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Geopolitical boundary narratives, the global war on terror and border fencing in India

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This article investigates how expansive new security projects have gained both legitimacy and immediacy as part of the 'global war on terror' by analysing the process that led to the fencing and securitising of the border between India and Bangladesh. The framing of the 'enemy other' in the global war on terror relies on two crucial shifts from previous geopolitical boundary narratives. First, the enemy other is described as not only being violent but also as outside the boundaries of modernity. Second, the enemy other is represented as posing a global and interconnected threat that is no longer limited by geography. These two shifts are used to justify the new preventative responses of pre-emptive military action abroad and the securitisation of the borders of the state. This article argues that in India the good and evil framing of the global war on terror was mapped onto longstanding communal distinctions between Hindus and Muslims. In the process, Pakistan, Bangladesh and increasingly Muslims generally are described as violent, irrational and a threat to the security of the Indian state. These changes led to a profound shift in the borderlands of the Indian state of West Bengal, where fencing and securitising the border with Bangladesh was previously resisted, but now is deemed essential. The article concludes that the framing of the war on terror as a global and interconnected problem has allowed sovereign states to consolidate power and move substantially closer to the territorial ideal of a closed and bounded container of an orderly population by attempting to lock down political borders.

key words borders security global war on terror India Bangladesh sovereign state system

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Introduction: order in the nation

Righteousness

Where there is righteousness in the heart,
There is beauty in the character.
When there is beauty in the character,
There is harmony in the home.
When there is harmony in the home,
There is an order in the nation.
When there is order in the nation,
There is peace in the world.[1]

The former president of India, Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, began his annual address to the joint session of parliament on 23 February 2007 with this short, elegant poem. He read it first in Hindi and then again in English, just to make sure everyone in the audience understood. Indeed, during his term as president he regularly recited this poem in his public appearances dating back to 2003, whether meeting technology executives, sanitation workers or university graduates (Kalam 2008). The poem is attractive because it integrates many of the enduring dreams of humanity: beauty in the character, harmony in the home and peace in the world. It also symbolises the popularly imagined duality of India because it is concomitantly spiritual and modern, succinctly linking the feelings of

ISSN 0020-2754

the heart with a linear modern march towards order in the nation and peace in the world. The poem, therefore, is also symbolic of India's emergent position as an important frontier in the 'global war on terror', which is described as a battle between the modern, civilised world and the terrorists that seek to destroy that system.

From the outset, the war on terror was presented as not simply a conflict between the United States and the terrorist network that attacked it. Instead, it is depicted as a global fight of the righteous, civilised people versus the evil, barbaric people of the world (Dalby 2003; Gregory 2004; Harvey 2003). On 12 September British Prime Minister Tony Blair (2001) declared that 'the terrorists responsible have no sense of humanity, of mercy, or of justice' and it 'was an attack on the free and democratic world everywhere', not just America. The global framing of the war on terror encouraged like-minded governments to position their internal and external conflicts as part of the fight. Rupal Oza (2007a) argues that Israel and India in particular adopted this rhetoric of threat and security to justify, *and expand*, their own exclusionary practices. Just as the United States has characterised terrorists as fanatical evildoers, Israel has positioned itself as the lone outpost of civilisation in the Middle East, while the Hindu Right in India has described Muslims as uncivilised invaders who threaten the secular stability of the Indian state (Gregory 2004; Oza 2007a 2007b).

Indian politicians often describe India as 'the worst victim of terrorist violence in the world', a claim that was supported by the multiple targets and long duration of the horrific siege in Mumbai in November 2008 (Advani 2008). Although the attack in Mumbai captured the world's attention, it was only the latest example of violence in India, which in 2008 alone endured 10 attacks that killed over 400 people. Indeed, in the 7 years since India allied itself with the United States in its global war on terror, India has suffered at least one major attack every year. This article, while denouncing the recent violence in India in the strongest terms, is primarily concerned with how terrorism is represented in India and how the aftermath of these horrible events has reshaped the security practices of the Indian state, particularly at India's political borders.

The adoption of a binary worldview in the global war on terror that sees all peoples and places as either good or evil (Brubaker 1999) is used to justify two different exceptional preventative responses by the state to the perceived threat of a future terrorist attack (Agamben 1998 2005). The first is a foreign policy that relies on the emerging doctrine of contingent sovereignty (Elden 2006), which argues that preemptive military action that violates international norms of sovereignty is justified when another sovereign state does not uphold its duty to prevent terrorist activities within its territory (Bush 2002 2006). The government of the United States relied on this logic in its invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as in threats of a potential attack on Iran (Gregory 2004; Gregory and Pred 2007). The second preventative measure is the increased securitisation of the home through electronic surveillance, the deployment of uniformed troops in public spaces (Katz 2007), and new fencing projects at political borders (Ackelson 2005; Amoore 2006; Andreas and Biersteker 2003; Coleman 2005; Sparke 2006). Since 2001, the United States has fenced 550 kilometres of its border with Mexico with an additional 575 kilometres planned, and Israel has created a de facto border with its contentious 700-kilometre security barrier in the West Bank. India, in addition to expanding its fence along the border with Pakistan, has fenced large sections of its 4096-kilometre border with Bangladesh, at a total cost of US$4 billion, a border which had been open and relatively lightly guarded for most of the previous 60 years (Kabir 2005).

The securitisation of the border with Pakistan is understandable; the two countries have had four wars in the past 60 years, and India routinely accuses Pakistan of supporting anti-state movements in Kashmir and other parts of India. However, the fencing of the border with Bangladesh deserves further scrutiny because India and Bangladesh have had peaceful relations since India helped liberate Bangladesh in 1971 and the population of Bangladesh shares a linguistic and cultural heritage with the Indian state of West Bengal. Indeed, although the federal government authorised a fence on the Bangladesh border in 1986, it was resisted in West Bengal, and only 5 per cent was completed by 2000 (Van Schendel 2005). Nevertheless, in the past 7 years, the resistance disappeared and the fence was rapidly constructed.

