

## **From regional disparities to mass violence. On the political economy of genocide in Bangladesh**

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### **1 Abstract and Introduction**

Following the definition of genocide as ‘deliberate extermination of a nation or race of people’ (Oxford, Webster), the actions of the Pakistan Army and their helpers in 1971 are termed as ‘genocide’, although the number of people targeted originally by ‘Operation Search Light’ by no means was the whole or a substantial part of the population of East Pakistan. How it could turn into genocide can be understood if one looks at the dynamics of a process that started with the liberation from colonial rule, the quest for a Muslim state in South Asia and the ensuing alienation and growing disparities in economic development and social well-being between the two ‘wings’ of undivided Pakistan discussed in the 1960s as ‘regional disparities’. The process ended in mass violence afflicted to the East Pakistan populace by the Pakistan army and their militias, the Bangladesh Genocide of 1971. It is compared to other violent events in Bengal/Bangladesh history that have been termed as genocide. To what extent economic factors played a major role in all of them is in the focus of this paper.

### **2 Suppression, exploitation and the quest for self-determination**

To understand the process we have to look beyond the war months into two directions, i.e. before and after 1971: The fact that it took Bangladesh two decades to reach the standard of living of the time immediately before the War of Liberation (Zingel 2012: 114) gives reason to raise the question whether only those killed during the war, or also those, who paid the price in the form of malnutrition, ill health and a shorter life expectancy, should be considered victims of genocide. Already during the war, as during all wars, most of the casualties did not die of wounds inflicted in combat, but as a result of insufficient food and the lack of medical service.

Whereas East Pakistan with its foreign exchange earnings from the jute export had been a most valuable asset for united Pakistan during the 1950s, it more and more became a dispensable burden in the eyes of the West Pakistani elite in the 1960s. The feeling of total neglect during and after the cyclone of 1970 led finally to the triumphant victory of the Awami League (AL) in the elections, the consequences of which the ruling elite was not willing to accept. Their criminal behaviour is a clear case of genocide. Still the question remains, whether such behaviour was deliberate.

### **3 Defining Genocide**

### 3.1 UN Convention

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1948, article II (UN 1951), defines genocide as ‘...any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.’

Article III defines the crimes that can be punished under the convention (UN 1951):

‘The following shall be punishable:

- (a) Genocide;
- (b) Conspiracy to commit genocide;
- (c) Direct and public incitement to commit genocide;
- (d) Attempt to commit genocide;
- (e) Complicity in genocide.’

### 3.2 Eight stages of genocide

Gregory H. Stanton, the founder of Genocides Watch, presented eight stages of genocide as a briefing paper at the US State Department in 1996, ‘where he drafted the United Nations Security Council resolutions that created the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, the Burundi Commission of Inquiry, and the Central African Arms Flow Commission’ (Wikipedia: Gregory Stanton). The eight stages and their characteristics (summarized here) are:

1. Classification (us and them) by ethnicity, race, religion, or nationality;
2. Symbolization by giving names or other symbols to the classification;
3. Dehumanization by denying ‘the humanity of the other groups; their members are equated with animals, vermin, insects or diseases’.
4. Organization, ‘usually by the state, often using militias to provide deniability of state responsibility’;
5. Polarization by driving groups apart. Laws may forbid intermarriage or social interaction;
6. Preparation: ‘Victims are identified and separated out because of their ethnic or religious identity’;
7. Extermination ‘begins and quickly becomes the mass killing legally called “genocide”’;
8. Denial ‘always follows a genocide. It is among the surest indicators of further genocidal massacres. The perpetrators of genocide dig up mass graves, burn the bodies, try to cover up the evidence and intimidate the witnesses ... blame what happened on the victims.’ (Stanton 1996).<sup>1</sup>

### 3.3 Basic questions

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<sup>1</sup> For the complete list see: The 8 stages of genocide by Gregory H. Stanton. Genocide Watch. <http://www.genocidewatch.org/genocide/8stagesofgenocide.html> (9.10.2013)

Before discussing individual cases, the definitions and concepts need to be elaborated. What does ‘deliberate’ mean and what ‘extermination’?

(i) Does ‘deliberate’ require an organization and a workable plan? This certainly applies to the Holocaust, where the perpetrator was a national government that used the state machinery in a very organized way. It also applies to the ‘Operation Searchlight’. In the other cases that will be discussed, governments and government organizations did act in an organized way, causing mass violence at least indirectly. In pursuing their objectives they were indifferent to the sufferings of the people to be expected and then to be observed:

The East India Company recklessly raised the revenue and was ill prepared for managing a severe draught; the colonial government only thought of keeping up their war production and of hindering the Japanese to invade Bengal. At partition the British-Indian government was absorbed by the split up of government and army and of an orderly withdrawal of the British troops, irrespective of the mass killings.

The Pakistani government thought nothing of respecting the cultural and linguistic identity of more than half of the population, did not interfere in the mass eviction of their religious minority and did little to protect the people in the coastal area from cyclones that almost every year ravaged the province, and after the Bhola Cyclone did not organize any meaningful help. Generally the central government was only interested in the foreign exchange that East Pakistan’s jute export earned, in the market that the eastern province provided for West Pakistani products and the foreign assistance Pakistan received to ease the misery of their eastern province.

Only three years after Independence, the Bangladesh government did not have the foresight to see either the imminent consequences of the Cuba deal, nor the poor harvest coming. As for the Hill Tracts, it was electric power that the Pakistan government wanted to produce in the Hill Tracts and after Independence it was the land for Bengali farmers that took precedence over the traditional rights of the tribal population. As for the hapless textile workers, their safety counts little for the owners of the garments factories and for the state. And in the case of the expected climate catastrophe time is lost in the blame game and the discussion of a right to migration. In all cases the governments, i.e. EIC, British-Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, acted deliberately, not so much in exterminating sections of the people (as in 1971), but in not caring for the consequences of their acting.

