The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories and the Bangladesh War of 1971

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Following the 1971 Bangladesh War, the Bangladesh government publicly designated the thousands of women raped by the then West Pakistani (later Pakistani) military and their local East Pakistani (later Bangladeshi) collaborators as *birangona*, (“brave women”). *Spectral Wound* aims to map out the public memories of sexual violence of the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 (*Muktijuddho*). Nayanika Mookherjee demonstrates that while this celebration of *birangonas* as heroes keeps them in the public memories, they exist in the public consciousness as what Mookherjee calls a spectral wound. Dominant representations of *birangonas* as dehumanized victims with disheveled hair, and rejected by their communities create this wound, the effects of which flatten the diversity of their experiences through which *birangonas* have lived with this violence of wartime rape. The book ethnographically examines the circulation of images, press and literary representations, testimonies of rape among survivors of sexual violence and their families, the left-liberal civil society and state actors. In critically examining the pervasiveness of the *birangona* construction, Mookherjee decentres the assumption of silence relating to wartime rape and opens the possibility for a more poitico-economic and ethical inquiry into the sexuality of war.

Nayanika Mookherjee is a Reader in Socio-Cultural Anthropology at Durham University. She has published extensively on the anthropology of violence, gendered violence during wars, ethics and aesthetics. Recent publications include *The Spectral Wound. Sexual Violence, Public Memories and the Bangladesh War of 1971*, special issues of the Journal of Material Culture on *Aesthetics, Politics, Conflict* (with Tariq Jazeel), on *The Self in South Asia* (Journal of Historical Sociology) and on *The Aesthetics of Nation* (Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute, with Christopher Pinney). Her new research is on transnational adoption and conflict: she is currently finishing a next book, *Arts of Reconciliation*.

All are welcome