# Partitions and the Sisyphean Making of Peoples[1]

## By

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### Introduction

The closer one looks, the more it appears that 'partition' is one of the geopolitical keywords of the last 200 years, indeed perhaps since the three partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793, and 1795 respectively. Too many dimensions of global governance are laid bare by its various modalities, and too many of the world's conflicts today have their roots in one partition or another for it to be derivative of, say, secession and self-determination. Consider the fraught negotiations and/or relations in Ireland, Bosnia, Cyprus, North and South Korea, the continuing effects of the *de facto* partitions of Palestine and Western Sahara, the simmering tension within Pakistan and between it and India, and the partition of Sudan into two states in 2011.[2] Kosovo and Serbia wrangle over their unofficial border as the nationalists on both sides decry a possible partition of Serbia and/or Kosovo. Germany is still dealing with the consequences of its postwar partition, just as one might suggest that Africa is suffering the consequence of its partition by European powers in the 1880s; partition was the term used at the time for the infamous 'scramble.'[3]

These are the obvious cases but many others submerged from view also offer key insights into current affairs. China just avoided partition by the great powers around 1900, and Persia between Britain and Russia a few years later, a fate not averted by Yemeni lands when the British wrested control of the southern part from the Ottoman Empire in 1886. Their experience or close brush with dismemberment needs to be borne in mind when assessing allergic reactions to western criticisms: the fear of renewed partition. The same applies to Turkey, whose nascent military forces successfully resisted—in fact reversed—the partition of the core Ottoman land, smashing the 1920 Sèvres settlement at the expense of Kurdish and Armenian national

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aspirations, with well-known effects: 'Kurdistan' is now divided between Turkey and the neighboring states of Iraq, Syria, and Iran, and efforts to 'liberate' the Kurds have led to violent insurgencies and genocidal counter-insurgencies in two of these countries. For its part, the cradle of Armenia lies in eastern Anatolia—that is, eastern Turkey—with its rump surviving in a small southern Caucasian state; at least that is how nationalists see matters.[4]

Syrian Arab elites were not so lucky, unable to withstand the French occupation of Damascus in 1919; their dream of Greater Syria was also strangled at birth when Palestine, Transjordan and later Lebanon were carved out of their expected territory, an outcome of the notorious British-French (and Russian) Sykes–Picot Agreement of 1916 that planned the partition of the Ottoman Empire. Showing how long the fear of dismemberment by greater powers has haunted so-called non-historical peoples, in 1920 these elites invoked the Partition of Poland as a terrible precedent and called for a US rather than French mandate over the region.[5] That year, Hungarians also decried the partition of their country in the Treaty of Trianon; it likewise continues to vex nationalists there to this day. More recently, in the 1970s, the South Africa Apartheid regime's 'bantustan' policy was referred to as partition, while earlier the French had considered partitioning Algeria to protect the European enclave in Algiers and along the coast.[6] Until 1997, Samoa was called Western Samoa because its eastern part remained in American hands, partitioned with the Germans in 1899.[7] A few years later, at the same moment of European expansion, Imperial Germany was also involved in subdividing Cameroon with the French, and also conceding France's partition of Morocco, to which the British had assented already in 1904.[8]

The urge to partition is not confined to the distant days of pre-WWI colonialism. Not long ago, in 2007, some US commentators and politicians thought that Iraq would be better off if partitioned into three regions, and there is even talk of partitioning Ukraine to appease its Russian population: to effect the equivalent of the Transnistrian secession from Moldova, the creation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia out of Georgia, or the extraction of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan after the Cold War. How many have asked why there are two Mongolias: one an independent republic, the other, known as 'Inner Mongolia,'an Autonomous Region in the People's Republic of China?[9] As I write, commentators are openly debating the partition of Syria and the end of the Sykes-Picot order as a solution to or inevitable outcome of its murderous civil war.[10] These are some cases but there are surely more, casting doubt on Charles S. Maier's contention that the age of globalisation replaced the age of territoriality, which commenced roughly around 1860, at the end in the 1970s.[11] Secessions, the striving for self-determination—and the impulse to partition—are as current as ever.