This article explores how this massive security project on the border between India and Bangladesh gained both legitimacy and immediacy as part of the 'global war on terror'. The discourse of

ISSN 0020-2754

the global war on terror relies on two crucial shifts in how the 'enemy other' is represented. The first shift is the simultaneous territorialisation of the enemy other as being from particular places that foster terrorism and de-territorialisation as anomie that is *outside the boundaries of modernity*. This concomitant locating of the enemy other while removing their legitimacy to exist in the modern world is used to justify both the securitisation of the home and pre-emptive military actions abroad. The second shift is the framing of the terrorist threat as being global and interconnected. Somewhat paradoxically, the global framing allows sovereign states to substantially consolidate power and move closer to the territorial ideal of a fixed, bounded and closed container of a homogenous, orderly and controlled population by attempting to lock down political borders.

These representations of the enemy other are created through geopolitical boundary narratives, which describe distinctions between categories of people and reify those distinctions by symbolically inscribing them onto the space of the earth (Abbott 1995). The categories used to classify people, places and things are not pre-given realities in the world but rather are socially constructed perspectives on the world (Brubaker 1996 2002; Jones 2009; Lakoff and Johnson 1999). Power lies in the ability to define the boundaries of the categories that are used to understand the world, which establishes *what is* and is not (Bourdieu 1991; Foucault 1971 1977). As geographical imaginaries are reshaped, material processes on the ground are reordered, as the discourse performatively creates the materiality that it names (Butler 1990 1993).

In India, these two shifts in geopolitical boundary narratives resulted in the mapping of the global threat of terrorism onto communal religious conflicts within India and onto external disputes with Pakistan and increasingly Bangladesh. This article examines this process by first depicting the state-scale narratives that represent Bangladeshi Muslims as evil and Bangladesh as a pre-modern space that is outside the modern system. Then, by drawing on interviews and focus groups conducted in the borderlands between the Indian state of West Bengal and Bangladesh as the border fence was built, it demonstrates how these exclusionary narratives were used to reanimate local communal disagreements as examples of the evil nature of Bangladeshi Muslims.[2] This reimagining of historical conflicts and contemporary practices in Bangladesh as outside the boundaries of modernity justified the immediate completion of the previously controversial border fencing project.

The state of security in India

In the immediate aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States, the government of India, then led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), expressed outrage at the violence and gave its full support to the United States' effort to fight extremism (Vajpayee 2001). The Indian Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in a televised address on 14 September 2001, linked India to the global fight:

> My dear countrymen, as you know, terrorists have struck yet another blow – at the United States of America, at humanity, at the civilized way of life. … Every Indian has to be a part of this global war on terrorism. We must, and we will, stamp out this evil from our land, and from the world. *Jai Hind* [Victory to India].

In the seven years since, even after a change in leadership in the 2004 election, India expanded its internal security measures, substantially strengthened its security ties to the United States, and sped up fencing projects at its political borders. In the process of implementing these changes to security practices, the geopolitical boundary narratives of the global war on terror, which represent the world as a binary of good and evil, were mapped onto historical communal conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in South Asia (Oza 2007a). This reframing of communalism as terrorism resulted in Bangladesh, with a majority Muslim population, increasingly being seen as a threat to India.

On 21 October 2001, just over a month after the attacks in the United States, the governments of India and the United States signed the Mutual Assistance on Criminal Matters Treaty, after which 'both sides expressed their determination to redouble efforts to eradicate the scourge of terrorism and to use this Treaty as an instrument to that end' (Ministry of External Affairs 2001). In early 2002, the Parliament of India passed the Prevention of Terrorist Activities Act (POTA), which was modelled on the US PATRIOT Act and granted Indian security services exceptional emergency powers to combat terrorism (Agamben 1998 2005). Although the expansive security measures granted through POTA were rescinded after the surprise victory of the Congress Party of India in the 2004 election, many of the most questionable security measures,

ISSN 0020-2754

which were temporary and under court review in POTA, were shifted into the permanent criminal code through the revision of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) of 2004 (Singh 2006). Singh argues that 'it has confirmed the dangerous trend of making temporary and extraordinary measures part of the ordinary legal system' (2006, 127).

In addition to these permanent changes to security laws, the Congress Party staked its leadership position in Parliament on further strengthening its security ties with the United States through the controversial United States–India Nuclear Cooperation Approval and Non-proliferation Enhancement Act, which was ratified and signed by both countries in October 2008 (Holmes 2007; Rajghatta 2008). Robert Kaufman (2007) calls this growing security relationship between the United States and India the most significant, but often overlooked, foreign policy success by the Bush Administration. He goes so far as to argue that '[w]ith the possible exception of Israel, no other country in the world is as pro-American as India' (2007, 151). The deal reversed a 34-year-old ban on trade in nuclear materials with India, which further solidified the defence, security and commercial relationships between the countries.

Finally, the Congress Party expanded border fencing projects along the Pakistan and Bangladesh borders, both of which were under consideration for several decades but were only begun in earnest by the BJP in 2002 (Kabir 2005). In practice, then, despite the Congress Party's public opposition to the BJP's position on terrorism, it has maintained or expanded most of the BJP's security measures. In January 2004 the Department of Border Management was created within the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs to coordinate the overseeing of border areas and to facilitate the construction of fences, roads and floodlights along India's borders. By the end of 2007, India had fenced 1913 kilometres of its 2308-kilometre border with Pakistan, with only rivers and desert areas that consist of shifting sand dunes left unfenced (Ministry of Home Affairs 2008, 146).

