MIGRATION MYTHS AND THE MECHANICS OF ASSIMILATION: TWO COMMUNITY HISTORIES FROM BENGAL[1]

Joya Chatterji

'Assimilate; do not be assimilated.'
LEOPOLD SENGHOR

In 1993, the Sylheti Social History Group in London published a little book entitled *The Roots and Tales of Bangladeshi Settlers*. Ten years later, in 2003, *Biharis. The Indian Emigres in Bangladesh: An Objective Analysis*, was brought out by the Shamsul Huq Foundation, a non-governmental organisation based in the old railway town of Syedpur in Bangladesh. The former, *Roots and Tales*, is an account of the Sylheti diaspora in the United Kingdom. Written in the first-person by Yousuf Choudhury, who migrated to Britain in the 1950s as a bachelor in his twenties, it purports to be the view of the migrant-insider and its style is personal and confessional. The latter, *Biharis*, tells the history of a community twice displaced by violence, the so-called 'Biharis' of Bangladesh. Although its author-the journalist, social worker and poet Ahmed Ilias-is himself a 'Bihari' who migrated from Calcutta in 1953 to what was then East Pakistan, as the subtitle of the book suggests, he strives to write as 'objectively' as a professional historian might, supporting his narrative with references to primary and secondary sources.

On the face of it, the two texts appear to have very little in common. One-*Roots and Tales*-is apparently a classic story of economic migration. It chronicles the temporary sojourn and eventual settlement in the United Kingdom of people largely drawn from a single region in the Bengal delta, the lowland districts of Sylhet, who now number about 300,000, living mainly in defined localities in the East End of London and in Greater Manchester. Choudhury traces their history back to the heyday of the Raj, when young men from Sylhet worked as lascars in the British merchant marine, some jumping ship in London in search of better working conditions. Others followed their lead, and through typical chain migration, gradually quite significant clusters of Sylheti migrants developed within

working-class neighbourhoods of London's East End, Manchester and also in Birmingham. In due course, these men were joined by elderly parents, by wives and children and other relatives, and became a typically self-sustaining diasporic community. Choudhury's is an optimistic story of (upward) mobility: of people who used their connections and their wits to survive, and who, through hard work and sacrifice, prospered and built a better life for themselves and their children.

Ahmed Ilias' *Biharis*, in contrast, is a stark account of forced migration. It tells the grim tale of how in 1946, just before India was partitioned on the lines of religion, Urdu-speaking Muslims fled from the deadly communal violence in Bihar. They sought and were given shelter first in Bengal (a province then run by a Muslim-dominated government). After partition, they fled to Bengal's eastern wing-which now became East Pakistan-only to become, once again in 1971, the victims of genocidal violence. This was when Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan in a civil war of unspeakable brutality. Today, perhaps 300,000 'Biharis' remain in Bangladesh, most of them still living in the squalid and desperately over-crowded camps where they took shelter during the war and in its aftermath. This is the story Ahmed Ilias attempts to tell in *Biharis*, 'objectivity' being his declared aim. But inevitably it is a much darker work than *Roots and Tales*, reflecting as it does on the defeat of a once-proud community and the death of its culture[2].

Yet a closer look at these two very different works reveals interesting parallels between them. Both are written in English, although for Choudhury and Ilias it is quite evidently their third language. Both authors are thinking men who might be described as 'organic intellectuals', members of the group or community whose experience they sought to articulate, though Choudhury comes from a working-class background while Ilias is a product of the north-Indian Urdu-speaking service elite. Both began their research and writing at roughly the same time, Choudhury in 1981 and Ilias in 1978. Both works were published by community groups. On careful scrutiny, the two books prove to have similar themes, similar internal structures and similar patterns of emphasis. This essay will contend that both texts produce 'origin myths' as well as 'migration myths' which have many tropes in common. By teasing out the features which the two books share, it will explore the inwardness of how, when and why migrant groups come to write their own histories. It will argue that both these histories were written with a view to enabling the 'assimilation' of the community they claimed to speak for, and to seek rights and recognition for that 'community' in its place of settlement. It suggests that reading these texts in a comparative and historical way throws

light on the complex processes by which migrant communities try to 'assimilate' into 'host' cultures.

'Assimilation' itself is a controversial concept. Since the early seventies, it been subjected to sustained critique. Scholars have rejected the classical portrayal of assimilation as a one-sided process by which alien communities are incorporated into an apparently homogeneous host culture, gradually (and inevitably) shedding their foreign ways and increasingly adopting the cultural values and mores of their hosts. As Rogers Brubaker has argued, this perspective was 'analytically and normatively Anglo-conformist. It posited, endorsed and expected assimilation towards an unproblematically conceived white Protestant "core culture"'[3]. In challenging this perspective, the 'differentialist' critique has informed (and was in turn inspired by) the politics and practices of multi-culturalism. It was supported by a growing body of evidence that ethnic diversity persists and survives among the 'new migrants' in the West, so much so that the new orthodoxy is that the melting pot 'never happened'[4].

In recent times, studies of migration have come to recognise the trans-national networks of migrant communities[5]. It is increasingly well understood that migrants remain embedded simultaneously in a variety of locations and 'networks'[6]. They are seen to maintain and deploy these networks to 'circulate'[7] between locations, rather than permanently to settle in one. Many scholars now see migrants as cosmopolitans who constantly and creatively renegotiate 'hybridity'[8], rather than as conformists who either maintain their 'traditional' culture or aspire to or adapt to the lifestyles of the host countries in the west. These studies regard the practice of 'hybridity' as challenging and unsettling the logic of modernity and its vehicle, the nation state[9].

These are valuable insights. Yet they gloss over the harsh realities of the contemporary world, where nation states monopolise 'the legitimate means of movement'[10], control their borders ever more stringently and erect ever higher barriers against entry and naturalisation, making it increasingly difficult for migrants to 'circulate', let alone to enter and stay on with full rights of citizenship. This is as true not only of the west (which implicitly or explicitly has been the focus of these new theories of diaspora) but also of states in the global south[11] which, as Zolberg and Shmeidl have shown, since 1945 have absorbed the vast majority of the world's migrants[12]. For many compelling reasons-which in turn have much to do with the constraints upon their options-many migrants today, whether in the west or elsewhere, seek permanently to settle in the locations where they presently dwell. Like Yousuf Choudhuri's 'Bangladeshi settlers' and Ahmed Ilias' 'Bihari emigres', they aspire to

live with dignity and in security in their new homelands. By examining the circumstances in which two migrants seek to negotiate assimilation in two very different national contexts -in Britain and Bangladesh respectively- this essay may throw light on concepts of assimilation which are still not well understood, and reveal the complex and textured quality of 'hybrid' subjectivities.

But first an important caveat. One of the authors of the works discussed here is still alive and well, and both have living children and families. *Roots and Tales* and *Biharis* are important works, not only for the communities they describe, but also for scholars of migration. Both contain much vital information. By suggesting that these works construct myths which deserve close analysis, this essay is not impugning their value or their sincerity of purpose. Rather, it underlines the fact that these books have a great deal to tell us, indeed much more than meets the eye.

Mythical pasts and sacred origins

Both books begin, as well they might, with an account of the origins of 'their community'. But both represent these origins using tropes that betray their intent to invest them with a special moral quality and purpose. Choudhury's *Roots and Tales* is the more obviously fabulous: indeed in places it resorts to the style of magical realism. The author traces the origins of the 'Bangladeshis' who are the subject of his book back to the central lowlands of Sylhet at the beginning of the thirteenth century. In ancient times, he tells us, this low-lying territory to the south of the kingdom of Kamrup in Assam lay partially submerged under the waters of the Bay of Bengal. But a swan-shaped gulf rose out of the sea and nestled among 'low hills covered with lush monsoonal forest, in an area rich in natural beauty...full of exotic fruit trees, splendid flowering plants and birds such as parrots, mynahs and seagulls.' This came to be the site of a market-town and port, known on account of its rare beauty as 'Sri Khetro' or 'Beautiful Field'. It served as a commercial centre 'for traders from many nations... Seafaring Arab merchants used to call at that port regularly for silk, spices and other oriental products'[13].

In a work written in a rather prosaic style (as the Foreward by the Oxford theologian Clinton Bennett puts it, Choudhury 'makes no claim to literary finesse in his third language, although he is an accomplished writer in Bengali'[14]), this passage stands out for its almost lyrical quality[15]. Home is, first and foremost, a landscape of extraordinary loveliness, a veritable Garden of Eden. But it is significant that Choudhury choses to stress Sylhet's ancient and original connection with the sea. Present-day Sylhet is far from the Indian Ocean, and yet the sea plays a crucial part in

his story. The ancient Sylhet of *Roots and Tales* is a hub of trade and exchange; Choudhury's Sylheti ancestors in a long-distant past were already itinerant sea-faring cosmopolitans.

In 1209 and 1300, according to Choudhury, two earthquakes changed the landscape around 'Sri Khetro', lifting the gulf out of the deep and severing its connection with the sea[16]. At that time, the land around the town was still partly submerged and remained largely uninhabited. But in 1313 it was conquered by Gour Gobindo, 'a cruel Hindu king who had no mercy for anyone'[17]. At this juncture in its early history, so we are told, there were only thirteen Muslim families in the area, descendants of seafaring merchants and Islamic missionaries, and they lived together in a village by the River Surma, a waterway which connected the hills of Assam to the Bengal delta. In 1340, the wife of one of these Muslim pioneers, Borhanuddin, gave birth to a baby son, and to celebrate, the proud father slaughtered a cow. On hearing of this, Raja Gour Gobindo ordered that the baby be beheaded and the arms of the mother be cut off. After the death of mother and child, Borhanuddin sought the protection of neighbouring Muslim rulers in Bengal, and travelled to Delhi to raise an army to challenge and defeat the 'cruel king'.

