

The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh: Through the Eyes of America

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An Interview with Professor Nurul Islam

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Statement of Purpose

The intention of this project is to educate people on the South Asian War of 1971 but more specifically it is to show the connection of this event to the events in America during that time and overall the Cold War. The War of 71 was an event where Bangladesh fought for independence from their oppressors, the Pakistani's. Through the first hand experiences of a Bengali scholar, the project reveals the general perceptive of the American public at that time, a demographic that has not been explored into much in the other Historiographies of this time period.

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Biography

Professor Nurul Islam is a renowned economist from Bangladesh. Nurul Islam was born in 1929 at what is now, Chittagong Bangladesh. Throughout his life, he was always surrounded with books and papers as he has been an economist ever since he graduated from college. Professor Islam has lived in many places such as Italy, England, and Bangladesh and in America where he currently resides. He received a B.A and an M.A in economics from Dhaka University and later went to Harvard where he got a M.A and a Ph.D in economics. After doing his doctorate in Economics from Harvard University in 1955, he worked as Professor of Economics, Dhaka University, and Director of the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (later Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies). Dr. Islam is noted for his part in the independence war of Bangladesh from Pakistan in the early seventies. He has written many books about his involvement in the war. Most of his book talks in depth about his opportunities to formulate policies in the early years of Bangladesh especially the six points program. Due to his line of work, Professor Nurul Islam is a very serious person and even in retirement still spends time working, as he is giving speeches and delivering presentations around D.C where he has lived last 10+ years.

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Historical Contextual Paper: America towards the Bangladesh War for Independence

Mush Nabi, a Bengali-American writes in the introduction to a book by his father, "My parents grew up in a corner of the world where the only thing that separated them from getting an education. On the other hand, my life was one where such things were granted" (Nabi 11). Mush Nabi is not the only one in Bangladesh who feels like that: many young adult Bengalis who have made their home in America feel the same way due to their parents experiences in 1971. When Mush Nabi's father was his age, his studies were interrupted in 1971 because he went to fight the war of liberation for his country. Many years later, many years later after settling down in the US he wrote a book on his experiences during the war. The book shows what a tremendous impact the book had on his father and his generation. Also the book had an impact on future generations of Bengali's, including his son, Mush Nabi. Bengali's are not alone in this thought of mind. In fact, many people in other countries feel similarly when thinking about their parents. It doesn't matter whether they are in Russia,

France or America; the revolution still serves as a haunting memory. In fact many countries have begun their birth through a violent battle which saddens but also inspires the older generation when they talk about their nation's history. The Bangladesh War for Independence is no exception. The tragedies that took place during the time period were heavy and intense. Many historians claimed that, "The mass killings in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) in 1971 vie with the annihilation of the Soviet POWs, the holocaust against the Jews, and the genocide in Rwanda as the most concentrated act of genocide in the twentieth century" (Bangladesh Genocide Archive). The war took place in 1971, and was fought for independence from an abusive government. Pakistan, the bigger power, took control of its eastern region that they had received from the Indian-Pakistani split in 1947 and started to adopt an omnipresent control over all its citizens. They did this by legalizing practices and suppressing any source of anger from their second class

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neighbors. Then it came to a point when the Bengalis wanted their own government and proclaimed independence. From March 26 to December 16, 1971, these two sides fought a bloody war that resulted in the birth of a new nation. Although this war went largely unnoticed by later generations of Americans and the rest of the world, the generation in the 70's were well aware of this war and were actively following it. There have been many sources that documented their feelings about the war and also their feelings towards the U.S Government. To understand the global perspective of the War of 1971, one must examine the reasoning and actions from both sides as well as gain a firsthand perspective from someone who directly participated in the events of 1971.

