4 Crowd Violence in East Pakistan/Bangladesh 1971–1972

Introduction

Some recent scholarship links violent persecutions in the 20th century to the rise of mass political participation.[1] This chapter substantiates this claim by exploring part of a country's history of crowd violence. Such acts constitute a specific form of participation in collective violence and shaping it. There are other forms such as forming local militias, small informal violent gangs or guerrilla groups, calls for violence through petitions or non-violent demonstrations and also acting through a state apparatus, meaning that functionaries contribute personal ideas and perceptions to the action of a bureaucracy in some persecution. Therefore, it seems to make sense to investigate specific qualities of participation in crowd violence. Subject to this inquiry is violence against humans by large groups of civilians, with no regard to other collectives of military or paramilitary groups, as large as they may have been.

My approach to this topic is informed by my interest in "extremely violent societies" that has already been outlined in the introduction. This means social formations in which, for some period, various population groups become victims of mass violence in which, alongside state organs, many members of several social groups participate for a variety of reasons.[2] Aside from the participatory character of violence, this is also about its multiple target groups and sometimes its multipolar character. Here, this means comparing the different degrees to which crowd violence was used by and against different groups and why.

The line between perpetrators and bystanders is especially blurred within violent crowds. I have questioned the usefulness of both, 'perpetrator' and 'bystander', as terms before and prefer to speak, more broadly defined, of "persecutors" rather

1 See Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Christian Gerlach, "Extremely Violent Societies: An Alternative to the Concept of Genocide," in: *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, 4 (2006): 461–463.

This is the modified version of a chapter published before under the same title in: Frank Jacob, ed., *Genocide and Mass Violence in Asia* (Berlin and Boston: DeGruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), 15–39. A short version was presented at the conference, "On Collective Violence: Actions, Roles, Perceptions," Center for Conflict Studies, University of Marburg, 20 October 2016. I am grateful to the participants there and also Axel Paul, Benjamin Schwalb and Frank Jacob for their comments.

2 Siehe Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111568737-004

than 'perpetrators', to, among other things, avoid placing responsibility only on (often inferior) executors.[3] However, this does not solve the thorny problem of assigning responsibility concerning crowd violence.[4] Crowds are not one collective agent. Usually not all members of a crowd, and not even all of its armed members, hurt other people with their own hands. Nonetheless, these seemingly non-violent people in an armed crowd may encourage others, directly or indirectly, to commit physical attacks, intimidate people that become victimized and prevent the victims from escaping by physical or psychological means. Thus, it may be less interesting to assign a term like 'perpetrator' to people than to describe responsibilities, concluding from observations of a sufficient number of cases of crowd violence, as will be presented here. As spontaneously emerging collectives, crowds have especially little cohesion, which makes motives particularly difficult to identify even though people more or less volunteered to participate and institutional and longer-term factors such as subordination to orders and rules and group pressure were less intense.

Thus, this chapter addresses the following questions: In what situations, where and when was there crowd violence? And when was it relegated to the background, perhaps being replaced by other forms of collective violence? What groups used it against what other groups, and how did they interact? What were the discoursive contexts of the violence and the intentions of the gatherings? What can be said (even if information is limited) about the relationship between individuals and the crowd? What was the relationship between the actors and the regime? And what pre-existing traditions of violence played a role?

East Pakistan/Bangladesh in 1971–1972 serves as a case study. This may be useful because of the multitude of victim groups, including many attacked by crowds, and because of the abundance of incidents. Conflicts in East Pakistan erupted in the wake of the first nationwide bourgeois-democratic elections in Pakistan. This chapter may lead to some insights into the relationship between mass participation in politics and mass violence in general. After some initial observations regarding traditions of political militancy in East Pakistan before 1971, I trace the occurrence of physical violence from among crowds through different phases from early 1971 to the spring of 1972.

3 See ibid., 4–5; Christian Gerlach, *The Extermination of the European Jews* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 15–16.

4 A collective volume on crowd violence is Axel Paul and Benjamin Schwalb, eds., *Gewaltmassen: Über Eigendynamik und Selbstorganisation kollektiver Gewalt* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2015), though only parts of that book address non-organized violence by large collectives. The chapters relevant here are by the editors (pp. 7–18, 383–408), Paul Dumouchel (pp. 103–123) and Ferdinand Sutterlüty (pp. 231–256).

Historical Context

At this point, a brief survey of events in East Pakistan in 1971 is at place. After partition in 1947–1948, the state of Pakistan emerged, consisting of two wings that were 1600 kilometers apart and differed widely culturally and economically. A little more than half of the population lived in largely rural East Pakistan (which became Bangladesh in December 1971), dominated by a peasant rice economy. Most inhabitants were Bengali-speaking Muslims. The most important minorities consisted of about 10 million Hindus and between one and two million Urdu-speaking former Muslim refugees from India, dubbed Biharis. The elites in the East that was economically stagnating and in the grip of deepening poverty protested, above all, the marginalization of the Bengali language and culture in the 1950s and economic discrimination in the 1960s. This led to demands for strong autonomy for the eastern part of the country that were championed by the Awami League, a political party under the chairman Mujibur Rahman. At the end of the 1960s, this movement merged with protests against the military dictatorship that ruled Pakistan since 1958. After the Awami League won the all-Pakistani elections in the end of 1970, open conflict erupted in March 1971. The military tried to crush the autonomy movement in a bloody crackdown, and, together with supportive local Muslim militias that included some Biharis as well as Bengali conservatives killed, arrested or expelled Awami League functionaries, students, pro-Bengali intellectuals and Hindus. In April, the army also started with massacres in villages, trying to defeat the emerging guerrilla movement with bases in India. Ten million people, mostly Hindus, fled to India, and even more people, largely Muslims, were displaced within East Pakistan. The army and their helpers also committed mass rapes. The number of killings reached hundreds of thousands. But mass violence of different kinds was also committed by civilians, including Bengalis who turned against Biharis and other non-Bengalis as well as Muslims persecuting Hindus, particularly in the countryside. Many instances of rape also occurred between neighbors and within families. In December 1971, Pakistani rule in Bengal was terminated by an Indian invasion along with Bangladeshi independence fighters. Afterward, attacks on Biharis and rapes continued, as did a famine that may have claimed more lives than direct violence, especially among returning refugees.

Given that few official Pakistani and Bangladeshi documents are available to scholars, this chapter is mainly based on observations and statements made by East Bengalis, Pakistani army personnel, foreign missionaries, journalists and diplomats. An additional problem is that accounts by Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are often bequeathed in publications where lines between facts and propaganda are blurred and that sometimes convey rumors, as do reports by foreign observ-

ers.[5] In a sense, my analysis is merely based on assertions about the occurrence of crowd violence. And yet, these sources are meaningful since it is characteristic how often and in which cases crowd violence was claimed to have taken place. In part of the cases, cross-checking allows for the verification of reports. Unclear language in the sources is another problem. As there is often no exhausting description or analysis of an event, only certain terms that were used, such as "mob" or "riot," indicate that it involved masses. By contrast, denominations like "gangs" or "goondas" point to small groups of actors. Unfortunately, most of the material is insufficient for in-depth micro-studies. In particular, one cannot say much about the identity of the people in those crowds – except that by far most were men – and who within a crowd turned violent. And at this point, little can be said about the important inner dynamics within those gatherings, although such knowledge would be highly desirable. This means that this chapter throws light on participatory violence and lethal social interaction, but – contrary to chapters 2 and 3 – regrettably not on an individual level, just on a group level. The social history of mass violence has limits in this case. But the material seems comprehensive and dense enough to identify significant patterns of group behavior, including the situations in which crowd violence came about.

