SOUTH ASIA
RESEARCH
www.sagepublications.com
DOI: 10.1177/0262728006066487
Vol. 26(2): 115–131

WHOSE HOMELAND? TERRITORIALITY AND RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM IN PRE-PARTITION BENGAL

Reece Jones
University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

ABSTRACT Scholarly inquiries into communalism in South Asia have often exclusively focused on politically constructed religious and ethnic identity categories. This article challenges these assumptions by arguing that territoriality and the designation of homelands played an important, but largely unrecognized, role in developing social and political boundaries in the region. By analyzing the writings of Bipin Chandra Pal during the Swadeshi period, this article points to the territorialization of a Hindu-based version of the national homeland as a key process in the development of communal difference in Bengal and South Asia more generally. It is concluded that the Hindu-dominated rhetoric of the early nationalist movement implicitly marked Hindus as the only true members of the nation. By implicitly excluding all other forms of social affiliations from the narrative of the homeland, it is argued that the stage was set for the contestation of territorial identity categories that played out through the 20th century in Bengal.

KEYWORDS: *Bengal*, *communalism*, *Hindu–Muslim relations*, *territorialization*

Introduction: The Politics of Nation and Population

Violence in South Asia is often presented in media reports, popular accounts, and even academic work as a conflict between monolithic ethnic groups or religious communities, even more so after September 11. Less rigorous interpretations commonly point to primordial ethnic differences and ancient religious hatreds as the root causes of conflicts (see Kamra, 2000). More nuanced work recognizes ethnic and national identities as modern social constructions, but often still seems to accept discrete communities of Hindus, Muslims, Tamils, Punjabis, or Bengalis as the basic units of society today.[1] Often the causes of 'communal' violence in South Asia are attributed to the divide and rule tactics of the British, the separatist politics of Muslim leaders, or they are even described as simply a pernicious consequence of modernity.

Brubaker (2002) has recently suggested removing the group connotation from ethnicity, nation, and race in order to better understand how these social categories operate. Brubaker (1996, 2002) points out that all of these are modern social constructions and should be seen as categories of practice and not categories of analysis. Although they are real in the sense that they are part of popular understandings of the world, and are often used for population mobilization, the categories of nation, ethnicity, and race are not historic realities and academics should avoid using language that reifies them. In order to do this, Brubaker (1996) suggests the term 'nationness', rather than simply 'nation', to describe the feeling of group membership that is common in the world today. The concept of nationness acknowledges the importance of 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1991) of people, but does so in a way that avoids reifying the existence of nations as monolithic social groups. Consequently, rather than attempting to define what the nation is or who members of the nation are, scholarly work should seek to determine why activists are attempting to develop a sense of national membership, what symbols or traditions resonate at a popular level, and how the national identification is maintained throughout the population on a daily basis (Billig, 1996; Edensor, 2002). As Hage (1996: 476) has noted, 'the nation is always a reality in the making rather than an already made reality'.

Instrumentalist theorists have suggested that actors within a locale will work to develop these perceived boundaries between populations in order to establish political support bases to pursue economic gain or political power (Brass, 1991).[2] For nationalizing agents it is important to use a rhetoric that emphasizes group membership, the feeling that an individual shares common traits, thoughts, or goals with a larger population, in order to link together disparate individuals into a cohesive unit (Brubaker, 2002). In reality a very small number of activists or organizations are often behind the campaigns that develop a sense of group membership in a population, which was typically not present before. Brubaker (2002: 171) points out:

> Certain dramatic events, in particular, can serve to galvanize and crystallize a potential group, or to ratchet up pre-existing levels of groupness. This is why deliberate violence, undertaken as a strategy of provocation, often by a very small number of persons, can sometimes be an exceptionally effective strategy of group making.

Gossman (1999), for example, has shown the galvanizing effect riots had in Bengal during the pre-partition years by pointing out that such riots were often instigated by a small number of activists, but the accounts of the riots spread fear and distrust throughout the population, dividing it along lines that may not have previously existed.

In this article, it is argued that the development of territorialized identities and the designation of homelands are two additional strategies employed to develop a sense of national membership within a population. This article first describes the importance of territorialized identities and homelands in nationalism generally and then investigates the roles they played in the early nationalist movement in Bengal. In particular, the writings of *swadeshi* leader Bipin Chandra

Pal are analyzed in order to demonstrate how the presentation of the homeland in the narratives and discourses of the nationalist movement developed boundaries between Hindu and Muslim populations.[3] Although some scholars have pointed out that the leaders of the *swadeshi* movement explicitly promoted Hindu–Muslim unity in order to challenge British authority in South Asia, the early nationalist leaders maintained that the unique characteristic that unified the disparate populations of the region was their shared Hindu culture that predated Muslim and Christian invaders. It is argued here that by presenting the land as the embodiment of a Hindu mother goddess, and Hinduism as the true expression of love for the land, all non-Hindu populations were othered in the land of their birth, which led to contestation of the meaning of the new imagined nation and its homeland. After looking at the role of homeland imagery in *swadeshi* writings, in the conclusion a link is suggested between the territorial rhetoric of the early nationalist movement in Bengal and the 'communal' violence that swept across South Asia during the rest of the 20th century.