Surprisingly, historians have contributed little to the study of partitions as a geopolitical practice involving great powers and local actors. That has been the preserve of political scientists and political geographers who perforce tend to rely on the monographic work of historians. Although this picture is slowly changing as transnational and comparative historical

perspectives gain traction, we are still talking about a handful of comparative historians at most. Ever cautious, they tend not to posit general theories about historical process or events, including partitions. Often, the differences between various cases are more important than the similarities, even with temporally adjacent events like the India and Palestine partitions. On the whole, historians work idiographically rather than nomothetically. The Rankean preoccupation with the particular over the general, however, can amount to intellectual defeatism when broader patterns, recurring themes, and the influences of historical and current learning processes are rendered invisible, if only because it abandons the field to the political scientists, geographers and their search for law-like regularities and decisive independent variables. What is more, the academic study of partitions is now dominated by political scientists who are often close to government and policy development: they are part of the 'official mind,' like historians in the first half of the twentieth century. For that reason alone, it is necessary to address these official assumptions. Laying bare their limitations is a necessary precursor to a reflexive historical treatment of the subject. Those assumptions posit the nation-state as the end point of human political history—but is it?

## Paradigms and Imaginaries

Summed up most briefly, the contemporary political science literature, which emerged in the late 1990s after the Yugoslav war of succession, presupposes the existence of ethnic or national groups with hardened identities that live in compacted zones of comingled settlement, vulnerable to internecine conflicts due to the fatal logic of what are called 'security dilemmas,' the cycle of violence unleashed when the maintenance of security for one group is interpreted as aggression by the other. 'Realists' like Jack Mearsheimer and Chaim Kaufman call for new borders and compulsory population transfers in seemingly intractable ethnic conflicts as the 'least worst' option for global governors, much like British policy makers when they entreated partition and transfer in the Peel Commission report about Palestine in 1937.[12] Opposing them are other political scientists like Radha Kumar and Don Horowitz who doubt whether partitions and compulsory population transfers achieve the claimed social and inter-state peace; in fact, Kumar argues, creating new borders can provoke the very violence that partition is designed to prevent. Moreover, they then lead to the paranoid political cultures witnessed in the Middle East and South Asia. Showing the policy proximity of this literature, she even has a website sponsored by the Council of Foreign Relations, the UN, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, and *National Geographic*, setting out the arguments for and against ethnic partitions and presenting information for those who need a quick briefing on the subject.[13]

To the historian's ear, this literature, whether for or against partitions, takes too much for granted. Ethnic and national groups are invested with ontological status as the primary, even sole, significant political actors, and as the primary and even sole source of individual identification in parts of the

world where political subjectivities were far more layered and certainly not determined by religion alone. Like Lord Curzon, they presume that peoples are 'mixed' and that they need to be 'unmixed' or, if not, then properly supervised. Yet we know that Greek nationality as such in Turkey was a chimera, and those people expelled from the latter to the former in 1922 and 1923 were Christians who spoke many local languages and possessed many identities; they were turned into Greeks by their experiences during and after the population exchange.[14] All too often, these authors proceed as if thirty years of constructivist sociology and historiography about nations and nationalism was never written. What is more, the policy discourse is indentured to a managerial gaze of 'solving' the problems of non-Western peoples, a subject position that smacks of neo-imperialism that in many cases led to the problems in the first place.

A striking feature of the literature is that it presumes the ethnic conflicts it seeks to solve rather than explaining how they came about, a question that would entail some reflexivity about the observational and interventionist subject position. For the creation of the seemingly irreconcilable tensions were often products of imperial strategies of imperial governance to begin with; how did those Indians end up in Fiji, Tamils in Sri Lanka, Zionists in Palestine and, much earlier, the Protestants in Ireland, to name a few cases? Finally, the 'for or against' discussion—whether to separate groups or enjoin con-social arrangements of cantonisation, federalism, and so forth—presupposes a right answer, a conclusive solution to a nationality problem, above all when a given nation is safely housed in a state. Switzerland, sometimes Belgium, is noted as the exception that prove the rule that is set by the so-called artificial states of Africa or, say, Sri Lanka, a fertile example for partitionists who argue that it would have been better off partitioned than suffer the brutal civil war with its outrageous civilian deaths.[15]