Traditions of Political Militancy

Nationalist scholars from Bangladesh have spread the impression internationally that East Pakistan was peaceful and homogenous, except for Pakistani army violence.[6] Nothing could be further from historical reality. Bitter conflicts between social groups and between the sexes, the frequency of riots, aggressive practices of political struggle and repeated occurrences of mass violence in the quarter of a century before 1971 testify to the contrary.

Large parts of the agrarian population of East Pakistan (and thus the overall majority of inhabitants) suffered from lack of land, and land conflicts divided villages and families.[7] Comprehensive serious discrimination against women was

5 A critical evaluation of some of these rumors is in Sarmila Bose, *Dead Reckoning: Memories of the 1971 Bangladesh War* (London: Hurst, 2011).

6 One example is Rounaq Jahan, "Genocide in Bangladesh," in *Genocide in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Samuel Totten and William S. Parsons (New York/London: Garland, 1995), 371–402, esp. 384.

7 M. Ameerul Huq, ed. *Exploitation and the Rural Poor* (Comilla: Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development, 1976) describes the situation in 1974. Although disputes aggravated in and after 1971, they did not differ in principle from earlier years.

common before 1971, and domestic violence widespread.[8] Social antagonisms led to almost constant unrest. From 1958 to 1966, the number of officially registered riots reached approximately 5,000 annually, or 14 per day, and they were on the increase. This level was even surpassed by far from 1972 to 1974.[9] Among these almost everyday civil disturbances, some periods of mass violence stood out. Between 1946 and 1950 as well as in 1964–1965, many pogroms took place, victimizing mostly Hindus but also other groups such as the small Christian communities. Since 1946, at least four million Hindus fled East Bengal (and in the year of 1970 alone, 248,158 reached West Bengal in India), tens of thousands were murdered.[10] Politics in East Pakistan knew little regard for minorities.[11] Other waves of collective violence included the language riots of 1951, hunger riots and several cumulations of student unrest.[12]

All of these included violence committed out of crowds. From 1946 on, there were mutual collective assaults between Muslims and Hindus in the context of decolonization and partition also in East Bengal. By early 1948, this had forced 800,000 Muslims from India to flee to East Pakistan and one million Hindus in the opposite direction.[13] These conflicts reached their peak in 1950. Masses of angry Muslims torched Hindu houses or entire neighborhoods and/or looted them, especially if Hindus had refused to convert to Islam. Sometimes crowds ransacked all stores run by Hindus. Crowds also attacked steamboats, trains and busses in order to slaughter Hindus. Many Hindu girls and women were raped or abducted. As a result, the refugee wave to India rose.[14] In 1964–1965 there were similar pogroms. This time, Muslims among the work force of factories, including Biharis, were also incited to turn against Hindus and massacred them in some cases. Hundreds of thousands of Hindus lost their homes, more than 667,000 took refuge in

8 See Yasmin Saikia, *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971* (Durham, NC/London: Duke University Press, 2011).

9 Mohiuddin Alamgir, *Famine in South Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, 1980), 139; Omar Noman, *Pakistan: A Political and Economic History Since 1947* (London/New York: Kegan Paul International, 1988), 32. I found no data for 1967 to 1971.

10 See A. Roy, *Genocide of Hindus and Buddhists in East Pakistan/Bangladesh* (Delhi: Kranti Prakashan, 1981), though this a very biased study; also Muhammad Ghulam Kabir, *Minority Politics in Bangladesh* (Delhi: Vikas, 1980). For 1970, see Marcus Franda, *Bangladesh: The First Decade* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1982), 103.

11 See Ghulam Kabir, *Minority Politics*.

12 Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*, 131–132.

13 Willem van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 131–132.

14 Ghulam Kabir, *Minority Politics*, 108–112, 114, 120–121, 137–143.

India in 1964.[15] Unlike in 1950 and 1971, all political parties formed a committee that stopped the riots relatively quickly.[16] What followed in 1968–1969 were months of student unrest that was joined by violent protests of workers and peasants that claimed the lives of some local elites.[17]

Through this history of violence, certain patterns of assault against some groups emerged, as did patterns of response. Locally, events had repeated themselves in some places before 1971.[18] How to avoid fatalities was also known: as a meticulous study of a rural confrontation between over 10,000 Muslims and Hindus in 1954 demonstrates, there was no spontaneous fighting, but after deliberations among local leaders, and in the fighting, the many sickles, knives and spears were used only against arms and legs of the opponents.[19] However, past events could also precipitate serious political misjudgments, as the U.S. consul in Dacca concluded in a telegram in 1971:

> With benefit of hindsight it [is] now evident AL [Awami League] tragically miscalculated its position in its post-1 March confrontation with MLA [Martial Law Authority]. Mujib und AL believed they dealt from position of strength, based not only from overwhelming victory at polls which legitimized position vis-a-vis MLA, but also blind faith in "people power." Strongly held myth here is that masses in 1968–69 anti-Ayub agitation not only successfully confronted police and EPRs [East Pakistan Rifles], but also had the regular army cowed.[20]

Two widely used tactics of political struggle in East Pakistan deserve special mentioning. A *hartal* (general strike) was called relatively often, locally or regionally, and rigorously enforced, down to stopping car traffic.[21] For a *gherao*, a tactic introduced in the late 1960s, businesses, authorities or residences were surrounded by a crowd in a hostile posture in order to get concessions by those encircled before they were given back their freedom of movement. Both tactics took large, aggressive groups of people to the streets.

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15 See Roy, *Genocide*, 10, 33, 38–51; for mass flights, see Franda, *Bangladesh*, 103.

16 Ghulam Kabir, *Minority Politics*, 74–75.

17 Van Schendel, *History*, 123; Kalim Siddiqi, *Conflict, Crisis and War in East Pakistan* (New York: Praeger, 1972), 121–131; David Loshak, *Pakistan Crisis* (New York et al.: McGraw Hill, 1971), 32–33.

18 Marian Olson, *Bangladesh: Tears and Laughter* (Willmar, MN: Willmar Assembly of God, 2002), 104–106 sketches the example of Gopalganj.

19 Beth Roy, *Some Trouble With Cows: Making Sense of Social Conflict* (Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 1994), esp. 48–73, 81–85.

20 Telegram from about April 1971, quoted in Archer Blood, *The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh: Memoirs of an American Diplomat* (Dhaka: University Press, 2002), 210. Mohammed Ayub Khan was the military dictator in Pakistan in 1968–1969.

