

*Spatial Inequity and National Territory: Remapping 1905 in Bengal and Assam**

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Abstract

In 1905, Viceroy Nathaniel Curzon applied well-worn principles of imperial order to reorganize northeastern regions of British India, bringing the entire Meghna-Brahmaputra river basin into one new administrative territory: the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. He thereby launched modern territorial politics in South Asia by provoking an expansive and ultimately victorious nationalist agitation to unify Bengal and protect India's territorial integrity. This movement and its economic programme (*swadeshi*) expressed Indian nationalist opposition to imperial inequity. It established a permanent spatial frame for Indian national thought. It also expressed and naturalized spatial inequity inside India, which was increasing at the time under economic globalization. Spatial inequities in the political economy of uneven development have animated territorial politics in South Asia ever since. A century later, another acceleration of globalization is again increasing spatial inequity, again destabilizing territorial order, as nationalists naturalize spatial inequity in national territory and conflicts erupt from the experience of living in disadvantaged places. Remapping 1905 in the long twentieth century which connects these two periods of globalization, spanning eras of empire and nation, reveals spatial dynamics of modernity concealed by national maps and brings to light a transnational history of spatial inequity shared by Bangladesh and Northeast India.

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Introduction

Recent history has revealed that national maps conceal the dynamic spatial complexity of modernity, for diverse trends combined in globalization are transforming what appear on official maps as stable geographies. The world of legally fixed national borders is fixed firmly in place by territorial passion and by state discipline, but capitalism is also reorganizing space to secure expansive circuits of mobility and feed capital accumulation in protective harbours of state power.¹ Such complicated mixtures of mobility and territorialism have been active for a very long time,² but they came to light more vividly when another new round of expansive globalization began to undermine assumptions about spatial stability in the 1970s, provoking novel approaches to studies of space in post-modernism³ and world systems theory.⁴ More dramatic provocations after 1989 forced more intellectual adjustments: globe-trotting private violence revitalized the United State's global militarism, and internet globalism, financial crisis, and Asia's economic ascendancy joined many other forces to propel a spatial turn across the disciplines.⁵

All this spatial turmoil nevertheless inhabits a world that is still carved firmly into national containers. The widespread remapping of modernity thus proceeds in national idioms and contexts, in what Arjun Appadurai has called 'the global now', filled with mobile 'scapes' promising rampant de-territorialization.⁶ In South Asia, recent globalization has accompanied increasing territorial conflict wrought by disruptively mobile neo-liberalism, Hindutva, Islamism, ethno-culturalism, Maoism, and US militarism. As Bangalore became Silicon Valley East, and Asian products filled Western stores, India

¹ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital*, London: Verso, 2003; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990; *Capitalism in Asia*, David Ludden, Ann Arbor (eds), Association for Asian Studies, 2004.

² David Ludden, 'Maps in the Mind and the Mobility of Asia', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 62:3, November 2003, 1057–1078.

³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1991; Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, London: Verso, 1989.

⁴ See Carlos A. Martínez-Vela, 'World Systems Theory', <http://web.mit.edu/esd.83/www/notebook/WorldSystem.pdf> [accessed 29 March 2011].

⁵ An exemplar is Andre Gunder Frank, *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

⁶ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

acquired an imperial identity,⁷ and struggles for territory intensified in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Kashmir, and Gujarat; in mountains of Northeast India, Bangladesh Hill Tracts, and Burma⁸; in Maoist rebel zones in eastern India; and in all national borderlands, most brutally those connecting Pakistan and Afghanistan, America's new AIPak military zone, where drone aircraft flown by remote control from Nevada bomb local people and places irrespective of national boundaries. Academic life is caught in these struggles and travels the world with increasingly mixed, overlapping attachments to national territory. Historical geography still serves national order.⁹ State cartography remains etched so deeply into intellectual life that even critical work in globe-trotting post-colonial and subaltern studies has reinforced national borders in South Asia.¹⁰ Yet notably since 1989, more mobile and diasporic scholarship has been mixing territorial sensibilities and generating more spatially complex ideas.¹¹

⁷ Sanjay Upadhyaya, *The Raj Lives: India in Nepal*, New Delhi: Vitasta Publishing, 2008; Arundhati Roy, *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire*, Boston: South End Books, 2004.

⁸ This is part of a vast region which Willem van Schendel and James C. Scott have christened 'zomia'. See James C. Scott. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

⁹ Area Studies programmes enforce national templates for knowledge production. See David Ludden, 'Area Studies in the Age of Globalization', *FRONTIERS: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, Winter 2000, 1–22; and 'Why Area Studies?', in *Localizing Knowledge in a Globalizing World: Recasting the Area Studies Debate*, Ali Mirsepassi, Amrita Basu, and Frederick Weaver (eds), Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003, pp. 131–137. A useful early contribution to the historical geography of national integration is *Regions and regionalism in South Asian studies: an exploratory study*, Robert I. Crane (ed.), Durham: Duke University, 1967. A master work in this field is Joseph E. Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978, reprinted Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991. Available at: <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/reference/schwartzberg> [accessed 29 March 2011].

¹⁰ *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical Histories, Contested Meanings, and the Globalisation of South Asia*, David Ludden (ed.), New Delhi: Permanent Black Publishers and London: Anthem Press, 2002.

¹¹ Peter Sahlins provided a model with *Boundaries: the making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989. Thongchai Winichakul led the way in Asia with *Siam mapped: a history of the geo-body of a nation*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994. Victor Lieberman has organized comparative studies with *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, circa 800–1830*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003; and with *Beyond binary histories: re-imagining Eurasia to circa 1830*, Victor Lieberman, Ann Arbor (eds): University of Michigan Press, 1999. Important work on South Asia includes Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994; Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765–1843*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997; Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India, 1200–1999*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; Manu Goswami,

Globalization calls for spatial histories which explore national territory as a dynamic process, not a natural fact of life. Territorialism in South Asia has a very long history, which continues today. National maps are not the last stop. *Imperial* spaces expanded for centuries before modern times, covering most but not all of the space claimed by nations today, though never uniting them conceptually or politically as national territories.¹² A distinctively *Indian national* space emerged for the first time in the period 1870–1914, inside Britain’s imperial globalization.¹³ Indian nationalists designed the nation’s geo-body as Indian imperial space reached its greatest extent inside the spaces of British Empire and global capitalism.¹⁴ Nations all across Asia and Africa acquired their spatial form in a world of empire, before 1930, but after 1945, these national spaces became territories of sovereignty in a totally new kind of global space defined by the universal reign of national state territorialism. The post-war spatial reorganization of the world provided post-imperial stability, ending decades of economic retrenchment and imperial conflict. It fostered recovery and growth, as it forged a spatial paradigm for modernity as a whole.¹⁵ National state territorial permanence only then became firmly entrenched as the spatial bedrock for politics, culture, and academic work. National territory in South Asia acquired its legal authority and cultural permanence inside this global space, defined by the post-1945 world of nations, which authorized a national template for all of human history. Dialectically, however, this new stable world map also provided a new

Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space, University of Chicago Press, 2004; Willem van Schendel, *The Bengal borderland: beyond state and nation in South Asia*, London: Anthem, 2005; and Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. See also Peter Robb, ‘The Colonial State and Constructions of Indian identity: An example on the north-east frontier in the 1880s’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 1997, 31:2, 245–283; and *Illicit flows and criminal things: states, borders, and the other side of globalization*, Willem van Schendel and Itty Abraham (eds), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.

¹² David Ludden, *India and South Asia: A Short History*, Oxford: Oneworld Publishers, 2004.

¹³ See Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, circa 1850–1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010; Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *Perilous Passage: Mankind and the Global Ascendancy of Capital*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005; P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688–2000*, New York: Longman, 2002.

¹⁴ Goswami, *Producing India*.

¹⁵ See John D. Kelly and Martha Kaplan, *Represented communities: Fiji and world decolonization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

basis for a new burst of expansion by globalizing capitalism, which had begun before 1970,¹⁶ then accelerated, and continues into the twenty-first century, destabilizing territorial order once again, in South Asia and elsewhere.

The long century spanning two periods of expansive globalization since the late nineteenth century provides a useful temporal frame for historical studies of national space, exposing the spatial dynamics which are concealed in static state maps. Nations are invested in those maps, however, and prefer to cut the century in half, dividing epochs of empire and nation, stopping and restarting time at independence. National time-in-space thereby erases imperial dynamics from national territorialism, renders globalization a recent intrusion, and makes all history moving across state borders international by definition. Splicing that long century back together, we can put national territory back in place as one feature of spatial history, not its master. The nation's current mastery of space entails a naturalizing of borders to extrude aliens and outer worlds and bury spatial anomalies, making unruly space appear as a managerial problem for the nation. In a long-century view of spatial history, these spaces provide opportunities to explore problematic qualities of national territory itself.

One unsettling space of this sort connects and divides India and Bangladesh. It is cut by a national boundary surrounding Bangladesh and separating India's northeast from the rest of India except for a narrow 'chicken's neck' corridor running between West Bengal and Assam. Most people in Northeast India live closer to Bangladesh than to the Indian mainland; many also live closer to China and Burma. The space embracing Bangladesh and Northeast India also forms the Meghna-Brahmaputra river basin,¹⁷ which never touches mainland India, and fell into one unified state territory twice in its history: first, in the Bengal Presidency of British India, from 1826 to 1874; and second, in the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, from 1905

¹⁶ In 1971, Robert Heilbroner argued that economic models based on trade among nations were unrealistic because multinationals were internationalizing the production process ('The Multinational Corporation and the Nation-State', *New York Review of Books*, 11 February, pp. 20–25.) In 1972, a special issue of *International Studies Quarterly* on 'Multinational Corporations and World Order' (16, 14, December 1972), announced 'the globalization of the market', p. 513.

¹⁷ David Ludden, 'India's Spatial History in the Brahmaputra-Meghna River Basin', in *Re-Writing the Northeast*, Neeladri Bhattacharya and Joy Pachuau (eds), Delhi: Oxford University Press (forthcoming).

to 1911. Divided decisively in 1911, the basin's deltaic and upland regions were assigned to Pakistan and India, respectively, at the 1947 partition of British India, but they nevertheless share histories of alienation from Indian territorialism, for when East Bengal became East Pakistan, Assam became a rebellious northeast region of India.¹⁸ This river basin forms, in fact, a transnational space where people have died fighting for independence from national states built by the 1947 partition: Bangladesh fought its way out of Pakistan in 1971, and Northeast India has (like Kashmir) seen many deadly encounters between rebels and Indian forces.¹⁹

The year 1905 is crucial in the spatial history that connects and separates Bangladesh and Northeast India. In that year, the Meghna-Brahmaputra basin acquired the unitary form that provoked its decisive division. Indian nationalist opposition to the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam brought Indian national space into public politics for the first time. This dramatic debut also invisibly inscribed spatial inequity into Indian nationalism, weaving together economic inequality under uneven development with power disparities which disadvantaged people living in poorer places. In 1905 began a long history of spatial inequity in the territorial politics of South Asia, which continues into the twenty-first century. It arrived during decades of growing spatial inequality under imperial globalization,²⁰ and a century later, such inequalities are growing once again, under national globalization. Then, as now, increasing inequality came from disproportionate capital accumulation in favoured urban areas of

¹⁸ Sanjib Baruah, *India against itself: Assam and the politics of nationality*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999; and *Durable Disorder: Essays on the Politics of Northeast India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005; Marcus Franke, *War and Nationalism in South Asia: The Indian state and the Nagas*. London: Routledge, 2009.

¹⁹ For a synopsis, see <http://www.ploughshares.ca/libraries/ACRText/ACR-IndiaNE.html>, where the summary statement on 26 October 2010 was this: '2009... can be viewed as one of relative improvement. The total number of fatalities fell significantly, from roughly 1,130 in 2008 to 843 in 2009. Fatalities increased in the state of Assam, but significant gains were reported in counter-insurgency activities, resulting in the surrender of at least 732 members of various terrorist groups'.