It was in Delhi, Choudhury relates, in the presence of the great sufi mystic Nizamuddin Auliya, that a fateful meeting took place between brave Borhanuddin and the 'leading Muslim saint' Shah Jalal, who had travelled to Delhi from Yemen with 313 followers. On hearing Borhanuddin's story, Shah Jalal 'decided to volunteer himself along with his followers'[18] to fight Gour Gobindo. Together with an army of 360 saints, Shah Jalal marched eastwards into Bengal and defeated Gour Gobindo in a battle replete with miracles in which the saints deployed supernatural powers and witchcraft to bewitch and destroy the enemy.

And then Sylhet revealed its sacred destiny. Before he set out on his mission in Al-Hind, Shah Jalal had been given a clod of Arabian earth by his spiritual mentors who instructed him to settle wherever he found similar soil. Miraculously, the marshy soil of Sri Khetro exactly matched this sacred lump of earth from dry and distant Arabia. So Shah Jalal settled permanently in 'Shil-hotto', and the 360 saints 'spread all over Sylhet' to propagate Islam. They also set to work reclaiming the land, building simple structures as their mosques, fishing in the waters and farming the land:

> Most of the saints got married, and many of them had a farm and a family. They worked all day long, growing crops or vegetables, looking after their cattle and catching fish. When the work was done they swam in the open clean water, then they sat and had some food. At the end of the day, they could go to their own straw built mosque and pray to their heart's content. Many of the saints were married to the new converts, had families, ran farms by themselves... but the saintliness of the

working saints was never washed away or wasted. Their faith was always with them and passed on to their descendants.[19]

Here the story of conversion deploys sexual metaphors of fertility and insemination so prominent in descriptions of Islam's spread in Bengal[20]. But whereas in other parts of Bengal, the exotic 'soil' (or host society) produced a version of Islam distorted by caste hierarchy and contaminated by other Hindu manners and customs, Sylhet's wondrous soil-in Choudhury's account-nourished the true faith. The homeland emerges from *Roots and Tales* as a beautiful green paradise adorned by the graves of saints. It is a land of plenty which sustains a casteless society of hard-working, peace-loving and god-fearing peasants[21], a truly Islamic brotherhood governed by the simple but robust moral values of their forefathers.

Some of these themes recall other better-known foundation myths[22], and the story as a whole powerfully echoes Richard Eaton's classic account of the role of 'ghazi-pirs' or soldier-saints' in establishing Islam and settled agriculture on the Bengal frontier[23]. But the point here is a rather different one. Choudhury's story is not only a myth of origins, it is also parable about settlement. In ascribing this cosmopolitan origin to 'the Bangladeshi settlers' in Britain, Choudhury constructs them as living descendants of saints from all over the Muslim world who long ago settled in Sylhet, bringing their faith with them and establishing Islam in the delta. By tracing the community's roots back to these pioneering saints and settlers, it validates the struggles and journeys of present-day migrants and sets them up as vectors for the expansion of the Islamic frontier in the western world. Implicitly, it imbues their story of migration and settlement not only with legitimacy derived from this origin myth, but also with a deeper moral and religious purpose[24].

But there is also another process at work in this account of origins: the construction of a notion of a single 'Bangladeshi community'. That process begins, of course, with Choudhury's choice of title, which alludes to 'the Bangladeshi settlers'. In his preface or introduction, the author admits that his story is 'mostly about the settlers from Sylhet as ... they are 95% of Bangladeshi settlers. The remaining 5% came from other places. I have tried my best to cover these people too'[25]. Yet Choudhury makes hardly any reference to these 'other people', and when he does, as we shall see, his remarks are disparaging and dismissive. But by describing his subjects as 'Bangladeshis' rather than Sylhetis, and then by assigning a single foundation myth set in ancient Sylhet to all of them, the work has launched the enterprise of incorporating (and indeed assimilating) different groups with disparate histories into a single national 'community' with shared origins and with a destiny in common.

Ahmed Ilias's account of the origins of the 'Biharis' is not as colourful as Choudhury's tales of Syhet, but nonetheless it shares with it some significant features. *Biharis* begins with description of 'The Home and Culture' which sets out, in ten pages, 'the glorious history of Bihar'. Even though, in the second paragraph of his preface, Ilias states (accurately) that 'Biharis did not come from the Indian state of Bihar alone'[26], a few pages later, he contradicts himself and states that 'the Biharis are proud of their ancient history' which he locates in the Indian state of Bihar. This is reminiscent of Choudhury's strategy where he first admits that all Bangladeshi settlers in Britain are not in fact from Sylhet, but then proceeds to give the whole community a single foundation myth located in ancient Sylhet. Ilias's constructs 'the home' of the Biharis not only as a place lost forever, but as a vanished golden age of Indian achievement. The thrust and tone of his argument are captured in the following paragraph:

Historically, Bihar is a land of faiths and religions, myths and mysticism, parables and legends. Islam began to spread in this part of India from around the twelfth century. Both its Hindus and Muslims were always seen at the forefront of every movement launched for the glory and greatness, liberty and independence of India[27].

At 'home', the 'Muslim minority lived scattered in villages and towns with all their (pride) and (prejudice), with the low standards of skills and education and the high esteem of old orthodox society. They were happy with their own way of life, culture, customs and traditions'[28].

In the same way that Choudhury's Sylhet is idealised, Ilias' 'Bihar' is also a rich and bountiful land. Indeed, readers might be surprised by Ilias' confident assertion that 'as a geographical unit, Bihar is the richest State in India'[29] (in fact it is one of the poorest). It is also, just as Choudhury's Sylhet, a land sanctified by faith. Ilias describes Bihar as a sacred site where Islam first took root in the sub-continent:

Long before the arrival of Muslim rulers, many Sufis and saints came to Bihar to preach Islam among the cast-ridden (sic) Hindu community.... Hazrat Shahbuddin reached Bihar before the attacks on Punjab by...Mahmud Ghaznavi (999-1027). Imam Mohammed Taj Fakir, another Muslim saint(,) came from the Middle East in 1104. His grandson Makhdum Sharfuddin Yahia Muniri belonged to the oldest and most widely dispersed Sufi orders in Bihar, the Suhrawardy and Chisti. A branch of the Suhrawardy order later emerged (and) was known as Firdausia under Yahia Muniri...[30]

So far, so similar. Both accounts trace the origins of the migrant community back to a single place; both describe that place as a land of peace and plenty; both locate the ancient 'homeland' as a sacred site which witnessed the birth of Islam in the Indian sub-continent; and both claim

cosmopolitan and saintly ancestors, who played a key role in expanding the frontiers of the Islamic world.

But there are also important differences between Ilias' account and Choudhury's, and their significance will become apparent when the authors' political intentions are considered. Ilias situates his 'Bihar' within a robust tradition of syncretism, and constructs it as a place where as well as Islam, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Jain cultures and polities thrived. *Biharis'* understanding of culture is more syncretic than that of *Roots and Tales*, claiming as part of the community's 'glorious history' the achievements of other religions besides Islam. Ilias takes pains, for example, to inform his readers that 'the two founders of Buddhism and Jainism inspired the world from this land. Ram's wife Sita, the most significant character in Hindu mythology was born in this land of faiths and religions.'[31]

He also repeatedly insists on a powerful Bihari tradition of 'anti-imperialism'. He claims that 'Bihar gave birth to many valiant sons, who fought for the liberation of India from the yoke of British Empire'. From the earliest times, Ilias tells us, Bihar's rulers have repelled invaders. Chandragupta Maurya 'put an end to Greek rule in India'. [32] Mir Quasem 'shifted his capital from Murshedabad (sic) to Munghyr to defend his rule against the forces of the East India Company'[33]. To a far greater extent than Choudhury, Ilias claims for his community a history of political sacrifice and leadership in the national struggle against British rule. By contrast, Choudhury's text is far more muted in its criticisms of British rule, for example, quickly glossing over an uprising in Sylhet against the Raj in 1782[34]. Its heroes are not rebels who fought the British, but trade unionists like Aftab Ali who organised and defended Sylheti seamen, and community leaders like Ayub Ali 'Master', who helped illiterate lascar migrants to cut through the red-tape in Britain. Ilias' emphasis on Bihar's traditions of high culture has no counterpart in Choudhury. Unlike Choudhury's idealised but rustic Sylhet, Ilias's Bihar was an ancient seat of learning which attracted people from far and wide: 'ever since Kumaragupta founded the Nalinda (sic) university near the capital Patna. This was a great seat of learning where more than a thousand teachers and scholars used to teach about ten thousand students drawn from middle and Far East countries'[35].

Home to the Khuda Baksh library, 'the richest library of manuscripts on Islam in the world'[36], Bihar was the seedbed for poets such as Kazi Nazrul Islam and Ramdhari Singh Dinkar. 'Bihar also produced many eminent writers, poets and critics in Urdu literature'[37]. The author's pride in this tradition shows how different his class-perspective is from Choudhury's. Ilias views history from the vantage point of a cultured

literati which has fallen on hard times, while Choudhury's angle of vision is that of a working-class community making its way up in the world. These different perspectives helped to shape strategies for assimilation, as will be seen below, were subtly but significantly different.

Migration myths: tales of loss and exile

Having established their singular origins in an idealised 'homeland', the next task for both authors is to explain why their subjects left their homeland behind. Both struggle to produce a seamless narrative of migration, even though this often strains the historical evidence and their own accounts. In both works, this distinctive narrative is repeated throughout the text at regular intervals, so that it assumes a normative power-appearing to elevate and encapsulate a 'truth' about the community which is truer than mere fact.