21 See for example Blood, *Birth*, 165.

General Elections and the Consequent Political Crisis, 1970–1971

The nationwide unrest of 1968–1969 forced the military government to change its frontman. The new leader of the junta, General Yahya Khan (1917–1980), promised general elections and actually organized them in November 1970. The Awami League won 75 percent of the votes in East Pakistan, which, through the majority voting system, made her claim 160 out of 162 seats from the East (the party did not run in the western part of the country) and, thus, the absolute majority in the Constitutional Assembly in Pakistan.[22] This was an outstanding political victory, but it did not mean that the East Bengalis sided united with one peaceful party. The turnout in East Pakistan was 57 percent of eligible voters, and during the election year, activists and supporters of the Awami League had attacked supporters of other parties also physically in order to intimidate them, and killed some of them.[23]

The leaders of the Awami League deduced from this election victory a claim to speak for, as it was called, the 75 million people in the East, and, as they took the election result support for their party's platform, also a hardly veiled claim to sovereignty for the East. The will of 75 million was not to be and could not be suppressed.[24] This argument also persuaded Henry Kissinger (1923–2023), the advisor for security affairs of the president of the USA, although Kissinger was not known as a friend of the founding of the state of Bangladesh.[25] The U.S. consul in Dacca called the Awami League's chairman Mujibur Rahman (1920–1975) by appearance and character a power-hungry man who derived his power from the masses.[26]

22 Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*, 127.

23 See François Massa, *Bengale: Historie d'un conflit* (Paris: Éditions Alain Moreau, 1972), 141; Hakeem Arshad Qureshi, *The 1971 Indo-Pak War: A Soldier's Narrative* (Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12; Siddiq Salik, *Witness to Surrender*, 3rd ed. (Karachi: Lancer, 1998), 5 and 15; Government of Pakistan, *White Paper on the Crisis in East Pakistan* (n.p. [Rawalpindi]: Government of Pakistan, August 5, 1971), 6–8. For the turnout, see L.F. Rushbrook Williams, *The East Pakistan Tragedy* (New York: Drake, 1972), 44.

24 See newspaper reports about speeches and interviews by Mujibur Rahman of 1, 21, 22 and 24 March 1971 in: *Bangla Desh Documents* (Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs n.y. [1971]), 189, 257, 261, 267; Peter Hess, *Bangladesh: Tragödie einer Staatsgründung* (Frauenfeld and Stuttgart: Huber, 1972), 57.

25 "[. . .] 75,000 Punjabi cannot govern 75 million Bengalis". Kissinger according to Minutes of Senior Review Group Meeting, July 30, 1971, in: *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, vol. XI (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 301.

26 Blood, *Birth*, 47.

When Yahya Khan postponed the meeting of the Constitutional Assembly indefinitely on March 1, 1971 due to discord between the political parties, many Bengalis suspected that fraud was intended. According to pro-Bengali narratives, this triggered an unarmed movement of passive resistance, but in reality it was not peaceful.[27] Mujibur Rahman called the Bengalis to arm themselves and take on the struggle. After the movement had already suffered bloody losses, one could also sustain more of them.[28] Already on December 30, he had announced that "any attempt to delay or thwart [the realization of the] wishes of the people would be resisted to [the] bloody end."[29] During one of the biggest meetings involving him that was held on March 7, Mujibur Rahman spoke of peaceful noncooperation but slogans called for the destruction of Pakistani troops.[30] After the military had shot at spontanous, sometimes violent, demonstrations, killing several demonstrators, Mujibur Rahman declared a *hartal* on March 2 that paralyzed public life, was modified on March 7 and then transformed into a parallel rule by the Awami League in East Pakistan including the control of media and financial institutions.[31]

This did not stop at rhetorics. Directly after Yahya Khan's indefinite postponement of the Constitutional Assembly meeting on March 1, masses of angry Bengalis took to the streets. Many were equipped with sharpened bamboo sticks and iron rods. For days, they smashed and looted stores and restaurants run by Biharis and Western Pakistanis, set several places ablaze and attacked opponents of East Pakistani autonomy as well as foreigners. Cars were torched and bricks thrown. Some groups, especially university students, tried to procure firearms, mostly by plundering arms stores. Some manufactured Molotov cocktails.[32] From March 2 onward,

27 Unarmed according to: Jahan, *Genocide*, 375. Bose, *Reckoning*, 18 and 24 argues the opposite way.

28 See an article by the *Hindustan Standard*, March 11, 1971, in: I. N. Tewary, *War of Independence in Bangla Desh: A Documentary Study* (New Delhi: Navachetna Prakashan, 1971), 118; Bose, *Reckoning*, 3; Mujibur Rahman's speech, 7 March 1971, in Rafiq ul Islam, *A Tale of Millions* (Dacca: Bangladesh Books International, 1981), 49; Mujibur Rahman's speech, 17 February 1971, according to *Pakistan Observer*, February 18, 1971 in *Bangla Desh Documents*, 165–166.

29 Telegram by U.S. Consul Blood, quoted in Blood, *Birth*, 131.

30 Blood, *Birth*, 173; see "Minority Group Obstructing Transfer of Power", in: *Dawn*, March 8, 1971, printed in: *Bangla Desh Documents*, 218–222, esp. 222.

31 "Mujib strongly condemns firing", in: *The People*, March 3, 1971, and "Mujib gives 10-point programme", in: *Dawn*, March 8, 1971, in: *Bangla Desh Documents*, 192 und 223; see also Blood, *Birth*, 157–158.

32 Bose, *Reckoning*, 23–26; Blood, *Birth*, 156–159; James und Marti Hefley, *Christ in Bangladesh* (New York et al.: Harper and Row, 1973), 13 und 15; Fazal Muqeem Khan, *Pakistan's Crisis in Leadership* (Islamabad et al.: National Book Foundation, 1973), 55–58; Rushbrook Williams, *East Pakistan Tragedy*, 53; "Wave of protests sweeps East Pakistan", in: *The Times*, March 3, 1971; Jahanara

violent clashes between demonstrators and the military took place, especially when civilians tried to storm public offices or blocked objects. According to the military, 172 persons died from March 2–4, though most in clashes between Bengali and non-Bengali civilians and as a result of police (not army) fire. Such incidents started on March 1.[33] The Awami League called these numbers grossly understated, and all victims were blamed on the military shooting at unarmed civilians.[34]

In several places, there were pogrom-like mass conflicts between Bengalis and Biharis that resulted in victims on both sides, but a higher number among the latter. The most lethal ones happened on March 3–4 in the port city of Chittagong, when Bengali demonstrators marched through a Bihari settlement in order to enforce the *hartal*, which was answered by shooting from Biharis. 200 people died on both sides, especially in neighborhoods inhabited by Bihari workers, sites that suggest that Bengalis were on the attack.[35] Other deadly clashes between Bengalis and Biharis in Chittagong followed shortly before March 25 when Biharis wanted to unload a ship of military goods quickly and Bengalis attempted to prevent that.[36] This time it was (at least according to Bengali sources) armed non-Bengali crowds who moved against Bengalis under the wrong assumption that the army would immediately come to their help. Many non-Bengalis were killed instead.[37] In several neighborhoods and suburbs of Khulna, crowds killed at least 57 non-Bengalis with improvised bombs, sickles and spears, mutilating them.[38] Angry crowds also appeared at highways and attacked, among others, cars that did not carry black flags

Imam, *Of Blood and Fire* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1989), 8–9, 27 (diary entries of March 1 and 16, 1971); *White Paper*, 29–30; Qutubuddin Aziz, *Blood and Tears* (Karachi: United Press of Pakistan, 1974), 21–22.