As far as non-state actors are concerned, they were out to evict and even kill the members of their target group, indeed, especially in 1971.

(ii) Extermination clearly means killing. But that can also be done indirectly, for example by preventing people from access to food or to medical care. As Jenny Edkins writes, quoting D. Marcus: ‘The question is whether steps such as the codification of famine crimes would help debunk the myth of famines as “the result of natural disasters, not human misconduct” as Marcus ... argues, or reinforce it. Certainly, given the way in which the attribution of “genocide” has been ducked notoriously on several occasions since the Genocide Convention, it is hard to be convinced that “if famine crimes were codified, the international community would be forced ... to determine whether a famine had erupted as a result of criminal behaviour’.” (Edkins 2007:

62-63; Marcus 2003: 280).

(iii) When does mass violence become ‘extermination’? How many or what share of the targeted group would be the minimum, so that mass killing qualifies for ‘extermination’? And in how long a period of time has this to happen? The famines of 1943 and 1974 were not the result of any specific action by the government other than a lack of provision and relief, but especially in 1943 relief was highly selective, so that Calcutta, where the army and war-related industry was concentrated, was saved, whereas famine ravaged especially in eastern Bengal. In 1971 and in the case of the CHT tribes, violence, however, was clearly targeted.

(iv) Who would be ‘race’ or ‘people’? Famines and cyclones hit people indiscriminately, although the poor are always the worst affected, because they have no reserves and live at places exposed to the vagaries of nature. This applies especially to the famines. In 1770 the natives counted little and for 1943 we know that the British prime minister had no regards for the Indians. The same can be said of the Pakistan Army in 1970. In 1947 there was a lot of enmity on both sides, between the Muslims and the Hindus, although by far not all of both groups shared the hatred. By 1971 most of the Hindus, especially the members of the higher castes, had left East Pakistan. Their role had been taken up by the new West Pakistan business class: Only one of the 22 families that controlled the Pakistan economy by the end of the 1960s was based in East Pakistan (Haq 1973). Officers and soldiers of the Army were almost exclusively from West Pakistan. Their local support came mainly from the ‘Biharis’, i.e. Muslims from eastern India (thus: Bihari), who spoke Urdu. They had been armed by the army and were involved in the worst atrocities. In the case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, it is clearly the tribal population that is targeted and suffers.

(v) Related to the question of the perpetrators is how active they have to be involved. Cyclones are natural phenomena and famines rarely have a central actor.<sup>2</sup> The responsibility for provision and relief, however, lies with the government, that not always felt responsible. This also applies to the colonial power that until today feels innocent of the carnage, mass eviction and chaos at partition. There is a debate to what extent the political leaders were responsible. In the case of 1971, most people would blame the West Pakistan leadership for ‘Operation Searchlight’, the army ‘clamp down’. The personnel in charge is no longer alive: President General Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan died in 1980; Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was hanged in 1979; General Tikka Khan, Martial Law Administrator of East Pakistan and in charge of ‘Operation Searchlight’ died in 2002. Who exactly is to blame, is not clear and will be difficult to ascertain, as they were alone at their decisive final meeting. The report of the Hamoodur Rehman Commission of Inquiry into the 1971 War was ‘charged ... with the duty of inquiring the circumstances in which the commander, eastern command, surrendered ...’ (p.11). The commission was set in by Bhutto in order to put the blame of the loss of East Pakistan on the generals, not to look into the atrocities (Niazi2006: 254; Brass 2013: 328-9). Likewise, the government of Bangladesh has not shown much interest in the fate of their tribal people that have been always at the receiving end of Pakistan’s and Bangladesh’s development policy. It was the Awami League, who in 1997 signed the peace accord that ended the guerilla war. By then, however, the plains people already were in the majority in most hill areas.

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<sup>2</sup> Stalin’s forced collectivization of agriculture and Mao’s Great leap Forward led to famines and millions of victims in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and in China in the 1950s.

(vi) Violence has many forms. Propaganda, instigation, spreading rumours, des-information and hate speech can be effective weapons of a cultural and linguistic genocide. Not to forget: The estrangement of East and West Pakistan started with the denial of Bangla as a national language.

(vii) Allowing violence to happen often is a sign of approvingly acceptance, what we call in German 'billigend in Kauf nehmen'. Verdeja (2013: 21; emphasis his) writes: 'Intent is perhaps the most vexing component of the definition of genocide. ... Genocidal intent has two broad components: this first is *knowledge*, or an awareness that the acts in question will result in the destruction of the group. The second is *specific (or special) intent* (*dolus specialis*), a narrow conception that requires a prosecutor to show that the perpetrator specifically seeks the destruction of the group as such.' Inactivity on the side of the rulers/government *post factum* is characteristic for all the cases of famine, cyclone, war and eviction discussed here.