In the case of Choudhury's *Roots and Tales*, the central theme of this narrative is that all 'Bangladeshi settlers' in Britain are sea-farers or their descendents:

> Most Bangladeshi settles are the descendent flesh and blood of those who were lost in the seas and survived to tell their tale, so it is our duty to keep our history alive and remind everyone of who we are and why we are here[38].

This assertion is repeated three times on the very first page of the introduction. It is then rehearsed no less than fifty times in the book. So how did Sylhetis-whose homeland was so far away from the water's margin-come to be seafarers? According to Choudhury, the explanation is the River Surma, the only waterway which connected Assam to Bengal and the sea, passes through Sylhet. In consequence, Sylhet had a long tradition-beginning with the early settler saints-of mercantile boats, carrying goods from Assam to Bengal and beyond. Although Sylhet's farmers were prosperous, its 'spare young men' (younger brothers and cadet sons) traditionally worked as boatmen. When the region came under British rule, things changed, particularly in the 19th century when the British introduced steam ships and steamer stations linking Calcutta to upper Assam. Aware that 'the new water way arrangement (had) hit the boatmen' hard, Choudhury argues, 'the (British) steamer companies perhaps realised the need to compensate the boatmen by recruiting them mainly as engine room crew..... This is the story of the Sylheti boatmen and how they became the steamer's crew.'[39] Here again we see evidence that Choudhury would like to take a benign view of British rule in Sylhet, even though he has to admit that these Sylheti lascars began to be 'ill treated and ill fed'[40]. They were exploited by British navigation companies

who paid them a sixth of what British crews received, he tells us, but even more by the Indian 'sarongs' and 'bariwalas' (or gaffers) who took a large part of their wages in return for finding them jobs on ships and housing them at ports while they waited for work. 'Out of frustration, they decided to desert their ships and go wherever they would find a chance', whether in Rangoon or Singapore or London[41]. But it was only during the First World War, when, according to Choudhury, 'over one thousand Bangladeshis' were brought to Britain 'to replace British seamen', that a few began to settle in London[42]. And it was during the Second World War that 'the Bangladeshi population began to increase in the U.K'. When the war ended in 1945, and with India's independence and partition in 1947, more and more Sylheti seamen found themselves unemployed, and sought work in Britain to support their families. The present Bangladeshi community in Britain, Choudhury insists again and again, are all descendents and kin of these first seafaring settlers, and almost all can claim to be related to persons who fought and died in the two world wars.

This account, while superficially plausible, does not bear historical scrutiny. A few Sylheti lascars did indeed jump ship in London, and some of them, in all probability, did eventually settle in Britain. In their turn, they assisted others to do the same[43]. But it is very unlikely indeed that all of today's 'Bangladeshi settlers' are their descendents. If this assertion had merit, the migrations from Sylhet to Britain would have peaked in the 1940s and 1950s, since after independence and partition in 1947, very few Sylheti lascars (by Choudhury's own account, supported by other authorities[44]) were able to find work on British ships. Instead, the numbers of Bengali migrants in Britain remained tiny in this period: by the early 1950s, there were perhaps no more than 300 Sylhetis in London; their numbers had grown only to about 5000 in the whole of Britain by 1962[45]. It was only after this date that their numbers began to grow rapidly, a consequence not only of new British restrictions on immigration[46], but also of the dangers and uncertainties of life in Bangladesh during and after the civil war of 1971. By 1986, when the British government published its first White Paper on Bangladeshis in Britain, it estimated that there were about 200,000 in the country[47]. By 2001, as the last census suggests, that population had grown by another 100,000 in the next 15 years.

The point to be stressed here is that contrary to Choudhury's account, the vast majority of Bangaldeshis now settled in Britain were never lascars on British ships, and were born long after the Second World War and the end of empire. The great majority of Bangladeshis who migrated to Britain did so in the two decades after Bangladesh achieved independence from Pakistan in 1971.

So why does Choudhury repeat his unsubstantiated claim over fifty time in the course of his book? For one thing, of course, it gives the 'community' a single shared history, and glosses over the deep political divisions which have long beset it[48]. It provides it with a simple genealogy which connects today's British Bangladeshis-through the lascar seamen who served on British ships during the world wars, and through them back to the Sylheti boatmen who were recruited to work on steamships on the River Surma in Sylhet-right back to the original band of 360 saints who accompanied Shah Jalal on his mission to spread Islam on the frontiers of Bengal. This genealogy serves both to unify 'the community' as fictive kin, and gives it an intelligible history imbued with a continuing moral purpose. But no less significantly, as we shall see below, it provides the foundations on which the 'settlers' built their claim to rights and full membership as citizens in Britain.

In Ilias's history, the communal riots in Bihar in late 1946 are depicted as 'the root cause' which explains why the 'Biharis' left Bihar. Throughout the book, Ilias returns again and again to these horrific events which (in his account) claimed 50,000 lives[49] and forced many thousands more to flee from their homes. When Pakistan was established in 1947, he tells us, many of these frightened people sought and were given shelter in its eastern wing. Later on, their numbers swelled as anti-Muslim violence in India in 1950 and again in 1964 drove more and more people out. Ilias's purpose is to imprint on the reader's mind the 'fact' that the people he writes about were victims of catastrophic events, refugees who, through no fault of their own, were evicted from the land of their birth and had to seek shelter elsewhere: 'The Muslim minority in Bihar were... happy with their way of life, when India fell for communalism and Bihar became the target'[50]. Even the language he uses to describe these events emphasises their passive victimhood: the Biharis were 'sorted out' and 'shunted off'[51], and 'forced to leave their country of origin'[52]. Ilias' recurrent theme is that the Biharis 'are descendents of those optees and emigrants who came to East Bengal after the great divide in India in 1947.'[53]

Yet there are contradictions, and a noticeable instability, in this construction of events. As Ilias himself admits, from the late 19th century onwards, the British had employed large numbers of Biharis on the railways when these were extended into eastern Bengal, and also many others in 'the police, judiciary and other civil departments'[54]. So when the calamitous events of 1946-47 took place, there were already a large number of Biharis long settled in parts of what now became East Pakistan[55]. After partition, some were joined by their families, but they were not refugees from violence. By Ilias' own account, (which the censuses and other studies support), many of the Urdu-speaking service elites who migrated to East

Pakistan after 1947 did so in fits and starts over more than two decades between 1947 and 1970, attracted by the better opportunities for employment in East Pakistan.

As we read on, then, it becomes clear why Ilias describes his 'community' as 'Bihari', even though he himself admits, its members do not all come from Bihar, and despite the fact, as he would be the first to acknowledge, that 'Bihari' has become a derogatory term in present-day Bangladesh. To call them 'Urdu-speakers' (arguably a more accurate appellation) would draw unwelcome attention to the question of language which sets his community apart from a national culture into which he seeks their assimilation. But more importantly, by calling them 'Bihari' he fixes in the reader's consciousness an association between this migrant group and the carnage in Bihar in 1946. The Bihar riots have long been held up as 'the moment when Pakistan was born', when the sheer brutality of the attacks demonstrated the impossibility of any reconciliation or rapprochement between India's Hindus and Muslims. They hold as large a place in the collective memory of partition in the east as do the 'Calcutta Killings' of 1946. Used in particular contexts, the very word 'Bihar' conveys all the horrors of 'the deadly ethnic riot'[56]. By calling his community 'Biharis', Ilias seeks to recall these outrages in order to evoke the sympathy of fellow Muslims and 'hosts' in Bangladesh, sympathy which his community patently deserves, despite their later 'mistakes' (more of which below). The word 'Bihari' in Ilias' book thus carries a powerful moral charge and is deployed with a clear purpose.

But at another level, the 'myth' of their enforced exile from Bihar also works to provide a single, straightforward common 'history' for the 'Bihari' community in Bangladesh today. Present-day Biharis are represented as linear descendents of those who fled the carnage. In turn, they are descended from the saintly pioneers who brought Islam to 'caste-ridden' India, and all are legatees of the great revolutionaries who resisted imperial incursions. Thus, they are the standard bearers of a sacred mission with a long history and heirs to a great culture. This 'history' seeks to unify the 'community', sanitise and simplify its complex and multi-stranded chronicles by providing a single and intelligible 'root cause' for its presence in Bangladesh. In this sense, it has much in common with the foundation myths of so many migrant groups, which typically see their migration as being the consequence of a single catastrophic event, even though historians might agree that they migrated gradually over a period of many decades, and sometimes over centuries[57].

Both these accounts, then, simplify a complex history of migration. Choudhury ignores the fact that the great majority of Sylhetis migrated to Britain during and after the upheavals of the 'liberation war' in Bangladesh,

and he greatly exaggerates the role of lascars-typically enterprising economic migrants-in that history. For his part, Ilias plays down the long process of 'economic' migration from Bihar and upper India to eastern Bengal, proposing instead that all 'Biharis' were 'forced migrants', victims of communal violence. These constructions enable both writers to provide a simple answer to the question 'why are we here?' But as we shall see, they deliberately privilege one particular answer to the big question over others because it suits their purposes 'here' and 'now'. What purport to be histories are not only about the past, but about the present and about responses to contemporary challenges. They also offer prescriptions for the future.

