also reckon with the violence of national disintegration and revise its own nationalist narrative if it hopes to achieve a truly integrated society.

Ali, son to a woman who comes to be known as Nanijaan, serves in the Pakistani army during the 1971 war. At the end of his nine-month-long tour, Ali finds Sajida, a "fiveandsix" (Khan 2006: 52) year-old Bengali girl, in Dhaka and decides to take her back to Islamabad with him. These details unfold through flashbacks that take place in the novel's present, at which time Sajida is a grown woman, married to Hussein, mother to two sons, and still living, unconventionally, under Ali's roof. The novel opens on the very night Sajida conceives her third child, the title character, Noor. Immediately after Noor's birth, it becomes apparent that she suffers from an unidentified developmental disability. Noor possesses uncanny artistic abilities with which she produces images seemingly retrieved from her mother's and grandfather's repressed memories of East Pakistan. These pictures, in large measure, prompt the flashbacks that gradually chip away at the stability of Ali's "ready-made family" (48).

The effort Ali puts into constructing this "ready-made family" represents a narrative propensity toward a naturalized integration. At times, the narrative voice, whose third person perspective frequently shifts to favor a specific character's view, frames Ali's paternity as both unintentional – "When he'd first returned from the war […], Sajida in tow, [Ali had] wondered sometimes at what he was doing: snatching, as if from thin air, and coming up, quite suddenly, with a ready-made family" (48) – and inevitable – "But as the years passed, first with Sajida's marriage and then the birth of her children, Ali recognized that he'd secretly longed for what followed" (48). This suggestion of unintentionality and inevitability obscures Ali's direct role in the consolidation of his own family, as though the family happened to him rather than because of him. Ali's views rhetorically naturalize the creation of his family. In doing so, they also effectively remove him as an actor from history – the past is something "cast aside" and "dissolving" (49) – thereby positioning his family as outside of history, as well. From this position outside of history, Ali's family functions, in McClintock's words, as the apparent "antithesis of history," as though the family is "excluded from national power" (1995: 358). Yet, as McClintock further contends, the family's appearance of exclusion from history and national power is central to how the family trope operates in nationalist discourse to naturalize the creation of the nation and to frame its authority as unassailable (1995: 358). Such an appearance of "givenness" would demand national integration as an inherent function of a Pakistani identity.

The unconventionality of Sajida's continued residence under Ali's roof after her marriage reveals the family's reliance on naturalized gender imbalances even while the family's very living circumstances draws attention to their construction. Upon Sajida and Hussein's engagement, for instance, Ali signals that his approval hinges upon one condition: "the newlyweds would live with him" (Khan 2006: 66). Not surprisingly, Hussein's mother objects, and

"Ali, furious that the accepted marriage proposal was giving Hussein's family liberty to already claim his daughter as theirs, couldn't bring himself to say that Sajida would always belong to him" (67). Sensing the impasse, Nanijaan intervenes and resolves the matter in Ali's favor, forcing everyone involved to acquiesce to Ali's paternal authority, all the while suppressing the urge to tell her son that "Sajida did not belong to [him], because she did not want to speak of her granddaughter in words better suited to land and war" (67). Nanijaan's association of Sajida with "words better suited to land and war" introduces the connections between the personal and national circumstances that make the construction of Ali's family possible. Yet, by weighing in on Ali's behalf, Nanijaan nonetheless helps her son conceal these connections and, as a result, obscure the family's historical positioning.

The primary domestic site of the novel, called "Ali's sector," also relies upon and subtly undoes these naturalized relations to national power. Because Ali only agrees to Sajida's marriage to Hussein on the condition that the young couple reside with him, Ali sets out to build a larger dwelling to accommodate Sajida's growing family. The plot on which Ali intends to build his new home sits next to one upon which a partially built and then abandoned home sits:

> This structure, a house, intended to be grand, had been deserted in the midst of construction. […] Like everyone else in Islamabad, Ali assumed that the partly built houses scattered around the city, which existed in a strange tandem of being there and not being there, belonged to East Pakistanis, dead or alive, who hadn't claimed them after the war. (34)

With a hint of the unraveling yet to come, the very site of "Ali's sector" stands in proximity to the history the naturalized construction of Ali's family seeks to disavow: the disintegration of the nation. The availability of the land Ali purchases hinges upon the absence of the East Pakistanis who never completed this first house, thereby stalling the development of the entire area until the construction of Ali's house begins. "Ali's sector" manifests the argument McClintock makes with respect to the location of domesticity: "Domesticity denotes both a *space* (a geographical and architectural alignment) and a *social relation to power*" (1995: 34; emphasis in original). That is, the house Ali builds for his family occupies a space already demarcated by the *absence* of the East Pakistanis, a (non)physical reminder of the political, cultural, and economic imbalances that characterized the relationship between the two wings of Pakistan, always, in the end, bending in favor of the western wing. Further, the house site demonstrates the distance Ali travels to ensure the continued inviolability and intactness of his family, a point ironically underscored by the house's layout: "One of the design peculiarities was that from the road the brick house, without the benefit of a roadside garden or a narrow strip of tended land, appeared stark and

uninviting, a virtual fort" (Khan 2006: 36). The house's fortress-like structure belies the naturalization of the family and the domestic scene.

