churian homeland as they moved into China proper in 1644; and the refusal of the Manchu bannermen to return to Manchuria from the early nineteenth century, having become accustomed to life in China. Of tremendous interest is the author’s bifurcated treatment of the Manchu’s Manchurianization and their de-Manchurianization after 1911. Overthrown and expelled by Han revolutionaries, some Manchu finally returned to their homeland, only to find themselves marginalized in Japanese-founded Manchoukuo from 1932 to 1945. The revival of Manchu territorial identity was, Shao argues, more a work of the Chinese racial nationalists who had sloganized their expulsion from China proper into their rightful ethnic homeland of Manchuria. Shao is at his best when he contrasts Sun Yat-sen’s secret plan to lease Manchuria to Japan to finance his nationalist cause with the subsequent impassioned Chinese nationalist drive to “recover” Manchuria for China in the wake of the Japanese creation of Manchoukuo. After the war, criminalized and punished for their association with the Japanese, the Manchus not only lost their homeland but were largely deprived of minority nationality rights to territorial autonomy in the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

The discussion of territorialization and de-territorialization is carefully interwoven with a sophisticated analysis of Manchu ethnic identity. The book starts with the Manchu eight-banner identity, whose complexity is compounded by the Qing institutions of two other “ethnic” eight banners: the Mongol eight banners and the Hanjun eight banners, the latter largely composed of Han people. Shao documents the tortuous relationship between the Manchus and Hanjun eight banners, and their eventual merger into a “banner” ethnic identity called Qizu at the beginning of the Republican period, and then finally a Manzu or Man(chu) nationality in the PRC. Shao acutely captures the irony of the Manchu ethnic identity dilemma by noting that it was the Manchu who initiated their de-ethnicization by promoting the inclusivist notion of the Chinese nation (zhongguoren), but the Chinese distinction of Han and barbarian ultimately ethnicized the Manchu. A highlight of the book is Shao’s nuanced study of the postwar trial and execution of a Manchu royal woman, Aisin-Gioro Xiyong, also a Japanese national, for treason against China. Her execution was legally justified by imposing on her a Chinese national identity. Thus what we have is a picture of the Manchu who experienced modernity as a twice-punished people: as their empire crumbled, the bannermen were killed en masse by revanchist Chinese nationalists for being alien intruders. After World War II, however, they were charged with treason by the Chinese, not for their Manchu identity but for their Chineseness.

This richly textured and historically sensitive book is a welcome contribution to the current debate about Manchu identity politics. It nevertheless suffers from several drawbacks. First, despite the rich content and various approaches, drawing on anthropology, history, geography, postcolonial and cultural studies perspectives, the book is undertheorized. Second, there is scant explanation provided for people’s preference for a Manchu/Manzu ethnic identity given its recent history of stigma in contemporary China. And third, the Mongol eight banners have never been brought into the equation with the Manchu and Hanjun eight banners; indeed there is a conflation of Mongol eight banners with Mongol zasag banners. This omission, in my view, limits the book to a rehearsal of the mainstream view of the Qing pivoting around the relationship between the Manchu and Han alone. Given that the Mongols were once an important ally of the Manchu, that half of Manchuria was and remains Mongolian territory, and that half of Mongolia ultimately declared independence from the (Manchu) Qing in December 1911, Mongolia’s exclusion from the analysis of Manchu identity politics and the transformation of China deserves a more careful explanation than accorded in this book. That is perhaps a subject for another project.


Yasmin Saikia’s new book, replete with heart-searing testimonies of women’s sufferings, raises concerns about the 1971 civil war in Bangladesh and its long shadow over some women’s lives. How can a retelling of the war from the perspective of its most vulnerable victims contribute toward lessening conflict in the present? Can the willful silencing of women’s stories and the gradual misrepresentation of birangonas (victims of sexual violence who were termed “brave women” by the new government in Bangladesh) be forgiven? Can forgiveness of some individual perpetrators, now repentant, take the place of a collective accounting of war crimes? What does it mean to be human?

Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh opens with a critique of official Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi representations of the 1971 conflict. The author expresses her hope that new retellings of the war, with women’s narratives at the forefront, might enable the work of healing to begin. Indeed Saikia goes further: she draws on the “concept of forgiveness by presenting the Islamic concept of huqut al-ibad (rights of humans) and individual responsibility to suggest closure for the traumatic violence of 1971” (p. xii). In addition to collecting over a hundred testimonies of women in Bangladesh and meeting over a hundred military personnel in Pakistan, Saikia has searched for records of the war in local archives across Bangladesh. While some archives proved to be absolutely bereft of any evidence, others, such as the Women’s Welfare Department in Sylhet, are unexpectedly rich. (The book’s bibliography, however, bears no references to local archives.)