#### 4 Mass violence in Bangladesh history

The decay of once 'Bengal of gold' coincided with the arrival of the colonial powers. The Portuguese, Dutch, French, Danes and English had come for economic reasons. They could establish their factories when the Moguls no longer effectively controlled the Ganges/Brahmaputra delta. The English East India Company (EIC) interfered in the wars of succession, established territorial power and earned the right to collect taxes. Their irresponsible dealings with land taxation led to the agricultural crisis of the late 1760s, when bad harvests struck the province on top of mismanagement and plunder. Ten million or one third of the population are reported to have died in the Bengal Famine of 1770, the first colonial genocide in India (Arnold 1999). Forced to introduce some kind of order, in 1793 the EIC settled the tax once and for all, what became known as the Permanent Settlement. The former tax collectors became owners, land became a tradeable commodity and could be bought by anyone, including non-agriculturists and foreigners, e.g. Armenians (Chaudhary 2006). One of them became the biggest *zamindar* in Dhaka. There are reports of 50s layers of sub-tenancy; absentee landlords spent their income in Calcutta. Once the first textile mills were set up in England, Bengal lost the markets for its world famous fine cloth (*muslin*). The result was de-industrialisation and de-urbanisation (Rothermund 1989). The story is known enough not to have to be retold again. Mass exploitation most probably became worse under colonial rule. The last chapter was the Bengal Famine of 1943, when total disregard for the peasant population led to several million Bengalis die prematurely. In Madusree Mukerjee's book 'Churchill's secret war' the jacket reads: 'A series of Churchill's decisions ... led to the death of some three million Indians.' (Mukerjee 2010). The peasants of East Bengal became victims of a policy that gave priority to war production over their lives; a policy of scorched earth was to slow down the expected Japanese invasion.

The disturbances that accompanied the partition of India in 1947 led to the first and most violent communal riots in Bengal, targeting religious groups. They certainly were deliberate, driven to quite an extent by economic motives: To punish landowners and moneylenders or – on the other side – to show tenants and debtors their place. During the disturbances immediately before and after the partition, 'religious cleansing' provided access to land and freedom from indebtedness. The disturbances of 1947 were less pronounced in the Northeast of the subcontinent than in the Northwest, fewer people were killed and evicted. Hundreds of thousands of Hindus were driven out in a second wave in 1950.

Jinnah's decision for Urdu as the national language of the new state was of tremendous economic importance. Language, the most economically valuable cultural technique, is learnt at a young age with ease and later only – if at all – with great difficulty. The decision was the outcome of colonial 'language planning' and the conviction that 'nation building' required one 'national language' for all. In practice it meant that the aspiring and young Bengal middle class saw themselves deprived of government and professional jobs. The language question stood at the beginning of a process of alienation between the two 'wings', i.e. East and West Pakistan, and later to a feeling of systematic exploitation and neglect in the East. When an especially murderous cyclone swept the delta in November 1970 and hundreds of thousands of people perished without the military government taken much notice and action (Bass 2013: 23), people lost whatever confidence they had in the central government and turned to the Awami League that demanded regional autonomy and almost complete political self-determination. In the national elections a few weeks later, the Awami League not only won almost all seats for East Pakistan, but also the absolute majority of seats in the National Assembly. The military government and the leader of the major political party in West Pakistan were not ready to accept the democratic verdict and instead decided for a military clamp down, followed by civil war, war with India, defeat, surrender and, finally independence of Bangladesh.

Recovery from all out war was difficult, indeed. International aid was coming only slowly and the government became more and more authoritarian. In 1974, the government saw too late that excessive monsoon rains flooded most of the country and destroyed the harvest. When they turned to the main bilateral donor, namely the USA, their request was turned down, because Bangladesh had sold jute sacks to the enemy neighbour of the superpower (Cuba) that had been embargoed because of its ties with the other superpower, the Soviet Union. When food aid finally arrived, thousands had died of starvation.

As the most densely populated state in the world (if we leave out some city states), almost all arable land is under crop. There are no land reserves with the major exception of the Chittagong Hill Tracts that traditionally are inhabited by a number of tribes of non-Bengali descent. As non-Muslims they had remained neutral in the civil war rather than joining the Bengalis in their fight for independence. They had to suffer inroads into their territory over decades, resulting in a guerilla war and mass emigration (Mohsin 2010).

The economic recovery since the 1990s has led to new forms of violence: appalling working conditions in the textiles industry, i.e. low wages and a lack of safety and security. Workers trapped in factories that collapse or go up in flames (Economist 2013) is seen as a genocide against the poor (Rai 2007).

The latest concern is a climate genocide (Morales 2010): If climate change is (partially) man-made and leads to a rise of sea level, millions in Bangladesh would be threatened (Bhattacharya and Fraczek 2012). Emigration is discussed as an option and given the reluctance of the preferred destinations to grant a right to migration and to welcome climate refugees (Islam and Zingel 2012: 205), one day might give reason to discuss a possible genocide against refugees.

This short history of mass violence in an area that today is Bangladesh by no means is complete. Some of the more serious cases have been selected in order to put the 1971 carnage in a historical perspective and to examine the hypothesis that what generally is called genocide is

less an act of ‘deliberate extermination of a nation or a race of people’, but the outcome of greed and indifference in pursuit of material gains. The ‘extermination’ is not so much the objective than the means to achieve it. Atrocities, if they are recognized at all, are justified with higher goals or by putting the blame on the victims for past misdeeds, moral shortcomings, or a wrong faith.

The discussion includes not only cases before the War of Liberation, but also after, in order to demonstrate how a victim can turn into a perpetrator, at least in the eyes of the new victims and of bystanders.