33 Salik, *Witness*, 48 und 56–57; A. M. A. Muhith, *Bangladesh: Emergence of a Nation* (Dacca: Bangladesh Books International, 1978), 202; *White Paper*, 30.

34 See for example Blood, *Birth*, 161.

35 Secretariat of the International Commission of Jurists, *The Events in East Pakistan, 1971: A Legal Study* (Geneva: International Commission of Jurists, 1972), http://nsm1.nsm.imp.edu/sanwar/Bangladesh%20Genocide.htm (last accessed January 8, 2008), chapter II a; *White Paper*, 31; account by Fazlul Rahman in *The Year That Was*, ed. Ishrat Firdousi (Dhaka: Bastu Prakashan, 1996), 345. A Bangladeshi author confirmed that this happened always in non-Bengali settlements though he claimed that there were only Bengali victims: ul Islam, *Tale*, 37–38. Aziz, *Blood*, 54–78 offers much higher victim numbers.

36 Letter by A. Majid from Zurich, in *International Herald Tribune*, August 9, 1971, printed in: *Bangladesh Genocide and World Press*, ed. Fazlul Quader Quaderi (Dacca: Begum Dilafroz Quaderi, 1972), 247.

37 Muhith, *Bangladesh*, 226–227.

38 *White Paper*, 31.

as demanded by the Awami League.[39] Trains were either stopped by crowds between stations or passengers encircled at stations and alleged or real opponents of political autonomy threatened. According to some sources, passengers of a local bus in Dacca were murdered by a crowd.[40] Violence from amidst crowds originated at several places from the attempt to enforce the general strike, which, in turn, was supposed to protest anti-democratic measures by the military junta, but also served as a vehicle for a creeping political takeover. Such violence built up incrementally.[41] However, it has to be added that witnesses attributed violence against non-Bengalis also often to small armed groups ("gangs"), rather than crowds.[42]

In the days after March 1, boycotts prevented army units in East Pakistan from the purchase of fresh food and crowds blocked unit movements, often without the military responding violently. The most bloody incident that did happen occurred in the town of Jodevpur on March 19 when there was shooting out of a crowd blocking a railway crossing at army troops which killed several people when returning the fire.[43]

All in all, there were many violent actions out of gatherings and demonstrations in several towns and cities from March 1–25, and not only during clashes with the army. Transitions between common practices of political struggle and mass violence were fluent. From about March 22 – three days before the army crackdown – mass assaults on Biharis began on a larger scale than in the weeks before. This can also be read from warnings of Bengali politicians which also indicate that the Awami League started to lose control of the events.[44] In one of the largest riots, 8,000 civilians, many of whom were armed, attacked residential neighborhoods in or around Saidpur on March 24–25.[45] The excitement and readiness for violence of those assembled sprung from their outrage because of political injustice and oppression, but often it was not directed against functionaries of the state but minorities that were considered alien, even though these were vaguely seen as linked with government and West Pakistani interests.

39 Jim McKinley, *Death to Life: Bangladesh as Experienced by a Missionary Family* (Louisville: Highview Baptist Church, n.y.), 9.
40 *White Paper*, 38; Aziz, *Blood*, 30.
41 In this point the *White Paper*, 29–39, appears realistic.
42 Aziz, *Blood*, 25–43.
43 Blood, *Birth*, 181–182; see details in Bose, *Reckoning*, 32–46.
44 See various articles in *Bangla Desh Documents*, 271–274.
45 *White Paper*, 39.

Crowd Violence in March/April 1971 and Its Suppression

After the army crackdown on March 25, the most common violence committed from within crowds in March and April 1971 consisted of massacres against Biharis.[46] Tens of thousands were killed. The most fatal incidents happened in Chittagong, Khulna, Jessore, Santahar (6,000 to 15,000 dead), in ten settlements in Mymensingh, where the crowds were armed with rifles, swords, spears and daggers (500 to 5,000 dead), and in Dinajpur.[47] Frequently this included the murder of women and children or the abduction of children.[48] In other places, only male adults were targeted. Such events may have been exaggerated in Pakistani propaganda or postwar pro-Pakistani studies (but see the partial confirmation by witnesses from the opposite side mentioned on the following pages). Nonetheless, such (pro-)Pakistani reports are significant in that they hold crowds, mostly called "mobs," responsible for attacks on non-Bengali civilians because they attest mass support to the political opponent, which undermines the idea that one should have kept a united state of Pakistan that is usually the basis of these publications. This lends such reports some credibility.

The slaughter of Jessore on March 30 and its results were observed by foreign journalists. Civilians armed with spears, rifles and other weapons hacked Pakistani soldiers and non-Bengali civilians to death.[49] A crowd of Bengalis was also about to lynch a U.S. missionary as an alleged "Punjabi" in a coastal area until a functionary of the Awami League clarified his identity.[50] The Pakistani authorities set up camps for about 25,000 Bihari widows and orphans.[51]

Pogroms against non-Bengalis have not only been described by Bihari survivors, Pakistani army officers, foreign media reporters and missionaries; they also

46 Siehe Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*, 148–151; Sumit Sen, "Stateless Refugees and the Right to Return: The Bihari Refugees of South Asia, part I", in: *International Journal of Refugee Law* 11, 4 (1999): 630–631. The strongly propagandistic book by Aziz, *Blood*, argues that there was violence from crowds (and not small armed groups) in many instances. Many of his data lack credibility in regard to timing, victim numbers and the arms allegedly used by attackers, but many of his descriptions also match depictions of the same case in other sources.

47 See *White Paper*, 64–69; for Chittagong and Khulna, see: Aziz, *Blood*, 57–78, 82–93. For Santahar: Michael Hornsby, "Pakistan army intervention set off events which led to vengeance killings in East Pakistan", in: *The Times*, July 12, 1971. For Mymensingh: Blood, *Birth*, 277 (500 to 2.000 dead); *White Paper*, 69. For Dinajpur: Peter Hazelhurst, "Massacre of thousands of refugees by Bengalis alleged", in: *The Times*, April 6, 1971.

48 For the latter point, see Saikia, *Women*, 84 (Saidpur).

49 Nicholas Tomalin, "Mass slaughter of Punjabis in East Bengal", in: *The Times*, April 2, 1971.

50 Hefley and Hefley, *Christ*, 20.

51 Hess, *Bangladesh*, 145.

appear in collections of postwar Bengali memories, such as the mutual pogroms in Khulna which led to, at least, hundreds of fatalities.[52] A crowd's attack at the Kabuli building in Chittagong, where supporters of the Pakistani government had barricaded themselves (some of them armed) led to them being killed, to looting and the rape of women by the crowd.[53] In the town of Ishurdi, large groups of people hunted down scattered Pakistani soldiers and Biharis and killed them. Similar things happened in villages close to Lamonirhat near Rangpur.[54] Bengali student Najmul Ansar fled the Pakistani army from Dacca to Comilla, but once there, he was surrounded by a hostile crowd who alleged him to be a Bihari.[55] These reports show also how distrust grew on both sides, many people armed themselves, protective steps were taken, rumors circulated and finally hostile crowds from both sides attacked civilians, as happened in Chittagong.[56]