The first event that led to 1971 was the split of Britain and India in 1947. The reason why Indians desired independence from Britain, their mother colony, was spread over 100 years. Britain originally used India as a trading post through a trading company, The East India Company. One of the important goods the company traded was fabrics. Indian women made fabrics for clothes and furnishings. These products later came into high demand and were imported to Britain in large quantities. Although Britain desired the prowess of the trading potential that India had, they did not care for their politics at first. However this changed. Britain started to take control of cities like Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi and established control. The young Indians at that time were initially oblivious to their rule, but soon took notice as they grew older. Mr. Bardhonray, when interviewed by Sutanu Biswas, was asked if the British rule had any impact on him while he was growing up. Mr. Bardhonray replied: "Up to school, we didn't think much. When we came to the college, then we realized that British rule is not good for us" (Biswas 31). Despite its Indian subjects realizing the true nature of their oppressors, Britain ruled India until 1947. Many people have analyzed this situation and presented their own opinions. One such person is Professor Peter Marshall. He noted this about the British reign, "By the end of the century British rule had been consolidated over the first conquests and it was being extended up the Ganges valley to Delhi and over most of the peninsula of southern India. By then the British had established a military dominance that would enable them in the next fifty years to subdue all the remaining Indian states of any consequence,

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either conquering them or forcing their rulers to become subordinate allies" (Marshall). Finally, after almost two hundred years of British rule, in 1947, the Indians, led by Gandhi, finally got independence after a prolonged struggle. But independence came with a price. Before they left, the British divided India into two countries, a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim majority Pakistan. This was in response to a demand by the Muslims of united India for a separate homeland for them.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, World War 2 had just ended in 1945. Hitler avoided by committing suicide. Germany was weakened. This relates to the war of 1971 in that the outcomes had a direct effect on American and European involvement in Southeast Asia from 1947 to 1971. Before World War 2, many European countries enjoyed a lot of power. South East Asia, as well as other third world countries, was strongly contained with little or no rights of their own. However after the war, European countries, such as France, Britain and others, lost most of their power and influence over the smaller, third world

countries. This led to the rise of countries like India, Pakistan and China. Although Britain retained influence and its government was still strong, it suffered a loss of influence with the double blow of losing India and other colonies in the region

The Partition of India in 1947 shocked the world and changed the scale of power in Europe, with Britain losing another of the colonies it had a hand in creating. Dr Crispin Bates notes, "It set a vital precedent for the negotiated winding up of European empires elsewhere" (Bates). The first job the British accomplished was to split the land into what would become, for the time being, India and East/West Pakistan. One nation, Pakistan was to become the Muslim-majority area, and the other land was to become the Hindu-majority area, India. The split was agreed between the British rulers, the Indian Congress Party and the Muslim League as a result of the demand of the Muslims in India to have a separate homeland. The Indian Congress Party, which initially argued to keep India intact, finally gave in. In the few weeks leading to the formal independence of India and Pakistan in mid-August 1947, there were riots between Hindus and Muslims which led to a lot of killing and a large scale migration on both

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sides, Muslims moving from India to Pakistan and Hindus from Pakistan to India. About 10 million people migrated during this time, the largest mass migration in human history (Bates). These riots, killing and uprooting of people left a lot of bitterness on both sides. In addition, although Pakistan became its own nation, they had another problem with the two types of people living in that country: West Pakistanis and East Pakistanis (Bengalis). The Muslims split with the Hindus to gain hope and freedom, but once Pakistan was formed, the Bengalis were the people feeling empty. This discontent later led into one of the goriest battles in history. It also was one event that did open the eyes of the government of U.S and the Soviet Union, who, on the other side of the world, had been fighting their own cat and mouse battle.

After World War 2, many changes were in order. Smaller third world countries at the time, such as China, India/Pakistan and Vietnam were slowly becoming more relevant. U.S and the Soviet Union were quickly becoming the two largest super powers in the world, and entered a period where the third world countries had a direct effect on the Cold War. The rising countries held economic and strategic benefits that the U.S and the Soviet Union could use. The Cold War, despite the common perception that the U.S and Soviet Union were the only big powers in the world, was slowly contradicted and included several countries with big and important roles.