More unexpected is the decision to fence nearly the entire border with Bangladesh, which is India's longest section of border at 4096 kilometres (Ministry of Home Affairs 2008). Despite the history of an open and relatively peaceful border,[3] by the end of 2007, 2535 kilometres of barbed wire fencing were completed along the Bangladesh border and 3250 kilometres of roads have been constructed to facilitate the movement of Indian Border Security Forces (BSF). Additionally, floodlights, which are switched on all night long, were installed on 277 kilometres of the most frequently crossed sections (Ministry of Home Affairs 2008). The floodlight project was expanded in 2008 with a goal of lighting a total of 2840 kilometres of the border with Bangladesh by 2012, at an additional cost of US$275 million (Rs. 1327 crore) (Ministry of Home Affairs 2008, 30). The panopticon of the Indian state need not be imagined; it shines bright all night long for many of the Bangladeshi borderland residents (Foucault 1977).

Despite the extensive security measures and expanded border fencing projects carried out by the current Indian government, the number of attacks inside India has increased substantially in the past 4 years. In 2008 alone, in addition to the Mumbai siege, which killed 173 people, there were major bombings in Guwahati in October, which killed 55 people, in Delhi in September, which killed 30 people, and in Ahmedabad in July, which killed 49 people (Sengupta 2008; Shankar 2008). Previously, large bombings occurred in Delhi in 2005, killing 59 people; in Mumbai in 2006, killing 209 people; and in Hyderabad in 2007, killing 42 people (Buncombe 2007; Kumar 2005; Rai and Sengupta 2006).

All of these attacks were linked in media reports and Indian government statements to extremist organisations from Bangladesh, although arrests and definitive connections have not been made publically (*The Daily Star* 2008; Makkar 2008; Nag 2008). The 2006 Mumbai train bombers, although reportedly from Pakistan, were said to have crossed into India via the Bangladesh border. In the 2007 Hyderabad bombing, the chief minister of the state of Andhra Pradesh said that 'available information points to the involvement of terrorist organisations based in Bangladesh and Pakistan' (Buncombe 2007). The Indian media widely reported that the same group that was suspected in the Hyderabad attack, 'Harkatul Jihad, Bangladesh', was also responsible for the Ahmedabad violence in 2008. Reports from Pakistan also suggested that the November 2008 Mumbai siege was planned in Bangladesh and supplies were bought in India near the Bangladesh border (Bokhari 2009). The Indian Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram denied that Bangladesh was connected to the Mumbai siege (*The Hindu* 2009), but nevertheless continued to link Bangladesh with terrorist activity, saying in

ISSN 0020-2754

December 2008, 'But the regrettable fact is that many groups still use Bangladeshi territory and we hope that they will not give sanctuary to such groups' (*The Hindu* 2008).

Just days after the September 2008 Delhi serial bombings, Manmohan Singh (2008), the Prime Minster of India, outlined the Indian response:

> Terrorism today is an ubiquitous global phenomenon and we are among its major victims … We have increased vigilance on our borders. Coastal security is being tightened … Several steps have been taken to improve both policing and intelligence, but a far greater effort is called for … Use of Closed Circuit TVs in areas where there are large congregations of people will need to be mandated. Greater use of technology, particularly relating to the detection of explosives and interception of Internet traffic will be required … We are actively considering legislation to further strengthen the substantive anti-terrorism law in line with the global consensus on the fight against terrorism.

The opposition BJP party, and many newspaper editorial boards, have called for reinstituting POTA and expanding the powers granted to security forces in response to the growing internal terrorist threat in India (Prakash 2008; *The Statesman* 2008). An editorial in *The Times of India* (2008) argued that 'We are at war … At this moment of crisis, some of the liberties that we take for granted might have to be curbed to ensure that terrorists, who follow no norms and rules, are effectively restrained.' These sentiments were further reinforced by the horrific Mumbai violence in November 2008.

L.K. Advani, the leader of the opposition BJP party in Parliament, argued in a widely covered speech in October 2008, before the Mumbai siege:

> POTA remained in existence from September 2001 till December 2004. During this period, only eight incidents of terrorist violence, including the attack on Parliament and on Akshardham Temple in Gandhingar, took place in India's hinterland, leading to 119 deaths. Contrast it with what happened after POTA was repealed: The footprint of terrorism has grown alarmingly larger in the past four years. Terrorists are striking at will in many parts of the country. Jammu, Ayodhya, Varanasi, Samjhauta Express in Haryana, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Malegaon, Jaipur, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Delhi and, in the latest attack, serial blasts rocked Agartala in Tripura just two days ago. During this period, 625 persons have been killed and 2,011 injured, depicting a five-fold increase in those killed and injured. It is the same country, same people, same police and same intelligence agencies; what then explains this unprecedented increase? The answer is very simple: Weak laws have emboldened the terrorists and appeasement has failed to change their intentions. (Advani 2008)

Advani's speech also explicitly linked the people and territory of Bangladesh to the terrorist threat in India. He continues:

> We can see this clearly from what both Pakistan and Bangladesh have been doing to us. Neither can match India's military strength. Yet, both have been threatening India with cross-border terrorism. This warfare is waged by an invisible enemy, for whom the civil society is both a source of sustenance and the target. The enemy exploits the liberties, freedom, technological facilities and infrastructure to his advantage, making even the more powerful, better equipped security agencies feel helpless.

The inclusion of Bangladesh as an equal partner with Pakistan in supporting terrorist activities in India marks a fundamental shift in the framing of Bangladesh in the public discourse in India and in the relations between the two governments. While India and Pakistan have been in conflict since their independence, Bangladesh and India have had peaceful relations, further encouraged by the linguistic and cultural history Bangladesh shares with the Indian state of West Bengal (Sengupta 2001).