Myths for assimilation: intertwining community and 'host' histories

In what way do these histories advance the cause of assimilation if, as has been shown, one of their purposes is vigorously to claim the unity, the integrity and the separate identity of 'the community'? This essay will suggests that people must first be 'assimilated' into a community with a single story about itself before it can begin to negotiate its acceptance as a part of a host nation. 'Ethnicity' maintenance does not prevent assimilation, as the critics of the concept have sometimes argued. Instead it is sometimes a necessary prolegomenon to it. Nor are the two processes mutually exclusive, as are the 'salad bowl' and the 'melting pot' views of migration and ethnicity. The reality, it would seem, is rather more complex than the conventional wisdom assumes.

The first technique our two books deploy for this 'work of assimilation' is to insert 'community history' into the 'national history' of the host country. Of course, no nation has a single national history, no matter how much nationalists might claim it does. But at certain times and in certain places, there may be a measure of agreement about which key historical events have crucially shaped a nation's identity, and migrant intellectuals seem to be quick to spot these areas of 'national' consensus. In the case of Britain in the late 1970s, when Yousuf Choudhury began to write his book (and indeed even today, as the recent votes for Churchill as 'the greatest Briton' suggest) the world wars, and particularly the Second World War was such defining events. Ordinary Britons who fought and died in these wars, as well as those who manned the 'home front', are seen as having displayed national unity and national character. Courage, pluck, stoicism and humour in the face of adversity, and 'just getting on with it' came to be seen as typically 'British' traits, displacing more aristocratic and more 'English' gentlemanly attributes. Fighting and dying for one's country in its 'finest hour', the epic struggle against Fascism, was the highest proof of Britishness[58].

The very first page of Choudhury's *Roots and Tales* makes plain his intention to insert 'the Bangladeshi settlers' into this narrative of British patriotic sacrifice, and calls to be quoted in full:

> Many people have misconceptions about the Bangladeshi settlers because they either have wrong information or lack of the same. Many do not know that the Bangladeshis were asked to come and fight for Britain in the two world wars. We fought both wars for them. We were in the warships and troop carriers when they were facing enemies. We were in British cargo-ships to bring in the vital supplies. Bangladeshis worked on the deck, went down to the bottom of the ships, and ran the engines for them. We were part of the British war power.
>
> The ships were attacked and sunk on the high seas. Many of our men were killed, not all of their dead bodies floated to the surface of the water. The dead bodies were eaten by sharks or simply decomposed.
>
> Many dead bodies went down with their ships leaving no trace, no grave or headstone is there to be seen, so our dead Bangladeshi seamen have been forgotten for all time.
>
> Most Bangladeshi settlers are the descendent flesh and blood of those who were lost in the seas or survived to tell their tale, so it is our duty to keep our history alive and remind everyone of who we are and why we are here[59].

This is a remarkable passage for many reasons. On the one hand, it makes very explicit the author's intention to inform 'many people' about his community's sacrifices on their behalf, and it is clear that his intended audience is the 'host' society, 'the British'. But what is particularly interesting is how he maintains the boundary between 'us' and 'them' ('we fought both the wars for them' etc.), even as he weaves the history of 'the settlers' into the tapestry of British history.

As soon as it is recognised that Choudhury's work is not only a book about the past, but also a polemical tract staking claims in the present and for the future, many peculiarities of its language and structure become intelligible. It explains the author's decision to write the book in English rather than Bangla. It explains, for example, why the author insists repeatedly-despite compelling evidence to the contrary-that all 'Bangladeshis' are descended from lascar seamen; it explains why his brief account of his community's origins stresses its primeval connection with the sea; why his Sylhet is literally born out of the ocean and why his 'community' (just as its British hosts) is presented as a sea-faring peoples. It explains why so much of the book is about the period of British rule over Sylhet, and why its account of British rule is so uncritical. It explains why it seeks to downplay the fierce conflicts between Sylhetis and 'Britishers', positing instead a chronicle of largely cordial interdependence

between rulers and ruled. It explains why it stresses the kindness and paternalism of the British owners of steamer ships, as shown when they employed the Bengali boatmen their ships had put out of business, and the decency of the British people towards them when they first arrived on these shores[60]. And of course it explains why the crucial and recurrent theme-which stresses Bangladeshi sacrifice for Britain during the wars, is the leitmotif of the work. This is the basis on which Choudhury rests his case for the community's right to settle in Britain. It is a right they have earned by their sacrifices on behalf of Britain.

But it also explains why Choudhury strives so hard to compress and simplify that history of 'the settlers' into a single narrative. That narrative has to be controlled tightly if Choudhury is to be able to make this claim convincingly. If the true variety of histories and experiences of Bangladeshi migrants were acknowledged, this would weaken his claim to rights for the community in Britain today. The 'community' has first to be constructed as 'Bangladeshi' in order for it to be accepted as British. Those migrants whose stories palpably strain the unified account of the community and its origins-for instance the snobbish 'Dhaka gentlemen' who turn their nose up at their more humble countrymen from Sylhet[61] and the 'Arabic-educated' pro-Pakistanis (persons of the same group Ilias describes as Biharis) who become the imams at their new mosques[62]-are 'reconciled' with the larger Sylheti population, soon 'gain their forgiveness'[63] and are apparently 'assimilated' into it, as they disappear from the account as suddenly as they enter it. It is only after this work of constructing, inventing and assimilating migrant Bangladeshis of very different sorts into one community has been achieved by the myths of origin and migration that Choudhury begins to describe his 'community' as 'British Bangladeshi'. Significantly, the term is first used only on page 196 of a 230-page work. Thereafter, the book refers repeatedly to 'British Bangladeshis'- their culture but also their secular problems-particularly their underperformance in education-and their politics in Britain.

But another interesting point is that the author simultaneously aligns his community with a 'general' British past and also with particular sections of 'British' society. His discussions of the lifestyles of the early post-war migrants-their liaisons and marriages with working-class white women, their sharing of food and lodgings with migrant workers from other parts of the world, their long shifts in the factories, their renting of premises and leasing of shops from East End Jews-identifies 'Bangladeshis' with a kind of enterprising working-class cosmopolitanism that, Choudhury suggests, characterised the 'Britain' in which they lived and worked. Palpably it is this 'Britain' into which he seeks the incorporation of his community. In this sense, Choudhury bears out Brubaker's suggestion

that assimilation must be understood as being a process by which a community repositions itself with regard to many different cultural referents, rather than to a single monolithic 'core' culture[64].

Towards the end of the book, moreover, Choudhury begins to describe 'Bengalis' as 'part of the immigrant population'[65]. They are represented as part of 'Black' movements[66], an integral element in the fight against racism in the 1980s: 'Bangladeshis had done a lot of fighting and were still fighting for their existence and rights'[67]. Increasingly he discusses their politics: their long-distance nationalism[68] vis-à-vis Bangladesh (through their support of the liberation movement), but also their political activism in the local councils in Britain to improve living conditions in the inner cities. He mentions certain liberal Britons as friends of the community: the social worker and historian Caroline Adams, Ken Livingstone and even Prince Charles, proudly reproducing a photograph of the Prince's visit to Aldgate. So one can see that Choudhury is positioning his 'community' within a certain construct of 'Britain' and of 'Britishness', one that is by turns hard-working and enterprising, cosmopolitan, egalitarian, tolerant and inclusive. In some senses, one might argue, he is constructing the 'Britain' into which the community of 'Bangladeshi settlers' is seeking to be assimilated, quite as much as he is constructing the community itself.

Ilias adopts similar strategies in *Biharis*. He, too, strives to insert his community into the national history of Bangladesh. But his is a rather more difficult enterprise and one that is fraught with enormous pitfalls. Above all, it requires him repeatedly to admit his community's past "mistakes" and seek forgiveness for them.

The first move Ilias makes is a bold one, considering that some of the deepest differences between Biharis and their hosts revolve around the question of language: Biharis are widely believed by Bangladeshi nationalists to have looked down on the Bengali language and to have stood aloof from the Language Movement (of which more below). In the first chapter of his book, Ilias asserts that the Bengali language and 'Bihari Urdu' have a common origin, that both descend from a single great linguistic tradition: that of Magadhi Prakrit.

> Bengali, Oriya and Assamese have their root in Bihar. Bengali is a typical descendent of the great language that, under the name of Magadhi Prakrit, was the vernacular of eastern North India for many centuries. This was the official language of the great Emperor Asoka and the Buddha and Mahavira, the apostle of Jainism...

> Bihari Urdu (is) unlike the (literary) Urdu evolved in Delhi and UP, (it) was overwhelmingly plain and simple.... Even today, most Bihari Muslims speak Magadhi, Maithili and Bhujpuri rather than Urdu...[69]

In this passage, Ilias seeks to construct a common linguistic heritage for 'eastern north India' and to place Bihar squarely inside it. Ilias's Bihari language is not a product of the courtly and aristocratic world of north India; rather it is an intrinsic part of a syncretic family of 'plain and simple' spoken languages. By making this claim, he seeks to defuse the tension engendered by the language question, and also to rid Urdu as spoken in Bangladesh of its elitist and North Indian associations. He rhetorically shifts the Bihar 'homeland' eastwards-in the direction of its Bengali neighbourhood and away from Upper India and Pakistan. He also pushes Bihari Urdu-speakers downwards in terms of social class, associating them not with the elite or ashraf north Indian tradition of Persianised Urdu, but with the more lowly atrap or ajlaf everyday bazaar dialects of the eastern region.