Two levels of analysis, then, must be simultaneously distinguished and related. On the one hand, we have the language of partition invoked by nationalists who cry out when they fear their country will dismembered by neighbors and/or great powers. Take Yemenis who in 2009 and 2010 were alarmed by rumors of a supposed new 'Sykes-Picot Agreement and partition of Yemen.' by the British and Americans.[16] On the other hand, we have the language of academic analysis that buys into the assumptions on which this fear is based. The term 'partition' presumes a natural whole that is dismembered by an outside power: as in the partition of Poland or of Africa or of Turkey, to name some of the book titles published over the past 140 years. The sophisticated version is Brendan O'Leary's influential theory whereby partition is distinguished from other phenomena by its violation of a supposedly natural unit: 'A fresh border, cut through at least one community's national homeland, creating at least two separate political units under different sovereigns or authorities,' by which he means the breaking up of sovereign (rather than multinational) entities with new borders rather than along traditional, internal boundaries. The latter applies to secession and self-determination.[17] The conventional literature in indentured to the national political imaginary thereby limiting its analysis of these issues.

As noted at the outset of this chapter, the term is part and parcel of a modern geopolitical vocabulary, like self-determination and secession that, again, presume the existence of peoples and nations as given entities and as the chief actors in history. Likewise, the notion of a stable and identifiable 'national homeland' is for granted—like 'a people' and its imagined community. But what is natural about it? Why were the German borders of 1937 taken as the 'natural' unit that was in part annexed (by Russia and Poland) and then divided into four zones of occupation? Likewise with Palestine. Revisionist Zionists considered it partitioned already in 1922-23 when the British lopped off its large eastern wing across the Jordan River and called it Transjordan, while Arabs regarded Sykes-Picot as the first partition; they had expected to be incorporated into a great Syrian-Arab homeland. It was the struggle with Zionist colonisation that fixated their cartographic gaze onto the British-drawn borders as the 'natural' homeland. The so-called two-state solution discussion today—the attempt to effect the territory's partition—reshuffles the deck yet again as Palestinians are invited, or rather induced, to accept the West Bank and Gaza as Palestine. At the same time, for many Israelis this would represent yet another partition of the 'historic' Jewish homeland, *Eretz Israel*, and is therefore unacceptable. Some entreat still more 'transfers' of Palestinians to Jordan.[18]

Not for nothing are secession and partition often linked and even used for the same event depending on perspective. For many Moldavians, the secession of Transnistria is in fact a partition orchestrated by the wicked Russians while the Russian Transnistrians regard their statelet as the legitimate manifestation of their right to self-determination. In Yemen, talk of secession and partition are used synonymously.[19]For this reason, it is impossible for someone affectively committed to 'nation-ness,' still less for nationalists, to write sensibly about partition—or for partition to be neatly distinguished from secession and self-determination.[20] If it is a geopolitical keyword, then only in an age of nationalism that conceals as much as it reveals.

What this vocabulary occludes is the fact that, far from solving identity dilemmas, partitions represent another episode in the endless process of their reconfiguration and adaption; rather than engaging in the separation of homogenous peoples, partitions are a modality of their making, however fraught and incomplete, indeed impossible; hence the title of this chapter. For while nationalists imagine that partition led to the territorialisation of their people and its return to 'history'—collective agency in time—the last sixty years has revealed the Sisyphean nature of realizing this national fantasy in practice. The partitions of the 1940s, for example, were not only temporally limited events but founded enduring structures that inserted a 'repetition compulsion' in the architecture of these state's foundations. By presuming fantasised homelands for declared nations, the terms of the discussion— whether for or against partition—loaded the state dice in favor of cultural homogeneity, with or without 'minorities,' rather than as spaces of plural political subjectivities typical of imperial and local spaces. Partition entails violence, not only at the foundation moment but in the process of nation-building and the formation of the national subject. As we will see, this

violence produces its own negation.