## 5 Genocides (?) in Bengal/Bangladesh: a comparison

The attempt of the Pakistan army to crush the movement for an independent Bangladesh was not the only genocide in the new country’s history. If we combine the standard definition of genocide as ‘deliberate attempt of a nation or race of people’ with common language usage, we can find quite a number of events of mass violence associated with the term ‘genocide’. How ‘genocide’ is used in the Bangladeshi/Bengal context can be found out with the help of the internet and a search engine. Google reports 27 million responses for ‘genocide’; Armenia, Cambodia and the Holocaust are high on the list. There is a music CD under the title ‘Spiritual Genocide’<sup>3</sup> and a text-based multiuser war game ‘Genocide’<sup>4</sup> on the market; reflecting an overuse and trivialization of the term. Entering ‘Bangladesh’ and ‘genocide’ yields 5.6 million and ‘Bengal’ and ‘genocide’ 1.2 million entries. To put the Genocide of 1971 in context, some prominent cases of mass violence related to Bangladesh and Bengal have been looked at.

This approach clearly has its limitations: Depending on the combination of keywords one gets very different results. Results also vary from day to day and might depend also on other factors. It is not clear, why the dropping of ‘genocide’ in several cases results in less and not more results. Culture and language are not necessarily attributed to ‘Bangladesh’ and ‘genocide’. Recent developments, as the catastrophes in the textiles industry, have no genocide-label as yet, although genocide is discussed in this context. But the results show that ‘genocide’ is attributed to the country’s history in many instances.<sup>5</sup> To what extent these cases fulfill the international accepted definition of genocide or Stanton’s eight stages will be analysed below, but also their underlying economic causes and consequences.

Hypothesis: Except 1971 (and that only to some extent), none of the events, commonly termed

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<sup>3</sup> O f f e r e d b y A m a z o n : [http://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/B009G3U5H0/ref=dp\\_top\\_cm\\_cr\\_acr\\_txt?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1](http://www.amazon.de/product-reviews/B009G3U5H0/ref=dp_top_cm_cr_acr_txt?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1) (9.10.2013)

<sup>4</sup> Vide: <http://www.geno.org/index.shtml> (9.10.2013)

<sup>5</sup> In October 2013 the numbers in brackets are the results of a Google search for the term (like ‘Bengal famine 1770’) with and without ‘genocide’: Bengal famine 1770 (340,000/72,900); Bengal famine 1943 (1,580,000/374,000); India partition 1947 (818,000/3,250,000); East Bengal 1950 (6,090,000/818,000); Bhol cyclone 1970 (1,240,000/279,000); Bangladesh war 1971 (1,540,000/16,200,000); Bangladesh famine 1974 (13,800,000/1,170,000); Chakma CHT (122,000/58,900); Bangladesh poor (1,930,000/102,000,000); Bangladesh climate (3,650,000/50,900,000).

so was a deliberate attempt at genocide, but nothing was done to avoid and/or to lessen the impact. No one ever took any responsibility; no compensations were paid.

## 5.1 Colonial rule

### 5.11 Bengal famine 1770

*What happened and why:* After the East India Company had won the battle of Plassey 1757 and taken over the *diwani* of Bengal *subha*, they raised the agricultural taxes and peasants started to grow less. After bad harvests the production and income losses were so much that 10 million, or one third of the population, died of starvation, diseases etc.

*Intent:* The famine was the outcome of a combination of a natural phenomenon (bad weather) and of greed and mismanagement on the side of the new colonial government. There was little that farmers could have done to avert the catastrophe. The famine, of course, was not intended, but the new masters did nothing to avoid it and to relieve their new subjects. It was the beginning of two centuries of misery for once ‘Bengal of Gold’.

Only one of *Stanton’s stages* would apply: denial. The blame was on the weather.

*Economic factors:* It was all about economy.

### 5.12 Bengal famine 1943

*What happened and why:* After the Japanese had invaded Burma, rice imports in India, especially to the coastal towns stopped. When prices rose, ‘surplus provinces’ stopped their export of rice to ‘deficit provinces’ like Bengal. For food supply, the colonial power gave priority to the army and to war-related industries in Calcutta. In order to halt the expected invasion, bridges and boats were destroyed, especially in Eastern Bengal. After a bad harvest and due to mismanagement up to 3 million people are believed to have died. Relief came late and was poorly coordinated.

*Intent:* The famine was the outcome of colonial policy and bad management and only partly of war and bad weather.

Otherwise only one of *Stanton’s stages* would apply: denial. The blame was on the Japanese and on war.

*Economic factors:* It was basically a matter of war economy.

### 5.13 Indian partition 1947

*What happened and why:* As an outcome of a colonial policy of divide-and-rule, the idea of a separate state for the Muslims was especially strong in Bengal. A confrontational policy of the major political/religious groups and the total absence of law enforcement allowed marauding groups a ‘religious cleansing’ of ‘their’ territories. Incited by their leaders and in the hope to win land, get rid of their debt and to have privileged access to government positions and in business, considerable segments of the public took part in the atrocities. The outcome were hundred thousands of people killed and millions of refugees.

*Intent:* Locally organized and coordinated killing, rape and looting were certainly intended.

*Stanton’s stages* apply. In the absence of ‘the’ state, various groups were inciting emotions and organizing local atrocities. Each side denied responsibility and blamed the other side and/or the colonial power.



*Economics*: The pros and cons of partition were to quite an extent based on economic hopes and fears.

## 5.2 Pakistan

### 5.21 Linguistic genocide 1948-1971

*What happened and why*: It is important to note that the East-West conflict in Pakistan did start with a fight over the national language. The students killed by the police on 21 (Ekushey) February 1952 became the martyrs of the movement for greater regional autonomy and later for independence.

*Intent*: Jinnah, himself an English speaker, obviously had no antenna for the role of Bangla in Bengal culture. He came to East Pakistan in 1948, months after Independence for his short and only visit, shielded by his entourage from the locals. He must have been surprised by the hostile reaction of the students when he declared that there could be only one national language and that had to be Urdu.