²⁰ See *Agricultural Production and South Asian History*, David Ludden (ed.), Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005. For analogous trends in Latin America, see Luis Bértola, Cecilia Castelnuovo, Javier Rodríguez, and Henry Willebald, 'Income distribution in the Latin American Southern Cone during the first globalization boom, circa 1870–1920', paper presented at the Midterm Conference of the International Sociological Association's Research Committee on Economy and Society, June 26–28 2008, University of Neuchâtel. http://e-archivo.uc3m.es/bitstream/10016/2500/1/wp_o8-05.pdf [accessed 29 March 2011].

increasing returns to investment.²¹ In 1905, spatial inequity privileged Calcutta, inflecting Indian nationalism and its economic programme (*swadeshi*),²² and after 1911, it fostered alienation and discontent in subordinate and peripheral regions of the basin, inflecting history in Bangladesh and Northeast India. In the world of globalization today, spatial inequity is once again favouring urban centres of capital accumulation and fostering alienation and discontent in disadvantaged regions of South Asia.

Spatial history in national territory

In 1905, when the King's Viceroy, George Nathaniel Curzon, proclaimed the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, combining eastern Bengal with Assam, it was immediately dubbed 'the partition of Bengal'. Preliminary proposals had provoked opposition for two years, but the final announcement sparked loud public protests that spread, diversified, intensified, and eventually, in 1911, induced government to redraw boundaries again, reuniting Bengal and re-separating Assam.²³ That political victory gave Indian national space a definite form and launched the national history of partition, for 1905 is best known as the opening of a divisive historical trend that separated east and west Bengal, leading to a second partitioning in 1947. In India, partition connotes national trauma, a dismemberment of a nation's geo-body.²⁴ In Bangladesh, partitions led to independence

²¹ On increasing returns, see Sanjoy Chakravorty, *Fragments of Inequality: Social, Spatial, and Evolutionary Analyses of Income Distribution*. New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 167–203.

²² Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India: Economic Policies of Indian National Leadership*. New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1966.

²³ See Gordon Johnson, 'Agitation and Congress: Bengal 1904 to 1908', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1973, 7:3, 533–588. For documents, see *The Partition of Bengal (1905–1911). Selected Documents*, Vinod Kumar Saxena (ed.), Delhi: Kanishka Publishing House, 1987; and Muntasir Mamoon, *Bengal Partition: 1905 and East Bengal*, translated from Bangla by Rana Razzaque, Dhaka: International Centre for Bengal Studies, 2008. (Dina Siddiqi gave me this book and Willem van Schendel stressed its importance).

²⁴ Rosemary George, '(Extra)Ordinary Violence: National literatures, Diasporic Aesthetics, and the Politics of Gender in South Asian Partition Fiction', *SIGNS: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 33:1, Autumn 2007, 135–158; Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2009; Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*, London: Macmillan, 2007, pp. 3–35.

and 1905 found its true meaning in the freedom struggle in 1971.²⁵ In India, partitions mark national struggles to preserve territorial integrity,²⁶ which continue today and worsen periodically, as they have again recently, spilling routinely across borders into land 'lost' to Pakistan.²⁷ Visions of undivided Bengal still inflect public and academic discourse in India, while in Bangladesh, the eastern deltaic region of Bengal has always had a separate regional identity, though in both countries, the border remains a site of anxiety, with armies on each side, and upheaval on borders with Burma a constant worry. India and Bangladesh share border anxieties expressed in spatial scripts that reinforce the authority of national territory by denigrating anti-national ways of seeing and using space with terms like 'separatist', 'fanatic', 'alien', 'refugee', 'infiltrator', 'incursion', 'terrorist', 'communal', and 'smuggling'.²⁸ They share the antipathy to anti-national ways of thinking about space that pervades national cultures and inflects historical writing around the world.²⁹

Remapping 1905 a century later, we can see that Indian national territory emerged inside many overlapping spatial histories, as one product of human agency inside spaces of experience, thought, and action defined in other ways. Manu Goswami and Peter Robb elaborate contextual spaces of globalizing capitalism, British Empire, and British India.³⁰ Opening our lens wider, we can see physical spaces of nature and human livelihoods, cultural spaces, very *longue duree* imperial spaces, and spaces of uneven economic development. The physical environment is composed of mountains, valleys, and deltaic flatlands of the Meghna-Brahmaputra basin, flowing from China and Burma into the Bay of Bengal.³¹ The modern history of this natural

²⁵ Mamoon, *Bengal Partition*, p. 35, ff.

²⁶ Meghnad Desai underlines this in *India and China: An Essay in Comparative Political Economy* (reprinted from a 2003 International Monetary Fund conference paper) New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2008.

²⁷ On territorial attachments, see Ludden, 'Maps in the Mind'.

²⁸ Sankaran Krishnan, 'Cartographic Anxiety: Mapping the Body Politic in India', *Challenging Boundaries: Global Flows, Territorial Identities*, Michael J. Shapiro and Wayward R. Alker (eds), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. pp. 193–214.

²⁹ Shail Mayaram, *Against History, Against State: Counter Perspectives from the Margins*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

³⁰ Goswami, *Producing India*; and Robb, 'Colonial State and Constructions of Indian identity'.

³¹ The only effort at river history in the region focuses on the Ganges: Radhakamal Mukerjee, *The Changing Face of Bengal: A Study in Riverine Economy*, with Introduction by Arun Bandopadhyay, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 2009 (first published 1938).

space began in 1824, with the British conquest of the northern basin and its annexation to the deltaic lowlands of the Bengal Presidency.³² In 1874, government detached northeastern highlands and valleys (including Sylhet) to form the new province of Assam. This province expanded in size through the 1880s, with additions of new conquered territories in southern mountains, which also led to the conquest of Burma.³³ In 1905, Curzon's redesign brought this larger Assam and eastern Bengal lowlands of the basin into the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. The 1905 province thus overlaps today's national state boundaries and the cultural boundary between Assam and Bengal that became more rigidly drawn during the anti-partition agitations and hardened further thereafter. The word 'partition' refers only to one part of the production of the new province, the separation of east and west Bengal; the combination of Bengal with Assam also offends national sentiments. As a result, Curzon's 1905 province is deeply unpopular with historians, who have used it primarily to dramatize national thought, rendering it a spatial anomaly, a mere administrative convenience,³⁴ and a cynical divide-and-rule ploy,³⁵ whose real significance lay in struggles between imperialists and nationalists that produced lasting legacies of *swadeshi*³⁶ and Bengali nationalism.³⁷

Much of the space comprising the 1905 province disappears in national accounts. Ancient Tamil poets prove surprisingly useful in its recuperation. The ancient poets thought about space without nations, without binaries of mind and matter, culture and nature. They

³² R. M. Lahiri, *The Annexation of Assam*. Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1954.

³³ Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal*, Calcutta: Government of India, 1884, reprinted as *The Northeast Frontier of India*, Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1979. Schwartzberg, *Historical Atlas*, Plate VII.A.3, p. 56, and Plate VIII.A.1 p. 63.

³⁴ J. R. McLane, 'The Decision to Partition Bengal in 1905'. *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 2:3, 1966, 221–237.

³⁵ Richard P Cronin, *British policy and administration in Bengal, 1905–1912: partition and the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam*. Calcutta: Firma KLM 1977.

³⁶ Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903–1908*, Delhi: Peoples Publishing House 1973, is by far the most influential book on '1905' today. See also John R. Broomfield, *Elite conflict in a plural society: twentieth-century Bengal*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968; and V. Sankaran Nair, *Swadeshi movement: the beginnings of student unrest in South India*, Delhi: Mittal, 1985.

³⁷ See Mamoon, *Bengal Partition*. M. K. U. Molla, *The New Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam 1905–1911*, Rajshahi: Institute of Bangladesh Studies, 1981; Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871–1906: a quest for identity*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981; and Sufia Ahmed, *Muslim community in Bengal, 1884–1912* Oxford University Press, 1974 (Second Edition, Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2002).

imagined landscapes of humanity and nature inside one another, and social life as composing a physical world of mountains, forests, river lowlands, seashores, and wastelands. Everything in the mountains filled the life of mountain people; and so it was in the forest for hunters, in the lowlands for farmers, on the shore for fishing and boat people, and in arid wastelands for thieves and travellers.³⁸ This poetic vision of living-in-space sheds useful light on petitions composed by elite Bengali *bhadralok* gentlemen who wrote to oppose the imperial plan to reorganize the Bengal Presidency published in December 1903.³⁹ One petition is dated March 1904, submitted by Babu Sita Nath Roy, Secretary of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, major zamindar, and banker, who remained active throughout the anti-partition movement.⁴⁰ He wrote a long essay opposing what he called 'the severance from Bengal of two of the most flourishing, cultured, and progressive districts, namely Dacca and Mymensingh, and of the Chittagong Division as a whole, and their enforced annexation to a backward province like Assam'. He goes on to explain what he means by 'backward,' a term used by other petitioners with the same intent, which translates as 'underdeveloped.' The province of Bengal and districts of Dhaka and Mymensingh were 'flourishing, cultured, and progressive', while Assam was backward because it lacked a High Court, Board of Revenue, Legislative Council, industry, and centres of culture and education. Assam was not even a real province, governed by an autocratic Commissioner who depended for personnel on Bengal officers. Assam was a virtual dependency of Bengal. Pushing Bengal districts into Assam was like forcing a rich girl to marry a poor man: it violated common sense.

Babu Sita Nath also gives another reason why eastern Bengal districts should not be alienated to Assam, saying,

³⁸ A. K. Ramanujan, *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology*, Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1966.

³⁹ The major archival sources for this paper are as follows: British Library, India Office Select Materials, Curzon Private papers India Office Records (IOR) Eur Mss.Vol. F111.247a (the key text is a memo from W. C. Macpherson to Home Dept, 6 April 1904), and Volume F111.247b (especially Home Department, Public-A. Proceedings, February 1905, Nos. 155–167, 'Reconstruction of the Province of Bengal and constitution of a new Province to be called the Northeastern Provinces', pp. 171–186, Babu Sita Nath Roy, and pp. 193–212, Ananda Chandra Roy). The Risley papers (Mss Eur E295, K532–36, and J 734–35) provide additional detail on related territorial changes.

⁴⁰ See Mamoon, *Bengal Partition*, pp. 22, 188, 244.

From a Shastric point of view as well as from European evidences it is abundantly clear that Dacca and Mymensingh were the real Banga or Bengal. . .Bikrampur in Dacca was and is still the home of all Kulin Brahmins and Kayasthas, and. . .every Kulin Brahmin in Bengal traces his descent to someone in Bikrampur. . . Dacca and Mymensingh have always been the principal seats of Sanskrit learning. . .there are in Dacca and Chittagong not less than 800 indigenous Sanskrit tols kept and maintained by pundits without any aid from Government. . . The pundits of East Bengal, equally with those of Nabadwip in the district of Nadia, exercise a predominating influence in all matters concerning religion and society, that is, in regulating all religious rites and ceremonies [in all Bengal].⁴¹

Giving Bengal districts to Assam would therefore divide, weaken, and insult Bengal's cultural heritage, to which its people are deeply attached. This attachment to the land represents a cultural rootedness, but also a contrast, opposition, and elevation, as Ananda Chandra Roy, another activist petitioner from Dacca, elaborates.⁴² He was the President of the People's Association, Secretary of Landholders Association, Pleader and Zamindar, and he informed government that, 'the land beyond the river Meghna has always been looked down upon as the land of the aborigines'. He then quotes Sir William Hunter, who he says described Dacca district as 'the Easternmost District of Bengal. . .[and] Eastwards, the broad stream of the Meghna always served as a barrier against the wild aboriginal races, whose names are preserved in the dynasties of Tipperah and Cachar'.⁴³

Both these petitioners, like the ancient poets, describe peopled landscapes formed by textual conventions with poignant meanings, depicting differences between mountains and plains and among peoples living in each. Likewise, petitioners deploy their imagery for a purpose, in this case, to oppose (what turned out to be) the penultimate version of a plan to reorganize Bengal and Assam, published by Henry Risley, Curzon's Secretary, in the *Gazette of India*, on 12 December 1903.⁴⁴ Like the poets, these petitioners inhabit social power relations: they address people who have power to affect their lives as people whose words are important (in this case, being printed and archived with Curzon's official correspondence). Our petitioners compose landscapes where spaces are not only different, however,

⁴¹ IOR Eur Mss.Vol. F111.247b, pp. 171–186.

⁴² For later activities, reported in Dhaka newspapers, see Mamoon, *Bengal Partition*, pp. 28, 31, 145–146.