In partitions, then, the identity dilemmas brushed over by the conventional approaches are deferred with founding violence and then metastasise during nation-building. The conflagration of India's partition cannot be contained by the narrative of communal violence; instead, it is ascribable to the logics of the nation and its quest for a state, a quest that constructs majority and minorities from pluralism, and a permanent sense of insecurity for the former and the notion of authoritarian modernisation for the latter's leaders. Not only is the resulting state populated by the 'paranoid suspicion of other group and/or communitarian unity,' it makes promises it cannot fulfil: as an imaginary homeland for violence's refugees in the face of indigenous subjects who resist the transformation of their own homeland. The 'nationalist search for clarity, uniformity, and 'purity' in the midst of manifest uncertainty, fluidity and inequality,' notes Gyanendra Pandey,' contains an 'unrealisable quality' that leads to constant disappointment.[21] Other subjectivities, whether of indigenous people, peasants, women, or minorities religions, are silenced in the name of the new homeland and its geopolitical self. Because the fears and insecurities mobilised by partition's leaders have not been assuaged by the Pakistani and Indian senses of home, political entrepreneurs can appeal to them for electoral gain—and for which there are no non-violent solutions. These states are thus based on a horizon of nationalist political expectation that, as one scholar put it, 'in a path-determinant manner, produces and reproduces, ethnicised behaviour patterns.'[22] That is why partition states come up with schemes to dilute alien population concentrations—such as the 'Judaization of the Galilee'—and why the architectural legacies of Jewish culture are being erased in Ukraine, just as Hindu civilisation is effaced in Pakistan, and parts of India are doing their best to forget their Muslim past.[23] At the same time, these residual subjectivities resist partition with their own 'molecular' logic, as Ranabir Samaddar puts it: the tendency to break identity down into molar units, whether neighborhoods, villages, cities, communities, families, gender, and parties.[24] Partition unleashes contrapuntal and dialectal processes of state homogenization in the name of the national partition ideal on the one hand, and resistance and fragmentation on the other. What we find 'is the non-fixity, instability, and general contingency of the national categories concerned.'[25] I elaborate briefly on these processes in South Asia below.

## Inventing Peoples in South Asia

### India

As might seem obvious in retrospect, realizing the national dream was complicated by the messy reality of imposing order on the region's demographic complexity. Take the case of one of the princely states that covered about a third of the India landmass at the time of partition. Hyderabad was ruled a Muslim Nizam who decided against accession to India in 1947 despite his territory's majority Hindu population. The Congress Party

predictably campaigned for union, though not the main Dalit parties, which did not relish domination by higher caste Hindus. A Muslim party, supported by Razakar paramilitaries, advocated Pakistan's cause, suppressing dissent. On the pretext of imposing order, India invaded in September 1948, and then had to decide upon the citizenship of the polyglot population, which included thousands of Muslims of Arab and Afghan descent who had lived there for generations. Seventeen thousand civilians were promptly interned for supposedly supporting the Razakars, which in practice meant Muslims in general. Because they were in legal limbo—no longer British Protected Persons, nor Indian citizens—Indian military authorities applied culturally determined criteria. The Afghan and Arab communities *as a whole* were decided to be non-Indian and culturally dangerous; they were to be deported, like Germans in Eastern Europe.

This seemingly straightforward operation was complicated by the presence of Indians in other countries. The implicit hostage theory applied to them as well, it seemed. The Hindus and Sikhs who had sought refuge in Afghanistan during Partition would be imperilled if the locals there learned of the Indian's shabby treatment of Afghans in Hyderabad. More well known in the West was the situation of Indians in South Africa; the last thing the Indian government wanted was their repatriation to India, because the country has sufficient trouble coping with the Partition refugees. Then there was the problem that the deported Afghans may fight on Pakistan's side in the unfolding Kashmir conflict. In the end, only a handful was compelled to leave. Making a people was not a straightforward proposition when nationality questions could not be contained in the bounded space of the state.[26]

As might be expected, the immediate aftermath of partition and the assumptions of the two nations theory imperilled the status of the millions of Muslims who remained as 10% of India's population. Hindu politicians and journalists constantly challenged their loyalty, despite the country's ostensible commitment to secular democracy, because the dominant assumption was that the natural or core Indian subject was a Hindu. Yet, despite the fact that Muslims were 'communities on trial', the official secularism was and is experienced by Hindu nationalists as an intolerable concession to Muslims, indeed as an obstacle to the realisation of an authentic Hindu civilisation, thereby mirroring the Muslim League's 'two nations' rhetoric that postulated fundamental civilisational differences between the two religious formations.[27] Time and again, middle class Hindus complain that the secular state goes too far to appease minorities: Sikhs and Muslims. Sundered by partition, it cannot be lose any more territory to separatists in Kashmir.[28]