Territoriality and the Homeland

The romantic image of the national homeland, which is often described as the only place where a particular nation can thrive free of the persecution of outside groups, is one of the most effective tools for mobilizing populations in the world today (Kaiser, 2002).[4] It does not matter whether the members of 'the community' view themselves as distinct due to language, culture, history, religion, ethnicity, or class; the perceived difference is always expressed territorially. Instead of viewing homelands and territoriality as just another aspect of national identities to be considered along with other social markers, they should be seen as the mediators through which all other factors operate (Agnew, 1987).

Symbols and traditions are effective tools for organizing populations because they demonstrate who is and is not a member of the group by establishing boundaries that differentiate between those populations that relate to the symbols and those who do not. However, a population is not predestined to be organized around a particular symbol but rather the choice of symbols used to unify the group often depends on the goals of the nationalizing leaders (Brass, 1991). Because nations are not historic realities, previously there were no symbols and traditions that linked larger populations together into nations (Anderson, 1991). Instead, nationalizing actors have had to 'invent traditions' to meet the need of a common heritage in order to develop a sense of group membership within a population (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1992).

Some scholars have questioned why the masses would so easily submit to the will of nationalizing individuals or organizations as is suggested by the instrumentalist theory of nation formation (Edensor, 2002). Typically, successful campaigns were based on symbols familiar to the population rather than completely new iconography. Additionally, the populations were promised greater economic and social benefits as soon as the nation was in control of its homeland, and they were made to feel as if they were part of the process of restoring the glory of their ancestors' illustrious past (Kaiser, 1994: 13). However, it cannot be

assumed that any symbol would necessarily resonate with the population, so instead particular symbols were often selected that were already part of the local landscape (Edensor, 2002).

As a symbol of the reality of the nation; the homeland is unparalleled. 'The designation of communal sites, memorials, monuments, public and private artifacts, museums, and art galleries . . . remind us we have a common origin, predicament and destiny inexorably tied to the homeland' (Williams and Smith, 1983: 517). These types of symbols are used to demonstrate the glorious history of the nation and the homeland represents where those triumphs occurred. Once this link is made, the nation and the homeland become mutually constituted, allowing nationalists to argue that the homeland must be secured for the nation to ensure its success in future generations (Kaiser, 1994: 20).

The importance of territoriality in social power relations has been most clearly described by Sack (1986), who argues that territoriality is not an essential aspect of human behaviour but rather a strategy used to control events and populations. Sack (1986: 3) defines territoriality as 'a primary geographical expression of power' and as 'the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographical area' (1986: 19). The advantages of a territorial strategy in human affairs are that it is an efficient way of communicating the authority of the controller of a territory over people and things, it simplifies the task of enforcing control by easily communicating the power relationship through boundaries, and it reifies power (Sack, 1986).

The development of a spatial dimension to the nation and then the nationalizing of the territory have been investigated in European contexts but have largely been overlooked in South Asia.[5] The territorial component of a national identity is essential because it allows boundaries between the imagined nation and others outside the group to be spatially displayed rather than merely mentally constructed. Additionally the territory, which is quickly assigned an emotionally charged name such as fatherland, motherland, or homeland, provides a tangible link to previous generations and the 'history of the nation' (Hage, 1996; Kaiser, 1994: 15–16). According to nationalists, the homeland was where the history of the nation was lived, the soil was worked to provide sustenance, and where earlier generations were laid to rest in the ground.

Typically the myths of the nation emerge in a period of conflict during which the history of the nation can be portrayed as a golden period of prosperity that is under threat in the present. In order to restore the past glory of the nation, nationalists argue the population must work together to defend the nation and its homeland from outside threats. This is a critical period in which the nationalist actors must link the imagined nation to a territorial homeland in order to spread the sense of national identity across the population residing there.

Inevitably, as particular local traditions are rescaled to appeal to the incipient national consciousness, some localities are privileged over others. The populations who may not have a pre-existing connection to the new symbols and traditions of the nation become a population in flux. These populations can either be nationalized and assimilated into the imagined nation or they can be excluded and

labeled as 'Others' within the same territory (Paasi, 1996: 14). In the latter case, new nationalizing leaders may emerge and attempt to consolidate these excluded populations into distinct social groups or even separate nations. This can lead to contestation and renegotiation of what it means to be a member of the new nation as the process of inclusion and exclusion works itself out. Narratives and discourses employed by nationalist leaders play a critical role in the process of developing boundaries between the 'We' of the nation and the 'Other' of outside groups and provide a useful tool for analysing how feelings of national membership are cultivated and developed within a population (Newman and Paasi, 1998).