Saikia is at pains to argue that Bengalis were not only
victims of violence in 1971, they were also perpetrators; crucially, there were also non-Bengali victims of violence. But this broad-brushed tarring of whole groups sits uneasily beside the more fine-grained analysis of “victims” and “perpetrators” that the 1971 war merits. Similarly, Indian agents are accused of “luring” and “encouraging” East Pakistanis to migrate to India (pp. 38, 39, 42, 67). Yet there is very little information from her Indian interviewees about what this entailed or how, for instance, “encouragement” to leave homes and villages in East Pakistan might have been received by the would-be refugees, some of whom became immigrants to Assam. After all, as I have argued in my own work (Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India [2011]), it is not easy to leave one’s homeland for another—a point reinforced by Saikia’s interviewees (pp. 195, 205).

The heart of the book holds testimonies of birangonas, women soldiers, and women social workers, as well as Pakistani men who participated in the war. Saikia’s lengthy introduction to each testimony includes an account of how she met the person as well as what she learned from these interactions. This tends to predetermine the reader’s reaction to the testimony that follows. Saikia privileges the testimonies of women who told her “their experiences as a didactic exercise” (p. 85) over those who could do so “only in disjointed fragmentary sentences” (p. 89). She suggests that a perpetrator’s acknowledgement of violence can deliver “justice . . . that no court of law or state can” (pp. xiv, 237). Indeed, her measured recounting of women’s testimonies contrasts with her strong views on how these testimonies can be made to work toward peace. Saikia asserts: “I do not believe the lack of enunciation about women’s experiences . . . should limit our ability to understand what women suffered because it is not language but ethics that should direct us to grasp the experiences of others” (p. 67).

The relationships among listening, redress, healing, “writing a people’s history” of the war, helping toward “the resolution of political battles,” and “empowering humanity in South Asia to reform and become better” (pp. 8, 71, 218)—all of which are stated to be the goals of this book—need unpacking. Saikia might have taken a leaf out of the deeply sensitive work of Veena Das (Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary [2007]), wherein the relationship between pain, language, and ethics is revealed to be far more complex than is suggested here.

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Canada and the United States


Back when he did standup comedy, The Daily Show host Jon Stewart used to joke about a Canadian woman who approached him at a party. “What do Americans really think of Canada?” she asked. “We don’t,” he replied.

When it comes to the 1960s, Americans thought just a bit more about Canada than Stewart suggested, but only in isolated areas. Of course, Canada was the place to which draft dodgers could flee. Important popular musicians were Canadian—Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, four-fifths of The Band, plus a number of others. Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau was the kind of hip politician Americans would never elect. He was progressive and cool; his young wife left him and ran after the Rolling Stones.

But aside from specific moments and situations, Canada in the 1960s is rarely considered in the overall vision of the era. Stuart Henderson sets out to rectify this lack of understanding in his detailed and comprehensive history of the Yorkville section of Toronto. Yorkville was a kind of Greenwich Village and Haight-Ashbury rolled into one. But it had some distinctly Canadian aspects.

Henderson describes pre-1960s Toronto as the equivalent of a U.S. midwestern city, stolid and quiet, without the cachet of Montreal, for example. But it grew to become a cultural hub, as beats, gays, and “greasers” (the label for rebellious working-class youths) began to congregate in Toronto’s Yorkville section. Paralleling the attraction of many U.S. cities, Yorkville became a magnet for runaways, weekend rebels, and others drawn to an urban locale they believed more tolerant of marginal lifestyles. Ultimately, it emerged as the hippie capital of Canada.

Henderson bounces between extremely detailed descriptions of numerous events and activities in Yorkville, and academic discussions aimed to locate a topic within the modern scholarly context. On each side, occasionally, there is too much detail. His research is prodigious and the minutiae of events sometimes overwhelm the meaning of the moment he is describing. His understanding of modern theory is also impressive, but sometimes distracts from his narrative.

There are interesting and revealing stories to tell about Yorkville, and Henderson obliges. Perhaps, as a Canadian, he is wary of trying to situate the Toronto and Canadian story within the context of the emergence of the counterculture in the United States, but that is where the ultimate import of his story lies. How did the Canadian context shift or modify the counterculture experience?

Clear connections existed between the Canadian 1960s and the United States. Like Greenwich Village, Yorkville was an important folk scene in the early 1960s, with performers like Pete Seeger joining Canadian folkies like Gordon Lightfoot. It was this scene that drew the young Neil Young and Joni Mitchell. Arkanas bluesman Ronnie Hawkins relocated to Canada. His new backup band of young Canadians, The Hawks, ultimately left him, evolving into The Band. Rock promoter Bill Graham, of Fillmore Auditorium fame, brought the Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead to Toronto for a free concert, intending to spark