Attempts to homogenise the country, like the imposition of Hindi as a national language in the early 1950s, foundered on the opposition of the regions, especially in Tamil Nadu whose language is unrelated to Hindi. Ultimately, the state had to reorganise the country's federal system along linguistic lines in 1956.[29]That Nehru's vision of a centralised and modernizing state was unrealisable has been shown by repeated regional independence insurgencies, like in Kashmir, Sikhs in Punjab, and in Assam and Nagaland in the far east, which have resulted in over 80,000 casualties and the *de facto*

partitions in the formed of new boundaries for borderland states and establishment of tribal zones and special territories.[30] In the Sikh case, accommodation with local autonomy had to be conceded, but not after considerable violence in the 1980s, which included revenge attacks on Sikhs for the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by two Sikh bodyguards in 1984 after she had ordered the storming of Golden Temple. Of course, this protracted conflict made a nonsense of the Non-Muslim category that determined population divisions in 1947. The yearning for national realisation or revenge also informs the communal violence that erupts periodically, like the demolition of Ayodhya Mosque by Hindu nationalists 1992 because it supposedly concealed a Hindu temple, an act that triggered the demolition of Hindu shrines in Pakistan. The Gujarat massacres of Muslims in 2002 is a notorious case in point.[31] Not that conflicts are always organised along ethnic lines; Maoist resistance—known as Naxalites—to modernisation's encroachment on peasant villages and economies continues to tie down state military forces across large parts of eastern India.[32] The issue of class is also a forgotten dimension during 1947 and 1948 when, at the local level, Hindu villagers discriminated between Muslim landowners who they were happy to see go, on the one hand, and Muslim artisans vital to their economy, on the other.[33] The modernist project of making an Indian people is consistently frustrated by the country's demographic heterogeneity and the non-conformist agency of local actors, just as Hindu nationalism provokes the minorities it would like to wish away.

### Pakistan

Similar dynamics were discernible on the Pakistan side of the border, though here the articulation of national identity confronted the challenge of defining the relationship between Islam and the new state. The Muslim League's 'two-nations'theory of South Asian Muslim nation-ness was, as Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar put it, a 'constructed category of community and political mobilisation.'[34] Such was the diversity of Muslim cultures, religious practices, locations of residence and spoken languages that a unity was impossible to imagine except in purely political, indeed non-territorial terms, divorced from historical continuities.[35] Consequently, the question of the country's national belonging became the question: who is a true Muslim?—which entails an intrinsic tension between its secular constitution and religious foundation, and instability of national symbols, like Urdu, which led to the loss of its majority province, East Pakistan, in 1971 (see below).[36] Such fictions shape reality in the form of the notorious 'hostage theory' of minority protection, whereby the security of the Muslim remnant in India—and Hindu and Sikh minority in Pakistan—would be guaranteed by a pact of mutual deterrence: any violence or persecution visited upon their minority here would be reciprocated on ours there. The idiocy of this strategy was soon recognised by prominent Indian Muslims who wrote to the United Nations in 1951, saying 'Our misguided brothers in Pakistan do not realise that if Muslims in Pakistan can wage a war against Hindus in Pakistan, why should not Hindus, sooner or later, retaliate

against Muslims in India.' And there would be nothing Pakistan could do to protect them.[37] Their justified fears could be generalised. As noted above, Hindu temples in Pakistan were destroyed in retaliation for the demolition of the Ayodhya mosque in 1992.[38]

Problems of national belonging confronted the authorities from the outset. During partition, Muslim elites of Sindh urged the Hindu middle class, also vital to the local economy, to stay, and Karachi was relatively peaceful until early 1948 when the Muslim refugees from the Punjab arrived. Likewise, the Dalit classes were also urged to remain, as the menial work they performed was deemed an essential service. The Muslim/non-Muslim categorisation also forced itself on groups with syncretic devotional practices, like the Meos of Mewat who were known as 'half-Muslims' because of their affiliation with neighbouring Hindus. Although now officially Muslim, they did sometimes did not know where to go because they verged on the heretical for orthodox Muslims. In other areas, the decision was easy to make after attacks by Hindus.[39] More complex still were the Punjabi Jat tribal group which comprised Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim members.