Swadeshi and Nationalism in Bengal

Nationalism in South Asia arose as sections of the population began to challenge the colonial authority of the British in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the late 19th century, during a period known as the Bengali Renaissance, many authors began to use nationalistic language, which then set the stage for the political mobilization and social conflict that occurred during the 20th century as power was contested across South Asia.[6] At the beginning of the 20th century identity categories were localized in Bengal, religious beliefs in rural areas were largely syncretic but revivalist movements were attempting to purify them into 'standard' versions of Islam and Hinduism. Additionally, the ideology of nationalism was beginning to take hold in elite, urban communities but had not been spread to the masses (Ahmed, 1981; Chatterjee, 1986; 1993; 1997; Eaton, 1993; O'Malley, 1917; Roy, 1983). Bengal was an important center for nationalist agitation because it was the headquarters of the British government in South Asia until 1911. Many influential writers, as well as religious and political leaders, were based in Calcutta, and it was the location of a large anti-colonial movement after the first partition of Bengal in 1905.

The 1905 partition of Bengal, imposed by the British to weaken the nascent nationalist movement, upset the balance of power in the region and forced the nationalist leaders to take their vision of a unified nation to the population in order to develop a support base to challenge the British colonial authority (Sarkar, 1973). The goal of the *swadeshi* movement was autarchy, developing an indigenous economy that did not depend on foreign goods, in order to weaken the economic hold of the British government (Sarkar, 1973). The ideology of the movement was spread throughout the region by newspaper accounts, journal articles, and speeches by the leaders. Additionally, traveling activists took the *swadeshi* message from village to village singing songs and giving speeches outlining the goals of the movement (Sarkar, 1973).

From the beginning the leaders of the movement were not merely concerned with overturning the partition, which Aurobindo Ghose (1948: 21) described as the 'pettiest and narrowest of all political objects'.[7] Instead they were looking to undermine the fundamental authority of the British to govern South Asia. Although the movement was based in Bengal, the leaders deferred to the requests of other Indian nationalists to frame their protests in all-Indian terms rather than

the Bengal-specific rhetoric of the Bengali Renaissance (Bose, 1997). Therefore, instead of framing the conflict in terms of an imagined Bengali nation, they spoke of an Indian unity involving all of the places under British colonial control. All of this makes the *swadeshi* period critical to the development of national identifications in South Asia, because it was one of the first times the ideology of nationalism was spread throughout the region as the *swadeshi* leaders sought out symbols to rally large portions of the population to support their cause.

Before looking specifically at Bipin Chandra Pal's writings during the *swadeshi* period, it is necessary to briefly outline the source of much of the *swadeshi* rhetoric, the writings of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Bankim was the most prominent author of the Bengali Renaissance and was one of the first to challenge the authority of the British in South Asia. He argued that the people of the region constituted a distinct nation based on their shared spirituality in contrast to the rational materialism of Europe (Chatterji, 1969).[8] Bankim questioned the history of Bengal that had been written by outsiders and noted that '[a]nyone who uncritically accepts as history the testimony of these lying, Hindu-hating Musalman zealots is not a Bengali' and famously observed in 1880 that '[w]e have no history, we must have a history!' (quoted in Chatterjee, 1993: 76). He argued that the history of the Hindu nation of Bengal needed to be written.

One of Bankim's poems, *Bande Mataram*, which means 'Hail, Mother' referring to the motherland, became the main slogan of the *swadeshi* movement (Ghose, 1947a; Sarkar, 1973). Shouting *Bande Mataram* at rallies against the partition of Bengal was common and eventually was banned in the streets because the meaning was deemed illegal (Bagchee, 1977). The poem begins by evoking images of the bucolic beauty of Bengal by describing the land as a mother that nurtures the population as her children. However, towards the end of the poem the mother is revealed to be a Hindu goddess and the children become the Hindu population of Bengal. Although many of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's writings on nationalism were infected with Hindu chauvinism, the new generation of nationalists could have utilized his motherland imagery to construct a more inclusive definition of the nation and its homeland by removing the Hindu-tinged rhetoric from the anti-partition movement.

Several scholars have argued that although Hindu myths and images were still used in the *swadeshi* movement, the importance of Hinduism was downplayed by the leaders who instead emphasized Hindu–Muslim unity (Bose, 1997; Chatterjee, 1997). Sugata Bose (1997: 63–4), for example, writes that 'many of the creative writers, nationalist ideologues, and political revolutionaries of the early 20th century did not agree with Bankim's attitude toward Muslims or his fictionalized version of the history of Muslim rule'. He cites specifically Bipin Chandra Pal, whose writings will be analysed in the next section, and Aurobindo Ghose as examples of *swadeshi* leaders that worked to include Muslims in the nationalist movement. Bose (1997: 64) quotes Aurobindo (Ghose, 1947b: 86):

> The vast mass of Mussalmans in the country were and are Indians by race, only a very small admixture of Pathan, Turkish, and Mogul blood took place, and even the foreign kings and nobles became almost immediately wholly Indian in mind, life and interest.

Bose contends that Aurobindo did not have an anti-Muslim view and instead was looking to include Muslims in the imagined nation. By pointing out that most of the population was of the same ethnic stock, and by arguing that Muslims were converts from Hinduism, Aurobindo was providing a link between the populations. Many nationalist movements around the world claim other populations were at one time members of the nation but have somehow left the group (Kaiser, 1994). However, this quote does not demonstrate that Aurobindo fully accepted Muslims into an imagined Indian nation. In fact, quite the opposite seems to be the case. Here Aurobindo implies that because Muslims used to be Hindus, once they are shown the glory of the past Hindu civilization they can renounce their Islamic religion and return to their true Hindu nation. However, until they do so, it appears, they will still be considered separate from the Hindu population.