In his next set of strategic moves, Ilias faces up squarely to the greatest obstacle to Bihari assimilation into Bangladeshi society- the charge that the community fought against the 'nation' in the war of 1971, joining hands with the Pakistani army in its brutal and merciless suppression of the people's uprising. Ilias attempts to explain this in a variety of ways. The Bihari refugees from India, he admits, made grave mistakes. But they did this largely because they were misled, misguided and ultimately betrayed by their leaders who took them into 'the wilderness'[70]. Despite the fact that the 'local Bengali community was ...very sympathetic towards (them)'[71], they kept themselves aloof from the locals, living apart in 'reservations'[72]. By adopting for themselves the title and status of 'Mohajers'-the Islamic term that the Pakistani state used for refugees-they isolated themselves from other groups in society. This created in them a 'psyche' which led them mistakenly to regard the cultural and political struggles of the local people as being against their interests. Instead of demanding that they should be treated equally as citizens of Pakistan[73], they claimed a special status for themselves as Mohajers who had made special sacrifices for the state, and who therefore deserved special privileges and special recognition. Unlike the Mohajers of Karachi and Hyderabad in West Pakistan, who were harsh critics of the Pakistani regime, the Bihari Mohajers in Bengal remained apathetic[74], won over by the regime by special allotments of housing and other facilities. Under the martial law regime of General Ayub Khan, the Bihari Basic Democrats 'were submissive to the political programmes of Ayub Khan. They performed their duty not as representatives of their community but as agents of the ruling clique'[75]. Their failure to adapt and assimilate, Ilias admits, was a huge error. It was this separatist 'psyche' which led to their failure to throw their weight behind the rightful political struggles of Bengalis against successive Pakistani regimes; and this was the reason for the dreadful

reprisals against the Bihari community after the war ended.

These are profoundly moving passages. Like many 'interested' historians of vanquished peoples, Ilias labours under the burden of having to explain why events turned out as they did, and this leads him to reflect with great seriousness on the past. In common with others in this predicament, he laments the short-sightedness of his people, but also shifts the blame to their former leaders, now deposed[76]. Again and again, he shows and regrets how the Biharis were betrayed by their leaders. Ilias's *Biharis* were misled first by the speeches of the creator of Pakistan[77], and then by the Muslim League leadership and their 'religion-based politics'[78]. After partition, they were let down by the Pakistani state, which encouraged them to cling to their refugee status as Mohajers and to their Urdu language[79]. In the late 1950s, they were betrayed by corrupt Bihari representatives who were too busy making money to give a proper lead to the community; and in the sixties, they were exploited by Governor Monem Khan 'who had very close contact with notorious (criminals), and who used them 'to create a wedge between locals and non-locals'[80]. In the late 1960s, when the campaign for the autonomy of East Pakistan gained ground, they were misled by West Pakistan-based Urdu newspapers and their false propaganda against the Bengal leader, Mujibur Rahman[81]. In the months before the outbreak of the civil war, they were betrayed again by the media when it falsely alleged that the Mohajer Convention had called for the partition of East Bengal[82], and after the war began, they were led astray by a false prophet-Warasat Khan, the leader of the Mohajer Party-who dragged orphaned Bihari boys into the war on the side of Pakistan[83]. In the aftermath of the war, when Biharis were hunted down and killed in their thousands by the so-called Bengali 'Sixteenth Divisions', they were betrayed by the Red Cross which encouraged and organised 'bewildered people' to register themselves for 'repatriation to Pakistan'[84]. Terrified victims of grisly reprisals, as they huddled in their make-shift camps after the war, they were exploited by the Indian soldiers who, instead of protecting them, took all their money on the false promise of getting them out of Bangladesh[85].

This theme of betrayal is repeated so often, and at such regular intervals in the book, that it demands reflection on its deeper discursive intent. Arguably, it takes forward two crucially important strategic purposes. On the one hand, it clearly seeks to drive a distinction between the innocence of the general Bihari community and the culpability of the 'bad apples' among their leadership. By this device, Ilias suggests that it is right for the 'soft-hearted' Bangladeshi nation to forgive these poor misguided people, in their own way as much victims of the old Pakistani order as the Bengalis on whose mercy he is throwing his community.

But on the other hand, there is a less explicit but nonetheless potent message in this saga of betrayal, directed at the Biharis themselves. Ilias' warning to his fellow Biharis is to be wary of the siren calls of the false prophets of today. In particular, he appears to appeal to them not to be misled by the likes of Nasim Khan, the retired railway guard who organised Bihari railway employees to fight for their repatriation (to Pakistan), and his organisation, the Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC). Since the mid- 1970s, Nasim Khan and the SPGRC have waged a long and highly publicised battle to arrange the transfer of all 'Stranded Pakistanis' to Pakistan, albeit with very little success[86]. Ilias describes the followers of Naseem Khan as 'frustrated and uneducated and half-educated youths'[87]. He clearly believes them to be misguided, and their goals for 'repatriation' to a country they have never seen and which has repeatedly repudiated them, to be unrealistic as well as evidently not in their own best interests.

Since 1980, Ahmed Ilias himself, and the 'Al Falah' NGO which he directs, have worked for the rehabilitation of 'Urdu-speaking Bangladeshis'[88] living in camps. His very description of them as 'Urdu-speaking Bangladeshis' (as opposed to Khan's 'Stranded Pakistanis') reveals his underlying purpose-to bring them out of the camps in which they have lived in a state of suspended animation and increasingly desperate poverty, and to help them negotiate their assimilation into the society and polity of Bangladesh. Hence Ilias writes with approval of those individuals among the Bihari community 'who are struggling for a place in the soft heart of the Bengali society', 'the literate and educated, representing the young generation wants to come out from the depressed situation and overcome the agony they have suffered for the last three decades'[89]. The deeper intent of his whole 'history' is to suggest that 'the literate and educated' syncretists of today represent the true 'progressive' spirit of the community's history, and hence represent the true leadership for the community today. Of course, in making this claim, Ilias glosses over the cracks within the community, particularly, but not exclusively, those that distance Syedpur's railway workers and Dhaka's jute-mill hands from the Urdu-speaking literati. His aim is to persuade the community and their hosts alike that 'Biharis' are in fact 'Urdu-speaking Bangladeshis'. The fact that this term is first used only towards the end of his book (on p. 154 of a 200-page text) suggests that through this usage Ilias seeks to transform 'Biharis' into 'Urdu-speaking Bangladeshis', in much the same way that Yousuf Choudhury metamorphosises Sylheti lascars into 'British Bangladeshis'.

Ilias's other objective is to provide this community of 'Urdu-speaking Bangladeshis' with an impressive record of service to the cause of

Bangladesh. He painstakingly catalogues every act by Urdu-speakers-whether as individuals or groups-which displayed their loyalty to their new Bengali home and to the national ideals of Bangladesh. He notes with pride that on 21 February 1952, when Bengali students took up their celebrated protest against Pakistan's decision to enshrine Urdu as the only state language of Pakistan, the 'Urdu-speaking civil servant' Hussain Haider refused to issue orders proscribing the movement, and was transferred for his pains. In this way Ilias 'inserts' Biharis into the history of 'Ekushey'[90], 21 February 1952, symbolically the moment that Bangladeshi nationalism was born[91]. He then goes on to describe the contribution of 'progressive' Urdu 'poets, writers, journalists and students' to 'the Language Movement':

Dr. Yusuf Hasan, Arif Hushyarpuri, Ayaz Asmi, Massod Kalim, Akhtar Payami, Akhtar Hyderabadi, Adeeb Sohail, Khwaja Mohammed Ali, Qamar, Manzur Rahman, Salahuddin Mohammed, Badruddin Ahmed (Engineer), Perwez Ahmed (Barrister), Hasan Sayeed, Abu Sayeed Khan and Zainul Abedin were prominent among the supporters of the language movement. Dr. Yusuf Hasan being a member of the Urdu speaking community played a significant role in the language movement. He issued press statements on behalf of the Urdu Progressive Writers Association in favour of the movement. He was also selected as one of the founder members of the 'Rashtro Bhasha Sangram Parishad' (the National Language Movement Council).

At a later stage, others like Ataur Rahman Jalil, Naushad Noori, Suroor Barabankwi, Habib Ansari, Bamo Akhter Shahood, Umme Ammarah and Anwer Farhad joined the movement. It was Salahuddin Mohammed, who had even said that if Urdu and Bangla were not accepted as two state languages of Pakistan, he then would demand only for Bangla as the state language.

The Language Movement also greatly influenced the progressive Urdu poets and writers in both wings of Pakistan.... In East Pakistan, Urdu poet Naushad Noori wrote a very powerful poem, 'Mohenjodaro', in Urdu....

(Ilias then quotes the full text of the poem 'Mohenjodaro', first in Urdu and then in English translation).

...The Urdu-speaking writers expressed their solidarity with the Language Movement. Anjuman Tarraq-e-Urdu (Organisation for the Development of Urdu) in East Pakistan severed its tie with the All Pakistan Anjuman... for its support to the government on language policy....The progressive Urdu students formed Anjuman-e-Adab, a literary organisation in Dhaka University (,) to support the contemporary progressive Bengali writers for their cultural struggle....[92]

And so on. Later, according to Ilias, when political movements against General Ayub Khan gained momentum, 'the progressive and pro-democratic Urdu students, youths, journalists, teachers, writers and poets'

mobilised themselves in their support[93]. 'The Bihari railway workers in Syedpur Railway Workshops joined the anti-Ayub movements following the directive of the Bihari labour leaders Azim Nomani and Mohammed Ibrahim'[94]. On the eve of the fateful general election in 1970, Ilias tells us, 'a progressive Urdu-speaking businessman Mahmood Hasan of Chittagong', who had been associated with 'progressive movements since 1952', brought out a new weekly 'Jaridah', whose first banner headline Hamri Nijat Tumhari Nijat, Chey Nukat, Chey Nukat[95] explicitly supported Mujibur Rahman and the Awami League's Six Point Charter for autonomy for East Pakistan[96]. In 1971, many Bihari labour leaders and journalists 'joined the liberation movement'[97]. He recalls that two officers in the army-Bihari Saghir Ahmed Siddiqui and the Bengali, Nurul Islam-were incarcerated and killed by the Pakistani Army. 'Two bloods' he tells us, had 'mingled together to live in union'[98], graphically demonstrating the syncretistic character of the freedom struggle and, (he suggests implicitly), the true spirit of the Bangladeshi nation.