Military attacks could lead to bloody riots by Bengalis who accused Biharis of signaling to the Pakistani air force.[57] In Lalmonirhat (Rangpur district), the local Bengali pogrom against non-Bengalis took place after Major Ziaur Rahman's (1936–1981) radio speech in which he declared a state of Bangladesh on March 26. Local Bengalis succeeded in burning down a Bihari neighborhood, but they had severe losses and were afterwards attacked by non-Bengali prisoners freed by the military.[58]

Some sources say that functionaries of the Awami League were responsible for anti-Bihari pogroms. Even a Bangladeshi historian accused "Awami League volunteers" of a six-day riot against Biharis in Chittagong at the end of March 1971.[59] But there are a number of counter-examples, in which Awami League functionaries prevented or stopped riots and mass murder.[60] Already in March 1971, Mujibur Rahman had repeatedly warned of rioting against Biharis, albeit in ambivalent

52 Account by Mustafa Kamal in Firdousi, *Year*, 489; see also *White Paper*, 66.

53 A detailed description can be found in the account by Waliul Islam in Firdousi, *Year*, 17–24.

54 Accounts by Arief Razzaque and Golam Sarwar in Firdousi, *Year*, 330, 389–391.

55 Account by Najmul Ansar in Firdousi, *Year*, 406–407.

56 Account by Mohammad Ishaque in Firdousi, *Year*, 25–27; Yaqub Zainuddin's account in ibid., 513–514 portrays probably events in Chittagong as well.

57 Blood, *Birth*, 276–278 (Mymensingh, April 1971).

58 Account by Golam Sarwar in Firdousi, *Year*, 389.

59 Talukder Maniruzzaman, *The Bangladesh Revolution and Its Aftermath* (Dacca: Bangladesh Books International, 1980), 87. See *White Paper*, 31; Aziz, *Blood*, 16.

60 Blood, *Birth*, 275 (Faridpur); Peter Hazelhurst, "Hundreds of non-Bengalis slaughtered in Bangladesh", in: *The Times*, April 6, 1971 (Dinajpur); letter by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of East Pakistan,"On the situation in Bangla Desh", May 3, 1971, in: *Bangla Desh Documents*, 314 (Rangpur).

statements.[61] Accusations by the Pakistani justice authorities against Awami League functionaries concerning violence against non-Bengalis, West Pakistanis and "non-conformists" were mostly vague, and, above all, largely not explicitly related to directing violent crowds. Either this was rare, or the Pakistani authorities wanted to avoid the impression of mass support for such violent acts.[62] If the role of representatives of the leading political party was more conciliatory, this would mean that crowds, and individuals in these crowds, acted rather autonomously.

In several areas, crowds, defying death, but also with the intention to kill, also turned on troops identified as supporting (West) Pakistan (after March 25, 1971, other army units supported Bangladesh's independence). Before the army crackdown on March 25, popular action was directed against the supply and movements of all units, including those that consisted mainly of supposed Bengalis.[63] Afterward, this changed. Locally, this was organized by a "Liberation War Committee" headed by an Awami League member-elect of the National Assembly in Satkhira.[64] Allegedly, 8,000 people moved against the military base in Saidpur already on March 24.[65] On March 31, about 50 Bengali police officers, 100 students and 5,000 peasants attacked an army unit in Kushtia. Instead of a suicidal frontal attack, they surrounded the troops and shot at them with hundreds of previously captured rifles. Peasants hacked those soldiers to death who tried to drive away in panic. 134 military personnel died, 13 were captured.[66] On April 2, 5,000 people armed with sticks, bows and arrows, spears and firearms stopped an army platoon on the way from Rajshahi to Nababgunj and captured a tank.[67] In Jessore, peasants armed with hoes, truncheons and bamboo spears held a barack under siege in order to kill the soldiers located there.[68] A crowd hacked nine soldiers in Bogra to pieces on April 6, around the same time as armed groups moved against

61 See for example Blood, *Birth*, 162 and note 28 in this chapter.

62 "Charges against 16 more MNAs", in: *Pakistan Times*, August 18, 1971, Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin (PA AA), B 37/629.

63 Salik, *Witness*, 56–57.

64 Suraiya Begum, "Introduction", in: *Rising from the Ashes: Women's Narratives of 1971*, eds. Shaheen Akhtar et al. (Dhaka: Ain O Salish Kendra and University Press, 2014; first in Bengali 2001), 105.

65 Massa, *Bengale*, 178.

66 "Pakistan. The Battle of Kushtia", in: *Time*, April 19, 1971, printed in: Quaderi, Bangladesh Genocide, 72–75. A unit of 300 men was annihilated in Pabna: Qureshi, *War*, 33.

67 Kalyan Chaudhuri, "Across the Border. The Masses Are Active", in: *Frontier*, May 1, 1971, printed in: *Media and the Liberation War of Bangladesh*, vol. 2, ed. Muntassir Mamoon (Dhaka: Centre for Bangladesh Studies, 2002), 109.

68 "Pakistan. Death of an Ideal", in: *Newsweek*, 12 April 1971, in Quaderi, *Bangladesh Genocide*, 50.

local Biharis. Similarly, in Ishurdi at the end of March, thousands of village residents took a stand against Pakistani troops, captured three soldiers and killed them later. Then Biharis were murdered and their property was looted.[69] In Mymensingh, pro-Bengali troops overpowered their circa 50 West Pakistani comrades, masses of civilians streaming into the base hacked those West Pakistanis to death who tried to flee, murdered their children and wives and kidnapped some of the women.[70] In the town of Feni, an armed crowd attacked a West Pakistani unit which had barricaded itself in a large building, holding Bengali soldiers prisoner. Many West Pakistanis, but also Bengali soldiers and many civilians died. South of the town, civilians held up a military column in fighting for several days.[71] West Pakistani soldiers and officers who lived outside closed quarters became easy prey to crowds who massacred them and often also their wives and children.[72] Some Pakistani military personnel moving around alone were also killed by armed groups or crowds between March 3 and 25.[73] Many of the sites of these actions indicate that the posture of these crowds was not necessarily defensive but that they pursued military units or men and/or confronted them at a favorable place for an attack. The passionate approach with no regard for one's own life, the low number of prisoners kept and the brutal ways of killing, all of this points to how strongly people in these crowds felt that their way of action was justified because it was for a just cause. It was widely held that Biharis and West Pakistanis deserved death, a view that was also adopted by some foreign missionaries. One of them wrote in late July 1971: "I became a Bengali . . . I revised my theology on the grounds that this business about loving your enemy needs rethinking. It was based originally on the supposition that the enemy is human."[74]

In turn, crowds of non-Bengalis turned against perceived opponents, especially in the wake of brutal army attacks like on March 27–28 in Dacca.[75] In some instances, the Pakistani military distributed arms among Biharis.[76] Large groups of Biharis acted in hostile ways against Bengalis trying to escape military vio-

69 Accounts by Arief Razzaque and Mazudur Rahman in Firdousi, *Year*, 330, 449–450, 453.

70 Bose, *Reckoning*, 83–84; Blood, *Birth*, 276.

71 McKinley, *Death*, 12–13.

72 For an example from Chittagong or Rangamati, see the account by Naseem Rahman in Firdousi, *Year*, 465; see also Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*, 151.