Partha Chatterjee (1997) has also emphasized that the *swadeshi* movement had an explicit theme of Hindu–Muslim unity and argues that the divisive nature of communalism was not present in South Asia until the 1920s. Undoubtedly the leaders of the anti-partition movement wanted to include as many Muslims as possible in order to undermine the British government. However, the appeal to unity did not conceal the fact that, as we shall see, the leaders were still arguing that the true nature of cultural unity in India was based on Hinduism. Although the movement encouraged the involvement of Muslims, there was an implicit understanding that they were not fully members of the nation. They were not on an equal footing with their Hindu counterparts, who were presented as the true products of the soil. This is a hegemonic discourse that allows the inclusion of others as long as they 'know their place' (Hennayake, 1992). In the following section, through an investigation of the ways that identity categories were territorialized during the *swadeshi* period, the inherent power relationships hidden by the rhetoric of Hindu-Muslim unity will become clearer.

The Soul of India

The Soul of India by Bipin Chandra Pal (1858–1932) is a text that attempts to lay out the ideology of the *swadeshi* movement and establish a foundation for nationalism in the region.[9] Pal wrote many of his books and journal articles in English, however he was famous for his ability to deliver rousing speeches in Bengali, which was spoken by the majority of the inhabitants of the region (Sarkar, 1973). The themes of his written work provided the theoretical framework for his speeches to large rallies and were further disseminated throughout Bengal by the mass-contact campaign of the *swadeshi* movement.

The Soul of India, which is a compilation of a series of letters laying out the justification for nationalism in South Asia, has four theoretical imperatives. The first is to establish the unique nature of the nation by describing what unifies the population and differentiates it from the British. The second goal of the text is to delineate the nation's homeland by describing the territorial extent of the new nation. The third goal is to show that the nation has always existed in its homeland throughout history. Once the nation and its homeland have been conveyed, and he has tied them together historically, Pal attempts to link the

people of the nation to their homeland, thereby territorializing identity. The fourth task is the most important and requires convincing the population of the region that they are members of the nation and should work together to protect their homeland.

Pal begins to establish the unique nature of the Indian nation by restating Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's arguments delineating the fundamental differences between European and Indian society. By arguing that India was culturally distinct from European, or more specifically British society, the nationalists could claim that the differences showed that India constituted a nation and therefore deserved an independent state in the sovereign state system. As the nationalists looked for a place to establish superiority to European ways, the spiritual realm provided the clearest and easiest course. Pal (1911: 67–8) writes:

> The word of Indian Evolution is Dharma; the word of European Evolution is Right. And these two words seem, to my mind, to completely sum up the fundamental difference between India and Europe. Dharma is the law of renunciation, Right is the law of resistance. Dharma demands self-abnegation, Right self-assertion. Dharma develops collectivism: Right individualism. Dharma works for synthesis: Right lives and grows in antethesis [sic]. Dharma is the soul of order: Right is the parent of revolution. To understand India we must seize the conception of Dharma. To understand Europe we must seize the principle of Right. How then, can the generalizations of European experience, gathered under the Law of Right help one to interpret the character and culture of India trained in the Ideal of Dharma? India, my child, must therefore, interpret herself.

In this passage Pal asserts that one important aspect of Indian culture that separates it from European culture is the role of religion. In making this point, he utilizes the same spiritual/material dichotomy that Bankim Chandra Chatterjee worked out a generation before. This allegedly unique spiritual and social foundation of Indian culture gives the nationalists a weapon to attack the British occupation of India and to assert their right to self-government as a distinct nation.

After establishing the distinguishing characteristics of Indian society, Pal delineates the geographic extent of the imagined nation. If the nation is to exist, it must have a homeland from which the nation has flourished in the past and which it needs to control for future success. In the section 'India a mere "Geographic Expression"', Pal (1911: 80–1) describes the extent of India:

> The Himalayas on the north, and the sea on the south, as well as . . . towards the east and the west of the Peninsula, demarcate this land from the rest of the Asiatic Continent . . . Such boundaries are scarcely found anywhere in our known world, except in relation to what we call continents. The physical isolation of India is really continental.

Often nationalists will attempt to make the boundaries of the homeland appear to be natural lines that have always existed and are waiting to be found by the members of the nation. For example, French nationalists have cited the hexagon shape of France as the natural borders of the nation (Weber, 1976) and many Americans believed their nation had a manifest destiny to control the land 'from sea to shining sea'. Pal is laying out his claim to the land of South Asia along the same lines. The Himalayas in the north and the ocean on each side are the

'natural' boundaries of the nation's homeland. They have always existed throughout history, as if God has made them for the nation, and have only been waiting to be found.