Time went on and South East Asia was unaffected, as it was not crucial. South Asia wasn't indirectly involved until the 1960's, when the U.S fought in the Vietnam War. China, led by Mao, allied with the Soviet Union, seeing them as a good partner for their future. But during the 60's while the Vietnam War took place China became disconnected with the Soviet Union. However, not before long, Nixon and America, as well as the rest of the world, turned their attention to China and the whole area of Pakistan, setting the stage for a big conflict of economic benefits.

After India and Pakistan gained their independence from Britain many questions formed. An important issue was that of Hinduism vs. Islam. There were two states that held the most attention: Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan and India were fighting over those territories and the UN had to mediate

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the situation in 1948. Once they reached a truce, Jammu went to Pakistan and Kashmir went to India. Although they "lost" the war, the Pakistani government thought the majority Muslim states of Jammu and Kashmir were rightfully theirs (Office of the Historian).

Pakistan, after its creation, had to handle its own problems. Once they got the Indians out, it was mainly Muslims with only some Hindus staying on. The two types of people living there were Pakistanis and Bengalis. The country was geographically separated into two provinces, West Pakistan and East Pakistan (also known as East Bengal) with India in between. There were four ethnic groups in West Pakistan: Punjabis, Pashtos, Sindhis and Baluchistan while Bengalis were living in East Bengal. Bengalis had the majority population compared to the West Pakistanis but the latter had more influence in government, the army

and in business and thus, more power overall. Instead of ruling with a democracy, Pakistan ruled with an iron fist. Pakistan reverted to the ways of their own past oppressors, the British, and spearheaded a reign of discrimination and cruelty that created resentment among the Bengalis. Historical observers noted that with all actions from 1947 to 1970, with especially 1958 to 1970, the Bengalis were always "shortsighted" (Blood 4). This led to the eventual need for war to get a fair government. Rules and decisions were passed to hurt the East while helping the West. A feeling of resentment started to crop up as many Bengalis felt exploited by their oppressors and they started their own protest movements. They also limited their rights, freedom, and denied them equal opportunity in the government but none was worse than their ultimate crackdown: language. Bangladeshis spoke their own language, Bengali, and the Pakistanis spoke several languages, including Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Beluchi and Urdu. Soon after Pakistan was formed, the ruling party, the Muslim League, made Urdu the official language of the country despite the fact that only 3% of them are actually spoke Urdu and over 56% spoke Bengali. This rule was insulting to the Bengalis because the government made a language spoken by the minority the official language of a country ignoring the majority population. The Pakistani government's reason for this sudden change, according to Tanweer Mahmood 10

Akram, was that, "Since Pakistan was more dominant, they felt that their own language, Urdu was more fitting for the new nation rather than Bengali, the language of the minority. They also went on to say that Urdu had more in common with Arabic, the language used in Islam, the religion from both sides, that Urdu was more appropriate than Bengali which had more in common with Hinduism, the official religion of India and not Pakistan/East Bengal" (Akram). The Bengalis were understandably upset that they didn't have a choice in expressing their freedom and tried to resist their oppressors. However, they had no chance against the Pakistanis due to the latter's power among the higher class. To the influential people in the government, Urdu was a common and easy language to understand. However, Urdu was alien to the Bangladeshis. They protested the ruling on the basis that the government can't restrict freedom of speech and expect the people to comply with unfair rules. They demanded a change in the rule to include the freedom of language. However Governor-General Jinnah declared in 1952 "Let me make it clear to you that the State Language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language. Anyone who tries to mislead you is really the enemy of Pakistan...so far as the State Language is concerned Pakistan's language shall be Urdu" (Akram). Many Bengalis were frustrated by this and started to think about independence. This led to the language movement of 1952, the first big event in the country (Long Way to War). Some days are remembered for a battle or a martyr. February 21st 1952 was no exception to that rule. For a few years, East Bengal tried to protest and change the ruling on the language barrier. They were successful in stopping Pakistani's attempt to crackdown on their cultures but those protests did not bring any change. Pakistan largely ignored the revolts as they attempted to eradicate the Bangla language by changing it to Arabic script. They even tried Roman numerals but they could not complete the task because of the opposition led by the Bengali scholars and students. This conflict increased till on February 21, 1952, Pakistani soldiers maliciously opened fire on a crowd during a student demonstration. Many people were killed, including university students. The Bengalis started looking further at