The very existence of the house gestures toward the "unnatural" aspects of Ali's family life in other ways, as well. Upon seeing the plans for "Ali's sector," Nanijaan considers how well the design suits its creator: "Ali had fortified the inner sanctity of his home with rooms on all sides in the same way that he'd fortified himself against marriage. Just as his courtyard could not be seen from the street, he would never have a wife who might come to know whatever it was he'd seen those months in the distant, wretched land" (36). Although Ali is building this house for his daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren, his connections to these people are in themselves unconventional, as Ali, though claiming to be a father – or, as quoted above, who "made himself a father" – is not a husband. Indeed, the novel hints at a genuine queering of conventional masculinity by having Ali's tour in East Pakistan last for the nine months it would take for a woman to gestate a baby (33, 50, 128). Ali's paternity, then, depends upon his own corresponding and unnatural "maternity."

Indeed, Ali's implication in the mortification of the masculine goes beyond his claims to paternity to encompass his own body. Just as Nanijaan sees the layout of "Ali's sector" as a metaphor for her son's emotional state, Ali tries to use self-torture as a means to deal metaphorically with his memories of East Pakistan. Reluctantly, Ali recalls the first night he returned to Islamabad with Sajida after his tour in the east. That night, once both Nanijaan and Sajida fell asleep,

> Ali had locked himself in the bathroom, fancying his head a wall-sized cabinet of drawers that could be nailed closed. […] Enveloped by steam so hot it burned his nostrils, he sat on the edge of the bathtub, slowly forcing his body into the water. […]
>
> He submerged his feet, and just like that, he relegated the screams to one drawer, the pit of dead bodies and their scattered twitching to another. Kneeling into the tub, the scathing heat turned his knees pink, and he put the rich color of blood disappearing into a pit of mud into its own compartment […]. Of all, it was the most difficult to contain. By the time his genitals were burned and blistered by the boiling water, the color bled. (53)

In a compelling counterpoint to nationalism's usual metaphorization of the female body as the repository of culture and tradition, Ali renders his own paternal body a metaphor for the violence carried out in the nation's name. In inflicting this abuse on his genitals, Ali also signals his departure from heteronormative convention; that is, Ali's self-torture explains, in part, his aversion to marriage, the institution that would make him a legitimate father by sanctioning his sexual activities as a husband. In effect, Ali's actions, meant to repress memories, must also desexualize him while leaving

him intact enough for the "masculine" claims Ali makes to fatherhood. So, although Ali's actions are partially in contravention of heteronormative dictates, they remain conservative in that they seek to retain patriarchal authority even if without the sexual license that usually accompanies such authority.

However, the novel suggests that Ali's need to claim masculine and patriarchal authority alongside his corresponding need to dissociate such authority from violence may not be possible. A wartime flashback shows why. On night duty, one of Ali's tasks is to bring Bengali women to his commanding officer. One night, Ali delivers a young woman and stands outside the officer's quarters with full knowledge of the woman's impending rape. Before leaving the room, Ali sees her body, exposed by the officer, and notes, "*White dribbled from her breast onto her stomach. Milk is white, cloudy, from the breast. That's when it occurred to me. The milk, the marks on her belly: This woman was a young mother*" (139; emphasis in original). Unlike in traditional conceptions of the Pakistani nation or Pakistani womanhood, motherhood is not sacred here; indeed, this woman is an example of McClintock's point that "[w]omen are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary" (1995: 354), making any mutilation of women's bodies by an enemy a violation of the subject nation. The officer summons Ali back into the office after he has mutilated the woman's body. The officer offers the woman to Ali, whose "*pants didn't tighten. I felt sick to my stomach. My first time, offered a woman like that*" (Khan 2006: 140; emphasis in original). His response – "a woman like that" – is ambiguous: a woman who is unattractively presented? A woman who is a mother? Or, a woman under the circumstances; that is, a recognition that wartime rape is not healthy sex? Disconcertingly, the rest of the scene does not clarify the ambiguity. The officer proceeds to coax Ali, resorting to humiliation as he forces Ali to expose his flaccid penis (140). Disgusted at what he deems Ali's lacking masculinity – "'*You're not a soldier*'" (140; emphasis in original) – the officer leaves. Left alone with the woman, with "[his] *pants still down*[, Ali] *took a few steps toward her. She was ripped and pried open* […]. *I straddled her. She was warm and wet* [from bleeding where the officer cut her genitals]. *My penis, soft and small, did nothing and, thankfully, I couldn't enter her. I pulled up my pants and covered the woman with the sari from the floor. I resumed guard duty outside the door*" (141; emphasis in original). Though Ali includes adverbial commentary in his recollection – "*thankfully, I couldn't enter her*" – this may be an appended notation, added years later. What remain unaccountable are Ali's actions. Why would he approach the woman *after* the officer left the room? Ali concludes his own recollection with an admission: "*I knew what I'd done*" (141; emphasis in original). Whatever motivated Ali remains unclear, but what does emerge from this recollection is the likely futility of Ali's attempt to blanch his memories by blanching his penis, an act he undertakes in order to stabilize himself for the larger good of his new "ready-made family." In other words, the violence of which

Ali was a part contributes to the creation of his family, wherein, despite his sexual aversions, he enjoys the authority customarily bestowed upon a father.