Pal concedes that an outside observer might point out that the huge region does not appear to be united in any way. He mentions the vast array of languages, cultures, climates, and landscapes that are present throughout South Asia (Pal, 1911: 82–6). However, he notes that all of these disparate peoples share the same history tied to the land. Pal (1911: 87–9, 92) bases that history on the word for the land, *Bharat*, which is named after an ancient king that myths say ruled over all of South Asia:

> To clearly understand and grasp the nature and reality of the fundamental unity in which our divergent and even apparently conflicting character and customs, cults and cultures, our racialities [sic] and provincialities, have almost from the very beginning of our history been rationally reconciled, you must try to realize the deep significance of this old and native name of the land [Bharatavarsha] which the foreigner has so long called and known as India [pp. 87–8] . . . Wherever a country is commenced to be called after some great historic personage, especially some great king or potentate, whether real or legendary, there necessarily lies at the back of it a distinct historic or national consciousness [pp. 88–9] . . . This fact conclusively proves the presence of some undeniable principle of historic or national unity in the consciousness of the people or peoples who lived in this land even in those early days [p. 92].

By citing a common heritage tied to stories about an ancient king, Pal (1911: 97) ties the disparate populations of India together discursively. Pal (1911: 124–5) further explains the basis of the unity of the people in South Asia by showing that in addition to a shared past, their way of life is the same as well:

> The unity of India was, thus, neither racial nor religious, nor political nor administrative. It was a peculiar type of unity, which may, perhaps, be best described as cultural . . . India was, thus, a great country, united in a common culture, though divided into many provinces and principalities, possessing a common life, though following diverse laws and customs, and pursuing, through diverse ways, a common spiritual and social ideal, – when the Mahomedans came to us.

He does not attempt to argue that there was an overarching state structure or government that united India, probably because it is difficult to prove that one existed. Instead he stakes out a separate criterion for unity in ancient times based on a common shared culture, which he suggests was Hindu-dominated. He mentions that although the different peoples pursued it in diverse ways, everyone shared 'a common spiritual and social ideal' as well as a 'common life' until a group of outsiders, he singles out the Muslims, came and disturbed what he describes as the great culture of India. This is one of the first signs that Islam is not treated as part of the great cultural tradition that he is describing. Because Islam came after this culture had been established, the fundamental basis of the culture must lie elsewhere. Pal (1911: 128) observes:

> India had ceased to be a mere geographical expression or entity long long before the advent of the British East India Company among us. It had been a social unit

> long long before the Mahomedans came to her with a new cry and culture . . . It was at any rate what may be called a Hindu unity.

The basis of the great Indian culture, in Pal's mind, is therefore Hinduism, which provided the cultural link throughout South Asia making the diverse populations a nation. India was not just a term to describe a location but it represented the web of social relationships and shared culture in that place, which distinguished it from populations that arrived later. Therefore, according to Pal, the cultural unity of India expressed through Hinduism, which existed before the arrival of the Muslims and well before the arrival of the British, makes it a nation. Pal (1911: 130) further notes:

> And in view of all this, it is unpardonable ignorance to say that India was always and still is a mere geographical expression, and the Indians have always been and still are a chaotic congregation of many peoples, an incoherent and heterogeneous collection of tribes and races, families and castes, but not in any sense a nation.

At this point, Pal has described the fundamental spiritual unity that makes India a nation, he has described the homeland where the Indian nation exists, and he has established a historical link between the disparate populations of India that unites the people as a nation in their homeland. Once the existence of a people with a shared culture and a common history is described, it is then important to establish a link between the people, the nation, and the homeland. Pal (1911: 133–4) clearly recognizes this as well:

> Of course, some kind of territorial unity is an essential factor of nationality everywhere. As our physical organisation is the fundamental material basis of our personal lives, so territorial unity is to national lives.

For the rest of the text Pal works to establish the link between the cultural community he has described and the land and territory of India, thereby (re)territorializing identity. In order to make this link, new symbols and traditions that are recognizable to the people must be employed to re-territorialize the population from their local identity to the scale of the new national homeland. Pal follows the lead of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in this and uses the traditional designation of the land as the mother to reinvent the national homeland as the motherland. It is no longer the local scale of experience with the land that provides the nurturing and nourishment of the mother, but instead the entire homeland of the nation nurtures the entire population. In this metaphor, the homeland is the mother and the members of the nation are the mother's children.

Pal (1911: 187) is quite clear in the text that he is looking for a reinvention of traditions that may serve the goals of the nationalist movement:

> All of these old and traditional gods and goddesses who had lost their hold upon the modern mind, have been re-installed with new historic and nationalist interpretation in the mind and the soul of the people.

Here he is taking older religious and cultural symbols and giving them new meanings in order to attach them to the national homeland. Because the nation is a new idea that did not exist before, this requires taking the traditions of a particular local community or group and rescaling them to the national

homeland. Pal (1911: 146) argues though, that he is not inventing the tradition but rather reminding the people of the knowledge of their ancestors that has been lost in the modern period:

> With the Europeanisation of our mind and modes of thinking even our words have been perceptibly Europeanised. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that the original significance of the word mother as applied to our country, has been largely lost to many of our educated countrymen, who see nothing more sacred or serious in it than a very tender and beautiful metaphor.