⁴³ IOR Eur Mss.Vol. F111.247b, pp. 193–212.

⁴⁴ Quote is from a letter from W. C. Macpherson (for Lt. Gov. Fraser) to Home Dept 6 April 1904.

but also very unequal. Their textual production of spatial inequality invokes ranked people and places, elite civility, ritual regulation, erudite condescension, and privileged defensiveness. Unequal spaces are marked with borders, cities, elite kinship, and cultural authority. These authors depict imperial as well as national space. They use a palimpsest of old imperial spaces to map the present, with references to Hunter, Shastras, Sanskrit *tois*, Brahmanical Bikrampur, and to Dacca and Mymensingh as 'the real Banga or Bengal'. Long histories and deep heritage in Bengali spaces appear in these texts, situated firmly in their political present. These high-class, urbane, Hindu (*bhadralok*) men of distinction are describing their Bengal, their homeland. They are composing a national space with ancient Indian imperial substance.

National and imperial space

These and other respondents to the penultimate plan published in December 1903 entered a political discourse that was then very new, a public disputation over the composition of India's spatial design. They composed national space in opposition to the new province, at a distinctive historical conjuncture, when Indian national space overlapped Indian imperial space at a moment of conflict triggered by imperial innovation amidst competitive pressures of world capitalism, and also, as we will see, at a time of increasing spatial disparities among regions of British India during the first big surge of globalization. Our petitioners indicate the constitutive interaction of national and imperial spaces, which they inhabit at the very moment when Indian nationalism internalized the imperial ethos of spatial inequity.⁴⁵

Indian national space was a territorial product of the late nineteenth century, emerging from experiences of life inside the world of capitalism, in the British Empire, and in British India. It was a bounded, mapped, and culturally embellished territorial homeland for a huge population comprehensively classified but only partly

⁴⁵ On inequality as a basic constituent of imperial order, see Karl de Schweinitz, *The Rise and Fall of British India: Imperialism as Inequality*, London: Methuen, 1983; and David Ludden, 'History and the Inequality Predicament in South Asia', 2006 Wertheim Lecture, University of Amsterdam, available online at <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~dludden/Amsterdam.htm> [accessed 29 March 2011].

self-identified as Indian.⁴⁶ Though Indians lived almost everywhere in the British Empire, Indian national space did not include overseas Indian places. Though British India did include Burma, Indian national space did not, and its embrace of Native States was weak at best. Manu Goswami argues convincingly that Indian national space was most culturally embellished and firmly established as the territorial *habitus* of the Indian nation where British India overlapped classical *Bharat* in the Gangetic lowlands. Babu Sita Nath and Ananda Chandra Roy reinforce that argument emphatically.⁴⁷ They situate Assam outside *Bharat*, inferior to Bengal, indicating that Assam lay outside or at best on the margins of Indian national space. The production of the Indian nation in 1905 kept Assam and Bengal apart, with Bengal superior as an embodiment of India's national homeland. Congress opposition to the new province stressed the importance of maintaining Bengal as it was, because imperial boundaries had institutionalized Bengali cultural space in a definitive territory, called Bengal, an essential feature of India, separate from Assam.

Indian *imperial* space is a different kind of space. It is not a product of modern times. It is ancient. It expanded and contracted over many centuries, moving across Gangetic plains in all directions, far beyond *Bharat*, becoming vastly eclectic, multicultural, including peoples from all over Eurasia. It is adorned with superior central sites of urbane regal power and authority, dramatized in state rituals, and includes vast peripheral regions remote from the centre, out in the countryside, in distant rural areas. Conquest, competition, rebellion, and the incorporation of peoples on the frontier had reorganized Indian imperial space many times. After 1825, imperial India expanded east as never before, adding Assam and finally Burma.⁴⁸

Integrating upland valleys and tropical mountains of the Meghna-Brahmaputra basin into Indian imperial spaces built in the Gangetic lowlands posed problems which have remained unresolved. That problem lay at the heart of Curzon's imperial project in 1905, implicating Bengal uniquely as the eastern frontier region of imperial India. Archaeological sites in Bogra and Comilla show

⁴⁶ On the distinction between classificatory, social, and personal identities, see Ludden, *India and South Asia*, pp. 235–272.

⁴⁷ Bipin Chandra Pal and other anti-partition *swadeshi* activists also elaborated this theme. See Reece Jones, 'Whose Homeland? Territoriality and Religious Nationalism in Pre-Partition Bengal', *South Asia Research*, 2006, 26:2, 115–131.

⁴⁸ Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper. *Forgotten Wars: Freedom and Revolution in Southeast Asia*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Mauryan imperial frontier settlements in Bengal. A seventh-century inscription described Sylhet as a land ‘outside the pale of human habitation. . .infested by wild animals and poisonous reptiles’,⁴⁹ but in the tenth century, Kamarupa kings (from Assam) settled Brahmans and supporters in Sylhet, in *Srihatta* and *Khanda Kamarupa*. Brahmans personified imperial India as *Bharat*, and in Bengal they did so long after thirteenth century Sena rajas built a capital at Vikramapura (Bikrampur) and Islamic culture began spreading eastwards across the delta.⁵⁰ Eighteenth-century Nawabs consolidated Bengali eastern frontiers with land grants to Hindu and Muslim settlers, but marches east from Murshidabad typically stopped at Dhaka, whose 1830 population was 47 per cent Hindu and 8 per cent Brahman.⁵¹ In Sylhet, on Bengal’s northeast frontier, Brahman administrators remained the mainstay of Nawabi and East India Company regimes. The medieval Brahmanical landscape of imperial *Bharat* remained part of British India’s imperial space in Bengal; it personified Bengal as Indian ‘national space’, as our petitioners so nicely explain. Mountains east and north of lowland Bengal remained beyond the pale for lowland elites. Once, when I asked a scholar in Shillong why Christianity had been so uniquely successful in Northeast India, he said, ‘because the Brahmans and Mullahs would not climb mountains’. Mughals did not climb either, and when they failed to conquer Assam by river, they marked their eastern mountain frontiers with *faujdaris* and tributary hill rajas attached to *Bangala subah*, in Sylhet, Tripura, Jaintia, and the Khasi hills.⁵²

Imperial *Bharat* stopped short of the eastern jungle highlands. When British India broke through India’s old eastern frontiers to conquer Assam and adjacent mountains, they were initially attached to the Bengal Presidency, until 1874, continuing the old pattern of imperial expansion eastwards from Bengal, through Bengal. British India expanded in all directions from its capital in Calcutta. Many

⁴⁹ Puspa Niyogi, *Brahman Settlements in Different Subdivisions of Ancient Bengal*, Calcutta: RK Maitra, 1967, p. 42, quoted in Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, p. 258.

⁵⁰ See David Ludden, ‘The First Boundary of Bangladesh on Sylhet’s Northern Frontiers’, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, 48:1, June 2003, 1–54; and ‘Investing in nature around Sylhet: An Excursion into Geographical History’, in *Contested Grounds: Essays on Nature, Culture and Power*, Amita Baviskar (ed.). Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 77–105.

⁵¹ Henry Walters, ‘Census of the city of Dacca’, *Asiatic Researches*, 1832, 535–538.

⁵² Ludden, ‘First Boundary’.

things Bengali attached to Indian imperial space and thus pervaded Indian national territory. Bengal Regiments conquered Punjab and rebelled in 1857. The Bengal Permanent Settlement anchored the discourse of landed property rights in British India. Bengali zamindars, bureaucrats, literati, reformers, educators, scholars, and *bhadralok* nationalists became central figures in Indian history. The capital of Bengal was the capital of British India, the hometown of Indian nationalism. Calcutta was an imperial capital, steeped in Indian imperial culture, where Bengal was a land of ancient Indian civilization, and Assam was not.

The late-Victorian conjuncture

Far from Calcutta, peripheral, poor, and poorly connected, Sylhet was a Bengali frontier district which had been moved out of Bengal to strengthen the new Assam Province in 1874. This departure raised no protest in Calcutta. In fact, my conversations with Bengali historians suggest that Sylhet's move to Assam during formative decades of Indian national space detached it from Bengali spatial identity. After 1874, other government programmes also endeavoured to bring eastern uplands and mountains more fully into British India, notably, expanding military activity, railway building, and tea plantations.⁵³ Curzon's 1905 province was part of an old imperial project to better integrate the new eastern territories,⁵⁴ and this in turn was part of a continuous search for territorial designs that would enhance imperial power and capital accumulation. During the late nineteenth century, as British imperial and economic expansion accelerated, they met serious constraints that Curzon's spatial redesign of Bengal and Assam sought to reduce.

The basic imperial problem was always financial. For centuries, imperial India had built its state machine with tax gathered inside constituent territories,⁵⁵ but local revenues served broader purposes under the British, as imperial India expanded beyond all previous

⁵³ Sir Robert Reid, *History of the frontier areas bordering on Assam: from 1883–1941*, Delhi: Eastern Publishing House, 1983; Amalendu Guha, *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam: Society, Policy, Economy*, Calcutta: KP Bagchi, 1991; and *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Movement and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826–1947*, New Delhi: KP Bagchi, 1977.

⁵⁴ Schwartzberg, *Historical Atlas*, pp. 65–66, 76–89.

⁵⁵ Irfan Habib, *An Atlas of Mughal Empire*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982.

bounds. Increasing tax returns in India supported imperial expansion generally and required more intensive administration in India.⁵⁶ British globalization compelled Indian government to deepen its command of Indian wealth with new forms of taxation, and to generate more wealth to tax by investing in ports, irrigation, and railways. Victorian imperialists measured economic progress by increasing output, trade, taxes, and opportunities for British investors, all stimulated by government policy.⁵⁷ After 1870, competitive pressures from rival imperialists in Africa, China, and the Americas increased the cost and set new limits on British territorial expansion. Raising new revenue in India became more difficult, amidst a long recession in Europe, forcing London to cut costs and press harder for more Indian revenue, just as plague and famine struck India.⁵⁸ British India's fiscal decentralization was driven by these financial pressures; it forced Indian regions to become more financially self-sufficient, pushing more revenue collection on provincial and local authorities. So as land revenue declined as a proportion of total revenues, receipts from customs, excise, telegraph, stamps, post office, irrigation, railways, and later income tax increased, and provinces and localities came to control more of total revenues.⁵⁹

Indian imperial territory became more comprehensively mapped, controlled, and taxed as officials sought ways to intensify low-cost administration and increase revenue. Programmes of decentralization became the institutional ground for imperial and national politics, and they also aggravated spatially uneven economic development by localizing powers of revenue enhancement and control in places with differing trends of capital accumulation and attractiveness for new investors. Decentralization brought more Indian representation into state institutions, promoting the political institutionalization

⁵⁶ Burton Stein, *Thomas Munro: The Origins of the Colonial State and His Vision of Empire*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989.

⁵⁷ A. K. Bagchi, *Perilous Passage*; P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688–2000*, New York: Longman, 2002.

⁵⁸ See Mike Davis, *Late-Victorian Holocausts: El Nino famines and the making of the Third World*, London: Verso, 2001.

⁵⁹ See *Report of the Royal Commission upon decentralization in India*. London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1908–1909; David A. Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: The Madras Presidency, 1870–1920*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976; Dharma Kumar, 'The Fiscal System', in *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Volume 2: *circa 1750–circa 1970*, Dharma Kumar with Meghnad Desai (eds), New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 905–944. Relevant statistics are available online at <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/statistics/index.html> [accessed 29 March 2011].

of national space, and in this context, debates about state finance became more political with their absorption into the discourse of public improvement. India's imperial development regime defined a national agenda. The Indian National Congress complained at every annual meeting about excess taxation and government spending (particularly for the military) and about low funding for public works.⁶⁰ The government responded with *Moral and Material Progress Reports* touting all kinds of government outlay as investments in Indian economic development.⁶¹ Dams and canals, railway and road building, port facilities, cooperative credit schemes, agricultural improvement programmes, hospitals, jails, schools, and all other major new projects depended on government funds.