73 Bose, *Reckoning*, 32–33.

74 Letter by U.S. missionary Goedert quoted in Hefley and Hefley, *Christ*, 50. See also Hess, *Bangladesh*, 148.

75 Hefley and Hefley, *Christ*, 18–19.

76 See Zaglul Haider, "Repatriation of the Biharis Stranded in Bangladesh: Diplomacy and Development", *Asian Profile* 31, 6 (2003): 631.

lence.[77] Violence by Bihari crowds occurred in particular where many Biharis lived, like in (or close to) certain towns and suburbs, and in railway settlements where they often formed the majority of residents.[78] As mentioned before, in Chittagong and its suburbs, there was mutual collective violence between Bihari and Bengali demonstrators. This resembled events in the Khalishpur neighborhood in Khulna and, to a degree, of the Mohammedpur area in Dacca.[79] A rare example of a lethal pogrom organized by Biharis on Bengalis late in 1971 is known for Chittagong.[80] But overall, it is striking that, although Biharis were accused both then and in the historiography of having committed atrocities, there is relatively little concrete evidence for Bihari *crowd* violence.

Even more than in the 1950s and 1960s (when also many Hindus were killed), factories and related settlements became the scene of brutal Bengali-Bihari infighting.[81] In many places, Biharis constituted a large portion of the management, but also of foremen, specialists and other workers. After March 25, it was often non-Bengalis, and especially superiors among them, who were slaughtered by Bengali workers who, at times, did not even spare their opponents' families.[82] When crowds of workers killed superiors (and when superiors killed workers), this also involved a class aspect, but workers were also pitted against workers. People acting out of crowds killed many Biharis and Western Pakistanis, military and civilians, as well as their families, at the Kaptai power station in the remote Chittagong Hill Tracts on March 25 and 26.[83] The most deadly of these incidents happened in two jute plants in Khulna around March 27, when both Bengalis and Biharis armed themselves and barricaded themselves in, the latter lost and many of them were killed, as well as some Bengalis.[84] Even before March 26, crowds

77 See Akhtar et al., *Rising*, 17–18, 154.

78 Secretariat of the International Commission of Jurists, *Events*, chapter IIb.

79 Account by Ferdousi Priyobashinee in *Tormenting Seventy One: An account of Pakistan army's atrocities during Bangladesh liberation war of 1971*, ed. Shariar Kabir (Dhaka: Nirmul Committee, 1999), n.p.; this was portrayed as one-sided violence in "Khulna's Days of Terror", in: *Bangladesh Observer*, 4 February 1972. For Mohammedpur, see Qurratul Ain Tahmina, "Zabunessa Begum: A Mother's Struggle for Her Family", in: Akhtar et al., *Rising*, 14–16.

80 Account by Abdul Gofran in Jahan, *Genocide*, 401–402 (events of November 10, 1971).

81 This is emphasized in Aziz, *Blood*.

82 Sen, "Refugees", 631; account by Naseem Rahman (steel workers' settlement near Chittagong) in Firdousi, *Year*, 466; account by Premankur Roy (brickworks near Phalpur close to Mymensingh) in ibid., 379. For the 1950s and 1960s, see Sen, "Refugees", 628; Richard Sisson and Leo Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh* (Berkeley et al.: University of California Press, 1990), 13; for attacks on Hindus, see Roy, *Genocide*, 40–41, 48.

83 Secretariat of the International Commission of Jurists, *Events*, chapter IIb.

84 Bose, *Reckoning*, 80–82; Shaheen Akhtar, "Ferdousi Priyobhashini: A Hidden Chapter", in: Akhtar, *Rising*, 144, 155.

apparently committed massacres targeting non-Bengalis in factories and factory settlements.[85] Long after the end of the war, on March 10, 1972, thousands of Biharis, including women and children, fell victim to another mass attack by Bengali civilians.[86]

After the Pakistani army had prevailed with brutal means and had all towns again under its control from about April 20, 1971, Bengali crowds no longer dared to turn openly against non-Bengalis (as it had still happened even in Dacca in the night from March 25 to 26[87]). In Dacca, army fire also stopped further vengeful pogroms of Biharis against Bengalis in late April, fueled by stories by refugees from the anti-Bihari pogrom in Mymensingh. Now the troops shot several Biharis,[88] after violent Muslim demonstrations that started from different points and converged at quarters with a population consisting mainly of Hindus and supporters of independence had still been permitted on April 13, which led to arson and murder.[89] It seems that the army moved, though reluctantly, against violent Biharis on a few other occasions after March 25. Some killers from their ranks received mild prison sentences.[90] Thereby the military stifled violent crowd action for the time being. Internationally, it wanted to show that it kept law and order, domestically the regime somewhat intensified its efforts to find Bengali allies after April 18 even among students and Awami League members, although without notable success.[91]

To be sure, violence in cities and suburbs continued on a high level, but for the most part as small operations by the army and the militias and "peace committees" supporting the regime who arrested or abducted individuals en masse, tortured and murdered them, abused women and robbed enemy property. Supporters of independence, in contrast, focused on tightly organized guerrilla attacks and bombings, refraining from violent mass demonstrations.[92]

In the countryside, the lack of Pakistani government control resulted in possibilities for crowd violence, especially when targeting Hindus. The historiography

85 Aziz, *Blood*, 44 und 47 (Narayanganj).

86 Bose, *Reckoning*, 159.

87 See Robert Payne, *Massacre* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 22.

88 Blood, *Birth*, 277 mentions that the army shot seven Biharis on April 28; see also Imam, *Blood*, 68 und 70 (diary entries of April 23 and 25, 1971).

89 Ahmed Sharif et al., eds., *Genocide '71: An Account of the Killers and Collaborators* (Dhaka: Muktijuddha Chetana Bikash Kendra, 1988), 41–42.

90 Account by Yaqub Zainuddin in Firdousi, *Year*, 514.

91 Blood, Birth, p. 280; FRG Consulate General in Dacca, report, October 28, 1971, PA AA, B37/629.

92 A rare counterexample is mentioned in the account by Masudur Rahman in Firdousi, *Year*, 455 (date and place are unclear). A crowd demanded from three Mukhti Bahini to kill some alleged Pakistani collaborators. The guerrillas only beat and humiliated these prisoners.

blames violence there, too, usually on the Pakistani army in connection with local militias (*razakars*) and especially on Biharis. For villages, some responsibility is also attributed to Muslim neighbors or Muslims from the area, but the forms their action took are often unclear. One author spoke of "oppression,"[93] others of looting, assault and burning down of Hindu neighborhoods, sometimes apparently carried out by large collectives.[94] Between March 1 and 25, 1971, people among crowds in the countryside supposedly killed political leaders loyal to Pakistan and other persons dubbed as antisocial and burned their houses.[95] Given the high density of the rural population, large gatherings were not uncommon. But all in all, there is little information about crowd violence in rural areas. According to one report, in the large village of Sherpur, crowds of Muslim locals went on a pillage of houses by Hindus after being asked by Pakistani troops to do so in late April 1971. After an army massacre at a nearby river, a crowd of villagers from other places coerced relatives of those executed to leave the site because they were afraid of army reprisals if the dead bodies were taken.[96]

We also do not know much about crowd counter-violence by Hindus. Refugees who often moved in large groups – consisting of up to 300,000 people – tried to protect themselves against attacks by small groups, inter alia, by taking women and children in the middle and placing men on the sides. It is possible that some of these men were armed. In one case, a local peace committee forced refugees to pay a toll and disarmed them for this purpose. However, if a group of hundreds of thousands accepted such treatment, it was either not disposed toward violent behavior or its members did not feel to be in a position to use violence.[97]

A Restricted Return to Crowd Violence in Late 1971

When Indian troops attacked East Pakistan together with Bangladeshi independence fighters in December 1971, there was once again a power vacuum, chaotic scenes and persecution of civilians. But those who acted were often small groups

93 Bose, *Reckoning*, 117.

94 See Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*, 160–161; Hefley and Hefley, *Christ*, 46; Peter Kann, "A Nation Divided", *Wall Street Journal*, July 23, 1971, printed in: *Bangla Desh Documents*, 422. A clear case from the area of Chittagong is in Jeannie Lockerbie, *On Duty in Bangladesh* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 121–122.