*Stanton's stages*: Language fulfills the conditions of classification (Urdu *versus* Bengali) and symbolization. As a former professor of Dhaka university, originally from Bihar, told the author when asked about his Bangla proficiency after 24 year of service in East Pakistan: 'I do not speak a single word of it and I saw not the slightest reason to learn it.'

*Economics*: As has been lined out, language is of central economic importance for its speakers.

### 5.22 East Bengal 1950

*What happened and why*: Wikipedia has an entry under the title of '1950 East Bengal genocide'. It starts 'The East Bengal genocide of 1950 or simply the 1950 genocide ... refers to massacre of Bengali Hindus by Muslim mobs, the Pakistani police and the para-military accompanied by arson, loot, rape and abduction in the months of February and March 1950. An estimated 1 million Bengali Hindus were forced to migrate into India by the end of the year. The killings subsided after the conclusion of the Delhi Pact which was supposed to ensure the security of the minorities in the two dominions.' The anti-Hindu violence started at the end of 1949 and continued into 1950 at various places. It can be seen as a continuation of the disturbances that accompanied the partition of India. They were less in the east of India – although very violent, indeed – than in the west. A still considerable Hindu minority remained in East Bengal after 1947; in 1950 especially the upper caste Hindus fled.

*Intent*: The anti-Hindu riots were triggered by various incidents that then were exploited by the law enforcing agencies and politicians.

*Stanton's stages*: The same as for Partition with the major difference that this time the government of Pakistan and no longer the colonial power was in charge.

*Economics*: As for partition.

### 5.23 Bhola cyclone 1970

*What happened and why*: On 11 November 1970, a few days before Pakistan's first national elections, East Pakistan was hit by one of the worst cyclones of the century. At least 300,000 people perished in the delta region (centre was Bhola island, hence the name). The fact that the military government of the day neither had seen that pre-warning systems were established and

cyclone shelters were built, nor did engage the army in relief operations after the cyclone, was decisive for the landslide victory of the Awami League in the elections of 1970 (and in some areas in January 1971 because of the cyclone).

*Intent:* Neither the cyclone, nor government intervention led to mass violence, but the intentional lack of organization to prevent and mitigate damage to life and property of government and army turned a common natural phenomenon into disaster and, therefore, is seen as genocide by so many (see the large number of results of the internet search for ‘Bhola cyclone’ + ‘genocide’. For more than twenty years the central government intentionally had neglected East Pakistan’s development, because capital productivity in West Pakistan was higher: Growth first and distribution later was the motto. There were no plans for a meaningful relief in case of such calamities, although the delta was visited by cyclones every year.

*Stanton’s stages:* Again: denial of responsibility. An army brigadier puts the blame on the Awami League’s ‘cyclone strategy. Firstly magnify the disaster ..Secondly demunitize Pakistan government effort to meet it. ... Highlight lack of sympathy and support from West Pakistan.’ (Khan 1975).

*Economics:* As will be lined out below, the policy of the central government reduced East Pakistan to its contribution to the country’s economic development, to be implemented first in West Pakistan.

#### 5.24 Bangladesh War 1971

*What happened and why:* The ‘War of Liberation’ was the culmination of 24 years of estrangement of the two ‘wings’ of united Pakistan. Of the Awami League’s Six Points 4 were about economics (see below).

*Intent:* ‘Operation Searchlight’ was planned as a limited, however brutal, campaign: ‘A.L. [Awami League] action and reaction to be treated as rebellion and those who support or defy M.L. [martial law] action to be dealt with as hostile elements. ... As A.L. has widespread support even amongst the E.P. [East Pakistan] elements in the Army the operation has to be launched with great cunningness, surprise, deception and speed combined with shock action.’ (Salik 1978: 228)<sup>6</sup> The operational plan was restricted to army action; economic implications are mentioned only once: ‘Protect factories at Ghazipur and Ammo Depot at Rajendrapur.’ (Salik 1978: 231) With the East Pakistan Razakar Ordinance of 28 May, 1971 (promulgated August 2, 1971), the military government (GoEP 1971) sanctioned the civil war and mass violence. In defence of their policy, the Government of Pakistan published ‘170 eye-witness accounts of atrocities committed on West Pakistanis, Biharis and other non-Bengalis and pro-Pakistan Bengalis in 55 towns of East Pakistan by Awami League militants and other rebels in March-April 1971.’ (Aziz 1974).

*Stanton’s stages* apply: classification (East and West); symbolization (language); dehumanization (‘monkeys’); organization (army and militias); polarization (ethnic, religious); preparation (assembling troops and arms, disarming of Bengal Rifles); extermination (Operation Searchlight); denial (putting the blame on India, the war; the generals and the foreign press (Mirza 1989: xxi)).

*Economics:* Four of the Six Points programme were on economics (text see below).

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<sup>6</sup> The operational Plan for Operation Searchlight has been reprinted in Siddiq Salik’s ‘Witness to Surrender’ (1978: 228-234).

## 5.3 Bangladesh

### 5.31 *Famine 1974*

*What happened and why:* The Peoples Republic of Bangladesh had a slow recovery after 1971, relying on India, the Soviet Union, the UN and a few other countries. The government was late in seeing a bad harvest and a food crisis coming. The USA cut their food aid after Bangladesh had sold jute sacks to Cuba. A possible waiver from the embargo was not given. 50,000 people are believed to have starved (Parkinson 1981: 98-99; Sen 1987: 131-153).

*Intent:* Not directly, but development assistance (aid) was used as a weapon in the Cold War. On the Bangladeshi side was mismanagement of a government that had become more and more autocratic.