Railways were empire's lifeline into the Indian interior, connecting administrative and military penetration with advancing signs of civilization and increasing revenues as well as opportunities for British investors. Curzon had a particular passion for railways. His tenure as Viceroy brought the first and only annual series of reports to account for every railway project under way in British India.⁶² By the time of his arrival, in 1898, imperial data also allowed for rather sophisticated spatial analysis of economic conditions. Regions had long been classified as being more and less productive, as measured by revenue and agricultural output; after 1870, the discourse of improvement equated territorial progress generally with inflows of state expenditure, particularly for irrigation, transportation, industry, law and order, and education. Petitioners against proposals for reorganizing Bengal made it very clear that comparisons of rich and poor regions were part of national discourse. An equation of advanced administration and government spending with national progress became basic for Indian nationalism when Dadabhai Naoroji argued that a net outflow of wealth to England from India explained

⁶⁰ *A Tryst With Destiny: A study of economic policy resolutions of the Indian National Congress passed during the last 100 years*, A. Moin Zaidi (ed.), New Delhi: Indian Institute of Applied Political Research, 1985.

⁶¹ See David Ludden, 'India's Development Regime', in *Colonialism and Culture*, Nicholas Dirks, Ann Arbor (eds): University of Michigan Press, 1992, pp. 247–287. On related social statistics, see David Ludden, 'Orientalist Empiricism and Transformations of Colonial Knowledge', in *Orientalism and The Post-Colonial Predicament*, C. A. Breckenridge and Peter Van der Veer (eds), University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993, pp. 250–278.

⁶² *Histories of railway projects*, Simla: Government Press, 1899–1906. (British Library IOR/V/25/722).

Indian famine and poverty. Britain was being enriched at India's expense as empire was draining wealth from the country.⁶³ Another version of this same idea emerged in the 1888 Dufferin Commission study, which argued that zamindari (landlord) wealth left rural areas in Bengal, flowing to the city, impoverishing workers more in western Bengal because peasant farmers owned more land in the east.⁶⁴ The old English idea that yeoman farmers invest more in land productivity acquired a new meaning as zamindar wealth migrating to the city came to be seen as a cause of rural poverty, stimulating anti-zamindari sentiments among officials,⁶⁵ and strengthening arguments for tenancy reform, as Congress stood firmly behind zamindari interests in its annual attacks on excessive land taxation.⁶⁶

Official debates about imperial finance took a spatial turn in the 1890s when the rendition of Berar from Hyderabad to British India demanded a redesign of provinces. Berar had to be put somewhere. Some boundaries had to change. Berar had to go either to Central Provinces or to Bombay. What were the benefits and demerits of each choice? Such questions opened discussions of other re-mappings. What about separating Sindh from Bombay?⁶⁷ What about moving all Oriya-speaking districts into one province? The Linguistic Survey was measuring language regions and the idea then entered official discourse that territories defined by dominant language might be governed more efficiently and simplify consultation with native groups. Indian representatives in provincial and local councils, established under decentralization, embraced this idea of linguistically designed administrative territories. In Bengal, opponents of Curzon's plan argued that government should not divide the homeland of Bengali speakers, and in Assam, they argued that Assamese language and culture would be threatened by Bengali influence. Curzon and Bengal Lieutenant Governor Arthur Fraser rejected the linguistic argument, insisting they could solve fiscal and administrative problems in both

⁶³ B. Chandra, *Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism*.

⁶⁴ Willem van Schendel, 'Economy of Working Classes', in *History of Bangladesh, 1704–1971*, Sirajul Islam (ed.), Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1997, Volume Two, pp. 520–525. See also Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, social structure, and politics, 1919–1947*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

⁶⁵ William H. Moreland, *Notes on the Agricultural Conditions and Problems of the United Provinces, Revised up to 1911*, Allahabad: Government Press, 1913.

⁶⁶ Zaidi, *A Tryst With Destiny*.

⁶⁷ This occurred in 1936. See Schwartzberg, *Historical Atlas* p. 66.

Assam and Bengal by combining Assam with eastern Bengal. But linguistic territorialism had taken root, with major impact in 1905.

By the time Berar joined the Central Provinces in 1903, correspondence had piled up concerning Bengal and Assam. Officials found a gross mismatch in their respective needs and revenues. Bengal was too big to be administered effectively. Some parts were under-served as state finance focused on favoured regions, particularly in the west, most of all, Calcutta. The Lieutenant Governor's time was consumed in Calcutta; he could tour eastern districts and visit Dhaka and Chittagong only once or twice in his three-year term, while locals in Calcutta had his attention all the time. In eastern Bengal, government could not attend even to basic law and order problems, notably on waterways, where violent struggles for river *char* islands and river piracy hampered river trade and transport. The Chittagong port was underdeveloped because it could not compete with Calcutta lobbies for government funding. The poverty of the Chittagong port terminus plus lack of support in Calcutta also hampered the Assam-Bengal Railway, formed as a company in 1892, which had built some 342 miles of track in disconnected bits by 1903.⁶⁸ Railway investors seem to have been pressing Curzon for help in expanding their hold over jute, tea, coal, and oil, whose exports had languished in a period of export growth from British India. In Assam, officials found a provincial administration with too little income to support any progress whatsoever. As a virtual dependency of Bengal, Assam did not attract able officers, or keep them long enough to make them local experts; they all worked in Assam waiting to return to Bengal. Tea planters ruled the roost, along with local landowners, under a single, relatively low-status British officer, the Commissioner. Even core Assam regions in the river valleys were barely integrated into British India; mountain areas lay altogether outside government's competence, which—as my Shillong informant did admit with a little prodding—goes a long way to explaining why Christian missionaries became so important in the hills. In effect, Assam was in private hands. Under the imperial discipline of decentralization, new government investments in Assam would require new revenues to be raised inside its provincial boundaries. Under current conditions, the only way to get more revenue into Assam was to redraw its borders, and the only

⁶⁸ Sunil Kumar Munshi, 'Transportation and Communication', in *History of Bangladesh*, II, p. 509.

practical way to do that was to combine Assam with the more revenue-productive region of eastern Bengal.

Territorial politics

Assam had been carved out of Bengal Presidency in 1874 to improve administration in the same ways and for the same reasons that preoccupied officials two decades later. Assam now had to be enlarged and enriched to expand its administrative integration and economic growth as imperial territory. The final plan towards this end emerged in three stages over a decade. In 1897, officials rejected a plan to move only Chittagong Division into Assam. In 1903, Risley published a second, larger plan, which added Dacca and Mymensingh divisions; this came in response to a statement by Maulvi Seraj-ul-Islam Khan Bahadur, representing Chittagong in the Bengal Council, saying that if this larger area were added, there would be less Indian opposition. A meeting on 26 December 1903 of 16 major zamindars '(both Hindu and Mohamadan) from Dacca and Mymensingh districts', proposed that Faridpur and Bakerganj could also be added. Government concluded that, 'There are many zamindars of Dacca and Mymensingh who hold lands also in the other two districts and it would for obvious reasons be exceedingly difficult for them to manage estates lying outside their own province'.⁶⁹ The publication of this enlarged plan, drawn up in December 1903, launched a third phase, when the plan was again expanded to meet objections like those of Babu Sita Nath Roy, whose long, erudite memo Curzon and Fraser cite respectfully. In February to March 2004, Curzon travelled to meet local notables in Dhaka and Mymensingh. On his return, he produced the enlarged final plan, which appears to have been designed by Dhaka Nawab Kwajah Salimullah, in January.⁷⁰ Curzon pressed it upon Fraser, who submitted quickly, like a good subordinate ally. This final plan brought all the districts in the Meghna-Brahmaputra basin into a totally new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, with its capital in Dhaka.⁷¹

⁶⁹ W. C. Macpherson (for L. G. Fraser) to Home Dept., 6 April 1904.

⁷⁰ Mamoon, *Bengal Partition*, pp. 27–30.

⁷¹ The formalization of this expansion scheme came in a confidential memo from H. H. Risley in Simla, 13 September 1904 (F111.247b, pp. 431–433). It shows a composition of Assam, Eastern Bengal (Dacca Division, Chittagong Division, including Hill Tipperah) and Northern Bengal (Rajshahi including Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Bihar excluding Darjeeling), and the District of Malda.

By encompassing the entire basin, the new province would divide the fewest possible zamindari estates and bring all routes to and from Assam under one administration, which Curzon believed would have many benefits. Trade by rail and river was very substantial in the basins. Though tea from Assam moving to Chittagong by rail was a small proportion of total trade, tea planters were influential and told Curzon that improving Assam railway connections with Chittagong would bring down the price of tea in England.⁷² The Surma River Valley (including Sylhet, Cachar, Manipur, Lusai Hills, and Khasi and Jaintia hills) sent 97 per cent of its exports to Calcutta, mostly chalk and lime (60 per cent) and tea (20 per cent), along with bits of jute, fruits and vegetables; and its exports by river also went almost entirely to Calcutta, almost all rice, as they had been since the eighteenth century.⁷³ Fraser therefore stressed that river administration needed improvement in the east. Improved river docking facilities would benefit British investors in the limestone mined in the Khasi hills, for their chief problem was transport, because

the streams that issue from the hills do not admit of the passage of large boats, and the stone has to be conveyed over the rapids in small canoes. Below the rapids, it is generally reloaded on[to] larger boats, and carried down to the Surma river, on the banks of which it is burnt into lime during the cold weather.

For his part, Curzon focused on industry and railways. Coal mines in Naga, Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia hills were the property of Assam Railways and Trading Company. Digboi wells were owned by the Assam Oil Company.⁷⁴ Tea companies wanted better transportation to Chittagong. Curzon believed his new province would stimulate investments in the port, railway, and a new provincial capital, providing new avenues for British and Indian investors, expanding the imperial economy, enriching the treasury. In addition, the province would focus politics in the east on locally important issues; it would put unruly Assam tea planters under rigorous, responsible authority; it would give Muslim majority areas a political voice; and it would

⁷² Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj*, pp. 70–71.

⁷³ See Ludden, 'First Boundary'. *Report on the Trade Carried by Rail and River in the Province of Assam During the Year 1903*, Shillong: Assam Government Press, 1904. *Report on the Trade Carried by Rail and River in the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. During the year 1910–1911*. Shillong: East Bengal and Assam Government Press, 1911. [Annual for 1905/6–1910/1911].

⁷⁴ *A Survey of the Industries and Resources of Eastern Bengal and Assam for 1907–1908*, Shillong: Eastern Bengal and Assam Secretariat Press 1908, pp. 85–88.

reduce the accumulation of native political interests in Calcutta which so irritated the Viceroy and Lieutenant Governor.

The simplicity of the final plan captivated Curzon. The goal was to tighten imperial administration, but Curzon was also intent upon representing local notables as being part of the planning process, and his archival papers thus came to be organized so as to make native petitions prominent. He clearly did not care for the Congress; he and Fraser felt that if partitioning Bengal weakened Congress, so much the better. They did not believe Congress represented Indian public opinion, but they disdained any and all opposition, from any quarter, inside or outside government. What most enraged them was that Congress anti-partition activists continued after 1905 to mobilize opposition to the final plan based on objections to earlier plans which had been scrapped to meet native objections. Activists raved in public meetings against moving Bengal districts into Assam, when this objection had been met by the final plan.⁷⁵

Curzon was confident his final plan met all reasonable objections. The new province would not be Assam. It would not be backward. It would have a High Court, Board of Revenue, Legislative Council, and all institutions of advanced administration. Its officials would be equal to those in Bengal. Few zamindaris would need to manage estates divided by new boundaries. Business in Calcutta would not be hampered and Indian as well as British businesses would find new sources of profit as Dhaka developed quickly as a new capital replete with educational and cultural institutions. Curzon assumed that elites in the east would flock to the new provincial capital. He was clearly oblivious to the complexity of the political scene in India when he resigned and left for England in August 1905.

Politicians who fought the new province understood it as a partition of Bengal, a violation of their Indian homeland, while the energies they mobilized emerged in spaces of uneven development where decentralization had shaped the territorial substance of India's national identity. Major imperial cities were privileged sites for national sentiments, first and foremost, Calcutta, where private and public investments had focused the accumulation of wealth for empire and nation alike.⁷⁶ Investors from all over India, led by Marwaris, and

⁷⁵ See newspaper accounts in Mamoon, *Bengal Partition*, pp. 139–326.