However, although urban populations have succumbed to European ways, he suggests the rural populations have maintained contact with the soil, as their ancestors did, and are the true examples of the nation. Pal (1911: 146–7) writes:

> The Mother in what people call the motherland, was to them not a mere idea or fancy, but a distinct personality. The woman who bore them and nursed them, and brought them up with her own life and substance was no more real a personality in their thought and idea than the land which bore and reared, and gave food and shelter to all their race.

Pal is drawing on the example of romantic nationalism in Europe by describing a traditional rural landscape as the true embodiment of the nation. This is an effective strategy because typically the nationalists are an urban minority that needs to enlist the large populations of rural areas in order to prove that they represent the will of the people (Hroch, 1985). By holding up the peasant as the ideal member of the nation, the elites divert attention from the origins of the movement and link it to the land and the masses, what Bose (1997) has called the 'peasantization' of the movement. The difficulty and irony of Pal's task is evident at this point. He is using European nationalism as a model to prove that a nation exists in India in order to remove the pernicious influences of the Europeans that have caused his nation to forget its links to the homeland.

The mother metaphor that links the land to the imagined nation is not in itself an exclusive symbol. The early nationalist leaders could have constructed an inclusive national image that was not exclusively the domain of Hindus. In fact, in Bengal the majority of the rural population was Muslim and would have easily related to the land as a symbolic mother that 'bore and reared and gave food and shelter'. However, Pal instead continues to rely on the Hindu myths of the land as the mother goddess following the work of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. He discusses the symbolic role of several Hindu gods, Jagaddhatree, Kali, Shiva, and Shakti, in the role of national development. The most telling is his description of Durga, a goddess that was conjured up to fight a king who was attempting to rule the world (Jordan, 1993). Bankim Chandra Chatterjee used Durga in his poem *Bande Mataram* to represent the nation and the homeland, mutually constituted, rising to defeat the imperialist British, symbolized by the king. Pal (1911: 174–5) writes:

> Durga represents this perfected type of nationhood. She is the soul of National Life and Unity. With her ten hands, she joins all the ten points of the compass in her, symbolising the territorial unity of the Nation's Body.

Therefore, the cultural unity described earlier in the text is now held together by the mother goddess, Durga. Her 10 hands reach across the 'natural' homeland of the

nation and tie together the Hindus through their religious connection with the land. Pal has chosen to take the Hindu myths of the land as a mother-goddess and re-territorialized it symbolically to the national homeland. Pal (1911: 187–8) writes:

> This Mother is the Spirit of India. This geographical habitat of ours is only the outer body of our Mother. The earth we tread on is not a mere bit of geological structure. It is the physical embodiment of the Mother . . . Our history is the sacred biography of the mother. Our philosophies are the revelations of the Mother's mind our arts – our poetry and our painting, our music and our drama, our architecture and our sculpture, all these – are the outflow of the Mother's diverse Emotional Moods and Experiences. Our religion is the organised expression of the Soul of the Mother.

Hindus, Pal suggests, should see the land as the mother of their race. Pal could have written about the history of Hinduism in India in a way which would have left room for other histories, too. Islamic histories, Buddhist histories, and various ethnic histories could then be accommodated as well. However, by writing explicitly that the philosophy, art, poetry, painting, music, drama, and sculpture produced in India are the 'outflow of the Mother's mind, moods, and experiences' and that the mother is a Hindu Goddess, the nationalist discourse became rather more exclusive. Therefore, if the homeland is the mother, and Hinduism 'is the organized expression of the soul of the Mother', then the populations that believe in any other religion risk becoming Others within that territory. In a final passage, Pal (1911: 191–2) reiterates his argument by continuing to rely on the trope of the homeland as the nurturing mother of the Hindu population:

> We are born unto this land. It receives us into its bosom even as our human mothers do. It supports our life with its own substance even as the nursing mother supports the growing life of her own baby. This land is literally the mother of our physical existence. It is indeed the physical body of the soul of our land and nation . . . It is therefore that our love of our land and people is an organic part of our ideal of the love of God.

Here he describes the land as the 'mother of our physical existence' that nurtures the population by providing food like a nursing mother. However, the love of the land and the nation is part of the love of God because the mother that provides the nourishment is the embodiment of a Hindu goddess.

The Soul of India is therefore not an overtly exclusive text and it does not specifically single out Muslims as a problem within the nation's homeland. However, by defining who is included in the nation, in this case primarily Hindus, everyone else risks becoming an Other. Pal argues that the soul of India is its spirituality in the form of Hinduism. Therefore, one could draw the conclusion that if you are not a Hindu, you are not truly a member of the nation. If you do not accept that the land of Bengal is the embodiment of Durga; then Bengal is not your homeland. By implying that the bounded homeland is the exclusive domain of Hindus, all non-Hindu populations within the territory are to some extent Othered, which initiates further contestation of the meaning of the homeland and the nation. The extent of this process of Othering is an open empirical question that deserves substantial attention, which is, however, beyond the scope of this article. The argument here is

simply that by territorializing a Hindu-dominated version of the homeland, the stage was set for the contestation of territorial identity categories that played out through the 20th century in Bengal.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the construction of territorialized identities and national homelands in Bengal played a crucial role in the development and understanding of boundaries between the religious communities of South Asia. Interpretations of 'communalism' in Bengal have often treated religious differences as the fundamental basis of conflict in the region and the importance of homeland imagery and human territoriality has been largely overlooked. Instead, it is argued that 'communalism' and 'religious conflict' should be reevaluated from a place-based perspective that takes into consideration the effects of territorial imagery on the diverse population's feelings of belonging and national group membership.

