirded by the modernization principle: peasants left rural environments and immigrated to the American city where they adopted new social values -- individualistic, rational and competitive. As Jon Gjerde notes, much of the early scholarship favored botanical metaphors to describe this process. Immigrants were, for example, "transplanted" or "uprooted," while the city was a "jungle" constantly invaded and reorganized by new waves of immigrants. Culinary metaphors also abounded, perhaps the most enduring of these was popularized by a Jewish immigrant, Israel Zwangill, in his 1908 play entitled *The Melting Pot*.

Salient Shifts in the Literature

In the 1960s, the assimilation paradigm received its first major systematic reformulation. Sociologist Milton Gordon distinguished between "cultural assimilation," or the adoption of the cultural norms of the Anlgo-Saxon center, and "structural

assimilation," that is, entrance into its primary institutions, including clubs and cliques. He argued that the first pattern had prevailed over the second, since ethnic groups had retained their own organizational networks. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, intrigued by the persistence of ethnic group solidarity in New York, went further and declared that assimilation hadn't happened.

It was historians, in particular, who undermined the central arguments of the assimilation thesis by focusing on the meaning and content of ethnicity in American life. The idea, for example, that the immigrant experience was one of alienation, and that immigrants had, in Oscar Handlin's famous thesis, been "uprooted" from their traditional, folk ways and wrenched into the disorientating pace of modern American life was challenged by a new wave of scholarship that focused on the continued vitality and adaptability of immigrant culture. Rudolph Vecoli, for example, showed how the very idea of a static "old world" culture was problematic, and that preexisiting institutions and senses of identity, rather than be a hindrance to immigrant adaptation in the United States, facilitated the process. The focus on immigrant agency and on the dynamic networks that sustained migration flows helped refine the study of population movements as a whole. The classic "push-pull" model could simply not stand in the face of the complex phenomena with which scholars were faced, and patterns like "chain," "circular" and "career" migration could better describe the varying motivations, destinations, and timing of migrations.

The move away from the assimilation paradigm towards ethnicity was linked to broader cultural and political developments, especially the Civil Rights movement, feminism, and identity politics. Coupled with the techniques of the new social history, the shift to ethnicity produced a fascinating range of material on individual ethnic groups, particularly of South European origin. (give egs) The intensive focus on one particular group, however, usually studied in one locale, tended to isolate groups from each other, and to avoid larger processes of integration.

While the concept of assimilation was seriously challenged, it has not altogether disappeared. Indeed, as Russel Kazal argues, three of the most interesting areas of

immigration scholarship have "revisited assimilation." Labor historians, for example, have looked at how labor activism and industrial unionism created a more unified working class out of diverse ethnic and racial base. This process of "trans-ethnic homogenization" has been tackled in a different way by scholars like David Roediger and Noel Iganatiev who place "whiteness" and its attendant privileges, at the center of their inquiry. In doing so, they have opened up a field which had not adequately addressed questions of racial identity in the assimilation process. The fact remains that "white" ethnics have more readily assimilated into the category American than have people of color. As Roediger remarks, "becoming white and becoming 'American' were intertwined at every turn." Finally, a third group of scholars have focused on how the invention of ethnicity is part of a larger process of cultural and structural adaptation in which groups shape a pluralistic America. Immigrants do not in other words fit into an already-constituted American pattern but interact with local cultures. This interaction produces a new synthesis which shapes the wider national culture. (Conzen)

Besides reconceptualizing assimilation, historians have developed more sophisticated understandings of movement across space and time. The concept of transnationalism, for example, has become increasingly popular as a way to theorize modern migration. In its simplest definition transnationalism connotes back and forth movement and the creation of networks across borders, which is in fact a very old characteristic of migration. Thus, the "trade diasporas" like the Genoese in the Spanish Habsburg Empire could be viewed as a precursor to transnationalism, as could the circular labor migrations of 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, the best example in the United States context being the migration of Mexicans into the American Southwest. However, what is new about modern migrations, and which makes a more complex understanding of transnationalism appropriate, is their connection to a whole set of cultural, economic and political exchanges that transcend the nation-state. Most importantly, these exchanges are facilitated and made more rapid by the use of technology in transportation and communications: the fax, the internet, the direct flight, the mobile phone, what Portes et al. call "space-and-time compressing technology."

To a certain extent, new transnational perspectives are picking up on themes found in earlier historical and sociological work which insisted on the importance of the pre-migratory context in shaping patterns of transatlantic migration. The work of Bernard Bailyn and Leslie Page Moch, for example, revealed the high level of internal European migration that preceded overseas migration. Saskia Sassen also focused on internal, and international migration and documented its relationship to global capital. Indeed, Sassen and others have challenged what was once a basic premise of capitalist expansion, namely that labor stays local, and capital moves globally. Transnational perspectives in immigration history have thus benefited from earlier historical and sociological work that pushed open the geographic boundaries of migration studies. As a result, historians have increasingly shifted away from the rigid dichotomy between "homeland" and "host-country" and on the excessive focus on how immigrants became "American." (Jacobson, Special Sorrows).

The contributions of anthropology have gone furthest in developing a theory of transnationalism that focuses not just on exchanges, or the rapid movement of people and information across national boundaries, but on a diasporic public sphere. While migrants are the most logical participants in this sphere, it is not exclusively their creation for what is central to the maintenance of modern transnational bonds is shared imagination. In this way, lesbians and gays have created queer transnational communities, just as a growing American Muslim community has become linked to a wider Muslim diaspora thanks to the internet.

Conclusion

Transnationalism can help historians discover links that they did not previously see and to rethink the boundaries of area studies. Modern Middle East history, for example, dominated as it is by a historiography of the nation and of nationalism, might look very different if it incorporated Lebanese, Syrian and other diasporas into its central problematic: how do people imagine themselves as belonging to a nation? Surely it is not mere coincidence that the earliest proponents of Arab nationalism were Syrian, many of them emigrants themselves, and that their emphasis on culture, language, shared

experience, political rights, and *not* on a particular piece of the map, made eminent sense to a Syrian "nation" where as many as one in six persons lived and worked in the Americas. To be sure, there are methodological problems, particularly for historians who view place as the principal generator of documents (birth certificates, marriage records, etc.), but transnational frameworks will require collaborative effort and they will generate a scholarship that more accurately reflects the complexity of the immigrant experience and imagination.

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