⁷⁶ For relevant spatial economics, see Masahisa Fujita, Paul Krugman, and Anthony Venables, *The Spatial Economy: cities, regions, and international trade*, Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Press, 1999, especially the introduction

from all over Bengal, led by zamindars, had lavished attention on Calcutta, where they came to buy real estate, to do business, for work and education. Calcutta grew with wealth drawn from rural Bengal in the form of rent and interest, and also in the form of consumer goods and export commodities, most notably jute.⁷⁷ All the jute mills of Bengal were in Calcutta and almost all the jute came from the east. National identity and interests developed together in Calcutta inside the grandeur and stature of a city that was heavily invested in the wealth of eastern Bengal. Curzon's concern with zamindaris being split by the new boundary was trivial compared with the composite power of social and economic interests tying Calcutta tightly to eastern Bengal, but barely touching Assam, which remained outside the territorial frame of national identity. Most major zamindars in the east were invested in Calcutta and thus in the continued flow of wealth there from eastern Bengal. Brahmans from Bikrampur, a major force in the Bengal civil service, looked to Calcutta, not nearby Dhaka, Bengal's second city, one-tenth the size of Calcutta.⁷⁸ Calcutta's grandeur increased with Dhaka's decline and spatial inequality in Bengal aggravated by power inequities of decentralization.⁷⁹ Business lobbies in Chittagong made it clear, for example, that the port remained underdeveloped compared with Calcutta because of their inability to garner political support in the capital.

Opposition to the new province emerged from territorial attachments to a unified Bengal that was strongly centred in Calcutta, when connections were weak among places in eastern Bengal and weaker still between Bengal and Assam. Curzon's province upset this pattern by connecting Assam and eastern Bengal and focusing investors on Dhaka as a new centre of regional integration. In the spatial context of 1905, it was logical that opposition to the province erupted in the east, where fortunes were tied to Calcutta. Even Nawab Kwajah Salimullah, who supported the province, did not initially oppose the movement against it. The Muslim League, formed in Dhaka, hosted by the Nawab, in 1906, after a series of meetings

available online at <http://web.mit.edu/krugman/www/fkintro.html> [accessed 29 March 2011]. Also Chakravorty, *Fragments of Inequality*.

⁷⁷ Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labour and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal Since 1770*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

⁷⁸ Sharifuddin Ahmed, *Dacca: a study in urban history and development*, London: Curzon, 1986.

⁷⁹ On the decline of Dhaka and Murshidabad during the rise of Calcutta, see S. Bhattacharya, 'Eastern India', in *Cambridge Economic History*, pp. 278–279.

in Calcutta, focused its attention instead on increasing Muslim representation in government.⁸⁰ Diminishing Calcutta did not attract any major Indian political interests. Muslim leaders in east Bengal even formed a Mohammedan Provincial Union to oppose the new province, arguing that separating from Calcutta to join 'the already impoverished Assam meant that the condition of East Bengal would also decline'.⁸¹ Dynamics of uneven economic development that typify capitalism had heaped enduring privilege on Calcutta as the capital of India and of India's largest province. In 1901, Bengal Presidency was more populous than all but six countries/empires in the world, with 45 million inhabitants.⁸² Calcutta loomed over its surroundings like no other Indian city. In 1911, it was almost ten times bigger than Dhaka, which lagged even further behind in education, industry, and urban attractions. Bombay was only six times larger than its Presidency's second city, Poona. Madras, much smaller, was only four times larger than the next largest city in the Presidency, Madurai, a provincial town, about the same size as Dhaka, with around one lakh residents in 1911.⁸³ Calcutta was the capital of Indian imperial space, Indian national space, and Bengali space, with five times more English-literate residents than Madras and Bombay combined. The Calcutta elite spoke to London. Laws made in Calcutta covered British India. Calcutta intellectuals had imperial authority; they were India's most influential public. Calcutta's *bhadralok* spoke for India to the world: Rabindranath Tagore, an east Bengal zamindar, won the Nobel Prize in Literature, in 1913. Calcutta was even a more Muslim city than Dhaka, at least demographically. In 1911, both had Hindu majorities, but Calcutta had only twice (2.3) as many Hindus as Muslims, while

⁸⁰ See *Muslim League Documents, 1900–1947*, Sharif al-Mujahid (ed.), Karachi: Quaid-i-Azam Academy, 1990.

⁸¹ Mamoon, *Bengal Partition*, p. 36; Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal*, pp. 248–250.

⁸² In 1900, China (402,680,000), British Empire (385,280,140), Russian Empire (128,932,173), United States and Colonies (87,000,000), France and Colonies (63,166,967) and German Empire (52,279,901) were bigger. Bengal was more populous than the Austro-Hungarian Empire (41,827,700), Japan (41,089,940), the Ottoman Empire (33,559,787), and The Netherlands and Colonies (33,042,238), including Indonesia. Data from http://www.sporcle.com/games/countrypopulations_1900.php [accessed 29 March 2011].

⁸³ Relevant statistics are available for downloading at http://dsal.uchicago.edu/statistics/1903_excel/index.html. The specific file used here is No.5.1903.005.XLS: MAIN STATISTICS FOR CITIES (including Cantonments). Digital South Asia Library. Originally accessed at: http://dsal.chicago.edu/statistics/1903_excel/1903.005.XLS.

Dhaka had three (2.9) times more. Calcutta had six times more resident Muslims (298,986) than Dhaka (47,295). Muslim Calcutta was three times more populous than Dhaka, a mere district town and no rival for the loyalty of any major Indian politician.

In 1905 planners wrote a lot about the over-sizing of Bengal, but not of Calcutta. The movement to reunify Bengal mobilized support for indigenous enterprise (*swadeshi*) without mentioning its concentration in Calcutta. The new 1905 province challenged the prevailing pattern of uneven development that favoured Calcutta and increased spatial inequality in eastern India. By meeting objections to earlier plans, by enlarging the new province to make it equal to Bengal, Curzon provoked even more opposition, by downgrading Calcutta. The new province included most Bengalis. It gave Bengal two capitals, which was unprecedented. By separating most Bengalis from Calcutta, at a time when increasing Indian representation in the administration was integral for decentralization, the new province promised a new formation of political identities as well as interests. It would divide Bengalis and bring into Indian national space peoples who had been alien to *Bharat* in Assam and the surrounding mountains. Indian national space as defined in Calcutta would be no more. Curzon's attack on Calcutta was therefore an assault on Bengal and on the territorial identity of the Indian nation.

Spatial inequity in *swadeshi*

The new province did benefit inhabitants. This would have been visible to observers by 1907. Relevant data in *Statistics of British India* and *Reports on the Administration of East Bengal and Assam* do not allow us to follow many trends accurately across the 1905 divide, but they do indicate that between 1905 and 1911, capital investments, money orders, mail, and taxable business activity accelerated in the new province, and external trade increased by about 8 per cent along with Chittagong port activity. New government funding flowed into transportation, river policing, cadastral surveys, and educational institutions.⁸⁴ Much of the new economic activity occurred in Dhaka,

⁸⁴ See *Statistics for British India 1906/7*, Calcutta: Government Press, 1908, Part One, pp. 12–13, Part Two pp. 62, 64, 72, Part Three, pp. 34–36, 48–53, 62A. In 1906–1907, registered factory employment increased faster in the new province than in India as a whole. The number of factories increased only 111 per cent (India = 112

where government produced new spatial privilege. A new capital began rising with government buildings. Dhaka's oldest modern government buildings and a plan for a new government complex date to 1906. The Dhaka club was founded in 1909.⁸⁵ Dhaka's population grew faster in the decade after 1901 than during any previous census-decade. The prospect of zero-sum growth, pitting Dhaka against Calcutta, does appear in population data, which show inverse trends for the two cities between 1901 and 1921. But at the provincial level, there was no economic trade-off: both provinces grew at the typically slow rate of the day, during 1905–1909, with the new province moving ahead a little faster, though the period is too short and statistics too gross to make much of this data. Sex ratios in the census indicate, by the much higher proportion of females in the more rapidly growing Dhaka population, that Dhaka grew from the influx of families from surrounding areas, while Calcutta remained an imperial, industrial metropolis, swarming with male migrants. Dhaka's base economy remained tied to farming, while Calcutta had jute mills to process all the jute from east Bengal, the bulk of world supply.⁸⁶

Closer research would reveal more local benefits from the new province, but here are some hints. The new Legislative Council launched a discussion of zamindari tenancy reforms, surely undesirable for landlord supporters in Congress.⁸⁷ Namasudra tenant farmers refused to support anti-partition agitation because they saw potential benefits from reforms and new potentials for government employment and education.⁸⁸ Small towns along rivers would have felt a boost in river traffic into and out of Assam. Bengali colonization

per cent) but total employment increased 136 per cent and adult male employment 139 per cent (India = 109 per cent for both). Post office statistics indicate a rapid increase in employment, total expenditure, letters and parcels received and sent, and money orders bought and paid. For more on such trends, see Ahmed, *Muslim Community*, pp. 223–230.

⁸⁵ Sharifuddin Ahmed, *Dacca: a study in urban history and development*, London: Curzon, 1986.

⁸⁶ Relevant statistics are available at <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/statistics/index.html> [accessed 29 March 2011].

⁸⁷ Ahmed, *Muslim Community*.

⁸⁸ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, 'The Namasudra Movement', *Critical Quest*, New Delhi, 2005, reprinted from *Dissent and Consensus: Protest in Pre-Industrial Societies*, Basu Deb Chattopadhyaya, et al. (eds), Calcutta: KP Bagchi, 1989. Namasudras in Bakarganj wrote a petition in 1906, saying, 'Namasudras and Mohamedans are the predominating communities of Eastern Bengal, and the latter unlike the Hindus possess a good deal of sympathy for the Namasudras'. Ahmed, *Muslim Community*, p. 201.

of river lowlands in Assam increased, with provincial support.⁸⁹ Amalendu Guha says the period 1901 to 1911 was

a turning point in the pattern mechanism of economic change in Assam. Railway mileage increased rapidly, and land hungry jute-oriented peasants of East Bengal could now come by the thousands to colonize riverine wastelands, on which the production potential for tea was almost nil. . . [and] the usury and trading capital which had accumulated over the past decades in the hands of the Marwai Baniyas could now be more productively used and speedily turned over as a result of increased commodity circulation.

Marwaris invested in tea and jute in Assam, where jute became important for the first time.⁹⁰

The spatial inequality of the old Bengal Presidency, so visible in official discussions, found no place in the national agitation. Hidden in the uproar over the partition of Bengal was an erasure of Assam. Unified Bengal was the only issue for nationalists. Benefits for people in the new province were not an issue. When support for the new province did arise, along with visible benefits rallied around the Dhaka Nawab, it was subsumed by the Orientalist discourse, prevalent on all sides, as an expression of Hindu-Muslim difference, and by arguments of Nawab's political self-interest as a pro-British politician.⁹¹ Spatial inequity and associated social and political inequalities were not public issues at the time, though they privileged Calcutta and enabled Calcutta-based nationalists to speak for the Indian nation. *Swadeshi* theory and activism expressed an economic nationalism that effectively naturalized existing spatial inequalities. The new province had threatened Indian investments in Calcutta in land, business, education, culture, and politics. The overlapping of Bengali, national, and imperial space in Calcutta gave Calcutta people low-cost options for cross-over investments in many fields. Influential people had planned families, businesses, and careers with their eyes on secure returns in Calcutta, and prospects were at best uncertain in a virtually unknown provincial town, Dhaka, where Calcutta people had few connections. *Swadeshi* made the unity of Bengal a national issue and also targeted one of Curzon's real motives for creating the new province, to benefit foreign investors. Nationalists

⁸⁹ Anindita Dasgupta, 'Emergence of a Community: The Muslims of East Bengal Origin in Assam in Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods'. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Guwahati, 2000.

⁹⁰ Guha, *Planter Raj*, p. 198–199.