Another point that emerges from Ali's self-torture is how he associates sexuality with violence. Not only is Ali's self-conceptualization of his sexuality conflicted, his understanding of female sexuality is similarly convoluted. The arrival of Noor's first period exemplifies this. Upon waking one morning, she notices the blood and screams. Ali is first to her bedside, followed by Sajida and Hussein, although it is Ali who first sees the blood that frightened Noor (112–13). To calm Noor, Sajida draws a bath, and, as the running water soothes the girl, Noor says to Hussein, "'Dreams, Aba! […] Red like the river'" (113). Noor's strange linkage of her menstrual blood with a dream from which she's awakened connect to Ali's unwilling tracing of his own associations:

> There wasn't much blood. As a teenager, Ali had read about menstrual blood. A few tablespoons a day, if that. […] The blood between Noor's legs, her crying on the other side of the bathroom door, made him think (in spite of himself and what he had resolved against) of his river. The one behind the officer's house, the darkness of it, in midday, the brightest of afternoon suns spilling from the sky. (115)

In Ali's mind, such an ordinary occurrence leads to his memories of the war. An important connection emerges in the scene of Noor's first period: namely, the pathological links between female sexuality and violence in Ali's long-repressed memories.

As he thinks of the river behind the officer's house, Ali remembers coming upon a Bengali woman at a train station in the south of East Pakistan. The woman's gender was indeterminate from a distance, but, as the train neared, Ali and his fellow soldiers could see "two huge pink infections oozing pus, yellow, where her breasts should have been. Chopped off, they were" (115–16). Out of compassion, the soldiers take the woman back to their headquarters to nurse her, and, in her delirium, she details the horrors she's seen, horrors committed by the (West) Pakistani Army on the Bengalis. While in this delirious state, she also starts menstruating; the soldiers must care for this, too (116). The woman dies, and, as the soldiers dig her grave "behind the barracks," Ali recollects how the lawn behind the barracks stretched to the river: "The river, in the sun, without haze, was dark. With dead bodies, not just that day, but the whole time we were there" (117). The appearance of Noor's menstrual blood triggers in Ali's mind the memory of this Bengali woman's period or, more precisely, the circumstances that brought this woman's period to his attention: the specifically targeted sexualized brutality she suffers. Of the Bengali woman's dead body, Ali recalls, "Even after she died, her wounds oozed. […] Between her legs, the blood still ran. The body rids itself of fluids after death" (117). The continually flowing fluids,

tied in this image with a dead body, present a small-scale example of the larger river near the woman's grave, always flowing despite being clogged with corpses. Such memories, many of which involve brutalized women, clog Ali's mind, prompting cynicism. Ali's memories of this woman provide a glimpse into the reasons why Ali both desexualizes himself and endeavors to ignore Noor's sexuality, which I discuss below. Female sexuality and, given Ali's self-torture, male heterosexual desire connect to violence and death in Ali's mind.

In contrast to Ali's perverted view of sexuality, the novel presents alternative portrayals of female sexuality in particular as a way to begin to break the association of sexuality, sex, death, and violence that contributes to the forced consolidation of Ali's "ready-made family." The framing of Sajida's sexuality as unconventional, for instance, develops from the way Nanijaan introduces her to how marriage genders roles and, consequently, shapes sexual norms. When it becomes clear to Nanijaan that Sajida will marry Hussein, the older woman instructs the younger one about the sexualized female body:

> [Nanijaan] took Sajida back to when she had been a bride, a girl younger than Sajida [...]. Her marriage was an arrangement between her parents and her husband's parents [...]. Nanijaan had liked him though, whatever that meant for a sixteen-year-old who still didn't understand that a woman had three holes between her legs, not one as she'd thought when she was a child, or two as she'd suspected when she was older. Nanijaan had birthed her first child before she'd realized that her monthly blood and her urine did not come from the same place. (61)

Even though Nanijaan can laugh at her own ignorance – calling herself "'donkey's brains'" (61) – while admitting this to Sajida, Nanijaan's lack of knowledge about her body, even after she becomes a wife and mother, suggests how *unnecessary* a woman's sexual knowledge or preparedness is to the larger societal functions marriage and motherhood serve in what the novel sets forth as a traditional framework. Immediately after admitting her ignorance of her own body, Nanijaan tells Sajida, "'He beat me'" (62). Faced with Sajida's confusion over this apparent non sequitur, Nanijaan further explains that her husband beat her for "'[b]eing his wife'" (62). The association between marriage and violence Nanijaan makes illustrates how, in her mind, the body of a married woman is vulnerable to several types of socially sanctioned sexualized violence, from the barest ignorance of anatomy to physical abuse made acceptable because a husband has power over his wife. This scene points to Nanijaan's awareness of how unjust and unjustifiable her treatment was. She tells Sajida about it because she will "not allow Sajida to duplicate her mistakes," which were to condone her husband's violence by remaining silent about it (62). Although belated, Nanijaan contests her husband's authority,

thereby pointing out to Sajida an alternative understanding of what marriage can be.