At every stage in the history of the nation's struggles for liberation, Ilias therefore insists, Biharis had played a role. From the earliest days of the battle against British rule, Biharis had been at the forefront of every struggle. During the movement for Bangladesh's freedom, Biharis had joined with Bengalis in fighting Pakistan's oppression. While some had admittedly been misled, coerced or inveigled into joining the Pakistani army and its depredations on the people of Bangladesh, the community's true leaders-intellectuals and writers-had fought and died for the nation. So too had the hard-working Bihari masses, notably the railway workers of Syedpur. Here again we see Ilias' strategy of incorporating Bihari workers into the 'progressive' history of the larger community.

So we see that Ilias skilfully weaves Biharis into the narrative of the making of the Bangladeshi nation. But also of considerable significance is the way in which he seeks to align his community with specific sections of Bangladesh's polity. As highlighted in the passages cited above, Ilias repeatedly uses the adjective 'progressive' to describe his list of 'Urdu-speaking Bangladeshi' heroes. Clearly, he is seeking to enlist the support of similarly 'progressive' segments of local Bengali society to achieve the rehabilitation of his community as true members of the Bangladeshi nation. Here again we see at work the subtle and complex mechanics of assimilation. Just as Choudhury positioned his 'community' as part of a certain kind of 'Britain', Ilias positions his Biharis as part of a certain kind of Bangladesh-one that is 'progressive' in a specifically South Asian meaning of that term: secular, anti-imperialist, egalitarian, tolerant and inclusive, one that celebrates the pluralism and syncretism of South Asia's

faiths and cultures. There is a subtle suggestion that this 'progressive' vision of Bangladesh has as yet to be to be realised, and Ilias hints at the prospect of 'Urdu-speaking Bangladeshis' joining with like-minded Bengalis in its construction and achievement. Just as Choudhury seeks to fashion 'Britain', so too Ilias constructs the community of 'Urdu speaking Bangladeshis' while also seeking to join with 'progressive' elements in the host country to reconstruct 'Bangladesh' itself.

The 'myth of return' and the context and politics of assimilation

The final set of questions raised by these texts has to do with their timing. Why were they written and published when they were? What was it about that moment of their production that made them appropriate, relevant or even possible? And if we can uncover these 'conditions of production', might we be able to speculate on the conditions in which migrant groups in times past wrote histories or genealogies of their communities?

The first set of answers seem to lie in generational changes within the community. The coming of age of a generation of children who have grown up in the diaspora (in the case of Choudhury) or in camps (in the case of Ilias) is a compelling fact and a concern that clearly animates both works. Choudhury refers directly in his introduction to these changes as one of his motives in writing his book:

> Now in 1993, most work-mates, room-mates and close friends of my earlier times have passed away. Their sons and grandsons became the family head, living in this country with their own wives and children.... The new generation in our community need to know more about us. What we were, what we are and where we come from. It is their roots, their identity, which are unknown to many of them. That identity is vital, no matter where they live. Without it, they will be lost[99].

Ilias is less explicit about his intention to write for the young, but he too refers repeatedly to the rise of a new generation of young people who have grown up in camps, and who understand little about the causes of their situation. Ilias seems keen not only to educate, but also to guide the young towards a brighter future, which he believes, can only come if they embrace an 'Urdu-speaking Bangladeshi' identity.

However a deeper imperative behind their writing appears to come from a recognition that the 'myth of return' is no longer sustainable. Choudhury writes poignantly of the gradual fading of the dream of going back 'home':

> After spending ten or fifteen years here, some Bangladeshis often decided to go home to resettle. They sold their properties...whatever they owned, then went to

Bangladesh with a lump sum of money... quite confident of a happy life.

As the dealing... really started, obstacles began to emerge. He realised that, without his conscious knowledge, he himself had picked up a lot of habits from the host country and was used to another pattern of life.

He found himself inexperienced in many day to day matters. He needed a guide at every step and gradually began to discover himself as a foreigner in his own home land. Still (he kept hoping) to get over it...

As time passed on, either money or health went down, if not both. Otherwise, if he was unlucky, he might get involved with a court case...The people stayed on until their patience ran out.

Eventually the spirit to resettle in the home land began to fade away....The first generation of Bangladeshi settlers might have had several tries to settle in the homeland and failed. Some are still alive... (Now) they grow a beard, dress up in white and attend the nearest mosque and spend hours praying....Although the father and son (may live) under the same roof, sharing the same food, with love, affection and care, yet in their minds they are living in different worlds[100].

With the long, slow and painful death of this dream, Choudhury and many of his contemporaries had to reconcile themselves to the fact that not only are their children not keen to return, but they themselves have been so changed by their years abroad that they can no longer slip back easily into life at 'home'. Perhaps (as suggested by the references to court cases and conflicts) they also have to recognise that 'home' too has changed forever. It seems that the very purpose of writing this history is to come to terms with this loss, finally accepting that 'the Bangladeshi settlers' are really 'here' in Britain to stay.

For Ilias, too, the book signals a recognition that the dream of 'repatriation' to Pakistan is just that-a dream. In a chapter titled 'The Long March' he describes, at some length and in much painful detail the process of disillusionment by 'the step-motherly attitudes of the Pakistan government'[101]. The Red Cross had raised false hopes among Bihari displacees that they would be 'repatriated' to Pakistan if they signed 'declarations of intention', but immediately after the Delhi Agreement of 1973, the Pakistan government made it clear that it had no intention of accepting these stranded peoples. So too did its citizens: Pakistanis in Sindh raised the slogan 'Bihari na khappan' ('Biharis are not wanted), 'taking advantage of the known views of (Bhutto's ruling) People's Party regarding Biharis.'[102]. Despite the efforts of Naseem Khan and the SPGRC, and the Saudi-sponsored organisation Rabita, the Government of Pakistan had stuck to its guns that 'Biharis will have to live in Bangladesh'[103]. Ilias

urges his community to face the harsh fact that there is no place for them anywhere else than in Bangladesh- they have been abandoned by Pakistan and forgotten by the international community. They have no choice, he suggests, but to come to terms with this fact and seek finally to settle and assimilate in Bangladesh.

So both our authors reach the same conclusion at roughly the same time-four decades after Partition and two decades after the birth of Bangladesh. The natural cycle of generations -as has been suggested above-helps to explain why this should be the case. But it would be unwise to ignore the changing political context in both 'host' countries, which encouraged the migrant community to take bold steps towards assimilation. The post-war decades in Britain had seen ever-harsher rhetoric against non-white immigration (Enoch Powell's 'rivers of blood speech' was only one example of a wider trend) and deepening racial conflict. In 1978, Margaret Thatcher had promised in a television interview that if elected, her party would 'finally see an end to immigration'; in the 1980s, Asians in Thatcher's Britain had experienced 'a further entrenchment of institutionalised racism, particularly in the form of immigration laws and the British Nationality Act (of 1981)'.[104] These were also decades of escalating racist violence[105]: in a poignant passage Choudhury lists the names of 'victims of racist attacks' killed during this period[106]. But in the early 1990s when Choudhury wrote his book, the Poll Tax riots and the defenestration of Margaret Thatcher from the leadership of the Tory party seemed to presage moves away from the harsh attitudes towards disadvantaged social groups in general, and immigrants in particular, which had characterised the previous decades. 'New Labour' was in the process of being born, and a new alliance of the centre-left-with the support of many sections of British society including the trades unions, the church, the liberal intelligentsia and the media-was gaining ground.

In 1988, the publication of Rushdie's Satanic Verses prompted widespread violence among outraged Muslims in Britain's inner cities. But of no less significance (Choudhury makes no mention at all of Rushdie's book) was the publication two years earlier by the British Government of the first policy document on Bangladeshis in Britain. This did not merely reveal official concern about the continuing 'backwardness' of the Bangladeshi population, but also showed beyond a doubt that their children were underachieving at school, faring far worse than Indian and Pakistani children. It is significant that Choudhury's book ends with a long discussion of the White Paper. He argues that it shocked the community- hitherto complacent about the education of its children-into action, and shows how British Bengalis began to enter local politics to seek to redress these issues. (Again, this bears out Brubaker's insight

that assimilation for 'secular' purposes continues to be salient for many migrant groups[107]). Instead of focussing their energies solely on Bangladeshi politics-as they had done in the past-they increasingly began to see the good reasons to seek to influence, or even to enter, local councils. Local politics appear to have become a vital arena for interaction between new spokesmen for the community and particular British people: constituency MPs, of course, but also local councillors, school head teachers, social workers and representatives of church groups. These interactions can be seen to have created a new space – perhaps what Brah calls a 'diaspora space'[108] – in which assimilation could begin to be negotiated by certain Bangladeshis and certain individual Britons. It is significant that Caroline Adams' path-breaking study of the community, *Across Thirteen Rivers and Seven Seas*, came out of her interaction with Bangladeshis as a social worker in the East End[109], and that this book 'explains' the Bengali presence in Britain in precisely the same terms as Choudhury's does, recalling the sacrifice of Bengali lascars in the World Wars. It is also significant that Choudhury's book was published by the Sylheti Social History Group in London-a small group of British liberals and left-leaning Bangladeshi community leaders such as Tassaduq Ahmed-who also is the author of the foreword to Adams' book. The fact that the preface to *Roots and Tales* was written, in a neat symmetry, by a leading Christian theologian, underlines the enabling role played by such individuals, and by civil society-based organisations and religious groups in the processes of Bengali assimilation.