⁹¹ Mamoon, *Bengal Partition*, p. 37.

now launched a critique of government investment in railways, which had always benefited British investors disproportionately and discriminated against Indians.⁹²

The direct connection between anti-partition agitation and *swadeshi* derives from the valorization of pre-1905 Indian national territory as a container of India's national economic development, as distinct from the British Empire and from the new Indian space defined by Curzon. *Swadeshi* was an explicit attack on British imperial privilege. Implicitly, however, it also mobilized mass support for an Indian national economy that valorized united Bengal, privileged Calcutta over Dhaka, and isolated Assam. National attachments to India in 1905 focused on Calcutta, travelled amongst major Indian cities, embraced eastern Bengal, but barely touched Assam. Indian national space became a terrain of privilege for established circuits of Indian investment in wealth moving out of Assam and out of east Bengal into Calcutta. To reunite Bengal, nationalists fought a boundary change that intentionally delivered benefits to Assam and east Bengal, especially Dhaka and Chittagong, but also to Shillong and Guwahati. Benefits there accrued to people who were less able to profit from Calcutta connections that favoured the landed and literate *bhadralok* service elite over lower status tenants, small businesses, and illiterate workers. The territorial politics of economic nationalism thus invisibly internalized inequities of power and uneven development, planted by imperial capitalism.

Back to the future

Counter-factual possibilities are intriguing: what if Congress had embraced the new province in 1905? It might actually have done so to expand its own political influence. The new province would have become part of a redefined Indian national space, embracing Assam and adjacent mountains. More benefits would have accumulated for inhabitants as new patterns of spatial integration and economic development emerged with improvements in transport and education

⁹² *Our Indian Railway: Themes in India's Railway History*, Roopa Srinivasan, Manish Tiwari, and Sandeep Silas (eds), Delhi: Foundation Books (Ministry of Railways), 2006; Amiya Kumar Bagchi, 'The Other Side of Foreign Investment by Imperial Powers: Transfer of Surplus from Colonies', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 8 June 2002, p. 2231.

and likely industrialization by the addition of jute mills in Dhaka and Chittagong. Dhaka would have brought in people from all over the province. Social and political divisions and oppositions would surely have developed along familiar Hindu-Muslim, Bengali-Assamese, and other ethnic lines, but their novel diversity would have complicated cultural politics and muted binary oppositions. Spatial inequality separating east and west Bengal, and Bengal and Assam, would have been reduced, and would thus not have aggravated ethnic and religious tension as much as in real history. Zamindari tenancy reform would have moved ahead in the new province, so the overlay of spatial, ethnic, communal, and class inequities dividing east and west Bengal would have been less volatile.⁹³ We can reasonably speculate that with Congress support the new province could have arrived in one piece in independent India. Had it survived, it would have formed—and its erstwhile space could still form—the basis for a territorial authority to manage the mobility of water, people, and commodities among highlands and lowlands of Meghna-Brahmaputra basin, which actual history has rendered impossible to date.

Counterfactuals aside, what did happen was a reunification of Bengal accompanied by political disaffection of east and west Bengal.⁹⁴ Assam and mountain regions were never effectively integrated into India. The mobility of peoples between mountains and lowlands became fraught with international tension and conflict. Today, India has built massive wire fences to prevent its citizens from crossing the border with Bangladesh because some citizens are fighting for territorial autonomy. The physical isolation of India's Northeast continues. Agartala, the capital of Tripura—a short walk from Bangladesh, from which it is cut off by a fence—finally got reconnected with the Indian mainland by railway, via Assam, in 2008. Tied to India by the narrow 'chicken neck', India's Northeast became a separate world of inward-looking ethno-regional politics resisting outsiders from India; it became a virtual Indian military colony where all the

⁹³ Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–47*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; Taj ul Islam Hashmi, *Pakistan as a Peasant Utopia: The Communalization of Class Politics in East Bengal, 1920–1947*, Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1994.

⁹⁴ On boundaries of Muslim identity, see Joya Chatterji, 'The Bengali Muslim: A Contradiction in Terms?'; and Shail Mayaram, 'Rethinking Meo Identity: Cultural Faultline, Syncretism, Hybridity, or Liminality?', in *Islam, Communities, and the Nation: Muslim Identities in South Asia and Beyond*, Mushirul Hasan (ed.), Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1998, pp. 265–282, 283–306.

best roads are built for the Indian army. After 1911, politicians in Assam fought to expel the Bengali district of Sylhet, which left India in 1947, having served as a bridge between Bengal and Assam from medieval times. When Sylhet joined Pakistan, that linkage broke. The Assam-Bengal rail line was torn up at the Sylhet border with Cachar during the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war. State military border violence still accompanies efforts to maintain age-old cross-border livelihoods in Sylhet and the adjacent mountains.⁹⁵

In 1911, King George V happily embraced Lord Crewe's proposal that 'HM' announce the annulment of the Bengal partition and the building of India's new capital in New Delhi at a great imperial Darbar.⁹⁶ Calcutta then lost its status as India's capital but returned to regional supremacy as the capital of Bengal. Along with this came the renewed underdevelopment of imperial administration in east Bengal; its weakness appeared in its darkest form in 1943, when the empire at war with Japan fed and fortified Calcutta as millions died of famine in the Bengal countryside.⁹⁷ When the Famine Commission considered the establishment of a state food distribution system, to prevent such disasters, it concluded that it was not possible in Bengal because rural administration was too weak.⁹⁸ After 1911, Dhaka ceased growing and Chittagong's Chamber of Commerce returned to its old complaining. The *bhadralok* regained its rural supremacy.⁹⁹ Tenancy reform stalled, leaving agrarian activists permanently opposed to Congress who eventually joined the Muslim League. The demand for Pakistan in Bengal emerged from efforts to improve the position of people in the east who had been alienated from the India defined by Congress in 1905. Less than a decade after 1947, leading politicians in East Pakistan left the League,¹⁰⁰ and then they struggled against Pakistan's even more blatant spatial inequity, which more than doubled economic

⁹⁵ Schendel, *The Bengal borderland*.

⁹⁶ Charles Hardinge, *My India Years, 1910–1916*, London: John Murray, 1948, pp. 36–43.

⁹⁷ Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981; Iftekhar Iqbal, *The Bengal Delta: Ecology, State and Social Change, 1840–1943* (Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies) London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

⁹⁸ *The Famine Inquiry Commission: Final Report*. Madras: Government Press, 1945.

⁹⁹ Iftekhar Iqbal, 'Return of the *Bhadralok*: Ecology and Agrarian Relations in Eastern Bengal, c.1905–1947', *Modern Asian Studies*, 43:6, 2009, 1325–1353.

¹⁰⁰ Ahmed Kamal, *State Against the Nation: The Decline of the Muslim League in Pre-Independence Bangladesh, 1947–1954*, Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2009.

disparities between East and West Pakistan during the 1960s.¹⁰¹ When efforts to rectify spatial inequity again failed inside yet another state context, the resulting upheaval yielded independent Bangladesh. Dhaka revived in 1947 and boomed after 1971, indicating how benefits accrue from such territorial redesigns, as they have done repeatedly from the formation of new states in India.¹⁰²

The year 1905 quickly acquired intensely binary iconic meanings. For most readers, it still evokes an imperialist assault on India, pitting Curzon against Congress, and a victory for the struggling nation against domineering colonialism. Documents of the day are replete with rhetorical passion that pushed the national movement to another level but also divided radical anti-partition *swadeshi* campaigners and Congress moderates and alienated people in east Bengal, including Rabindranath Tagore, who explored his feelings in his novel, *Gora*, which was serialized in 1907 and translated into English in 1909.¹⁰³ Tagore had joined the movement but became ‘repelled by the elements of parochialism, obscurantism, and Hindu chauvinism’ which it politicized,¹⁰⁴ and his 1917 short story, *Ghore Bhare* included a preface expressing his desire to heal the wounds of 1905.¹⁰⁵ Debates about partition in 1947 gave 1905 even more intensely political meanings, which still dominate.¹⁰⁶

I want to suggest another way of reading 1905, lifting it out of national history, remapping it inside a spatial history that is

¹⁰¹ F. Just and J. R. Parkinson, *Bangladesh: Test Case of Development*, London: Hurst, 1976, p. 9.

¹⁰² David Ludden, ‘Who First Declared the Independence of Bangladesh?’, *Holiday* (Dhaka) 11 July; published as ‘Forgotten Heroes’, in *Frontline*, 20:15, 19 July–1 August 2003. Available online at <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~dludden/LuddenFrontlineHeroes.htm> [accessed 29 March 2011].

¹⁰³ Lalita Pandit, ‘Caste, Race, and Nation: History and Dialectic in Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gora*’, in *Literary India: comparative studies in aesthetics, colonialism, and culture*, Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit (eds), Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995; pp. 207–243.

¹⁰⁴ Malini Bhattacharya, ‘The Home and The World’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33:26, June 1998, 1620 (a review of *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson (eds), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁵ See Kalyan Sen Gupta, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005; Ashis Nandy, *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism: Rabindranath Tagore and the Politics of Self*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994.

¹⁰⁶ This paper has been discussed in that context. Some critics hear it as a critique of narrowly self-interested Calcutta politicians, echoing British imperialistic ideas about Congress opposition. My appreciation of the imperial capitalist functional logic behind the formation of the new province has led some readers to interpret this paper as a paean to Lord Curzon.

focused instead on overlapping patterns of uneven development, spatial inequity, and territorial politics. Bangladesh indicates how these patterns have changed over time and how the power relations that form spaces of uneven development appear in many guises. In 1905, Bengal government represented eastern Bengal as a region of official neglect.¹⁰⁷ Tenant farmers spoke of their land in terms of tenure rights. Congress painted east Bengal as part of the nation. The Dhaka Nawab imagined a space of public authority. The Muslim League and many later writers represented east Bengal as a Muslim space.¹⁰⁸ Forty years later, the last of these images became predominant in the imperial space of the 'two nation theory'.¹⁰⁹ This changed quickly after 1947. Bengali solidarity took centre stage in the political transformation that turned East Pakistan into Bangladesh. Despite all this change, eastern Bengal is consistently described as a disadvantaged region inside spaces of inequity in South Asia. At the same time, Assam was being more and more strictly separated from Bengal. By 1947, Nagas and others had laid their own nationalist claims to regions in Assam.¹¹⁰ Meanwhile, Indian nationalists subsumed all these into a unitary, disadvantaged Indian national space struggling for autonomy in the British Empire. Thus 1905 opened a continuing history of territorial politics entangled with spatial inequity operating simultaneously at various levels of scale. It is attached not only to histories of partition and to national struggles for territorial integrity, but also to ongoing present-day struggles for territorial autonomy inside the spatial inequities of national territorialism.

¹⁰⁷ See Lovat Fraser, *India Under Curzon and After*, London: Heineman, 1911. 'Of all the territories of India, none was less known or less cared for until recently than the present province of Eastern Bengal. Assam was comparatively familiar to the world without; it had its own Chief Commissioner, and the tea interest, at any rate, was audible enough. But eastern Bengal, although its chief city, Dacca, was only 250 miles from Calcutta, was ground less trodden by Englishmen than the Khyber. It lay beyond wide brimming rivers. To reach it was a muddled business of casual trains...and uncertain steamers. In the rainy season it was one vast swamp. No wandering traveller sailed upon its waterways. The very landlords were absentees, squandering upon the delights of Calcutta the substance which their agents wrung from the peasantry. To the officials of the Bengal Government, it was a place of banishment... Good administration stopped short at the Ganges' pp. 367–369.

¹⁰⁸ The League eventually declared the province was 'beneficial to the Muhammadan community which constitutes the vast majority of the population', Ahmed, *Muslim Community*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁹ Chatterji, 'The Bengali Muslim'.

¹¹⁰ Franke, *War and Nationalism*.

In South Asia, colonialism frames national history, but spatial inequity is framed in addition by globalizing capitalism, which complicates and contextualizes national history by spanning regime transitions. Market integration of the modern world economy proceeded steadily after 1820, slowed a bit in the late 1800s, accelerated around 1905, crashed in 1929, expanded after 1950, and accelerated dramatically again after 1980.¹¹¹ The politics of 1905 inhabit a little boom in world market expansion, which was particularly prominent in India,¹¹² where uneven development was being propelled at the time by the same kind of open market policies that drive globalization and promote increasing spatial disparities today. In 1914, the United States Consul at Bombay described British India as ‘one of the few large countries of the world where there is an “open door” for the trade of all countries’.¹¹³ Most goods arriving at ports were imports and exports. British India was the world’s fourth largest industrial cotton textile producer. Manufactured goods comprised 20 per cent of exports, a figure never surpassed. In the next two decades, industrial output grew faster in India than in Britain and Germany,¹¹⁴ as trade with countries outside the empire increased.¹¹⁵ Indian labour was also going global: by 1921, Indian emigration far exceeded immigration, moving mostly to Ceylon, Malaya, East and South Africa, Fiji and the West Indies, all in the embrace of empire.¹¹⁶

During those decades of globalization, much of India’s global mobility flowed through Calcutta. Empire channelled the wealth of globalizing capitalism up the imperial status ranks to benefit people and places in proportion to their rank in empire’s many-layered cake, from top to bottom, most of all the British at the very top, but also Indian professional, business, and landowning elites in higher

¹¹¹ Christopher Chase-Dunn, Yukio Kawano and Benjamin D. Brewer, ‘Trade Globalization since 1795’, *American Sociological Review*, 65:1, 2000, 77–95; Angus Maddison, *Monitoring the World Economy, 1820–1992*, Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 1995.