Further, if we read Nanijaan's confessions as an impulse to underscore the constructed rather than the natural quality of Nanijaan's husband's authority, we can also see how the novel traces and broadens this impulse through its representation of both Sajida's and Noor's sexualized bodies. In this context, the novel's opening paragraphs are instructive. "Noor was Sajida's secret," is the first, one-sentence paragraph, followed by, "She knew the exact moment her child was conceived" (1). Readers' introduction to Sajida comes by way of her awareness of her own body, a stark contrast to how Nanijaan describes herself as a young woman. In the novel's third paragraph, the narrator tells us that, in this moment when Noor is conceived, Sajida lies awake in "[t]he stifling heat [that] hung thick in the air made almost sweet by the faint smells of lovemaking and freshly bathed and powdered children asleep on the floor" (1). This sense-oriented description of Sajida and Hussein's bedroom makes explicit Sajida's engagement in sexual activity with her husband. By including the detail that the room smelled faintly of sex, alongside Sajida's realization that she's just conceived her third child, the novel solidly and directly grounds the event in the materiality of Sajida's body. When compared to how both Ali's and Nanijaan's sexualized bodies are framed, such a frank and unsentimentalized – though not crass – portrayal of Sajida's sex life breaks convention. This portrait of Sajida does not desexualize her, as Ali attempts to do to himself, nor does it convey her ignorance or victimhood, as Nanijaan's self-representation does. In a qualified way, then, this initial representation of Sajida's sexuality suggests her "erotic autonomy," to invoke, once again, Alexander's phrase. Sajida's "erotic autonomy" is qualified to the extent that she is both wife and mother in a family unit that, in many ways, functions as a microcosm for the post-1971 Pakistani nation. Yet, at the same time, the portrayal of Sajida's sexuality as something much different from either Ali's or Nanijaan's constitutes an alternative vision of what sexual relations and sexual roles within a marriage can be. Whereas, for instance, Nanijaan's ignorance illustrates how unnecessary a woman's sexual awareness or preparedness is to what the novel presents as the traditional institution of marriage, Sajida's awareness and the novel's matter-of-fact presentation of Sajida's sex life makes a woman's sexual awareness and knowledge appear as givens. Through these opening paragraphs, the novel establishes a certain idea of a sexualized body as its basis, and it is from this base that readers can compare the subsequent and differing portrayals of the other characters' sexualized bodies. In effect, the novel "norms" the kind of sexuality Sajida represents even while the dominant nationalist discourse would relegate it to the margins.

In a sense, the novel also endows Noor with "erotic autonomy." As with Sajida, we come to understand Noor's claims to autonomy through comparison. Next to her brothers' future prospects, for example, Noor's are decidedly unusual. Considering his grandsons' futures and savoring the foregone

conclusion that he would enjoy "being a father – and the sweetest progression thereof – a grandfather" (166), Ali speculates:

> Looking at [his grandsons], Ali dared to wonder what kind of fathers they would be. Kind, he imagined, and smiled when he envisioned that they might have many children between them. *You only have to look at them*, he thought, *to know their futures were courting them*. (166; emphasis in original)

With a strong suggestion of inevitability, Ali's suppositions immediately run toward casting his grandsons as fathers. On the tails of this passage comes Ali's thoughts about Noor: "Noor, simpler, was more special yet" (166). There is no speculation about Noor's future as a wife and mother following this statement. Although the narrator does not have Ali think this explicitly, it is plain that Noor's disability makes her unmarriageable and, hence, from a traditional standpoint, unlikely to be a mother. In other words, Noor's disability, from this viewpoint, seeks to make Noor's sexuality irrelevant, if it does not try to erase it entirely. From another angle, however, Ali's failure to acknowledge Noor's sexuality releases her from heteronormative pressures.

The novel, at times, certainly represents Noor's maturing body as beyond these pressures. At the novel's close, when Noor is thirteen, the narrative perspective begins to favor Noor's interiority whereas previously her thoughts and motivations were opaque. In a remarkable scene that renders tangible a vision Sajida has on the night she conceives Noor – thereby bookending the novel's frank presentation of Sajida's embodied sexuality with a similarly frank image of Noor's – Noor paints herself with Sajida's cosmetics. With purple, orange, and pink in her hair, shades of red, black, and brown, along with glitter, on her face, Noor

> settled on the low wooden chair, and when she was ready, her head began to gently sway, as if to an invisible pulse of music. Gradually, in slow waves, her body began to move, from her shoulders to her arms, her chin to her neck, the heel of her foot to the toe, […] and then, finally, into her hips, until she stood, in utter submission to her own private dance. (202)

Noor relinquishes her will to the dance she performs only for herself. Sajida comes upon Noor in the midst of her play and sees "an adolescent girl of thirteen with curves of her own" (202). The description of how Noor's body responds to her impulse and of how Sajida sees this body – it is not, immediately, that of her daughter; rather, it is the body of "an adolescent girl" – suggests a freedom from familiar labels or modes of bodily comportment. Because the narrative voice favors Noor's perspective at this point, we can read this act as Noor's claiming her body in such a way as to present an alternative to Ali's implicit heteronormative views that would otherwise frame her sexualized body as a cipher.

In this discussion of Sajida's and Noor's sexualities, I am asserting that these daughter figures embody an "erotic autonomy" in tension with the traditional conceptions of femininity and womanhood, particularly as marriage and motherhood shape these two concepts. Nanijaan's arranged marriage and identity as the sacrificing mother of sons stands as the counterpoint to Sajida's understanding of her body in her own marriage and the final image readers receive of Noor. And Ali's perspective represents a deliberate attempt to impose heteronormative conventions on Noor. To succeed, this attempt has to ignore or disregard instances that challenge the appearance of naturalness upon which such conventions rely. The novel intimates that Ali fails at his attempt. And, though Ali fears this failure will threaten the stability of his "ready-made family," it actually constitutes its only hope for survival. In other words, a recognition of the daughters' unconventional sexualities points the way toward the potential for integration rather than the threat of disintegration.