But the most interesting feature of the last chapter of Choudhury's book which discusses the 1986 White Paper is its suggestion that assimilation (at least with the secular purpose of raising educational standards of the community, and improving their access to healthcare and housing) is a *national* duty for all British Bangladeshis. The community *must* encourage educational achievement, he suggests, because its failure in this regard lets the nation down. The fact that both Indian and Pakistani children had outstripped Bengalis at school is stressed again and again. It is as if Choudhury is seeking to play upon Bangladeshi anxieties about their overweening neighbours in South Asia to provoke them into taking steps to 'improve' themselves in Britain. Thus we see the playing out of an apparent paradox-'long-distance' Bangladeshi nationalism being deployed to drive forward Bengali assimilation into British politics and British culture.

Ilias's *Biharis* must also be placed within the political context in which it was published. In 2003, months before *Biharis* came out, Bangladesh's Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Abid Khan and others vs The Government of Bangladesh* that the Urdu-speaking 'Bihari' petitioners were citizens of Bangladesh by birth, and could not be deprived of their political rights.

This landmark judgement followed other rulings in favour of Bihari petitioners (*Mukhtar Ahmed vs Government of Bangladesh, Abdul Khaleque vs the Court of Settlement and Others, and Bangladesh vs Professor Ghulam*) where the Court found that even Bihari petitioners who had acted against Bangladesh and collaborated with Pakistani soldiers during and after the civil war could not be denied their rights as citizens. In their turn, these rulings came in a context of a growing liberal pro-democracy movement, spearheaded by civil society groups such as Ain-o-Shalish Kendra, which began to challenge discrimination against Biharis, but also against Hindu minority groups and Muslim women. It was supported by sections of the academic community, notably by the Refugee Migratory Movement Research Unit (RRMRU) at Dhaka University, which published findings of research on the appalling conditions in which the Bihari camp-dwellers eked out their existence. Sections of the media took up the Bihari cause[110]. Soon after Ilias' book came out, in *Swapnabhumi* ('The Promised Land'), documentary film-maker Tanvir Mokkamel portrayed the community and its history in a deeply sympathetic light. That film, made in the Bengali language, was clearly directed at the local Bengali-speaking population, and it 'explained' the Biharis' predicament to local Bengalis in much the same way that Caroline Adams explained the Sylhetis' history to white British readers. The fact that Ilias mentions some of these rulings and trends in his book[111] suggests that he was extremely aware that his goal of Bihari assimilation enjoyed the support of many 'progressive' Bangladeshis.

Like Choudhury, Ilias identifies the pressing need for his community to attend to its secular needs in Bangladesh. He urges it to consider the future of 'the young generation' here and now, a generation that 'want(s) to come out of the depressed situation and overcome the agony'[112] instead of hankering after 'repatriation' to Pakistan in an indefinite future. His particularly concern is that without better provision for their education in Urdu and Bengali, they would fail to improve their circumstances. But he also warns of the danger that the great Urdu literary tradition to which they are the heirs might die forever. Once again, we see how Ilias's Urdu/ Bihari nationalism sits comfortably with his case for assimilation: indeed nationalist sentiment is deployed to advance arguments for assimilation. He sees no contradiction between the survival and persistence of the 'ethnic' culture and secular incorporation into the national life of Bangladesh.

So both projects work with and through nationalisms, but in complex ways. Both identify the community with not one but two territorial nations (the British Isles and Bangladesh/Sylhet in the case of Choudhury; Bangladesh and Bihar/India for Ilias). But both also construct diasporic, de-territorialised 'transnations'[113]. The 'British-Bangladeshi' people and

'Urdu-speaking Bangaldeshi' people are both shown to have been formed, in a fundamental sense, by repeated migrations: they are 'migrant-nations' who have successively sacralised the spaces in which they have settled.

But it would not do to gloss over the differences between these two projects. Choudhury's shows greater self-confidence and aspiration. It seeks to build coalitions actively to influence the direction of British national politics, by working through and with local government, the church, the 'race relations industry'[114] and other civil society groups. Ilias' goals appear to be rather more modest and tentative: he seeks basic social recognition for 'Urdu-speakers', to supplement the very basic political rights they have finally achieved. Their respective projects for assimilation appear to work within the particular spaces their authors see as being open to them: they creatively respond to particular circumstances and negotiate particular challenges while pursuing similar (but not identical) goals.

Conclusion

In *Roots and Tales*, Choudhury recalls that when he and his friends were young men working in Britain, they used to laugh when people described them as immigrants. They knew that they were in Britain temporarily. They counted the money they earned in terms of Bangladeshi *takas* (rupees). Now, however, 'their sons didn't regard his pounds as takas to invest in paddy farmland in Sylhet, as his father did. He preferred the things here-red brick houses, good carpets, modern furniture, fashionable clothes to wear and a nice car to drive. When he got a pound he spent it as a pound in the place where it was earned and where he lived'[115].

This essay has attempted to uncover the processes by which 'takas' became 'pounds' and sojourners became settlers. It has suggested that the apparently clumsy and anachronistic, but in fact revealing, title of Choudhury's book-The *Roots and Tales of Bangladeshi Settlers*-provides a clue to the process by which Sylhetis became both 'Bangladeshis' and 'Settlers' simultaneously. It has underscored their strong emotional bonds with the national project in Bangladesh, but has shown how they came to view assimilation (or true settlement) in Britain as a Bangladeshi patriotic duty. Both community histories by Choudhury and Ilias reveal the complexities and inwardness of the long-distance nationalisms of migrant groups, complexities which previous studies have tended to overlook.

Both histories suggest, moreover, that concept of 'hybridity' calls to be refined to capture all the subtle nuances of the cultural and political processes by migrants try to assimilate into their new homes. For our migrants, constructing and recognising their own cultural hybridity is a

process replete with pain and confusion, and is part and parcel of the ending of their dreams of returning 'home'. Their stance towards the nation-state-whether of origin or of settlement-is also rather less critical than some authors have suggested. Most migrants (like Choudhury and Ilias) are caught up in a deeply asymmetrical relationship with the 'host' society, and their tentative steps towards assimilation can only succeed if they are supported by civil society groups in the host country. They have no choice but to couch their claims for rights in terms that the host country (or sections of its political classes) deems to be 'legitimate'. The 'third space' about which Bhabha has written proves, in their case at least, to be extremely constrained.

One further question arises from this effort to compare these community histories. This essay has investigated the circumstances in which they were written and published, and has concluded that both were written at the moment in the community's history when the 'myth of return' could no longer be sustained. This suggests a different approach to the foundation myths of much older migrant communities. Might these older genealogies and myths-whether inscribed in copper and stone as in the case of the weavers Roy and Haynes have described, or in the Huguenot community histories Susan Lachenicht has studied, or in the tales of origin of the Goths discussed by McKitterick, Christensen and others[116]- also have been produced at a not dissimilar juncture in their history? Might they also have been constructed with similar purposes and goals? It may well prove interesting to explore further the question of when and why communities produce origin myths and legends. As Ilias' and Choudhury's histories have hinted, such explorations in their turn might help us construct a more historically informed understanding of the mechanics of assimilation.

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NOTES

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2. In this context, it is an excellent example of the histories of the vanquished which Schivelbusch describes. See Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat. On National Trauma, Mourning and Recovery* (translated by Jefferson Chase), London, 2003.
3. Rogers Brubaker, 'The Return of Assimilation? Changing Perspectives on Assimilation and its Sequels in France, Germany, and the United States', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 24 No 4 July 2001, p. 540.
4. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City*, Cambridge MA, 1963, cited in Brubaker, 'The Return of Assimilation', p. 532.
5. Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2001; Khachig Tololyan, 'Elites and Instituions in the Armenian Transnation', *International Migration Review*, Vol. 37, 3, 2003; (also see Alejandro Portes' conclusing remarks in the same special issue of *IMR*); Tony Ballantyne, *Between Colonialism and Diaspora. Sikh Cultural Formations in an Imperial World*, Durham and London, 2006.
6. *Migration: a Welcome Opportunity*, RSA Migration Commission Report , 2005
7. Claude Markovits et al (eds.), *Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750-1950*, London, 2006.
8. Homi Bhabha, 'The Third Space', in J. Rutherford (ed.), *Identity. Community, Culture and Difference*, London, 1990; Homi Bhahba, *The Location of Culture*, London, 1994; Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, London, 1996; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, 1996. For a critical discussion of the concept of 'hybridity', see Claire Alexander, '*Diaspora and Hybridity'*, in P. Hill Collins & J. Solomos (eds), *Handbook of Race and Ethnic Studies*, London (forthcoming).
9. James Clifford, *Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, Cambridge Mass., 1997.