95 Maniruzzaman, *Bangladesh Revolution*, 65.

96 Suraiya Begum, "Binapani Saha: The Many Faces of 1971", in: Akhtar et al., *Rising*, 269, 271–272. This resembles events in Chuknagar some weeks later; see chapter 3 of this volume.

97 Partha Mukherji, "The Great Migration of 1971. I – Exodus", *Economic and Political Weekly* 9, 9, March 2, 1974, 368.

of armed men who searched neighborhoods for Biharis and alleged collaborators of the Pakistani side, shot men, raped part of the women and plundered, especially at night.[98] However, the image of the 'collaborator' became also very important as target for Bangladeshi crowd action, as it is still today.[99] Several observers also reported crowd violence at the time in which Biharis were hunted down and their houses burned, but this was often weeks and months after the end of the war in early 1972 and even still in April.[100] Afterward, Biharis stayed in many places in their own camps or neighborhoods for protection. In the middle of December of 1971, a rather exceptional incident occurred in which armed independence fighters together with a crowd armed with sickles, spears, axes and firearms moved against non-Bengalis; some people were massacred by the crowd, whereas smaller groups later killed women and children who were held captive. The number of dead seems to have run at least into the hundreds. Indian troops liberated the survivors.[101]

One event appears symptomatic. An armed commando under leftist guerrilla leader Kader Siddiqi (b. 1948) presented four alleged collaborators, who were accused of having attacked Bengalis, looted and tried to abduct two women, in a sports stadium in Dacca on December 18, 1971, and tortured and bayoneted them to death for half an hour in front of the cheering crowd of 5,000. Foreign media representatives filmed and photographed the scene, which was later shown by some Western European TV stations.[102] On a symbolic level, this can be interpreted in a way that the victorious guerrilla fighters who had risked their lives in the struggle for independence, which lent them some legitimacy, took the law into their own hands, acting on behalf of the people in a way that was perceived as just. Viewed from another angle, the onlookers left the reckoning to the armed fighters. Such a procedure reduced the active role of crowds in the violence to being supportive

98 For Dacca, see the accounts by Afsan Chowdhury, Humayun Kabir und Muneer-u-Zaman, Firdousi, *Year*, 343, 377 und 440; Olson, *Bangladesh*, 207; Julian Kerr, "Mukti Bahini settling old scores in Dacca", *The Times*, December 18, 1971. For other places, see Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*, 152; also Sen, "Refugees", 633; Sami Mustafa, "Who Is Conducting a Genocide? ", in: *Pakistan Forum*, 3, 4 (1973): 15–16.

99 See Nusrat Sabina Chowdhury, *Paradoxes of the Popular: Crowd Politics in Bangladesh* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 129, 153–157.

100 Hefley and Hefley, *Christ*, 86; Ben Whitaker et al., *The Biharis in Bangladesh* (London: Minority Rights Group, n.y. [1977]), 9, 14 und 16 (Dacca and Khulna); Bose, *Reckoning*, 159–160 (Khulna, March 10, 1972); Peter Hazelhurst, "Hundreds of non-Bengalis slaughtered in Bangladesh", in: *The Times*, May 8, 1972 (Mirpur near Dacca).

101 See the account by Mohammad Jafar Al Khan in Firdousi, *Year*, 521–525.

102 See Hess, *Bangladesh*, 146 and photograph after 144; photographs in Aziz, *Blood*, ix–xii; Bose, *Reckoning*, 156–157; Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*, 152.

onlookers. It is also characteristic that these atrocities of December 1971 are rarely collectively questioned in Bangladesh until today, whether in the historiography or in public memory, unlike by some, or even quite a few, murderers individually – including Kader Siddiqi, whose pangs of conscience led him, according to his own version, to adopt a traumatized baby orphaned by the war who is perhaps a child of Biharis.[103]

Beyond this single case and phase, in Bangladeshi public memory, Bengali people in violent crowds of 1971–1972 were not perpetrators, but victims and heroic resisters. Their violence is considered as legitimate as that by Biharis as illegitimate – just like it was viewed then. What prevails is still the "narrative of the enemy."[104] To my knowledge there was no prosecution of crowd violence in Bangladesh at all (probably not even against Biharis or Bengali supporters of the Pakistani government, because the cases about which I read of pertained to gang violence and more direct service to the Pakistani army); and, as mentioned, Pakistani prosecution of such cases up until December 1971 was extremely limited. Crowd violence was a crime that went unpunished, mostly due to a fundamental lack of a sense of guilt on all sides, resulting in the lack of will to prosecute and probably only secondarily because it was impossible to identify responsibility.

Conclusion

In East Pakistan/Bangladesh, massive, often deadly violence was committed in many cases out of crowds in 1971 and 1972. How many people were killed this way is hard to tell but the numbers probably ran into the tens of thousands. Such incidents accumulated in specific phases of contested rule with weakened government authority: in March and April 1971 and from December 1971 to April 1972. Between these periods, this happened only in the countryside where the Pakistani military, with just a few tens of thousands of troops, and the public administration exerted no full control.

Imaginations about irrational crowds are, to an extent, disclaimed by the evidence for East Pakistan. Crowds showed political consciousness, a pattern that is also said to be typical for today's crowds in Bangladesh (though they are easily influenced by rumors) and that seems to have emerged in the 1946 Hindu-Muslim

103 See (also for Siddiqi's own interpretation of the execution) Saikia, *Women*, 238–239 und 257–258, note 33. General observations as mentioned are in part taken from Yasmin Saikia, "Insāniyat for peace: survivors' narrative of the 1971 war of Bangladesh", in: *Journal of Genocide Research* 13, 4 (2011): 481, 488–489.

104 Saikia, "Insāniyat", 481.

riots.[105] The incidence of crowd violence was closely related to the overall political situation, mass mobilization and/or self-mobilization during intense political polarization. People responded to confrontations revolving around current questions of oligarchic power vs. democratic system and procedures, national unity of an Islamic state vs. regional popular sovereignty and West vs. East Pakistan concerning the distribution of resources. Both found their demands highly legitimate and near-sacred, which resulted in sharp confrontations and left little room for dialogue. In part, people connected these demands and rejections with negative collective prejudices about Bengalis, Pakistanis or Biharis, and since many tried to distinguish members of these groups by innate physical markers (i.e., skin complexion and body height), linking these to descent, I do not hesitate to call this a form of racism. Links were also made to other traditional social divisions and stereotypes which led to collective ascriptions such as that Hindus (and secular intellectuals) supported Bangladeshi autonomy/independence and Biharis the Pakistani government. Both sides found collective violence highly justified and tended to dehumanize the 'enemy'. The strong emotions that accompanied political conflicts were expressed in cruel ways of killing, mutilations, the murder of children and few criticisms of such action. However, as far as crowd violence is concerned, there were several, but fairly clear conflict lines instead of chaos.