The survival of Ali's family requires a revision, informed by the daughters' "erotic autonomy," of the family's founding narrative: how Ali found Sajida. Upon his return from the east, Ali "described Sajida as an orphan and assigned the cause. *Cyclone*, he'd said, as if her presence could be summed up in one word" (11–12). By way of an introduction to Nanijaan, Ali presents Sajida, "She says she's fiveandsix. Little girl from East Pakistan. She'll stay with us" (52). Nanijaan asks after Sajida's mother, and Ali's response is to ask for tea (52). These details provide the barest bones of the family's narrative: Sajida was young and alone; Ali finds her and brings her back to Islamabad. So embedded is this story in the family's life that, when Ali asks Sajida years later what she remembers about how they came together in Dhaka, Sajida rattles off the rote response: "'You saw me. You found me. You took me. Right?'" (170). This simple story frames Sajida as wholly forlorn and Ali, heroic.

Noor's presence proves pivotal in the initial stages of the revision of this simple story. Her artwork, abstract and visceral at the same time, breaks the frame of this founding family narrative. One of Noor's pictures – an image of colorful oil barrels stacked one on top of the other (105) – shakes Sajida into remembering where she had seen those barrels in her own life. Capable of grasping only "snippets," Sajida recalls leaving her village, ravaged by the cyclone that struck Bengal in late 1970, for Dhaka. She is taken in by UN relief workers, although she maintains the hope of being rescued by her biological father (106). From within these hazy memories, Sajida retrieves the image of the barrels: "The barrels lay on their sides on top of one another, rising in smaller and smaller rows. They were bright and rusted at the same time, a medley of blues, whites, greens, and reds" (107). Aware now of the memory, Sajida looks again at Noor's picture. "Noor was right. She'd drawn what Sajida had forgotten" (107). These evoked memories expand, laying out the scene in which Sajida thinks she remembers first coming upon Ali: "A truck sped by, kicking up dust and gravel, but she couldn't move. […]

A man got out of the jeep. She heard him, but she didn't turn to look. She was suddenly exhausted, so overcome that when this man – Ali, Aba, her father – picked her up […] from the side of the road, she let him" (108). Faced with Noor's technicolor supplement to the founding narrative Ali has always told her, Sajida wonders, "*Was it like that?* […] *I could ask him*, she thought, imagining Ali attempting to provide her with answers" (108; emphasis in original). Notably, Sajida imagines "Ali attempting" to answer her questions, suggesting that Sajida's uncertainty over the accuracy of her own memory begins to chip away at her willingness to accept Ali's account. This scene of remembrance closes with Sajida dreaming about the barrels, dreaming about "the way it had been" (108). Strikingly, in this dream, which the novel presents as an accurate portrayal of events, Sajida convulses with weeping as Ali herds her onto a transport plane heading back to West Pakistan: "Surrounded by people she did not know, flanked by people she could barely tell apart from the others, Sajida cried. 'Ma,' her body shook with dry sobs" (109). Less a promise of sanctuary, this scene reads more like an abduction.

Sajida is not the only one affected by Noor's artwork; Ali, similarly, finds himself inexorably caught in the memories these pictures evoke. Their common viewing of these pictures compels Ali to discover what Sajida may remember: "Ali threw out the questions one by one, as if he didn't know the answers. [… H]e wanted Sajida to share what she knew, suspecting that if she put it into words, something important might be laid to rest" (170). The disingenuousness of Ali's proddings – "as if he didn't know the answers" – indicates his own desire to contend with, finally, all that he has worked to suppress. As he awaits the recitation of Sajida's memory, the narrative traces Ali's own detailed account of what occurred on the day he met Sajida on the roadside. At first sight, Ali cannot discern Sajida's age, because she's hunched over a curb looking at something on the ground (171). This indeterminacy is significant, for all Ali and the other soldier who is driving the army truck can tell – and that because of her braid – is that she is a female child. The truck stops, and, "without knowing why," Ali lifts the girl and puts her in the back of the truck (171). "As they began to drive, the officer [driving] opened the window for a moment. […]. The child's kurta slipped down her front: collar bones poked out as did the tiniest buds of nipples Ali had ever seen. The girl continued to look at him, as unaware as any child of her nakedness" (171). Ali's inability to discern the girl's age, compounded by the inadvertent exposure of her (prepubescent) breasts, confound Ali. She's "unaware" of her exposure, but he is not. The girl's "unwavering directness […] gave [Ali] pause. *Why wasn't she afraid?*" (172; emphasis in original). Just as when Ali declined his superior officer's offer of the raped Bengali woman, the meaning behind Ali's wondering why the girl is not afraid is ambiguous. It is reasonable to expect a child to be afraid of strangers, as the foundling Sajida is on the transport plane shortly hereafter. Yet, with the indeterminacy of her age, the exposure of her body, and Ali's experiences witnessing – and nearly partaking

in – sexualized violence, it is also possible that Ali cannot believe that the girl is not afraid that he or the driver will rape her. Sajida's "unwavering directness" may be an early sign of the frankness with which she understands her own body and sexuality as an adult.