It has not been lost on commentators that the two-nations theory was most popular in those states where Muslims were a minority (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Bombay) and not in northwest and eastern India, the putative Muslim homeland(s).[40]There the imposition of Urdu as the national language by the refugees from India—known as *Muhajirs*—has always provoked resistance from the intensively regional cultures of Baloch (or Baluch) and Sindh. In the latter, the flooding of the capital, Karachi, by *Muhajirs* has triggered a nativist Sindh reaction and then *Muhajir* counter-mobilisation, resulting in various forms of violence in the 1990s and 2000s. An insurgency in Baluchistan has been ongoing for decades, and secessionist or at least autonomy movements endure in the North West Province as well. No sooner had they become Pakistanis than the indigenous peoples of Pakistan asserted their regional identity against the *Muhajir* Pakistan ideal. The artificiality of the national imagining endures in the struggle between the *Muhajirs'* sense of representing the pan-Muslim Pakistan ideal and the regional nationalisms that regard it as a virtually alien imposition from Indian Muslims who do not really belong. As in India, the national ideal has had to accommodate indigenous resistance. Its incoherence is further evidenced by the tendentious myths of origin in Pakistani school books, as Ayesha Jalal has shown; the disjuncture between a national projects struggle for an unattainable ideal in the face of a obstreperous historical record.[41]

### East Pakistan

The issue of origin and language bedevilled the West Pakistan's relationship with the Eastern wing, today's Bangladesh, whose population has always exceeded that of the west. To be sure, the Bengali Muslim League had campaigned successfully for East Bengal's inclusion in Pakistan, but the subsequent history of their relations with the west revealed markedly divergent understandings of the country's nature. For East Bengalis, Pakistan

meant self-rule by Muslims and freedom from Hindu economic domination; not for nothing did Hindus leave the province in increasing numbers over the years, although it was spared the extensive violence of the Punjab. Bengali Muslims did not share Jinnah's redemptive view of Pakistan by which Urdu, which he insisted be imposed as the state language in all provinces, represented the essence of Muslim culture because of its proximity to Arabic and Persian. Bengali, on this view, was a Hindu language and thereby represented oppression and psychological dependence. West Pakistanis therefore considered Bengalis' resistance to Urdu as obtuse, smacking of the dangerous regionalism that would prefer a united but religiously mixed Bengal over Pakistan.[42]

As a consequence, East Pakistan was not imagined as part of the core Pakistani identity; much in the way that Muslims were not regarded as real Indians. Similarly, the West Pakistan elites could not tolerate a loose federation with the west wing—that is, East Bengali regional autonomy—in the same way as the Indian Congress could not accept the Muslim League's demand for such arrangements. So when the Bengalis strove for such autonomy in 1971, the army attempted to suppress it with genocidal violence, eventually losing the province after Indian invasion. With the establishment of Bangladesh, most South Asian Muslims now live outside Pakistan, making the 'two-nations' theory even more tenuous; a problem that many in Pakistan have faced by seeking to Islamicise the state. Since 1971, Indian Muslims have barely looked to Pakistan as a desirable place to migrate.[43] Partition's molecular logic was unfolding.

Perhaps the most telling case of this impossible logic is that of the Muslims from Bihar in India. Fleeing Hindu violence, they migrated to East Pakistan in 1947 and 1948 where they expected membership in the new Muslim homeland. Being Urdu speakers, however, the local Muslim Bengalis often regarded them as representative of the West Pakistani project they increasingly rejected. Indeed, Biharis, as they were called, did support the pan-Muslim ideal—they had little choice—and to their cost. Thousands were killed by Bengali nationalists during the autonomy movement in early 1971; some of their number then aided the Pakistani military forces and were subsequently murdered as collaborators. Those who survived and can be identified are being legally prosecuted in Bangladesh as I write. Tens of thousands still languish in camps awaiting 'repatriation' to West Pakistan, their putative homeland, where they have never been and where they are not particularly welcome—Pakistan ceased accepting them in 1981—to avoid tipping the demographic balance further in favour of the *Muhajirs* and against the Sindhis.[44] All the while, the emigration of Hindus into West Bengal in India continues, as it is made clear to them that they are not so welcome in the east either.

## Conclusion

While irreducibly particular in scale and violence, the patterns and logics discernable in South Asia can be detected in the other partitions of the 1940s:

of Germany and Palestine. I conclude by briefly highlighting them.