Pre-modernising Bangladesh

It was by no means a foregone conclusion that the secular, moderate country that gained its independence in 1971 would become, or at least be perceived to be, a haven for terrorists and a grave threat to the security of India that required a massive fencing project on the border. Despite the political border that divides the Indian state of West Bengal and Bangladesh, and the anti-Bangladesh narratives in the contemporary public discourse in India, the two Bengals have a long history of cultural, political and economic connections. In addition to the common Bengali language spoken on both sides, they share many cultural traditions based in literature, food and dress; practices that often emerged from the city of Calcutta [contemporary Kolkata in West Bengal]. In an interview, a 63-year-old Muslim male middle school headmaster in Bangladesh explained the connections prominent cultural and political figures in Bangladesh's history had to Calcutta prior to the 1947 partition:

> Artists, writers, educators, politicians, they all lived in Calcutta. Literary leaders such as Rabrindranath Tagore

ISSN 0020-2754

> and Kazi Nazrul Islam, politicians like Huseyn Suharwardy. They were born there, they started their lives there, they studied there, and they started their political movements from there.

The people of the two halves of Bengal also historically resisted efforts to divide them politically, as is demonstrated by the 1905 *Swadeshi* movement that protested a British colonial political reorganisation that involved dividing the province of Bengal (Sarkar 1973).

The province of Bengal was nevertheless eventually divided on religious lines in the 1947 partition, which carved Pakistan out of Muslim majority areas in the northwest of British India and in the eastern districts of Bengal (Chatterji 1994 1999; Tan and Kudaisya 2000). However, in the years after that event, the political climate in East Pakistan [East Bengal] shifted away from its religious alliance with West Pakistan towards a secular nationalism that emphasised the shared Bengali culture of the population (Jahan 1972). The slogan of the Bangladeshi independence movement was 'Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims of Bengal, We are all Bengali'. After its independence, many of the Islamist leaders of the erstwhile East Pakistan, who had not supported independence for Bangladesh but rather sided with the Pakistani army, were sent into exile and were banned from politics (Murshid 2001). The original constitution of Bangladesh downplayed Islam while emphasising nationalism, democracy, socialism and secularism (Feldman 2006; Murshid 1997 2001; Huq 1984).

Therefore, despite the 1947 partition that divided the province of Bengal based on religion, there are many other factors that indicate lingering cultural, economic and social connections between West Bengal and Bangladesh (Chatterjee 1997; Ghosh 2004). These connections explain the decades-long resistance of the state government in West Bengal to the fencing project on the Bangladesh border. Although the official decision to build a fence, ostensibly to slow the flow of undocumented immigrants from Bangladesh, was made by the Indian Parliament in 1986, by 2000, only 5 per cent of the border had actually been fenced (Kabir 2005; Sammadar 1999; Van Schendel 2005). Most of the completed sections were where the border divides Bangladesh from the Indian state of Assam. In West Bengal only a few kilometres were completed near border crossings (Van Schendel 2005). However, since 2002 the Left Front government in West Bengal, which has governed Bengal for over 30 years and traditionally turned a blind eye to cross-border movement, relaxed its opposition to the border fence (Kumar 2005). Furthermore, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, has repeatedly warned of the threat posed by terrorism, controversially suggesting in 2002 that Madrasahs in West Bengal were supporting terrorism (*Times of India* 2002) and in 2005 arguing that the Pakistani security service, the ISI, was setting up operations in West Bengal by crossing the border from Bangladesh (Chatterjee 2006).

The shift in West Bengal occurred as the public discourse in India emphasised the connections between Islamisation in Bangladesh and terrorism in India. The secular orientation of Bangladesh began to change in the mid-1970s as the political necessity of unifying the entire population against Pakistan waned and internal political considerations gained importance (Huq 1984). Since the late 1970s, the various governments that came to power increasingly integrated Islam into the affairs of the state through changes to the constitution and the removal of restrictions on the Islamist parties (Feldman 2006; Murshid 1997 2001; Van Schendel 2001). The rehabilitation of the formerly banned Islamist parties was complete by the 2001 election in which the Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote were members of the winning coalition and were given seats in the cabinet.

In India, the revival of Islamist politics in Bangladesh is not understood as a spiritual awakening, or simply a populist political strategy. Instead it is described as a fundamental shift in the mentality of the residents of Bangladesh that radically reconfigured the connections between West Bengal and Bangladesh (Saikia 2003). Datta argues that

> religious extremism is on the rise in Bangladesh and the groups identified with or espousing the cause of radical Islamic trends have brought havoc to the country. (2007, 145)

In the borderlands of West Bengal, the Islamic shift in Bangladesh is perceived as making the people susceptible to the lure of terrorism and therefore a threat to the security of India. Jaideep Saikia writes that

> The slogan *Amra hobo Taliban, Bangla hobe Afghan* (we will be the Taliban, Bangladesh will become Afghanistan) has been carried into rural Bangladesh. The growing Islamisation of Bangladesh has direct consequences

ISSN 0020-2754

> for the secular space of North East India that it strategically borders. (2003, 2)

In an interview, a 46-year-old Hindu male shopkeeper in India explained how the change is understood:

> Everywhere in the world where there is terrorism, Muslims are doing it. They are doing terrorism. Now America's president Bush is doing something about it. We support America because we are in the same situation. We realise now that terrorism is beginning here and it is coming from Bangladesh. Please don't mind me saying it, I was born there, but now that is a Muslim country. It is becoming like Laden.

The result is the perception that Bangladesh is a place that is increasingly organised by pre-modern social codes that do not mesh with the modern state of India. Rather than modernising, many in the West Bengal borderlands feel that Bangladesh has gone in the opposite direction since its independence and has become increasingly pre-modern in its orientation.

A global threat to modernity

Throughout the history of the sovereign state system there has been fear of the enemy other across the border (Neocleous 2008). As Carl Schmitt (1996) famously argued, one of the fundamental roles of the state is to distinguish friend from enemy; that is, to create the boundaries of the categories of those who are represented by the state and those who are not. Geopolitical boundary narratives are the means through which the boundaries of place-based identity categories, such as nations, ethnicities and enemy others, are established. Geopolitical boundary narratives describe the boundaries of particular categories and those inchoate categorical boundaries are reified as they are territorialised to particular places in the world.