In the chronology of the novel, it has taken decades, not to mention several of Noor's pictures, for Ali to be able to call forth in such detail the day he met Sajida. And, although a long time coming, this moment catalyzes a breakthrough:

> At the time, he believed his intention was to help the child. But as the years passed and he'd had more and more time to consider his actions, he knew he'd done it, not for her, but for himself. Taking the child home, making her his daughter, Ali worried that in pretending to save her, he remained what he wanted, so badly, no longer to be. (172)

This admission of selfishness breaks the frame of the founding family narrative Ali constructed and passed on to Sajida. She was not saved by him; rather, Ali now recognizes that his ability to take her without fear of recrimination derives from his gendered position as a male soldier, a position scores of others have used to inflict sexualized violence. He is able to acknowledge his tendency to connect sexuality, sex, violence, and death through his corollary – though belated – acknowledgement of the young Sajida's sexual autonomy. Ali abducted Sajida and passed it off, by means of his simple story, as a compassionate adoption.

For the revision of the founding family narrative to be complete, Sajida must also acknowledge the changes in the story. As Sajida begins to grapple with the broken frames of the narrative, the threat of the family's dissolution is real.

> Sajida's conversation with Ali had stayed with her. [… S]peaking with her father about that morning long ago had sharpened her memories. The open road, the truck, the holes in her dupatta. *You saw me. You found me. You took me.* After their conversation, her memories had a different feel to them which Sajida tried to comprehend. (176; emphasis in original)

So unsettled is she that, when Hussein chastises her for criticizing Ali's wartime service – "'You don't have the right. It's not your business. For God's sake, Saji, he's your father!'" – Sajida responds, "'Not really, you know'" (178). This admission of bare fact prises apart the conflation that long ago occurred in Sajida's own mind: "And just like that day in Dhaka, the faces of her father, the fisherman, and Ali, the man who found her by the side of the road, blended into one" (108). Now she sees two distinct faces.

The sanctity of Ali's "ready-made family" becomes even more tenuous after Sajida not only admits Ali's revisions to the founding narrative into her

awareness but also adds some of her own. Subsequent to but no less emotionally draining than the one in which Ali and Sajida straighten out the details each remembered of their roadside encounter, another conversation reveals a particularly heinous event at which both Ali and Sajida were present. Ali was in charge of a group of soldiers who were to dig a massive pit that would serve as a mass grave for dead East Pakistanis. He reveals how he and the other soldiers, wet from an early monsoon rain, became frightened by the arrival at the graveside of a group of unarmed Bengalis, elderly people and one child. The soldiers open fire, and new corpses fall onto old. The child, though not shot, falls into the grave, now thoroughly sodden and awash in mud. A link emerges between Ali's memory and the little that Sajida recalls of her first five or six years in East Pakistan from which Sajida now pieces together another aspect of her memory, telling Ali, "'I […] was there'" in the pit of mud (193–5). Somehow, Sajida survives and, in the novel's present, when the memory of that harrowing day surfaces in her consciousness, she "considered the beginning of her story. She recognized it was different now from the one she'd carried with her since she was the girl of fiveandsix. […] *That was how it had been*" (199; emphasis in original). Sajida now sees Ali as a soldier who nearly killed her, bringing forth the conclusion that, "[e]ven if Ali hadn't stopped on the Dhaka road, wide like a river, that hot, dry early morning on the way to the airport, the two of them would have been forever joined by a pit of mud" (199). Here is the tipping point in the continued existence of Ali's "ready-made family." Sajida, too, sees that Ali's family came into being through violence.

The novel's final scene, which immediately follows Sajida's recognition of how the muddy pit conjoins her and Ali, features Noor painting herself, as I discussed above. Sajida sees Noor, who has used her own body as a canvas, and, suddenly, Noor throws an object at a full-length mirror, causing it to shatter into countless pieces (203). The sound brings Hussein and Ali running, and they find Sajida and Noor "[c]lutching each other, first by their hands and then by their shoulders and arms, and they shrieked with laughter" (203–4). The broken mirror, accompanied by Noor's unselfconscious dancing, both constitute Noor's claiming of her own "erotic autonomy" and the destruction of the familiar images the mirror reflected. The joy mother and daughter feel suggests a release, and, given Hussein's frightened reaction (203), it is an unexpected and unconventional liberation. That Ali also witnesses Sajida and Noor's embrace brings the focus back to both female characters' positions as daughters in this story. Sajida, through Noor's agency – not only her pictures but also her dance and her smashing of the mirror – breaks through the violence that connects her to Ali. For his part, Ali prostrates himself "before his ready-made family," as though "he'd never stopped believing" (204). Sajida reaches for Ali in this position of surrender or submission and "lock[s] her arms with his" (204). Bodily, Ali humbles himself, expresses his contrition, and, by reaching out to him, Sajida signals the possibility of forgiveness. The family is by no means fully consolidated at

the novel's close; a shattered mirror cannot be put back together. It does, however, stand a chance of being re-constituted along different lines, with a different narrative to tell its story.

By forcing the creation of a family, Ali "imagined making amends, atoning" (172). Yet, Ali's gestures at securing an internally harmonious familial structure, at perpetuating a filiative set of relations, fail precisely because of his deep reluctance to deal openly with all of the circumstances, the creation of Bangladesh foremost among them, that shape the realities of that internal, domestic site. Herein lies an allegory of the nation bent on forgetting its past. Khan's *Noor* figures the creation of Bangladesh as a tear in the fabric of a Pakistani *intra*national identity, leaving the nation that remains teetering on the brink of full out national disintegration. As a way to circumvent this dissolution, the novel refocuses attention on the fictions Ali and, implicitly, Pakistan tell about the events of 1971. The novel's conclusion, though unresolved, suggests the progressive potential of an affiliative order. The realization of this order may occur only through an explicit rendering of historical accounts.