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Independence as their only solution to resolve this issue. The fight over language rights was the beginning of the Bengali struggle which reached an important milestone in 1970: the general election to elect a parliament for Pakistan. The election was supposed to bring an end to the military rule that had existed in Pakistan since 1958. After 1958, Pakistanis upped their attempts to contain the Bengalis and maintain their control. Historians and diplomats each noted that the period of 1958-70 was considered the tensest period during the 20+ year's conflict. Archer K. Blood, an American Diplomat who was posted in East Pakistan during the late 1960s and early 1970s has written that most Bengalis favored an immediate end to the Martial Law Administration (Blood 3). Even though President Ayub Khan promised "an early to constitutional

government", he really had a supercilious view of politicians and the people to have their own government system (Blood 3). Instead he introduced a new political system called Basic Democracies (Blood 3). It was a new program that was intended to educate a largely illiterate population in government by giving them limited representation. While it seemed like a compromising gesture, Khan kept heavy control over their views. Many historians did not approve of Khan's plan and they thought it was going back to British rule where the government controls what the people think do or act (Blood 3). The plan also made Bengalis despise Khan even more and it set the stage for the 1970 Election. .

In the election of 1970, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his party, the Awami League, won the general election, taking 167 out of the 313 seats available. The Pakistan government then took one the most ignorant position they have ever taken in their history: denying the Awami League its rights as the rightful majority party. This issue put the Bengalis over the edge and they demanded independence soon after. After 23 years of containment by the Pakistanis, Bangladeshis decided to go to war to resolve the issue.

The Election of 1970 and its aftermath set the course for their independence. Although Bengalis gained more influence than they had in 1947, they still were treated like second class citizens. Despite West Pakistan "attempting" to compromise, the East Pakistanis didn't fall for it and found out that they Mahmood 12

were "shortsighted" on every deal (Blood 4). Bengalis had accomplished many goals, such as stopping the crackdown on language going any further than what it was, and were getting some representatives in government; however those were ignored by the Pakistanis, who refused to share more power with the Bengalis. Years of this struggle reached its peak in 1971. By this time, most Bengalis started referring to their province of East Pakistan as Bangladesh (Land of the Bengalis) which was the original name of the land before the British named it Bengal.

The first few months of 1971 saw heavy tension between the two groups and it was only a matter of time before war was officially declared. The war started on March 26 1971, but some say the war really began in 1970 and intensified in March of the next year. On March 3rd, Bangabandhu ("Friend of Bengal") Sheikh Mujibur Rahman called for a strike and peaceful movement in order to gain independence. Rahman specifically called for "Continuous Strikes", strikes that happened daily from 7 AM to 2 PM. Continuous Strike was when people strike for a certain time every day. Many Bengalis followed his word, and closed down stores, banks, airplanes and even railroads to counter the Pakistanis, who in response, used barbaric techniques, such as killing dissidents, in an attempt to strike fear in East Bengal. Not surprisingly, Pakistan could not sway the Bengalis' mind as they kept protesting peacefully. Despite the resistance, many Bengalis were killed by the Pakistanis in street protests, leaving the two sides apart in any peace talks. On March 5th, President Khan announced that the government would meet on March 25th to discuss future plans. This appalled Bengalis because Khan's tone showed that he was not interested in reconciliation and he also chastised Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, their trusted leader. Due to this disappointing announcement, many Bengalis sought after Rahman and asked for advice. For a few days, his party, the Awami League, was questioning what to do. But at the end Rahman decided to deliver a speech, a speech that would be remembered by every Bengali of that generation.