Similar to the representation of communism during the Cold War, which Campbell argues was 'a code for distinguishing the ''civilized'' from the ''barbaric''' (1992, 159), contemporary geopolitical boundary narratives describe the terrorist enemy other as a violent threat, which defines the self as the opposite of those things (Said 1979). However, there are two crucial shifts in the geopolitical boundary narratives of the global war on terror that allowed for a rapid consolidation of power by sovereign states and an expansion of security practices. First, the enemy other, although territorialised as a threat emanating from particular places like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Gregory 2004), is not conferred a legitimate right to exist anywhere in the world. Instead, the enemy others of the global war on terror are symbolically narrated out of the modern world itself. Second, the threat posed by the enemy other is described as no longer being constrained by the geography of the places from which it emerges. Instead, it is represented as a global and interconnected security threat to all modern sovereign states, not just those that are near the source.

During the Cold War, and many other twentieth-century conflicts, the enemy other was often another state in the sovereign state system, and the dominant geopolitical narratives revolved around containment and the domino theory (Dodds 2003). The United States and its allies focused their attention on the simplistic but evocative notion that the threat of the communist enemy other needed to be contained in order to prevent neighbouring states from falling like dominos. There are two key assumptions here. The first is that the Soviet Union, although an enemy, was another sovereign state and did have a legitimate right to operate within its territory. It was recognised as such at the United Nations and participated as another actor in the sovereign state system. Conflict during the Cold War occurred when one state attempted to extend its power beyond its boundaries into neighbouring states. The second assumption is that even when the threat did move beyond the territorial boundaries of the Soviet Union, it was almost always into neighbouring states. Therefore, containment and the domino theory were based firmly on the notion that the threat was located in a particular geographic area and that its potential consequences were often in that same area.

In the global war on terror, the geopolitical boundary narratives also describe the enemy other as a violent threat and locate the enemy other in particular places (Gregory 2004). However, the irrational people and pre-modern practices that are perceived to characterise those places are concomitantly described as being outside the boundaries of modernity. The enemy other is no longer seen as a legitimate actor in the sovereign state system but rather as anomie that is a threat to the modern system itself. Additionally, the geography of the threat is no longer limited to those particular places where it is found, but rather represents an unpredictable global threat that could affect any state,

ISSN 0020-2754

not just the neighbouring states (although those, too, are at a particularly great risk). These two changes in the geopolitical framing of the enemy other create the necessary conditions that allow the rapid expansion of previously controversial security projects.

As George W. Bush argued only 3 days after the attacks of 11 September, '[o]ur responsibility to history is already clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil' (2002, 5). The rhetoric is no longer about containing an evil empire, but rather about eliminating evil from the world. This sentiment was echoed by Ariel Sharon in Israel (Gregory 2004), and in the statements by Blair and Vajpayee referenced above, all of which framed the event as an example of evil that has no legitimate place in the world and which must be eliminated.[4] This displacement of the enemy other from modernity is used to justify the two exceptional preventative responses of the global war on terror: the doctrine of 'contingent sovereignty', which removes the legitimacy of sovereign states that sponsor terrorism – literally marking them as no longer part of the modern system – and the rapid securitisation of the sovereign state, which is designed to prevent the anti-modern threat from entering the sanitised space of modernity.

The most telling part of L.K. Advani's October 2008 speech on terrorism in India was the conclusion in which he explicitly linked the terrorist threat – always with the adjective Islamic implied if left unsaid – to the symbolism of a Hindu religious ceremony that celebrates the victory of good over evil:

> One last point. The *Navaratri* festival has begun. It will conclude on *Vijaya Dashami*, which symbolizes the victory of Good over Evil. I suggest that, in addition to *Ravan Dahan* (burning of the effigy of Ravan), let *Navaratri pandals* all over the country also do *Atankvaad Dahan* (burning the effigy of the Demon of Terrorism). Let it symbolize our collective resolve to make India terror-free.

By presenting the enemy other as pre-modern and irrational, it follows that they cannot be reasoned with. Instead of a global dialogue about the causes of terrorist violence, a pre-emptive foreign policy is necessary to kill them before they can kill us. Instead of reaching out to develop a broader understanding of the world, righteousness and a binary worldview result in a security state at home to prevent evil from ever entering 'our land'.

Boundary narratives at the border

In the borderlands of West Bengal, despite the many economic, cultural and social connections with Bangladesh that previously existed across the open border, these narratives have gained substantial traction. Bangladesh is represented as a danger to the stability of India by overlaying terrorism onto communal distinctions. This occurred, first, as collective memories of violence over the past several hundred years were reimagined as not merely reprehensible behaviour during times of unrest but as examples of evil and, second, as the traditional beliefs and everyday practices of Bangladeshi Muslims were reimagined as examples of unpredictable irrationality. As Bangladeshi Muslims are narrated as historically evil and presently irrational, Bangladesh is increasingly perceived to be a pre-modern place that could foster the growth of terrorism, which therefore must be prevented from entering the modern state of India.

Oza argues that the narrative that labels Muslims as a barbaric enemy other

> was a deliberate political and geographical maneuver that served the Hindu Right's agenda of crafting a pure Hindu nation by dismantling the place of Pakistan and Muslim minorities in the subcontinent. (2007a, 17)

Of course, over the past 150 years there has been an ongoing effort by Hindu leaders to weaken the place of Islam in South Asia by arguing it is a religion with foreign origins that is illegitimate in the homeland of Hinduism (Chatterjee 1993; Jones 2006 2007). This version of Indian history was originally expressed by prominent cultural and religious leaders in the late nineteenth century such as Bankim Chandra Chatterji (1992) and Swami Vivekananda (1900), and it continues to be employed in contemporary debates. A 44-year-old Hindu male teacher in India described the perceived connection between the spread of Islam in South Asia and the decline of Hindu India:

> [in English] At one time our area was enriched in every way, in every aspect like fruits, breads, water, beasts, cattle head, poultry, and fish. … There is no parallel country. But the Muslim suppressors did much harm to India. They were cruel beyond any civic sense. They only killed and cut the Indian people. They pierced their religion. They threatened them with knives and swords. That was the dark period of India and that is why our economic and social condition is so

ISSN 0020-2754

> deteriorated. Okay? Only the Muslims were the most dangerous elements who did harm to India.