*Stanton's stages:* As a result of a natural phenomenon (weather), lack of foresight, poor management and international politics, the famine would not qualify as a genocide; although the donors can be blamed to some extent.

### 5.32 *Chittagong Hill Tracts*

The combination of 'Chakma' and 'genocide' resulted in surprising 760,000 results. When 'linguistic genocide' and 'Bangladesh' are entered, the results mainly refer to the tribal areas.

*What happened and why:* The Chittagong Hill Tracts were the only tribal area in East Bengal. As an 'Excluded Area' it enjoyed certain rights of self-determination that were restricted already in Pakistani times in order to allow the government to build a dam over the Karnaphuli river and store the water in a large reservoir, that opened up the tribal areas. As a sub-minority the tribes remained neutral in the War of Liberation and, thus, were accused of siding with the Pakistan Army. After independence their rights were curtailed, Bengali speaking settlers entered the tribal areas and the tribes became minorities in their own area. Resistance came mainly from the Chakma, the most populous of the tribes. A guerilla war lasted until 1997 when there was an agreement with the government.

*Intent:* Seen from the tribals, the main perpetrator was first the Pakistan government and later the Bangladesh government and army, actively and inactively, i.e. by not protecting the tribal population.

*Stanton's stages apply:* Classification (state/nation *versus* tribals); symbolization (tribals, non-Bengalis, non-Muslims); dehumanization (reference to their tribal religion and culture); organization (East Pakistan Water and Power Authority, government and army); polarization (terrorists); preparation; extermination (indirectly); denial.

*Economics:* It is basically about land and hydroelectric power.

### 5.33 *The poor and not so poor*

*What has happened and why:* What is being discussed as 'Genocide of the Poor' and condemning people to poverty is structural violence. The 'silent holocaust of hunger' has been claimed to cost 13 million lives world over every year (Rai 2007). Bangladesh has not been blamed for this so far, most probably as the country is considered to be very poor anyway and as such hardly in a position to do much about it. But after the country has become – quite unexpectedly – a leading exporter of textiles, especially of ready made garments, the conditions under many of the 4.5 million – mostly female – employees have to work have found media

attention. Besides wages that are hardly enough for subsistence, the quickly constructed factories lacking basic safety and stability is finding mentioning. Thousands of workers have died in fires and collapsing buildings without much being done for their safety. It is only a matter of time that it will be named as a new type of genocide.

*Intent:* Like in famines, death and damage is not intended, but accepted as a ‘side effect’ of making money on the side of the factory owners and traders and as a stimulus to economic development and growth, foreign exchange earning and employment (and thus: votes) generating on the side of the politicians.

*Stanton’s stages* hardly apply, with the exception, again, of denial.

*Economics:* It is all about economics.

### 5.34 Climate change

*What has happened and why:* There is little disagreement about climate change over the last two centuries, more so about the reason, i.e. whether global warming is caused, at least partially, by emission of climate gases, especially carbon dioxide. As an effect, the sea level has been rising at a speed of 3.2 millimetres a year.<sup>7</sup> At a faster rise it is expected that large tracts of the delta will be inundated, the groundwater becomes saline, millions of people lose their habitat and food production will suffer (Gore 2012).

*Intent:* The cause lies in the rapid industrialization and an overuse of the natural environment. Global warming is not intended, but there is little done in the rich countries, the main culprits, against a further rise.

*Stanton’s stages:* The main causes lie outside Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government has embarked a Delta Plan, but otherwise concentrates on (rightfully) blaming the rich countries and demanding a right to migration.

*Economics:* Whatever action the Bangladesh government takes to mitigate the economic and social costs to the affected population, it will be very expensive.

## 5.4 Need for a wider definition

Comparing these events that have been associated with ‘genocide’, it is evident that the 1971 war would qualify as ‘genocide’, to some extent also the fate of the tribal population. In all other cases, governments have been bystanders, doing little to prevent catastrophes and to mitigate their impact and shunning any responsibility. All cases were determined to quite an extent by economic considerations. The cases of famines, cyclone and – of lately – lack of safety and security of factory workers and climate change show, however, that the common use of language requires a wider definition of genocide than ‘deliberate extermination of a nation or race of people’. The question is whether terms like ‘deliberate’ or ‘intentional’ do not include a total disregard of consequences. It is basically the question of individual responsibility within a criminal/irresponsible system. The other question is of the intentional or unintentional targeted group: The UN convention lists ‘national, ethnical, racial or religious’ groups but not poor or otherwise disadvantaged people.

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<sup>7</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in their latest report expect an acceleration of the rise of the sea level of 3.2 millimetres per year to 8 to 18 millimetres by the end of the century with ‘medium confidence’ (IPCC 2013: 18).

## **6 Regional disparities and the interwing trade: Root causes of the Bangladesh movement**

Bangladesh gained independence on 16 December 1971. Two years later, Pakistan recognized its dismemberment and Bangladesh as an independent state. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the prime minister of Pakistan, had assembled the heads of 38 Muslim nations at the Second Islamic Summit at Lahore in February 1974, including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the prime minister of Bangladesh. In order to show the unity of the Muslim world, Mujib was invited, most probably with the help and on the instigation of Saudi Arabia; in July of the same year Bhutto visited Bangladesh.<sup>8</sup> The acceptance of Bangladesh's independence so soon could be seen as an indication that East Pakistan was dispensable. This is not just another far fetched conspiracy theory, if one remembers that East Pakistan was considered the 'soft underbelly' of Pakistan that was left to be defended in the west. Hence the limited military strength in East Pakistan and the unconditional surrender of the Pakistani troops in East Pakistan after just two weeks of fighting. As has been complained in a Pakistan defence journal: 'With all the hindsight, a retired Pakistani lieutenant general in 2001 still insists that the policy of defence of East Pakistan from West Pakistan was a sound policy. The reason he gives is that West Pakistan was the 'heartland' and 'hub of industrial and military power'. ... These esteemed and patriotic soldiers fail to understand the basic fact that no group of a country wants to see itself as 'strategically useless' or 'gateway' and hence dispensable while others elevating themselves to the 'core' and 'heartland' of the state worth fighting and dying for.' (Hussain 2002) 'President Yahya went on a long mental holiday after ordering the army crackdown on 25 March. Apparently he lost interest in the fate of east Pakistan ...' (Salik 1978: 107).