The daughter and sister figures in "The Sin of Innocence" and *Noor* facilitate a gendered critique of an important aspect of traditional nationalist discourses: the family. In this way, both fictions position the 1971 war as a point of potential transition wherein a positive change may emerge from this moment of national disintegration. Unlike nationalism's positioning of maternal figures as the sites of biological and cultural reproduction, these daughters and sisters, I have argued, each contravene such heteronormative dictates. From their positions outside these norms, Munni child, Sajida, and Noor each point toward an alternative, gender-progressive vision of the nation. In these visions, the female characters act with determination and autonomy rather than only as conduits for the transmission of traditional cultural values and identities. Although the ending of Umara's story prevents us from seeing the further development of Munni child's vision, Khan's novel does show how Sajida's and Noor's visions affect Ali, pointing toward one way that an understanding of "Pakistaniness" can indeed be revised so as not to perpetuate long-standing exclusions and (gender) inequities.

5 Eternally displaced persons

Inside the borders, outside the nation

In a speech delivered on the occasion of his election as President of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah sketched a vision of inclusivity for the nascent nation:

> We are starting in the days when there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State.
>
> (Jinnah 2004: 17)

Jinnah struck this inclusive chord in religious terms, establishing Pakistan from the outset as a secular state despite its having come into being as a homeland for India's Muslims.[1] More important for my present purposes, however, is Jinnah's implicit acknowledgement of the new geographical borders demarcating Pakistan and his insistence upon belonging within these borders. In August 1947, "Pakistan" became a territorialized idea and, as such, conferred upon its inhabitants a new national citizenship. This territorialization stood in sharp relief to the vision the Muslim League propagated throughout the 1930s and early 1940s. Further, as I pointed out in Chapter 3, Mohammad Iqbal, as president of the Muslim League in the 1930s, concerned himself with issues of nationhood, place, and identity, often leveling serious critiques from an Islam-centered perspective against a too rigid alignment of these terms: "the object [of the prophetic mission] is to purify the nations of the world of the abuses which go by the name of time, place, land, nation, race, genealogy, country, etc., although the differences of nations, tribes, colours, and languages are at the same time acknowledged" (1973: 243). Like Jinnah's statement from his 1947 presidential speech, Iqbal's claim values difference and, explicit where Jinnah's speech is implicit, Iqbal's words caution against the "abuses" – discrimination, communalism, etc., one presumes – of a geographically bounded understanding of national identity. What emerges from this series of statements made over the course of less than twenty years is an indication of an awareness, from the inception of the idea

of "Pakistan," of the risks involved in literally grounding a Pakistani national identity in a geographically specific location.

The risks inherent in "grounding" the idea of "Pakistan" resonate in several fictions about the 1971 war. The three short stories I examine here – Naeem Aarvi's "Godhra Camp" (translated 2008), Asif Farrukhi's "Expelled" (translated 2008), and Intizar Husain's "City of Sorrows" (1973/ translated 2008)[2] – fictionalize these risks through the historical realities of Bengalis resident in what was once West Pakistan and of Biharis who migrated to what was then East Pakistan during the subcontinent's first partition in 1947. These historical realities call forth the interdependent concepts of statelessness and homeland or, more broadly, a concern with place. Clearly, each story's title indicates a preoccupation with place: "Godhra Camp" and "City of Sorrows" are site specific, while "Expelled" begs the question of "from where?" All three stories use their focus on place to create a narrative disorientation that confounds definitions of a Pakistani nationalist identity based on geographical boundaries. The stories' forms break neat chronology in a way that highlights yet distances the narrative perspective from how "traditional historical narration" relies upon "chronological sequence and the logic of precedence and succession […] to preserve what has happened by making it seem inevitable, necessary, plausible" (Benhabib 1990: 181). In rendering their fictionalized accounts of the events of 1971 and their aftermath, that is, these stories diverge from a chronological or linear narrative structure characteristic of traditional historical narratives in order to historicize – rather than accept as inherent or natural – the legitimacy of an emplaced Pakistani nationalist identity. For, as Lisa Malkki asserts, "both displacement and emplacement are […] historical products, ever-unfinished projects" (1995: 516).

Further, these three stories centralize place not only for its significance to the specific historical moment of the 1971 war but also to enact a reversal. That is, historically and fictionally, the Biharis and Bengalis figured in Aarvi's, Farrukhi's, and Husain's stories are indeed stateless; at the same time, however, these three stories turn this historical accuracy back around so as to examine how "emplaced" Pakistanis are themselves, figuratively speaking, stateless precisely because the government of Pakistan excluded the Bengalis, denationalized the Biharis, and, even more fundamentally, required the vast reorganization of populations' relation to place in order to come into being from the start. Whereas in my earlier discussion of Khan's novel *Noor* and Umara's short story "The Sin of Innocence," the outlook was future oriented and concerned with generational reproduction, in the stories discussed here, the outlook may more accurately be called past oriented, though it is no less concerned with generations. In effect, these three stories identify the workings of an affiliative order that reinscribes filiative power and lament the national inability or disinclination to change. Each of these three stories seems to wonder what became of the ideal notion of "Pakistan" that the previous generation strove and sacrificed for. This wonderment or loss further

underscores the purpose of the narrative strategies the stories adopt: neat historical linearity provides a semblance of transparency and historical inevitability that fails to account for the culpability of some and the powerlessness of others.