The affective fear created by the attacks of 11 September 2001 (Ó Tuathail 2003), and the subsequent violent events in India, allowed these longstanding grievances between Hindus and Muslims to be linked to the contemporary narratives of good and evil in the discourse of the global war on terror, narratives that argue that the evil terrorists must be completely eliminated from the world.

In the borderlands, this connection was made by reframing collective memories of both historical and contemporary violence against minorities in Bangladesh. In these narratives, the violence is described in a way that removes it from the context of communal animosity on both sides of the border and instead situates the blame squarely on the troubling behaviour of Muslims. The actions of Muslims are not described as those of reasonable people who were temporarily overcome with rage during a time of unrest or who were retaliating for violence committed against their families. Instead, their actions are presented as being symptomatic of the cruel and evil nature of Muslims. The atrocities committed by Hindus during and after partition, and for which many acts by Muslims were tit-for-tat reprisals, are almost completely erased from the collective memory in West Bengal. The result is a hardening of the boundary between the perceived evil Muslim aggressors and the innocent Hindu victims (Kamra 2000).

A 52-year-old Hindu female homemaker, who was born in East Pakistan but migrated to India as a child, graphically describes an attack she witnessed just before her family left (my emphasis):

> In another family, they had six cute girls and five sons. The type of persecution they suffered you cannot hear with your ears or see with your eyes. They were an educated family. He was a high school teacher and all of the girls had degrees. The boys were also educated. … The Muslims tortured them in so many ways. *So why would I call Muslims good*? I will not feel right if I say that. They brought them out one by one, these girls were educated in Calcutta, and raped them. You would also be shocked by what happened to their father. In front of his elderly wife they bound his arms and shot him. Is it possible that people who engage in this type of oppression can be called good?

By recounting her story, I am not suggesting that the violence she describes was acceptable or that it did not occur. Indeed, the intensity with which she told the story left no doubt in my mind that she witnessed these attacks. What I want to emphasise is the manner in which the violence is recounted. In the years after partition there was violence on both sides of the border and many Muslims were harassed and killed by Hindus. However, in her recollection of the events, the Hindus are presented as peaceful modern people. She describes them as an educated, civilised family, even pausing to add the qualification 'these girls were educated in Calcutta' to the critical sentence about the violent acts. She also emphasises that these horrendous actions of a few Muslims makes it impossible for her to say that Muslims, generally, are good. In the process, the violent, deplorable actions during a particular event result in the boundary between good and evil being mapped onto the categories Hindu and Muslim.

The erasure of violence in India, whether perceived or actual, furthers the notion of the threat of an evil enemy other across the border in Bangladesh. In narratives about contemporary violence, India is represented as a civil and just place where modern people reside. Bangladesh, conversely, is described as a place where barbaric actions are commonplace and accepted by the people. A 52-year-old Hindu male businessperson, who was born in East Pakistan, but immigrated to an Indian town near the border, explains:

> When the Babri mosque was destroyed [in 1992 in India] there was substantial violence in Bangladesh. You have no idea how ferocious the Mohamadans [Muslims] are. In a civil society this sort of behaviour will not occur. They would throw children in the air and spear them when they came down. Sometimes they would light a house full of people on fire.

Without dwelling on how or why the Babri mosque was destroyed in India, which for the record was done by a Hindu Right mob, he quickly shifts the blame to the 'ferocious' Muslims in Bangladesh. The violent and exclusionary acts in India that initiated the events in Bangladesh are ignored and instead the even more violent and more uncivilised actions of the enemy other are recounted. The 'sort of behaviour' that actually occurs 'in a civil society' is not discussed, but the behaviour of Muslims is narrated out of it, excluded as the uncivilised other (Said 1979).

It is not particularly surprising that this sort of violence is described as outside the boundaries of civilised behaviour. It is. However, the same

ISSN 0020-2754

boundaries between modern and pre-modern appear in narratives about the quotidian experiences of populations on both sides of the border. These narratives describe the expansion of traditional Islamic social institutions that subjugate women in Bangladesh, the replacement of a modern education system in Bangladesh with religious schools, and even the irrational choices made by Bangladeshi Muslims in the markets and in their homes.

A 34-year-old Hindu female primary school teacher in India describes how the social norms in each place have become increasingly different:

> I have never been to Bangladesh but it is a Muslim majority country. Because of that there is more conservatism there. That means they are strict in terms of honour, culture and religion. They are very strict. Compared to that, India is very liberal. There women have to wear purdah [veil] and they are not able to get a good education. Here at night you see many women out in town. Did you ever see that in Bangladesh? Very little. Here there are many more freedoms.

In West Bengal, the treatment of women in Bangladesh is consistently cited as a critical distinction between the two places that signifies the boundary between a modern India and a traditional Bangladesh. As Chatterjee (1993) and Oza (2007a) argue, the female body is often narrated as the place where the conflict between the traditional and the modern is contested. India is represented as part of the modern, civilised and developed world, while Bangladesh is symbolically partitioned off as an anachronistic place where pre-modern social codes still shape everyday life. The reality of life in Bangladesh is less important than the perception that it is a violent and pre-modern place.

The most troubling aspect for some residents of the West Bengal borderlands is the feeling that irrational behaviour is not limited to times of uncertainty but rather is pervasive. An exchange from a focus group involving two Hindu male college-educated telecommunications workers in India, aged 36 and 27, demonstrates this view:

> 36-year-old: Here we think that our next generation needs to be able to feed themselves. [The Muslims] do not think about this. They irrationally have ten or twelve children and think Allah will take care of them. Allah will save them. When we consider what science says, they just say Allah. Just imagine it, if one family has ten members how many members those children's families will have. But their country has no land, it has three big rivers.