By 1971 East Pakistan had outlived its economic usefulness for West Pakistan: Foreign exchange earnings from the export of raw jute and jute products had lost importance, although East Pakistan provided an easy market for West Pakistani agricultural and industrial products in the 'interwing trade' between the two parts of the country. In economic terms East Pakistan had become dispensable, indeed.

The quest for regional autonomy was discussed in the 1960s in terms of regional disparity, as East Pakistan had fallen behind West Pakistan for most economic and social indicators. In the beginning, however, not economic or social, but cultural differences had dominated the discussion. The whole debate had started right after Pakistan independence and intensified during the 1950s and 1960s: Early decisions to have only Urdu as the national language (and even to write Bangla with Arabic letters) meant a devaluation of the economically most valuable cultural technique, i.e. language. Proficiency in the national language was essential for having access to higher education and later to government jobs. Most of the Muslim upper and urban middle class from north and central India and the Gujarati merchants had gone to West Pakistan. The army had always a much greater presence there; officers and soldiers mainly came from the 'martial races', i.e. Punjabi and Pashtuns. The country soon was run by West Pakistani feudal, bureaucrat, army and business communities. Karachi became the capital of Pakistan, while Calcutta, the capital of undivided Bengal with all the jute industry went to India.

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<sup>8</sup> The author was in Dhaka at that time and found that for the Bangladeshi Pakistan already was something of a very distant past – after the traumatic years since 1970. Their welcoming of one of the main perpetrators of war and genocide was not to absolve him, but an expression of hope for normality.

As part of a ‘growth first – distribution later’ strategy the government went for industrializing West Pakistan, where capital productivity was higher, funded by East Pakistani export earnings and aid. Whereas East Pakistan with its foreign exchange earnings from the jute export had been a most valuable asset for united Pakistan during the 1950s, it more and more became a burden in the eyes of part of the West Pakistan elite in the 1960s. The feeling of total neglect during and after the cyclones of 1970 led finally to the triumph of the Awami League in the 1970/71 elections and to the refusal of the ruling elite to accept the results.

In the 1950s, as a study at the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg (von Urff and Ahrens 1974) shows, West Pakistan imported almost twice as much as it exported and received two third of aid (net capital imports), whereas East Pakistan had a trade surplus by almost one half and received only one third of aid. In interwing trade, however, West Pakistan exported more than twice as much to East Pakistan as it received from there. In total, there was a substantial transfer of resources from the poorer Eastern Wing to the richer and more developed Western Wing. During the first decade East Pakistan lost 3,089 million Rupees.

In the 1960s West Pakistan still imported twice as much as it exported; it also received two third of aid. East Pakistan imported slightly more than it exported, the trade balance was negative, but far less than in West Pakistan. In interwing trade West Pakistan again exported much more to the East than it received from there. In total, West Pakistan received a net inflow of resources of 500 million Rupees in the second decade, much less than during the 1950s.

In 1969-70, the last year of the Third Five Year Plan, West Pakistan imported twice as much from abroad than they exported; East Pakistan ran a comparatively much smaller trade deficit. Exports and imports were twice as much in West Pakistan as compared to East Pakistan. West Pakistan again received more aid than East Pakistan. West Pakistan exports were almost twice as much to East Pakistan than it received from there. The resource transfer of 47 million Rupees from East Pakistan to West Pakistan was modest.

When after 1971 foreign debt was to be divided between Bangladesh and Pakistan, 34.7 per cent out of all disbursements of foreign assistance between 1950 and 1969 that could be attributed to any of the two ‘wings’ went to East Pakistan and 65.3 per cent to West Pakistan. If we take the greater number of population in East Pakistan (then: 54 per cent of total) into account, East Pakistan received per head less than half as much than West Pakistan. On top of it, projects of the central government benefited mainly West Pakistan, not to speak of military aid that is not included in any figures (GoP 1970: 293ff.; von Urff et al. 1972: 19).

Summing up: In the 1950s East Pakistan was the major earner of foreign exchange and received little aid. The resource gain of West Pakistan was partly offset by interwing trade. In the 1960s East Pakistan imported more than it exported; it still got only one third of aid, but ran a high trade deficit with West Pakistan. East Pakistan’s complaints shifted from foreign exchange earnings and share in aid to unfair trade practices in the interwing trade.

If East Pakistan would have received a share in aid related to their share in total population or even related to the extent of poverty, there would have been no transfer of resources from East to West. Therefore some analysts believe, that East Pakistan had outlived their usefulness as a provider of resources and, thus, became a dispensable liability. The Fourth Five Year Plan

(1970-75) had envisioned a larger share of plan outlays for east Pakistan, but it was never put into practice (GoP 1970). Anyway, plan implementation in the eastern province always lagged behind that in the western province.