There is a fundamental difference between a political leader saying that their religion is superior to other religions and a leader saying their religion is derived from a particular piece of land and that only the followers of their religion have a connection to the soil of that place. In the first case, there is not a territorial aspect, and consequently territorial boundaries are not necessarily established between the populations. Other populations can continue to live there without having their sense of belonging threatened (Hennayake, 1992). In the second case, the place itself becomes the domain of only one religion, which seeks to exclude others from enjoying equal legitimacy in that place. This territorialization of identity categories can have a galvanizing effect that establishes boundaries that may not have existed before.

In Bengal, the distinctions between the categories of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' were not completely arbitrary, but at the beginning of the 20th century the line was blurred in many ways. However, by beginning to link the territorial homeland of the nation to a Hindu-dominated sense of identity, the discourse of the early nationalist movement created an image of a nation, and a national homeland, based on the symbols of Hindu mythology that tied the land to a locally dominant mother-goddess. The symbols incorporated the connection rural populations felt toward the land as a provider of food and life, but further rescaled this association to the national homeland as the true mother of the nation. By explicitly linking Hinduism to the land, non-Hindu populations were in danger of being symbolically excluded from the newly defined homeland and becoming Others within the nation's territory. The suggestion that they were not fully members of the imagined nation could have caused these other populations to contest this Hindu-dominated definition of the nation and assert their competing claims to the land. This contestation of the territorial control of Bengal can be seen as a potential source of the persistent violence of the 20th century during which South Asian populations sought to establish not only a place of belonging, but also a land where they could feel at home. Consequently, any study of

communalism or religious nationalism in South Asia that does not consider the centrality of territoriality and homeland discourses to the process of boundary making is incomplete. Moreover, by beginning with the assumption that ethnic or religious identity categories are now, or have always been, based in particular places, scholars run the risk of reifying the categories of practice they are attempting to understand.

Acknowledgement

Thank you to Brent Jones, Sivylay Jones, Bob Kaiser, and Salim Mohammed for commenting on earlier drafts of this article. Thanks also to the anonymous reviewers at *South Asia Research* for suggestions in the later stages. All errors that remain are mine.

Notes

1 See, for example, Benedict Anderson's introduction to Balakrishnan (1996) in which he goes to great length to emphasize the nation to which each of the authors belong. Also see Brubaker (1996) for a critique of academic writing on nations and nationalism.

2 Actors should not be taken to mean only elites, as is suggested in some instrumentalist writing. Instead anyone who actively works to develop or reify the boundaries between perceived groups would be an actor.

3 The *swadeshi* movement attempted to overturn the 1905 partition of Bengal by boycotting British goods and developing anti-colonial sentiments within the population (Sarkar, 1973). Bipin Chandra Pal was selected because his speeches and writings were influential in forming the ideological basis of the early nationalist movement in Bengal. Many of the techniques and slogans of the *swadeshi* movement were used throughout India during the subsequent successful anti-colonial nationalist movement in the 1920s–1940s. Additionally Pal, along with Aurobindo Ghose and Swami Vivekananda, is often cited as an example of the inclusive nature of turn of the century nationalism (Bose, 1997; Chatterjee, 1986, 1993). Muslim authors are conspicuously absent from this analysis, largely because they were not part of the leadership of the early nationalist movement.

4 For example, Pape (2003: 345) has recently suggested that in spite of the fact that most suicide bombings are presented as the work of religious fundamentalists, the protection of a national homeland has been the driving force of the campaigns: 'Every suicide terrorist campaign from 1980 to 2001 has been waged by terrorist groups whose main goal has been to establish or maintain self-determination for their community's homeland by compelling an enemy to withdraw'.

5 Notable exceptions are Bayly (1998) and Bose (1997). Both emphasize the importance of homelands in their work, but they tend to conflate the ideas of the nation and the homeland. Additionally, both present the homeland as if it is a part of the pre-colonial political system in South Asia rather than a modern social construction. Barrow (2003) and Edney (1997) have provided important interventions into how the geographical entity of India was constructed. Goswami's (2004) work, published after this article was written, also makes an important contribution by arguing that the political economy of the region produced the imagined national space of India. Kaiser (1994) and Paasi (1996) have written extensively on territorialization in Europe.

