



Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar. *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. xiv + 288 pp. \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-13846-8; (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-51101-8.

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Gilmartin on Zamindar *Long Partition*

Over the last couple decades, histories of the partition of India and its consequences have proliferated. But Vazira Zamindar's study stands out for the originality of its conception and its importance in making sense of this seminal event. Zamindar is well aware of the complex history of political negotiation and conflict that led to the British decision to divide the subcontinent in 1947, but this is not the focus of her book. Nor is the violence that marked the drawing of the partition boundaries between India and Pakistan, though this plays an important part in her story. Rather, Zamindar's book is a study of the ways that the logic of partition—and of the migrations that it set off—fundamentally shaped the very process of state-building and bureaucratic consolidation that produced the Indian and Pakistani states. It is in this sense a book, as the title suggests, about *The Long Partition*, the long-term process of official engagement (by both Pakistan and India) with migration, return, and belonging, that helped to constitute, amidst much contingency and bureaucratic violence, the meaning of separate nations and states. Partition eluded easy closure in the years after 1947, she argues, as it was a development that put at the very process of making modern nation-states to trial and scrutiny (p. 13).

The strength of Zamindar's book lies in her dramatizing clearly that the making of these states occurred against the backdrop of the thousands of complex per-

sonal and family decisions made in these years by migrants (and non-migrants) themselves. Few historians have, in fact, shown so clearly how the histories of everyday, personal decisions inescapably shaped the parameters in which high-level state-making and nation-building occurred. Zamindar focuses in particular on Delhi and Karachi, and on the multivalent issues that shaped decisions to migrate or stay in those two new capital cities. Though violence and the fear it produced played a major role, such decisions were grounded also in the everyday worlds of family, work, marriage, and property. Zamindar documents these concerns through interviews conducted in both Delhi and Karachi, and through the traces that such varied motives and entanglements have left behind in bureaucratic and court records. In juxtaposing such personal worlds with official efforts to formulate and define a rationality of state control over the process of migration, Zamindar in fact shows clearly *both* the power of bureaucratic control and violence in disrupting everyday lives, *and* the contingencies that made it impossible for either the Indian or Pakistani states to fully or easily deploy a logic of state rationality on partition's aftermath. In fact, it is one of the great strengths of Zamindar's account that one is left in the end with a sense both of the power and violence of the process of state-building that partition engendered, and, at the same time, of the state's inevitable limitations in the face of the complexity of everyday life that defined partition's

migrations.

The contradictions in post-partition state-building are traced by Zamindar through a series of illustrations, none more compelling than her careful delineation of the critical problem of evacuee property, an issue she shows to be far more complex than has usually been portrayed. On the one hand, control and redistribution of evacuee property represented a key framework in which the state asserted its claims to rationalizing developmental authority by using rehabilitation to normalize state oversight over a property-owning society in the wake of partition's migrations. But, on the other hand, as Zamindar shows, this process in some cases only thinly masked state participation in coerced displacements from property, in which Muslims in India were, in effect, expropriated to make room for Hindu and Sikh migrants. A full exchange of minority populations was in fact negotiated only in the Punjab, but resettlement of evacuees, including pressure on intending migrants to give up property, became a mechanism, in both India and Pakistan, of state control over minorities. Indeed, issues of migration, in Delhi for example, became increasingly caught up not only with questions about migration to Pakistan (which did not necessarily want more Muslim migrants from India), but also with the designation of Muslim zones within the city, as a mechanism of protecting Muslims, or (depending on the arguments being put forward) clearing Muslims and thus freeing up evacuee property in other parts of the city.

In fact, Zamindar's book raises critical questions about the meaning of voluntary migration in the wake of partition. Much of the law surrounding migration and citizenship in the years after partition was predicated on the notion that migrants made free choices in terms of their decisions to settle in India or Pakistan, but in fact, as Zamindar shows, the issue of choice was extremely complex and can hardly be assessed independently of the personal and bureaucratic worlds (including those regarding property) in which many migrants and non-migrants were enmeshed. The very process of state-building in these years was caught up with the problems in reconciling the legal notion of choice (as it arose in migration cases) with attempts to establish fixed (and thus, in the end, unchosen) categories of citizenship. As Zamindar notes of one court case as India sought to fix the meanings of citizenship in the wake of partition, allowing an individual ... to choose his own nationality, was to open a Pandora's box in this social and political landscape (p. 208). Such contradictions were doubly evident in cases involving women and children. And yet, to

escape entirely the paradox of choice surrounding the interpretation of migration and citizenship was impossible, as her discussion of the complex history of government issuance of permits and passports makes clear.

Among the most compelling arguments running through Zamindar's account are those highlighting the complex relationships between citizenship based on territory and that based on religion. Implicit of course in the subcontinent's territorial partition was a vision of territorial nationality, a vision embraced, as Zamindar makes clear, by both India and Pakistan. And yet, the couching of the demand for Pakistan before 1947 in terms of a two-nation theory based on religion complicated efforts to come to terms with this transformation. In the case of Karachi, policies on migration were marked by considerable tension, as Zamindar shows, between a Muhajir community (whose views were often reflected in the Urdu newspaper, *Jang*) that saw Pakistan's embracing of migrants as a key to the state's religious/ideological identity. Yet, the government of Sind was far less welcoming of migrants, as, ironically, was the government of Pakistan, which worried about its state capacities being overwhelmed by a wholesale migration of Muslims from India. In India, post-partition policies came face to face with the Muslim question, the problem of reconciling a territorial view of citizenship and nationality with the notion that Muslims, as a special category, had to specially prove their identification with India (their choice) in ways others did not. Zamindar's book in fact provides a powerful historical backdrop for understanding the special disabilities faced by Muslims as Indian nationhood and identity solidified in the wake of partition. Yet, at the same time, her work also shows the complex legal and ideological negotiations that marked the efforts of the bureaucracy and the courts to come to terms with the complexity of the varied positions of Muslims in India and their relationship to Muslims (family, friends, spouses) across the newly drawn borders.

Zamindar's history of *The Long Partition* is an important contribution to the subcontinent's history literature for many reasons. First, it persuasively makes the case that we view India's partition not as a single event, but as a long-term process, with critical consequences for our historical understandings of the cultural framework within which state-building and nation-building took their distinct courses in Pakistan and India. Second, it suggests the critical importance of treating the histories of Pakistan and India together in these years. One of her most powerful arguments lies in her contention that

the history of migration tied together the histories of the two states in ways that makes it highly problematic to write their histories after 1947 entirely separately. Third, it illustrates dramatically the importance of linking together the history of everyday life and that of the state, for it is clear from her presentation that neither can be fully understood without the other.

Last, and in some ways most intriguingly, her work suggests critical frames in which it is important for historians to reconsider the entire story of India's parti-

tion, after 1947 and before as well. Though Zamindar herself does not take on the story of the events leading up to partition, the various tensions surrounding migration and its meanings in the years after 1947 raise critical questions for framing the larger story. Partition can no longer be viewed as an aberration in the larger histories of nationalism and state-building that define the subcontinent's twentieth-century history; rather it crystallizes critical questions about the relationship between state-building, national identity, everyday life, and individual choice that marked the end of the colonial era.

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