¹¹² Michelle Burge McAlpin, ‘Price Movements and Fluctuations in Economic Activity (1860–1947)’, in *Cambridge Economic History II*, pp. 878–904.

¹¹³ United States Department of Commerce, Special Consular Reports, No. 72, *British India, with notes on Ceylon, Afghanistan, and Tibet*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 1915, p. 9.

¹¹⁴ Morris D. Morris, ‘The Growth of Large-Scale Industry to 1947’, in *The Cambridge Economic History of India, II*, pp. 569, 576, 609.

¹¹⁵ *Annual Statement of the Sea-Borne Trade of British India with the British Empire and Foreign Countries for the fiscal year ending 31 March, 1926*, Calcutta: Government of India, 1926, Table 10.

¹¹⁶ Schwartzberg, *Historical Atlas of South Asia*, p. 115.

echelons below, mostly in major cities, most notably Calcutta and Bombay. By 1905, it was apparent that profits of imperial globalization benefited empire as a whole more than either England or India,¹¹⁷ pitting economic nationalists against imperialists in both countries. Curzon's imperial vision crashed against the Congress vision of empire dismembering Indian space. When *swadeshi* promoted Indian investments in Indian national space, it invisibly inscribed spatial inequity into Indian nationalism by weaving the economic inequality of uneven development into imperial power disparities so as to favour Indian investors with Calcutta connections over disadvantaged people in poorer places in East Bengal and Assam.

Spatial disparities were increasing in India at the time. Their patterns proved persistent and their severity is increasing again during the second great expansion of globalization. A century ago, Radhakamal Mukerjee explained that economically dynamic Jats were making the thinly-populated western region of the Indo-Gangetic richer and more productive than the stagnant densely populated high caste landlord-based regions of Bihar and Bengal. In 1911, William Moreland blamed zamindars for sluggish development,¹¹⁸ and 60 years' later, Eric Stokes did the same, once again highlighting the superior productivity of small-holding farmers,¹¹⁹ which also emerged in debates about the Green Revolution.¹²⁰ Today, Lakshmi Iyer and Abhijit Banerjee argue that persisting legacies of colonial land

¹¹⁷ See *India and the World Economy, 1850–1950*, G. Balachandran (ed) Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003; Douglas M. Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon: Colonial Armies and the Garrison State in India, 1819–1836*, London: Taurus Publishers, 1995; David Washbrook, 'Agriculture and Industrialization in India', in P. Mathias and A. Davis (eds), *Agriculture and Industrialization: from the eighteenth century to the present day*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996; David Washbrook, 'Changing Perspectives on the Economic History of India', unpublished keynote paper for the Japanese Association of Asian Studies, October 2005, presented to the Economic History Workshop, University of Pennsylvania, 23 April 2006; and David Washbrook, 'The Indian Economy and the British Empire', in Nandini Gooptu and Douglas M. Peers, *Oxford History of the British Empire: India*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (forthcoming).

¹¹⁸ Moreland, *Notes on the Agricultural Conditions*.

¹¹⁹ Eric Stokes, 'Dynamism and Enervation in North Indian agriculture: the historical dimension', in Eric Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, pp. 228–242, reprinted in Ludden, *Agricultural Production and South Asian History*, pp. 36–53.

¹²⁰ Michael Carter, 'Identification of the Inverse Relationship Between Farm Size and Productivity: An Empirical Analysis of Peasant Agricultural Production', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 1984, 36, 131–145.

tenures help to explain growth disparities in rural India,¹²¹ though other explanations could highlight exogenous forces like state and market forces, following Dadabhai Naoroji, whose notion of ‘drain’ has never been applied systematically inside India. Nonetheless, our 1904 petitioners did implicitly combine these two kinds of explanation, citing aboriginal cultures and also inadequate government investment for backwardness in Assam. The World Bank would certainly agree with Congress and Curzon that large scale infrastructure investment is essential to promote economic growth. A mix of endogenous and exogenous causes can thus be mobilized to explain local trends inside patterns of uneven development. The nineteenth-century construction of vast systems of canal irrigation and urban infrastructure opened new productive horizons in western regions of old *Bharat*; the new capital in New Delhi and later national state expenditures for the Green Revolution also favoured western regions, which have remained more attractive for investors and comparatively fast-growing for a century.¹²²

In 1905, Calcutta was a privileged place in a region that was weakening economically compared to others while Calcutta was falling behind Bombay as India’s economic center.¹²³ Calcutta thus enjoyed but also suffered the force of spatial inequity, which works against people in poorer places who seek to mobilize resources they need to improve their conditions locally. Calcutta’s relative decline does not appear to have been visible in 1905, but one logical response to the spatial pattern of uneven development surrounding the city was very visible: people left villages in greater numbers to move up the central place hierarchy into urban sites of increasing opportunity. In the half-century after 1870, all kinds of people left rural India, at increasing rates, for cities and overseas, above all from the eastern Gangetic basin¹²⁴ and likewise disadvantaged dry interior regions of southern

¹²¹ Abhijit Banerjee and Lakshmi Iyer, ‘History, Institutions and Economic Performance: The Legacy of Colonial Land Tenure Systems in India’, October 2004. Paper available at <http://econ-www.mit.edu/files/511>, accessed 13 April 2011 via the Abhijit Banerjee’s department website: <http://econ-www.mit.edu/faculty/banerjee/papers>. I thank Yuthika Sharma for this reference. Lakshmi Iyer’s website at <http://www.people.hbs.edu/liyer/> [accessed 29 March 2011] has a number of relevant papers.

¹²² Schwartzberg, *Historical Atlas*, pp. 254–261.

¹²³ Amiya Bagchi impressed me with this line of argument. See his *Perilous Passage*, p. 310 ff.

¹²⁴ Arjan de Haan, *Unsettled settlers: migrant workers and industrial capitalism in Calcutta*. Hilversum: Verloren, 1994, p. 92.

India.¹²⁵ Calcutta was the central place for migratory arrival and departure in eastern India. Such mobility made some migrants better off and enriched urban economies but aggravated spatial inequity between city cities and hinterlands. Urbanization in British India was not rapid by post-1947 standards but steady and influential in the urban-based perspective of Indian nationalism, which worked inside the spatial inequity of globalizing capitalism, and also in a position of relative privilege inside India. Indian nationalists looked up the imperial ranks to challenge the British: they saw spatial inequity dividing India and Britain; they did not focus sharply on spatial inequity inside India. The upward and outward flow of wealth leaving India was what captivated nationalists, not the disproportionate flow of wealth into privileged places inside India.¹²⁶ Staunching the outflow of national wealth to increase the accumulation of wealth inside the country became India's definitive economic project, under the banner of *swadeshi*.

Success had stunning results. After 1947, India became an ever-richer part of the world economy. Lant Pritchett has shown that between 1870 and 1985, ratios of per capita income between rich and poor countries increased globally more than six-fold.¹²⁷ Today, the gap between the richest and poorest countries is still growing,¹²⁸ but by contrast, Gregory Clark and Susan Wolcott have shown that India's century-long declining per capita GDP, compared with that of Britain and the United States, stopped abruptly in 1947.¹²⁹ Independence allowed India to keep and create more wealth inside

¹²⁵ Ludden, 'The Formation of Modern Agrarian Economies', in *The History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture, Volume VII, Economic History of India, 18th–20th Centuries*, Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri (ed.), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2004, pp. 1–40.

¹²⁶ See Amiya Kumar Bagchi: *Private investment in India*, Cambridge: University Press, 1972; *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*, Cambridge: University Press, 1982; and *The Evolution of the State Bank of India*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Calcutta, 1987.

¹²⁷ Lant Pritchett, *Divergence, Big Time*. Washington DC: World Bank. 1995. Policy Research Working Paper 1522. Background Paper for the *World Development Report, 1995*.

¹²⁸ On Africa and 'the fourth world', see Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture, Volume III. End of Millennium*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998, pp. 70–165.

¹²⁹ Gregory Clark and Susan Wolcott, 'One Polity, Many Countries: Economic Growth in India, 1873–2000', available at <http://www.econ.ucdavis.edu/faculty/gclark/210a/readings/One%20Polity.pdf> [accessed 13 April 2011].

national territory,¹³⁰ although it remained poor, with per capita GDP hovering around 10 per cent of the Britain/United States' average.

India is still the poorest of the world's five largest national economies.¹³¹ Even so, India's trend of relative impoverishment compared with rich western countries stopped dead in 1947. Most analysts point to liberalization in 1991 as India's great economic watershed, but the turn-around in 1947 was more historically significant: independence allowed India's comparative national wealth trend to shift from negative to positive. The same trend holds for China and the weight of their combined populations brought global inequality down significantly after 1950, when the rate of increase in world inequality slowed considerably.¹³² After 1980, India's comparative wealth-trend moved upwards faster, and after 1991, faster again.¹³³ The same trend holds true for China, so if we weigh national wealth by population, rapid growth in India and China is now reducing the rate of increase in global inequality, even as the gap continues to increase between the richest and poorest people and countries.¹³⁴

The significant decisions that produced growth-trends in India did their productive work in a world organized by spatial inequities of globalizing capitalism. Until 1991, Indian central planning managed its market economy, but in 1991, India joined a global trend by returning to the same kind of free-market, import-export oriented economic policies that had prevailed in Curzon's day.¹³⁵ Indian state investment in the early planning period kept regional disparities

¹³⁰ David Ludden, 'Development Regimes in South Asia: History and the Development Conundrum', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40:37, 10 September 2005, 4042–4051; and 'A useable past for a post-national present: Governance and development in South Asia', in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, Golden Jubilee Volume (1956–2006), 50:1–2, 259–292.

¹³¹ Branco Milanovic, 'Half a World: Regional Inequality in Five Great Federations', *Journal of Asia Pacific Economy*, volume 10, No. 4, November 2005, pages 408–445, available online at http://econ.worldbank.org/external/default/main?pagePK=64165259&theSitePK=469372&piPK=64165421&menuPK=64166093&entityID=000016406_20050830161631 [accessed 13 April 2011].

¹³² Francois Bourguignon and Christian Morrisson, 'Inequality Among World Citizens, 1820–1992', *The American Economic Review*, September 2002, pp. 727–744.

¹³³ Clark, and Wolcott, 'One Polity, Many Countries'.

¹³⁴ *The Economist*, 'More or Less Equal?' 11 March 2004, originally viewed at http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=2498851 [accessed 29 March 2011].

¹³⁵ Tirthankar Roy, 'Economic History and Modern India: Redefining the Link', *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 16:3, 2002, 109–130.

relatively stable at comparatively low levels, though spatial inequality was not an explicit policy concern.¹³⁶ In 1985, however, R. H. Dholakia showed that inequality among Indian states had been increasing along inherited lines since the 1960s. Studies of this trend have since multiplied,¹³⁷ and spatial inequality is now seen to be ‘a serious problem’ in India, having remained entrenched ‘in spite of planning,’ increasing notably after 1991.¹³⁸ The same trend is visible in China and the causes seem to be similar in both countries: government decisions to invest in planned growth and also in market-based growth tended to favour regions that were already richer, with better infrastructure, more productive populations, and more effective political connections. Liberalization aggravated entrenched spatial inequality because it freed and forced each region to engage globalizing capitalism with its own inherited strengths and weaknesses.¹³⁹ The decentralization of state economic power turned state officials into sales people seeking domestic and foreign investors. In China, Yongnian Zheng calls this devolution of power a ‘state transformation’,¹⁴⁰ and the phrase also applies in India, where national politics changed dramatically in the 1990s, as regional parties came to control the central government in coalitions organized around the Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party.