6 Several scholars have pointed to the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries as the crucial period in the development of anti-colonial nationalist sentiments in Bengal. See Ahmed (1981), Chatterjee (1986, 1993) and Sarkar (1973).
7 This line comes from a series of articles that were published in the journal *Bande Mataram* in April 1907.
8 Partha Chatterjee (1986) has done extensive work on how the early nationalist leaders used the dichotomies of East and West, as well as spiritual and material, to further their anti-colonial agendas.
9 *The Soul of India* was selected for this article because it is representative of the ideology of the *swadeshi* and early nationalist periods. Similar arguments can be found in the writings of Aurobindo Ghose (1947a: 7–13; 1948) and even religious leaders such as Swami Vivekananda (1900: 7, 531, 582).

References

Agnew, John (1987) *Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society*. Boston, MA: Allen & Unwin.
Ahmed, Rafiuddin (1981) *The Bengal Muslims, 1871–1906: A Quest for Identity*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
Anderson, Benedict (1991) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edition. London: Verso.
Bagchee, Moni (1977) *Vande Mataram*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.
Balakrishnan, Gopal (ed.) (1996) *Mapping the Nation*. London: Verso.
Barrow, Ian (2003) *Making History, Drawing Territory: British Mapping in India c.1756–1905*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
Bayly, Christopher (1998) *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
Billig, Michael (1996) *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage.
Bose, Sugata (1997) 'Nation as Mother: Representations and Contestations of "India" in Bengali Literature and Culture', in Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal (eds) *Nationalism, Democracy, and Development: State and Politics in India* (pp. 50–75). Delhi: Oxford University Press.
Brass, Paul (1991) *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*. New Delhi: SAGE.
Brubaker, Rogers (1996) *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Brubaker, Rogers (2002) 'Ethnicity Without Groups', *European Journal of Sociology* 43(2): 163–9.
Chatterjee, Partha (1986) *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*. London: Zed Books.
Chatterjee, Partha (1993) *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Chatterjee, Partha (1997) 'On Religious and Linguistic Nationalisms: The Second Partition of Bengal', in Ranabir Samaddar (ed.) *Reflections on Partition in the East* (pp. 35–58). New Delhi: Vikas.
Chatterji, Bankim Chandra (1969) *Bankim Rachanavali*. Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad.
Eaton, Richard (1993) *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier: 1204–1760*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
Edensor, Tim (2002) *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*. Oxford: Berg.
Edney, Matthew (1997) *Mapping an Empire: The Geographic Construction of British India 1765–1843*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.

Ghose, Aurobindo (1947a) *Bankim-Tilak-Dayananda*. Calcutta: Arya Publishing House.
Ghose, Aurobindo (1947b) *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity*. Calcutta: Arya Publishing House.
Ghose, Aurobindo (1948) *The Doctrine of Passive Resistance*. Calcutta: Arya Publishing House.
Gossman, Patricia (1999) *Riots and Victims: Violence and the Construction of Communal Identity Among Bengali Muslims, 1905–1947*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
Goswami, Manu (2004) *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Hage, Ghassen (1996) 'The Spatial Imaginary of National Practices: Dwelling Domesticating/Being-Exterminating', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 14: 463–85.
Hennayake, Shantha (1992) 'Interactive Ethnonationalism: An Alternative Explanation of Minority Ethnonationalism', *Political Geography* 11: 526–49.
Hobsbawm, Eric & Ranger, Terence (eds) (1992) *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Hroch, Miroslav (1985) *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Jordan, Michael (1993) *Encyclopedia of Gods: Over 2,500 Deities of the World*. New York: Facts on File.
Kaiser, Robert (1994) *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Kaiser, Robert (2002) 'Homeland Making and the Territorialization of National Identity', in Danielle Conversi (ed.) *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the Study of Nationalism* (pp. 229–47). New York: Routledge.
Kamra, A.J. (2000) *The Prolonged Partition and its Pogroms: Testimonies on Violence Against Hindus in East Bengal, 1946–64*. New Delhi: Voice of India.
Newman, David & Paasi, Anssi (1998) 'Fences and Neighbours in the Post-modern World: Boundary Narratives in Political Geography', *Progress in Human Geography* 22: 186–207.
O'Malley, L.S.S. (1917) *Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, Sikkim*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Paasi, Anssi (1996) *Territories, Boundaries, and Identity*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
Pal, Bipin Chandra (1911) *The Soul of India: A Constructive Study of Indian Thoughts and Ideals*. Calcutta: Choudhury and Choudhury.
Pape, Robert (2003) 'The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism', *American Political Science Review* 97: 343–61.
Roy, Asim (1983) *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Sack, Robert (1986) *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Sarkar, Sumit (1973) *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal: 1903–1908*. New Delhi: People's Publishing House.
Vivekananda, Swami (1900) *Speeches and Writings: A Comprehensive Collection with Four Portraits*. Madras: G. A. Natesan.
Weber, Eugene (1976) *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
Williams, Colin & Smith, Anthony (1983) 'The National Construction of Social Space', *Progress in Human Geography* 7: 502–18.

Reece Jones is a PhD student in the Department of Geography at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His research focuses on boundary making discourses and practices and his publications include a forthcoming article in *National Identities* entitled 'Searching for the Greatest Bengali: The BBC and Shifting Identities in South Asia'.
Address: University of Wisconsin-Madison, Science Hall, 550 N, Park Street, Madison, WI 53706, USA. [email: reecejones@wisc.edu]