*First*, the issue of lost women and children during wartime and partition violence bears in important ways on the 'making of peoples.' A religious-nationalist logic was work at in the Indian partition during which up to 50,000 women were thought to have been abducted or gone missing, often euphemisms for terrible sexual violence. Both governments co-operated for a decade to locate and repatriate the women, who were often adopted into the families of their abductor, having borne children by the time the investigation teams came knocking at the door. Many resisted the state's claim on their body, which was so symbolically freighted with notions of national honor and purity; for they knew that despite their claiming and appropriation by the new postcolonial nation they would be banished by their original families because they were now dishonored and contaminated by intimate contact with the other.[45] Likewise, in Europe, as Tara Zahra has shown, non-German children abducted by the Nazis became the object of intense policy and welfare activism by children's advocacy groups. Almost without fail, they decided to repatriate the children even if they were happily living with a German family. Their putative nationality trumped their new familial contexts.[46]

*Second*, the ethnic cleansing in each of the 1940s partitions and the 1971 East Pakistan secession struggle requires comparative treatment. On first blush, the semi-militarised pre-emptive 'cleansings' of East Punjabi Muslims by Sikhs in 1947 bear comparison with the Zionist forces' Plan Dalet in March 1948. The creation of the Palestinian refugees also needs to be brought into a relationship with the subsequent expunging of a similar number of Jews from Arab countries. For the evidence suggests a 'hostage theory' reaction by Arab governments to the Palestinian's plight, even though Israel was happy to welcome them. The national fantasies of these Arab societies now excluded the Jews who had been part of those societies's fabric for millennia.[47]

*Third*, partition's molecular logic needs to be tracked systemically in the citizenship laws of these countries and in their treatment of refugees, especially their right of return and property rights. Zamindar's work on the Pakistan-India border provides material for comparison with German and Israeli cases.[48]

*Fourth*, the role of refugee elites of the first generation in driving the secular national project in Pakistan and Israel against the religious nationalism of the indigenous Muslims and Jews respectively can be systematically considered. Such an investigation might ask why in these countries and India religious nationalism has begun to erode founding secular ideal. Partition's molecular logic leads by inexorably to peeling of the national onion to its religious core.

*Fifth*, just as important are the 'stranded' non-elite refugees created by partition's molecular logic, namely the Palestinians in refugee camps in Lebanon, for instance, who are definitely not considered assimilable to the Lebanese body politic for the same reasons Biharis remain stranded in Bangladeshi camps until recently; they will upset an ethnic balance in a country by which nationalist ideology—whether Pan-Arabism or Pan-Islam—they should be welcome.

These kinds of questions are as topical as ever in view of the partitions that press upon the international community's attention today, as in Syria. Not that our answers will provide the United Nations with tidy solutions to the civil wars that rage in such places. Historians need not be policy makers or government advisors; we are interested in the deep structure of these conflicts: how the presumption of a national self that experiences and drives self-determination and striving for homogeneous and sovereign nation-states *produces* them in the first place. The geopolitical imaginary continues to posit nation-states as empire's natural successor, indeed as history's telos. Given the inability of this imaginary to produce stable and enduring forms of sovereignty and compatible sense of home, we are entitled to pose Jane Burbank and Fred Cooper's question: 'Can we imagine forms of sovereignty that are better able than either empires or nation-states to address both the inequality and diversity of the world's people?'[49]

## Notes

[1] A version of this paper will be published in Dubnov, Arie M, ed. *Partitions:  A Transnational History of Twentieth Century Territorial Separatism.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming.

[2] Belloni, Roberto. 'The Birth of South Sudan and the Challenges of State Building,' *Ethnopolitic*s, 10, 3-4. 2011, 411-429; Fraser, T. G. *Partition in Ireland, India and Palestine: Theory and Practice.* London: Macmillan, 1984; Schaeffer, Robert K. *Severed States: Dilemmas of Democracy in a Divided World.* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999; Cleary, Joe. *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel and Palestine* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; Bianchini, Stefano et al, eds., *Partition: Reshaping States and Minds.* Abingdon: Frank Cass, 2005; Jassal, Smita Tewari and Ben-Ari, Eyal eds. *The Partition Motif in Contemporary Conflicts.* London: Sage, 2007.

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