> 27-year-old: Muslims naturally have a different mentality. If you help them their eyes will change and they will not acknowledge it. They are laughing this minute but they could stab you with a knife the next.

> 36-year-old: They are very different. They do not understand what friendship means. All over the world terrorism is carried out by Muslims: Laden, Saddam Hussein, Taliban.

The 36-year-old begins by making a clear distinction between Indian society, which he characterises as modern and scientific, and Bangladesh, which he feels is a place where people have irrational beliefs. Crucially, the banal everyday irrationality of the population in Bangladesh is seen as the link to the prevalence of terrorism in the Muslim community. Although it is recognised that most Muslims are not terrorists, the narrative of generalised Muslim irrationality provides the fear that at any moment any Muslim *could* become a terrorist.

When taken together, these narratives frame India as a place populated by good people and Bangladesh becomes a place that is populated by irrational and violent people, who 'naturally have a different mentality' and are potentially a threat to the peace and stability of India. The events of 11 September 2001, and the subsequent terrorist attacks in India, have allowed the rhetoric of the global war on terror, which frames the fight against terrorism as an effort to eliminate evil from the world, to be mapped onto these perceptions of Bangladesh as a traditional, irrational, barbaric and evil place.

In the West Bengal borderlands, there is a clear desire to link the local situation to the larger effort to eliminate terrorism in the world. The conversation between the 27-year-old and 36-year-old telecommunications workers continues:

> 27-year-old: We read the paper, we know what America is saying, what they want, what they want to do. We understand it … The most important thing is that Bangladesh has become a refuge for terrorists. Terrorists are in every part of Bangladesh. We are telling America the news about where they are … They have lots of madrasahs and that is where the terrorists are. They are in every district. We possess this information.

> 36-year-old: Presently the problem is terrorists coming to India. Now because of this problem with terrorists we have to view Bangladesh with suspicion. At first this was not the case, but now terrorism is increasing. Bangladesh is now a refuge for terrorism. It is increasing and it is coming here across the border from Bangladesh.

ISSN 0020-2754

The realisation that these local communal distinctions between the populations on each side of the border match the global threat posed by terrorism resulted in a rapid reappraisal of an open and unguarded border with Bangladesh. Rather than understanding the distinctions between the two populations as merely examples of divergent cultural and religious practices, the perceived barbaric and irrational behaviour of Bangladeshi Muslims is increasingly understood as an existential threat to India and other sovereign states. A 66-year-old Hindu male retired headmaster and local politician in India sums up the concerns of borderland residents:

> Q: Why is India building the fence?
>
> A: The terrorists. They are making passage through Bangladesh to India. The western part of India is very secure with desert and troops but this portion is open. It is open. There is not very strong restriction against movement. They are coming to the border and crossing it. There is no natural barrier there so they are crossing the border like it is a highway.

There is a resigned acceptance that the situation has changed in Bangladesh, which forced the residents of West Bengal to support the construction of the fence and the securitisation of the borderlands.

The affective fear of the enemy other across the border resulted in the feeling that not only is a fence necessary, but that it must be constructed rapidly to prevent further infiltrations inside India. The accelerated project began in 2002 and by 2008 the border between West Bengal and Bangladesh was completely fenced, except in the Sundarbans, a large mangrove forest where rivers mark the border (Ministry of Home Affairs 2008). The 24-year-old male contractor whose company was working on long sections of the security project in West Bengal reported that his company was instructed to do whatever it takes to complete the fencing project. In an interview in a border town he explains:

> Q: Why is the fence being built?
>
> A: [in English] The president has demanded it no matter what the cost. The fence must be finished by 2007. The main reason is terrorism. Bangladesh is the only way terrorists can enter India. If you look at Assam, ULFA get their weapons from Bangladesh. If you look at Tripura, the rebels there get their weapons from Bangladesh. If you look at West Bengal, the Naxalites get their weapons from Bangladesh. And it is not just the border areas, once a terrorist is in India they can go everywhere. [. . .]
>
> Q: What religion are you?
>
> A: I am a Muslim but I am not a terrorist. India has been good for me and I am happy here.

The pervasiveness of the 'Muslim as terrorist threat' narrative in the daily discourse in India is evident from his need to follow up his religion with a declaration that he, himself, is not a terrorist. Although he is happy with the situation in India, many other borderland residents have felt the shift in attitudes towards Muslims and fear that they are no longer seen as equal citizens of India. A 45-year-old Muslim male businessman in India describes the changes he experienced:

> One type of separation already happened in the attitudes of my Hindu neighbours. Now, by making this fence, they are reinforcing it.

Borderland residents in Bangladesh, on the other side of the previously open border, also feel this change in West Bengal. According to a 60-year-old Muslim male local politician in Bangladesh:

> Q: Do you still have relationships with people in India?
>
> A: I do have connections with people there. Still when I go to India they love me. But now the situation has become bad. The problems and fears created by Laden [pointing to his long beard] keeps me from going there now. I used to go but I have not been for several years. The Taliban movement began and all these sorts of things have happened. The people of this country keep a long beard which makes them stand out in India. They may be suspicious of me and shoot me. BSF [Indian Border Security Force] is killing many people on the Bangladesh border. Because of this fear I do not go there.

The change in the atmosphere in West Bengal results in many Bangladeshis reconsidering their plans to travel to India to visit family or to look for work, which is, of course, the goal of the fence. However, although fences and barriers are meant to create a secure space, they often fail to completely prevent the movement of people across the border.