Economic convergence has not occurred in India, but rather divergence. Convergence depends on structural fundamentals being similar in richer and poorer areas, but as Farhat Noorbaksh explains, ‘the lack of social and economic infrastructure in some backward regions encourages further investment and progress in the richer

¹³⁶ Madhavi Majumdar, ‘Regional Disparities in India: 1950–51 to 1967–68’, *Urban Studies*, 15, 1978, 343–349.

¹³⁷ Adarsh Kishore, ‘Towards and Indian Approach’, in *Globalisation, Living Standards, and Inequality: Recent Progress and Continuing Challenges*, David Gruen and Terry O’Brien (eds), Reserve Bank of Australia, 2002, p. 126. <http://www.rba.gov.au/publications/confs/2002/conf-vol-2002.pdf> [accessed 13 April 2011].

¹³⁸ B. B. Bhattacharya and S. Sakthivel, ‘Regional Growth and Disparity in India: Comparison of Pre- and Post-Reform Decades’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39:10, 6 March 2004, 1071–1077; Also N. J. Kurian, ‘Widening Regional Disparities in India: Some Indicators’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35:7, 12–18 February 2000, 538–550.

¹³⁹ See Parthapratim Pal and Jayati Ghosh, ‘Inequality in India: A survey of recent trends’, DESA Working Paper No. 45, ST/ESA/2007/DWP/45. http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2007/wp45_2007.pdf [accessed 29 March 2011].

¹⁴⁰ Yongnian Zheng, *Globalization and State Transformation in China*, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

regions which race ahead and the vicious circle goes on'.¹⁴¹ Important decisions that shape spatial patterns of economic development in independent India followed tracts laid down in British India and produced durable patterns of spatial inequity. Where empire put landlords in control of the countryside, independent India delivered relatively low levels of private and public investment in agriculture, health, and education.¹⁴² In the rush to enhance aggregate national economic growth, state planning tended to favour already privileged people and places. After 1980, the upwardly-mobile social strata which had guided nationalism from the outset turned government towards free-market policies that predictably rewarded them most.¹⁴³ Indian nationalism changed along the way, as liberalization mixed the consumer culture of 'India shining' with a strong dose of Hindu chauvinism.¹⁴⁴ Wealthier groups and regions have led the way in globalizing India and they have become steadily richer by doing so.¹⁴⁵ In 2004, National Sample Survey data indicated that, after 1991, new wealth went mostly to wealthier classes with privileged access to governments and markets. The urban rich benefited most: the top quintile of income groups in cities increased their per capita consumption by 40 per cent, but in rural areas, by only 20 per cent. The rural rich thus became richer compared with their neighbours, but poorer compared with the urban rich.¹⁴⁶

The continuing history of spatial inequity under globalization in India is a feature of worldwide capitalism¹⁴⁷ and of the nation's unique

¹⁴¹ Farhad Noorbakhsh, 'Human Development and Regional Disparities in India', University of Glasgow, 2003, http://www.cvso.co.uk/media/media_22245_en.pdf [accessed 29 March 2011].

¹⁴² Banerjee and Iyer, 'History, Institutions and Economic Performance'.

¹⁴³ Leela Fernandes, *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006; E. Sridharan, 'The Growth and Sectoral Composition of India's Middle Class: Its Impact on the Politics of Economic Liberalization', *India Review*, 3:4, October 2004, 405–428.

¹⁴⁴ *Making India Hindu: Community, Conflict, and the Politics of Democracy*, David Ludden (ed.), New Delhi: Oxford University Press, Second Edition, 2005.

¹⁴⁵ Milanovic, 'Half a World'.

¹⁴⁶ See Angus Deaton and Jean Dreze, 'Poverty and Inequality in India: A Reexamination', Centre for Development Economics, Working Paper No. 107; Jayati Ghosh, 'Income Inequality in India', http://pd.cpim.org/2004/0215/02152004_eco.htm [accessed 29 March 2011]; and *The Great Indian Poverty Debate*, Angus Deaton and Valerie Kozel (eds), Delhi: MacMillan, 2005.

¹⁴⁷ Gaurav Datt and Martin Ravallion, 'Is India's Economic Growth Leaving the Poor Behind?', *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 16:3, 2002, 103–106; Martin

composition.¹⁴⁸ Spatial analysis needs to bring many levels of spatial scale into view at once, but a basic point of departure for this long research agenda is the coexistence of two spatial trends, which connect 2011 with 1905 and have important political implications: urban-rural and regional disparities increase together during periods of expansive globalization.¹⁴⁹ For India, Angus Dean and Jean Dreze have showed that recent growth favours states in the south and west, distressing states in the north, east, and northeast which had been disadvantaged previously by public and private investors.¹⁵⁰ The relative poverty of regions in the east (Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal) compared with the west (Delhi, Punjab, Haryana) is longstanding, but recently all regions that depend on farming, including Punjab and Haryana, have had slower growth, because overall growth in agriculture and allied services has declined to less than half (3.2 per cent) the rate of growth in India's aggregate per capita GDP (6.7 per cent), thus increasing the ratio of rural-to-urban poverty.¹⁵¹ Foreign Direct Investment also favours more industrial regions.¹⁵² Similar trends pertain elsewhere in Asia. And meanwhile, regions out of the loop of capital accumulation under the old empires of the Mughals, British, Dutch, French, and Chinese, in mountain regions across Nepal, Northeast India, the Chittagong

Ravallion and Gaurav Dutt, 'Why has economic growth been more pro-poor in some states of India than others?', *World Bank Economic Review*, 8:1, 2002, 1–25.

¹⁴⁸ Jackie Assayag, *The making of democratic inequality: caste, class, lobbies and politics in contemporary India, 1880–1995*, Pondichery: Institute Français du Pondichery, 1995.

¹⁴⁹ For China, a large proportion of inter-regional inequality can be explained by urban-rural disparities. Ajit S. Bhalla, Shujie Yao, and Zongyi Zhang, 'Causes of inequalities in China', *Journal of International Development*, 15, 2003, 133–152; Ravi Kanbur and Xiaobo Zhang, 'Fifty years of regional inequality in China: A journey through central planning, reform, and openness', *Review of Development Economics*, 9:1, 2005, 87–106, also available at http://www.wider.unu.edu/publications/working-papers/research-papers/2004/en_GB/rp2004-050/ [accessed 13 April 2011]. Cited in Milanovic, 'Half a World'.

¹⁵⁰ Deaton and Dreze, 'Poverty and Inequality'. Gaurav Datt and Martin Ravallion, 'Is India's Economic Growth Leaving the Poor Behind?' notes that the two richest states in the 1980s (Punjab and Haryana) hit a low-growth trend in the 1990s, but that by leaving these two states out, 'there is a strong positive relationship between level of GDP in the mid-1980s and growth rate in the 1990s; that is, there is divergence between per capita GDP among all but the richest states in India', p. 97.

¹⁵¹ Dutt and Ravallion, 'Is India's economic growth leaving the poor behind,' pp. 97–98.

¹⁵² Kishore, 'Towards an Indian approach'.

Hill Tracts, highland Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, and South China, still remain out of the loop.¹⁵³

Territorial politics can be usefully reconsidered in the light of a long history of spatial inequity on the underside of globalization. Looking back from the present, it seems that Indian national politics in 1905 increased East Bengal's subordination and Assam's marginality, as eastern regions of British India were declining economically compared with others. These trends continued past 1947. The subordination of East Bengal left a durable imprint on its politics: the Indian National Congress never won elections after 1905 and the political pursuit of spatial equity encouraged partition in 1947, after which, spatial inequity in Pakistan provoked a Bengali war of independence. Bangladesh thus acquired the territorial authority that allowed its inhabitants to pursue benefits like those enjoyed in independent India. In Assam and Northeast India, the politics of 1905 aggravated the isolation that had become entrenched in regional politics, and spatial disadvantage worsened with each failed struggle for autonomy. India's planning period reduced spatial inequity but liberalization brought Assam the most drastic decline of any major Indian state in its relative per capita income.¹⁵⁴ The freer mobility of capital under liberalizing governments after 1991 delivered benefits to places in proportion to their security and profitability. Neo-liberal hegemony increased economic penalties for physical isolation and political instability, stimulating more demands for autonomy, more instability, violence, and repression. This occurred not only in Assam and Northeast India but also in the adjacent Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, which is subject to a similar history of spatial inequity,¹⁵⁵ and in Kashmir. The Planning Commission described the Assam situation as follows:

Notwithstanding a decade of relatively rapid economic growth in India following the sweeping economic reforms initiated in 1991, the pace of

¹⁵³ These regions embrace tropical mountains and valley homelands of tribal and minority groups living on peripheries of national state control who, James C. Scott argues, engage in a constant struggle for autonomy, keeping themselves intentionally at a distance from global circuits of capital accumulation. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*. For a comparative view of economies on the margins and in borderlands of territorial order, see *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders, and the other side of Globalization*, Willem van Schendel and Ity Abraham (eds), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

¹⁵⁴ Adarsh Kishore, 'Towards an Indian approach to globalization', p. 130.

¹⁵⁵ Shapan Adnan, *Migration, Land Alienation, and Ethnic Conflict: Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Research and Advisory Services, 2004.

growth in Assam has slowed down in recent years. It has among the poorest infrastructure and social indicators. Its infrastructure development index is only 79 in comparison to the base level of 100 for the country. Despite its natural resources and environment, its per capita income is the third lowest among Indian states (after Bihar and Orissa). In this respect, its position has also been worsening relative to states such as Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh that were on similar levels five years ago but have now advanced to higher levels. There has been little progress at reducing poverty and Assam's population estimated to be below the poverty line was about 41 percent in 1993–94 against the all India average of 36 percent. While poverty in Assam declined from 51 percent in 1973–74, its relative ranking about major states dropped from 6 to 12. Apart from Haryana, Assam is the only state where there was a drastic worsening of rank. Together with large-scale migration, this has led to a large and rapidly rising unemployment.¹⁵⁶

Many conflicts have developed in spaces of inequity during the long century spanning the first and second globalization and regime transitions between empire and nation. Nationalists opposing empire a century ago unknowingly subordinated and marginalized regions in the Brahmaputra-Meghna basin and spawned regional struggles for autonomy that nationalists in post-colonial states met with violence in pursuit of territorial integrity, spawning independence in Bangladesh and rebellious disorder in Northeast India. Regional struggles of a similar kind have occurred in all South Asian nations and spatial inequity at various levels of scale have also provoked territorial politics at other levels of spatial scale, notably in Nepal¹⁵⁷ and Telangana.¹⁵⁸ Globalization targets specific localities in dispersed territories where investors pursue opportunities in expansive agricultural production and natural resource extraction in uplands, woodlands, mountains, and dry lands that thus enter new power relations of spatial inequity, as private and public coercive power accumulates capital under the authority of national development regimes. People in such localities may have no territorial authority to cling to, except that of those who

¹⁵⁶ 'Assam: Reorienting Fiscal Strategies Towards Economic Development', http://planningcommission.gov.in/plans/stateplan/sdr_assam/sdr_assch3.pdf [accessed 29 March 2011].

¹⁵⁷ S. Mansoob Murshed and Scott Gates, 'Spatial horizontal inequality and the Maoist insurgency in Nepal', in Ravi Kanbur, Anthony J. Venables and Guanghua Wan, (eds), *Spatial disparities in human development: perspectives from Asia*, Tokyo, New York: United Nations University Press, 2006, pp. 188–206.

¹⁵⁸ C. H. Hanumantha Rao, *Regional Disparities, Smaller States, and Statehood for Telangana*, New Delhi: Academic Foundation, 2010.

oppress them, generating conflicts on capitalist frontiers with no firm regional roots, such as nineteenth century Santhal struggles against zamindars and imperialists, and current Maoist struggles in regions of mineral wealth boosting India's economic ascendancy.¹⁵⁹ The year 1905 thus opens a window into disparate histories of spatial inequity in territorial politics, which merit much more scholarly attention.

¹⁵⁹ Felix Padel and Samarendra Das, *Out of This Earth: East India Adivasis and the Aluminum Cartel*, Hyderabad: Orient Black Swan, 2010.