## 7 Conclusion

It has been argued that economic factors played an important role in all cases that have been associated with genocide. The prominent role of economic factors especially applies to the colonial period and the turmoil that accompanied the partitions of India and later of Pakistan. It also explains why the cases of mass violence are so difficult to discuss and why cooperation among the major South Asian states is making so little progress, despite a regional cooperation (SAARC), preferential (SAPTA) and even free (SAFTA) trade agreements.

One of the reasons is the rarely discussed question of ‘abandoned’ or ‘enemy’ property. After the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the legality of enforced transfer of ownership during the waves of ‘collectivization’ and ‘nationalization’ had been questioned. In Germany there are still court cases pending on behalf of Jewish owners, driven out of the country by the Nazi regime, not to speak of the millions murdered. In South Asia there also must be millions of open claims. In Bangladesh a group of dedicated researchers (Barkat et al. 1997; Barkat 2000) brought out detailed studies of the impact of the Vested Property Act (formerly: Enemy Property Order) that lead to a heated discussion and to death threats.<sup>9</sup> The landmark Vested Properties Return (Amendment) Bill 2011 was finally passed (Ethirajan 2011; Asian Tribune 2011). It could set an example for claims in India and Pakistan.

This leads to the question of ownership in a more general sense: The author met a number of staunch nationalists in Pakistan, proud of their country, but without being overly religious. For them it was important not to live in a country where they would be looked down as members of lower castes. In India, Hindu-nationalists go so far as to emphasize that all Indians are basically Hindus, and those who adhere to other religions ought to be brought back to fold. The Hindu society, however, divides into *varnas* and *jatis*. So where would be the place for the Muslims? Since caste affiliation is determined by descent and perpetuated by endogamy (how ever defined) and arranged marriages, still common practice among all religious groups in South Asia, the next question would be what castes the ancestors of the present Muslims belonged to before conversion. Following the belief in India that especially members of the lower castes converted to Islam, it means that Muslims would find themselves on the lowest rung of the socio-religious hierarchy. In Pakistan, however, the system of *biraderi* is also not free from traces of a caste system and the elite loves to claim descend from immigrants from West and Central Asia and, thus, a privileged status. Little wonder that this claim of the superiority by the West Pakistani was rejected in East Pakistan, where the percentage of the *ashraf* in the population was much smaller.

Coming back to the initial question of the role of economic factors, it can be said that they played a prominent role in all cases of mass violence looked at. As the main protagonists have retired by now, it should be possible to study the interdependencies between economic and non-

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<sup>9</sup> The author of the present paper could meet one of the authors of the studies only with great difficulty; he arrived with police protection.

economic factors more in depth, also and especially with regard to new forms of mass violence.



Table 1: The East-West transfer system 1948-1970 (in bn Rupees)

	West Pakistan	East Pakistan	Total
<i>1948-49 to 1960-61:</i>			
Export earnings	8.962	12.488	21.450
Imports (-)	20.060	8.913	28.973
Foreign trade	-11.098	3.575	-7.523
Net capital import	5.015	2.508	7.523
Foreign exchange	-6.083	6.083	0
Interwing trade, net	2.994	-2.994	0
exports/imports	5.460	-5.460	0
imports/exports	-2.466	2.466	0
Net resources	3.089	-3.089	0
<i>1961-62 to 1969-70</i>			
Export earnings	15.043	15.402	30.445
Imports (-)	-33.578	-17.157	-50.735
Foreign trade	-18.535	-1.755	-20.290
Net capital import	13.527	6.763	20.290
Foreign exchange	5.008	-5.008	0
Interwing trade, net	4.508	-4.508	0
exports/imports	10.400	-10.400	0
imports/exports	-5.892	5.892	0
Net resources	500	-500	0
<i>1969-70</i>			
Export earnings	2.220	2.111	4.331
Imports (-)	-4.081	-2.369	-6.450
Foreign trade	-1.861	-0.258	-2.119
Net capital import	1.165	0.954	2.119
Foreign exchange	-0.696	0.696	0
Interwing trade, net	0.743	-0.743	0
exports/imports	1.666	-1.666	0
imports/exports	-0.923	0.923	0
Net resources	0.047	-0.047	0

Source: von Urff and Ahrens 1974: 312.

### **6-Point Formula – Our Right to Live**

Issued by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as President of the Awami League on March 23, 1966  
Excerpts from Bangladesh Documents. New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs [1971], pp. 23-.

1. The constitution should provide for a Federation of Pakistan in its true sense on the basis of the Lahore Resolution, and Parliamentary form of Government with supremacy of Legislature directly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise.
2. The federal government shall deal with only two subjects, viz: Defence and Foreign Affairs, and all other residuary subjects shall be vested in the Federating States.
3. A. Two separate, but freely convertible currencies for two wings may be introduced; or : One currency for the whole country may be maintained. In this case, effective constitutional provisions are to be made to stop flight of capital from East to West Pakistan. Separate Banking Reserve is to be made and separate fiscal and monetary policy be adopted for East Pakistan.
4. The power of taxation and revenue collection shall vest in the federating units and the Federal Centre will have no such power. The Federation will have a share in the state taxes for meeting thei required expenditure. The Consolidated Federal Fund shall come out of a levy of certain percentage of all state taxes.
5. (1) There shall be two separate accounts for the foreign exchange earnings of the two wings, (2) earnings of East Pakistan shall be under the control of east Pakistan Government and that of West Pakistan under control of West Pakistan Government, (3) foreign exchange requirement of the Federal Government shall be met by the two wings either equally or in a ratio to be fixed, (4) indigenous products shall move free of duty between two wings, (5) the Constitution shall empower the unit Governments to establish trade and commercial relations with, set up trade missions in and enter into agreements with foreign countries.
6. Setting up of a militia or paramilitary force for East Pakistan.

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