Therefore, victims of this violence were mostly members of easily identifiable and located minority groups that were perceived as ethnically, religiously or culturally different. Non-Bengalis (so-called Biharis) and Hindus often lived in separate settlements, neighborhoods or houses. There were relatively weak ties between groups,[106] and ideas about the otherness of certain groups were widespread, having in part solidified during former conflicts. Non-Bengalis and West Pakistanis were recognized based on their broken Bengali, West Pakistanis by their fair skin color, male Hindus because they were not circumcized and female ones by their clothing and body painting. Interwoven with ethnoreligious difference was socioeconomic conflict: a majority of Bengalis still identified Biharis and Hindus with wealth and power although many of the latter groups had either lost their elite status before or their elites had left the country, and many members of these groups had been poor all along.

105 See Chowdhury, *Paradoxes*, 21; Janam Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine, Riots, and the End of Empire 1939–1946*, Ph.D dissertation, University of Michigan, 2011, 315–350. But this may have already been the case in the Quit India protests of 1942, see Ram Sharan Vidyarthi, "The August Movement 1942", in S. K. Sharma, ed., Quit India Movement (Delhi: Mittal, 2009), 84–90.

106 See Imam Ali, *Hindu-Muslim Community in Bangladesh* (Delhi: Kanisha, 1992), 87–88, 198, 204–205.

Those who committed violence out of crowds, by contrast, belonged mostly to the majority.[107] First of all, for them (Bengalis, Muslims) it was easier to gather masses of people. Moreover, the majority of the population also derived legitimacy from their numbers. The will and demands of the majority played an important role in public discourse. In this context, to belong to a crowd reinforced the impression that one's actions were admissible, and violence was very much rationalized by presumedly fulfilling a collective will, which reached beyond the crowd in which one was situated. Many participants in mass gatherings acted with an unshakable feeling of entitlement. Accordingly, violence was often used in broad daylight and in public spaces. It was not by accident that violence came about when the course of action was contested after democratic elections. From this developed a particular idea of *Volksgewalt* (a German term that can both mean 'people's power' and 'violence by the people'). Tajuddin Ahmed (1925–1975), the Prime Minister of Bangladesh's government when it was not yet internationally recognized, said when he took office in a radio speech on April 11, 1971 that "Quislings . . . will be destroyed by the people themselves."[108] Later, literary works from Bangladesh about the events in 1971 emphasized the same points, such as crowds' claim to sovereignty as well as the fact that they were violent (even to the point of killing undecided and uncommitted people who were no enemies).[109]

Mass gatherings and collective action also served to enforce unity or at least establish social delimitation and subordination – on the path to a national state. In the short run, such violence prompted millions to flee; in the longer run, it forced Biharis to barricade in refugeee camps and drove Hindus into an inferior social position. The political leadership played a considerable role in this process involving crowds. Accordingly, the Awami League used intimidation for their electoral victory in November 1970, and Muslim notables in the countryside forced many Hindus to convert to Islam under the threat of collective action (although most revoked their Islamification in 1972).[110]

Though not much can be said about the internal mechanisms of the crowds, violence likely added some cohesion to them as well. This is supported by the infrequency of information, according to which not only individuals[111] but also

107 This is so although the majority of those killed in the conflicts of 1971 by all kinds of violence were Bengalis.

108 Printed in *Bangla Desh Documents*, 282–286, here 285.

109 Chowdhury, *Paradoxes*, 11–14.

110 For the latter point Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*, 146.

111 See for the example of a Bengali neighbor who saved a Bihari girl from a crowd that was about to rape it, from the perspective of one of the girl's abductors, in Yasmin Saikia, "Beyond

groups within crowds in East Pakistan opposed violence.[112] Earlier violent mass gatherings tended to solidify collective identity and trained according behavior, which was the intention of some of the instigators and organizers of these shows of force.[113] But again, whatever the degrees of intentionality of the various actors, it is likely that the violence, much more than consolidating *this* specific collective (the crowd), sent out political messages to broader audiences, restructuring social and geographical spaces and visibly occupying the public sphere. Personal greed resulting in direct plunder played a secondary role in urban areas, but was important in the countryside.[114]

Minorities mobilized violent crowds only if they felt supported or tolerated by the political regime. This was especially the case for the Biharis until the Pakistani army moved against such mass attacks. Afterward, Biharis could still denounce adversaries and form militias or informal gangs for violence. Usually it was more the defense of a united Pakistan than of Islam as such that was used as justification for this, in close connection with the defense of their own group as well as its status.

Violence committed out of crowds was a kind of political participation. It was also open to the lower strata of society, as great numbers of peasants and workers are reported to have taken part in many events. But this was not necessarily about weapons of the weak but rather about the exertion of power. Strictly speaking, these were often not peaceful demonstrations. Many participants were armed, which points to much readiness for violence from the start. On the one hand, heavy and automatic weapons were not carried, which meant that the crowds' preparations were clearly inferior to the weaponry of army troops; on the other hand, the arms at hand had great lethal potential such as knives, axes, sickles, spears, sharpened bamboo sticks, iron rods, hunting rifles, shot guns, self-made bombs and Molotov cocktails. Through these weapons, the violence was rooted in the everyday (and the means were common and easy at hand) and in tradition. In

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the Archive of Silence: Narratives of the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh", in: *History Workshop Journal* 58, 2004: 285; another example is in the account by Golam Sarwar, in: Firdousi, *Year*, 390.

112 See the account by Yaqub Zainuddin in Firdousi, *Year*, 516. Zainuddin relates that he and other Biharis continued to stab Hindu women and children despite objections expressed by other Biharis, abusing the latter in Urdu as "enemies of our nation". Tahmina, "Zabunessa", 17–19 is also about varying behavior of a Bihari crowd in which some wanted to kill Bengalis, others wanted save them, and some of the rescuers nonetheless looted Bengalis' property.

113 This is suggested by the microstudy of Roy, *Cows*, concerning events in 1954.

114 Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*, 21–22, 321, 335–342 found looting of great importance also in the city of Calcutta in 1946, also as a result of a brutalization through famine, which, however, had little impact in urban Bangladesh in late 1971 and early 1972.

many cases, men were experienced in their use and production, also from past civil strife.

It would appear that the subject matter of this chapter belongs in the context of a long tradition of political militancy involving masses in East Bengal that stretches to the present. Instead of being restricted to a transitional period to democracy,[115] this specific regional tradition has lasted and evolved over many decades and different political systems: late colonialism, West Pakistani dominance, independent Bangladesh, military dictatorships and formal democracy. Under the conditions of 1971, some restraints that normally limited such militancy ceased to apply and forces of non-violence were often subdued. The next chapter analyzes non-violence as a result of social interaction in a different context.

115 This is the context within which Mann, *Dark Side*, places participatory violence.