10. John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship & the State*, Cambridge 2000. Also see Mark Salter's *Rights of Passage: The Passport in International Relations*, Boulder, 2003; and Daniel Turack's *The Passport in International Law*, Lexington, 1972.
11. On the control of borders and membership in South Asia, see Vazira Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*, Chicago, 2007; and Joya Chatterji, *The Disinherited. Migrants, Minorities and Citizenship in South Asia,* (Delhi: Permanent Black, forthcoming).
12. Aristide Zolberg and Peter Benda, eds, *Global Migrants, Global Refugees: Problems and Solutions*, New York and Oxford, 2001
13. Choudhury, *Roots and Tales*, p. 10.
14. Ibid, p. viii
15. Deliberately or otherwise, it evokes Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's famous verse *Bandemataram,* which describes the 'motherland' as a place of sweet waters, ripe fruit and cool breezes (*sujalam, suphalam, malayaja sheetalam*).
16. *Roots and Tales*, p. 11.
17. *Roots and Tales*, p. 12.
18. *Roots and Tales*, p. 14.
19. *Roots and Tales*, p. 17.
20. Joya Chatterji, 'The Bengali Muslim; a contradiction in terms?', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. XVI, 2, 1997; (republished in Mushirul Hasan (ed), *Islam, Communities and the Nation*, New Delhi, 1998.
21. *Roots and Tales*, p. 20, 26.
22. Gour Gobindo's act of infanticide resembles, of course, the evil acts committed by King Herod and also the wicked King Kansa of Mathura in Hindu mythology. Kansa was the maternal uncle of Lord Krishna, who imprisoned his sister and killed each one of Krishna's siblings at birth.
23. Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam on the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, Berkeley, 1993.
24. Also see Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim. Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2006.
25. *Roots and Tales*, p. xii.
26. *Biharis*, p. ix.
27. *Biharis*, p. 17.
28. *Biharis*, p. 25.
29. *Biharis*, p. 16.
30. *Biharis*, p. 18.
31. *Biharis*, p. 17.
32. *Biharis*, p. 17-19.
33. *Biharis*, P. 18.
34. *Roots and Tales*, p. 21.
35. *Biharis*, p. 17.
36. *Biharis*, p. 25.
37. Ibid.
38. *Routes and Tales*, p. ix.
39. *Roots and Tales*, p. 31.

40. *Roots and Tales* , p. 33.
41. *Roots and Tales,* p. 43.
42. *Roots and Tales,* p. 50
43. Joseph Salter, *The Asiatic in England. Sketches of Sixteen Years of Work among Orientals*, London, 1873; Joseph Salter, *The East in the West. Work among the Asiatics and Africans in London*, London, 1895; see also Rosina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes. Indians in Britain 1700-1947*, London, 1986.
44. G. Balachandran, 'Circulation through Seafaring: Indian Seamen, 1890-1945', in Markovits *et al* (eds.), *Mobile People.*
45. Caroline Adams, *Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers. Life Stories of Pioneer Settlers in Britain*, London, 1987, p. 54, 64.
46. In 1962, the Conservative Government Enacted the Commonwealth Immigration Act, which restricted the entry to Britain of migrants from the Commonwealth by instituting a new voucher system. This led to a spurt in migration from Commonwealth countries, as many migrants from countries such as Pakistan rushed to bring close relatives over to Britain before the Act came into force.
47. *Bangladeshis in Britain*, Vols 1 and 2, UK House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, HMSO, 1986.
48. The community was divided by its attitudes towards Pakistan before 1971; since then supporters of different regimes and parties have frequently clashed.
49. It is always difficult to verify the numbers of those killed in riots, but 50,000 is clearly a very exaggerated figure. Lord Wavell, then the Viceroy of India, guessed that between 5000 and 10000 people lost their lives. Wavell to Pethick Lawrenece, 22 December 1946, in N. Mansergh and E. R. Lumby (eds.) *The Transfer of Power*, Vol IX, London, 1980, p. 140. See the discussion of numbers killed and displaced by the violence in Papiya Ghosh, *Partition and the South Asian Diaspora. Extending the Subcontinent*, London, New York and Delhi, 2007, pp. 2-3.
50. *Biharis,* p. 26.
51. *Biharis,* pp. x, xi.
52. *Biharis,* p. xiii.
53. *Biharis,* p. ix.
54. *Biharis,* p. ix.
55. See Haraprasad Chattopadhyay, *Internal Migration in India. A Case Study of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1987.
56. Daniel Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*, Berkeley, 2001. Interestingly, the 1946 Bihar killings feature in Horowitz's book as an exemplar of this type of violence.
57. See, for instance, the account of the foundation myths of mobile weaving communities in Tirthankar Roy and Douglas Haynes, 'Conceiving Mobility: *Migration* of Handloom Weavers in Precolonial and Colonial India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 1999; and Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Remembered Villages: Representation of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of Partition', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1996.
58. Chris Waters and other historians of British national identity have argued after the war, British national culture was reconstructed to include the working classes

in the 'nation', and the war was the crucible in which this new identity was forged. See C. Waters, '"Dark Strangers in our Midst": Discourses on Race and Nation in Britain, 1947-63', *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 36, 2, 1997. Also see C. Waters, 'J.B. Priestly' in Susan Pederson and Peter Mandler (eds.) *After the Victorians. Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain*, London, 1994; S. O. Rose, 'Race, Empire and British Wartime Identity', 1939-45', *Historical Research*, Vol. 74, 184 (2002); R. Weight, *Patriots. National Identity in Britain, 1940-2000*, London, 2003. Joanna Lumley's recent campaign in support of the Gurkhas' claim to settle in Britain also rested on their support for Britain on the battlefield.

59. *Roots and Tales*, p. 1x.
60. *Roots and Tales*, pp. 90, 118-20.
61. *Roots and Tales*, p. 196.
62. *Roots and Tales*, p. 177.
63. *Roots and Tales*, p. 179.
64. Brubaker, 'The Return of Assimilation', p. 543-44.
65. *Roots and Tales*, p. 195.
66. *Roots and Tales*, p. 192.
67. *Roots and Tales*, p. 195.
68. On 'long-distance nationalism', see Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparison. Politics Culture and the Nation*, London, 1998, and Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Eugene Fouron, *Georges woke up Laughing. Long-distance Nationalism and the Search for Home*, Chapel Hill, 2001.
69. *Biharis*, pp. 19-20
70. *Biharis*, p. 66.
71. *Biharis*, p. 60
72. *Biharis*, pp. 67-68
73. *Biharis*, p. 61.
74. *Biharis*, p. 88.
75. *Biharis*, p. 85.
76. Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat*, pp. 3-13.
77. *Biharis*, p. xi.
78. *Biharis*, p. 66.
79. *Biharis*, p. 68.
80. *Biharis*, p. 92.
81. *Biharis*, p. 93.
82. *Biharis*, p. 95.
83. *Biharis*, p. 114.
84. *Biharis*, p. 132.
85. *Biharis*, p. 133.
86. See Papiya Ghosh, *Partition and the South Asian Diaspora*, pp. 57-122, Abingdon, 2007.
87. *Biharis*, p. 151.
88. *Biharis*, p. 154.
89. *Biharis*, pp. 155-6.

90. *Ekushey*, literally 'the 21st', recalls the date when Bengali students protesting against Pakistan's language policy were killed by the police. It is still commemorated as *Shaheed Dibas* (or Martyrs Day) in contemporary Bangladesh.
91. *Biharis*, p. 75. Also see Sufia M. Uddin: *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, Ethnicity, and Language in an Islamic nation,* Chapel Hill, 2006.
92. *Biharis*, pp. 77-78. (emphasis added).
93. *Biharis*, p. 94.
94. *Biharis*, p. 95.
95. Literally, 'Our salvation, your salvation, Six Points, Six Points'. Emphasis added.
96. *Biharis*, p. 102.
97. *Biharis*, p. 118.
98. *Biharis*, p. 119. Emphasis added.
99. *Roots and Tales*, pp. ix-x.
100. *Roots and Tales*, pp. 219-223.
101. *Biharis*, p. 150.
102. *Biharis*, pp. 150-51.
103. *Biharis*, p. 153.
104. Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, p. 37-38.
105. Ibid., p. 39.
106. 'East End- Altab Ali was knifed on his way from work. Isaak Ali was murdered near his home. Southall –Gurdip Singh Chigger was stabbed to death. Newham-Akhtar Ali Baig was killed. Hackney- Michael Ferreira was murdered. Liverpool Street Station – Famous Mgutshini, an African student was knifed. Windsor-Sewa Singh was killed. Leamington Spa- racist threw petrol over an Asian woman and burnt her to death. South London – Fenton Ogbogbo lost his life. Swindon –Malcolm Chambers and Mohammed Arif were murdered by racists. Leeds- a Sikh woman burnt to death in her home when it caught fire following a racist attack. Walthamstow- Mrs Perveen Khan was sleeping in her home, with her three children, when racists set fire to the house, she and her children lost their lives…'. *Roots and Tales*, p. 193.
107. Brubaker, 'The Return of Assimilation?'
108. Brah defines it as a place of intersectionality and confluence: 'where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate, and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition.' *Cartographies of Diaspora*, p. 208.
109. Kenneth Leach, 'Caroline Adams: youth worker devoted to the welfare of London's Bangladeshi community', *The Guardian*, (Obituaries), 23 June 2001.
110. See, for instance, Md Ruhul Quddus, 'Recognising citizenship right' in *The Independent* (Dhaka), 6 October 2007, A.B.M. S. Zahur, 'Enrolling Stranded Pakistanis', *The Daily Star*, 1 October 2007; 'Quazi Quamruzzaman et al, 'The camp-dwelling Biharis and Bangladesh', *New Age*, 17 September 2007.
111. See the chapter on 'Legal Aspects', pp. 191-5, and the reference to Dr C. R. Abrar of RRMRU on p. 157 of *Biharis*.
112. *Biharis*, pp. 155-6.

113. As in Tololyan's 'Armenian Transnation.'
114. Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, p. 28.
115. *Roots and Tales*, p. 223.
116. Roy and Haynes, "Conceiving Mobility'; Susanne Lachenicht, 'Huguenot Immigrants and the Formation of National Identities, 1548-1787', *Historical Journal*, Vol. 50:2 (2007); A. S. Christensen, *Cassiodorus, Jordanes and the History of the Goths. Studies in a Migration Myth*, Copenhagen, 2002.