Along the Bangladesh border this is particularly true because the fence itself has many gates in it (Kabir 2005; Buerk 2006). India built the fence 150 metres away from the actual border in accordance with a treaty with Bangladesh that prohibited defensive structures in that zone. However, it is not an empty de-militarised zone; farmland runs right up

ISSN 0020-2754

to the border on both sides. To accommodate the Indian farmers whose land is on the wrong side of the fence, India built hundreds of gates that are open for a few hours a day, which also provide hundreds of potential holes in the barrier at the border. These gaps allow the government to continue to argue that ever more stringent security measures are necessary to protect the population.

Conclusion

When Abdul Kalam's vision for a righteous India is considered in the light of the exclusionary narratives and practices that underpin the global war on terror, it appears more ominous than elegant. Although the securitisation process at the Bangladesh border is substantially undermined by the many gates in the fence and the corrupt practices of border security guards, it is still important to consider what it might mean if the fence does eventually succeed in preventing, or greatly reducing, the number of Bangladeshi Muslims entering India. Would that alone result in the civilised and ordered society that is desired? The answer is an unequivocal no. The problem is that by representing Bangladesh and Pakistan, which have Muslim majority populations, as terrorist threats that must be sealed off, it is inevitable that Muslims in general become marked as potential threats to the security of the state. In India, this is troubling because Muslims make up an enormous minority population of over 150 million people. The state of West Bengal alone has a population of 20 million Muslims, who are legal citizens of India. These Bengali-speaking Muslims look like, dress like and speak like the Muslim residents of Bangladesh. If Bangladeshi Muslims are irrational, pre-modern, violent and potentially evil terrorists, what does that make Bengali-speaking Muslim citizens of India? For some in India these ambiguities mean that the final solution is to eliminate Muslims completely (Simpson 2004). The 46-year-old Hindu male shopkeeper in India suggests this possibility:

> I do not like terrorists. If I hear that someone is a terrorist, I think they should be shot immediately. All Muslims are not bad but many Muslims are evil. If they were all finished off it would be good.

As communalism has been subsumed into terrorism in the popular discourse in India, the internal exclusionary practices directed towards Muslims, which have been ongoing for many decades, have been transformed into important security measures in the global fight against terrorism.

The rapid change in sentiment about the border fence in the West Bengal borderlands occurred with two important shifts in the discourse of the global war on terror. The first shift was the representation of the enemy other as not only violent but also evil and outside the boundaries of modernity. It concomitantly identified threatening places and removed their legitimacy in the modern sovereign state system. The second shift was to reframe the threat of the enemy other as one that is global and interconnected, rather than constrained by geography. The framing of the terrorist threat as a global security concern means that all modern citizens are potential targets and all sovereign states need to secure their territory to protect their citizens, regardless of their proximity to the source of the threat. In the West Bengal borderlands, these fears are exacerbated because there is the perception that they are indeed near the source of the threat.

These two shifts in the geopolitical boundary narratives that represent the enemy other allow for the rapid consolidation of power by sovereign states. In India, the discourse of the global war on terror was invoked to implement legislation that allows extensive surveillance of individuals suspected of terrorism, to expand security relationships with the United States, and to fence off the borders of the country. All three of these previously contentious measures were rapidly enacted by drawing on the affective fear of a violent, irrational enemy other (Ó Tuathail 2003; Singh 2006). Although the history of the sovereign state is marked by a continuous expansion of its authority into many spheres of everyday life (Mann 1988 1997; Neocleous 2006 2008), some theorists suggested that globalisation represented the end of this era as regional political organisations and transnational economic networks weakened the state and resulted in an increasingly borderless world (Ohmae 1990 1996). These predictions appear to have been premature, and rather than creating a borderless world, the affective fear of a global and interconnected terrorist threat allowed the state to return with a vengeance. The last decade is characterised by the consolidation of power by many sovereign states specifically through bordering practices. The incorporation of previously marginal areas into the sovereign space of the state brings it substantially closer to the nationalist vision of a

ISSN 0020-2754

co-terminous nation, state and territory. In line with Abdul Kalam's modernism philosophy, the anomie outside India's borders must be prevented from entering and that which is present in India must be eliminated and replaced with a righteous, orderly and compliant population. However, if Muslims continue to be marked as a threat to the security of the Indian state, the goal of a homogenous, modern space is still far from being realised, which raises many disturbing questions of what sort of 'ordering' could happen next.

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Notes

1. This poem is originally adapted from *The Great Learning* by Confucius. A translation by James Legge (1960) is 'Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts will be rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy.' In India, the poem is most closely associated with Sri Sathya Sai Baba, a religious figure, who includes it as one of his core teachings (http://www.saibaba.ws/quotes/character.htm).
2. The research described in this article is based on discourse analyses of newspapers and government documents as well as 101 interviews and 15 focus groups. The interviews and focus groups are part of a larger research project conducted in Dhaka and the district of Dinajpur, Bangladesh and Kolkata and the district of Dakshin Dinajpur, India between August 2006 and April 2007. The data discussed in this paper are largely drawn from the interviews on the Indian side of the border because the paper engages primarily with the discursive construction of the enemy other in India and the changes in bordering practices that result. The view from Bangladesh is only briefly touched on here but is examined in depth elsewhere (Jones forthcoming). The specific names, locations and dates of the interviews are withheld due to the sensitive nature of the topic. In order to provide some context to the quotations, each interviewee is identified by their age, gender, occupation and country of residence. All interviews, except those marked [in English], were conducted in Bengali. All translations were done by the author in collaboration with a research assistant in Bangladesh.
3. Peaceful is a relative term. There are regular skirmishes between the Indian Border Security Force and the Bangladeshi Rifles. Additionally, several hundred civilians are killed every year as they attempt to cross the border (Kabir 2005).
4. Although all of these leaders have since left office, the security projects they put in place have been continued, and in the case of India, expanded. Even the election of Barack Obama in the United States does not represent a shift on border security because he voted in favour of the 2006 Bill (H.R. 6061) to authorise the construction of the border fence along the United States–Mexican border.

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