The very circumstances that gave rise to the name "Bihari" point to how far-reaching the stories' engagement with defining "Pakistaniness" is. As I've noted, "Bihari" names the Indian Muslims from north-eastern India, many of them Urdu speakers, who migrated to East Pakistan in 1947 because such a large number of these Muslims came from the Indian state of Bihar.[3] Like their Urdu-speaking compatriots who migrated to West Pakistan in 1947, Biharis may more properly, if generically, be known as muhajirs or migrants/refugees. And, in the mythologies built around the territorialization of the idea of "Pakistan," these muhajirs/refugees often figure as the people whose sacrifice for the new nation of Pakistan was the greatest, for they were the ones who left ancestral lands and made the trek east- or westwards based, in part, on their commitment to the ideology of a homeland for India's Muslims.[4] By traveling east, the Biharis heeded "Jinnah's 'clarion call' to get the new nation infrastructurally off the ground" in a region of the new nation that developmentally lagged behind the west (P. Ghosh 1995: 135). But, 1971 proved a dangerous year for Biharis. As Yunas Samad reports, "Biharis, many of whom had joined the para-military forces in support of the army crackdown against Bangladeshi separatism, became pariahs in both countries and were left to languish in refugee camps" (2007: 106). Bengali Muslims can likewise claim a significant place in the story of the idea of "Pakistan," for it was in Bengal in 1906 that the Muslim League first came into being. Thus, the Bengalis' and Biharis' precarious situations, post-1971, their very statelessness, rips apart a nationalist mythology/history based, in part, on the figure of the muhajir. For these reasons, I assert, the Bengalis and Biharis in Aarvi's, Farrukhi's, and Husain's stories manifest the historical realities of these groups while also functioning as figures central to any notion of "Pakistaniness" from its inception as both an idea and as a geographically bound nation.

With these historical circumstances in mind, the stories' concentration on place emphasizes the stateless condition of Bengalis and Biharis and calls forth what Lisa Malkki calls the "technology of power" (1992: 34) that Pakistan and Bangladesh employed to deal with this condition of statelessness: the internment camp. Power or control over stateless populations is important because of the cracks such groups reveal in territorially based identities and the rights that, instead of being inherent in "humanness," actually accrue to people by virtue of a nation's ability to confer (or strip away) citizenship. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt elaborates upon the connection between statelessness, rights, and the camps. Because "every attempt by international conferences to establish some legal status for stateless people failed because no agreement could possibly replace the *territory* to which an alien [...] must be deportable," Arendt argues, the camps

offered "the only practical substitute for a nonexistent homeland" (1994: 284; emphasis added). The "homeland" or nation is necessary – place is necessary – to construct identity, at least in a paradigm, such as the one that has dominated throughout the twentieth century, that looks to the nation-state as grantor of human rights and as people's "natural" site of belonging. And, according to Judith Butler, denationalized peoples also shore up the significance of belonging to the homeland, for their dispossession is "not outside [national] politics" (Butler and Chakravorty Spivak 2007: 5–6). Biharis, having been denationalized by the government of Pakistan, as Sumit Sen argues (1999: 641), especially exemplify this notion.[5] They have been figuratively unplaced; yet, ironically, to comprehend the Biharis' identity, the governments of Pakistan and Bangladesh have had to emplace them (or the majority of them) in specifically designated sectors, districts, camps.[6] Aarvi's story, "Godhra Camp," takes up the trope of the camp directly, while Farrukhi's and Husain's stories adopt a metaphor of place-based constraint in their representations of place.

From its opening, Naeem Aarvi's "Godhra Camp" establishes the centrality of place while it also individuates its unnamed narrator from the story's other inhabitants. In its first eight paragraphs, the narrative sketches an unnerving view of an internment camp, wherein an unbalanced woman, grasping barbed wire even as she bleeds, cries out, "'Shams … uddin … Shamsu … ddin'" (2008: 184). A crowd *outside* the barbed wire fence observes the woman and benefits from the "explanation" of a young man who is also, apparently, behind the fence, for the narrator identifies the young man's "unmistakable refugee accent" (184). This young refugee tells the crowd that the woman has gone crazy because her husband, formerly of the Pakistani Army, joined the Mukti Bahini and subsequently died in action (184). This exegesis allows the assembled crowd to determine, "'Oh! So she is mad and the wife of a Bengali traitor'" (184). Satisfied, the crowd disperses. Because the narrative voice of the opening paragraphs shares with the reader this account of the woman's behavior before that voice switches into the first person, we can assume that our first person narrator is a part of the crowd that observes the woman and accepts the young man's explanation. The narrator's presence among the crowd is important for at least three reasons: first, it establishes the crowd's mobility in stark contrast to the woman's and the young man's confinement behind the barbed wire; the contrast between the group outside the fence and those inside it sharpens with the details of the detainees' ethnic identities: they're Bengalis, whose accents sound foreign to the crowd, thereby establishing the crowd as "natives" to the place or, simply, (West) Pakistanis; and, finally, the narrator's emergence from the crowd as an individual through the establishment of a first person point of view in the ninth paragraph suggests his differentiation from a mass view.[7]

The narrator's difference from the crowd matters because it facilitates the use of discontinuous time in the story. Although the story opens with the scene just described, once the narrator takes the stage in the first person,