On March 7th 1971, Sheikh Mujib Rahman spoke to a crowd about what Bengal should do. In his speech, he wanted the crowd to "build a fortress in each and every household and be prepared to

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fight for their freedom" (Rahman). Rahman also wanted implementation of a 4 point plan. He demanded from the Pakistani Government: immediate withdrawal of martial law, immediate withdrawal of troops back into barracks, inquiry into the loss of life, immediate transfer of power to the representatives by March 25th. The crowd listened to his every word and prepared for the worst. Rahman ended his speech with the passionate words: "our struggle this time is a struggle for freedom, our struggle this time is a struggle for independence. Joy Bangla" (Rahman).

The Civil Disobedience Movement went on until the end of the month. On March 25, the Pakistani army leadership met and decided to crackdown. This led to the

next day, where Tajuddin Ahmed, the PM of East Bengal stated, "We are independent" (Ahmed). He stated the reason being that Bangladesh has no choice but get freedom by fighting the Pakistanis. Thousands were killed daily and the Bengalis were living in fear. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was declared public enemy #1 and arrested and the government started a manhunt for anyone who worked with him, including the scholars. Due to the impending danger, many Bengali scholars, including eminent economist, Professor Nurul Islam, fled to India and then decided to go into different areas, where they can be safe and also drum up support to Bangladesh and cut off any advantages for Pakistan.

While Bangladesh was fighting the Pakistanis for respect, America was nearby, fighting a major war: the Cold War. In the 1960's, America was in the mist of the Cold War. It was fighting the Vietnam War because it wanted to "protect" areas such as Vietnam from communism. It ended up losing the Vietnam War and respect from East Asia. However during the time, China, who used to be its enemy, broke off from the Soviet Union. During the same time as Bangladesh's War of Independence in 1971, America, under Nixon, had poor relations with East Asia, and saw the falling apart of China and the Soviet Union as a way to repair the relationship. Nixon then set out a path that would have America deal with China. The reason that they decided to do that was because China slowly came to the realization that the U.S was not the enemy and that they needed to work

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together. Both sides were coming off from upheavals: Cultural Revolution and the Vietnam War. Both Mao and Nixon agreed on the basis that a better relationship was the best hope for both their countries. They then discussed shortcuts that would help them reach the alliance faster.

America could have done this in two ways: through Pakistan or Romania. Nixon and Kissinger found out that Romania would have been difficult because they were uncomfortable about the negotiations that would have taken place. So they went to President Yahya Khan in Pakistan in order to gain access to China. In fact, Henry Kissinger wrote in his book that Nixon received a letter from Yahya Khan, which said that, "they would be prepared to send an emissary to a mutually convenient place to arrange high level contacts with China" (Kissinger 229). America did talk to China, and the relationship grew better due to their common foreign policy.

When Pakistan got involved in a bitter war with Bangladesh and the U.S government as a part of their agreement supported Pakistan, supplying weapons and ships to aid in their defense. However the main reason that Pakistan was aided by the U.S. was that since India was allied with the Soviet Union, the U.S did not want to risk any chance to give the Soviet Union any advantage. Robert Gates, former CIA Director wrote in his book, "In the 1971 war between India and Pakistan, Nixon and Kissinger both believed that Moscow had played a perfidious role in supporting India that ultimately threatened a Sino Soviet war and U.S involvement on the side of Pakistan and China against the USSR and India" (Gates 40). This went on until some of the exiled scholars as well as the journalists reported the reality of the situation to the general public. In turn, the general public raised enough resistance for the congress to at least talk about the subject.

Meanwhile, in Bangladesh, the scholars left because they were in danger due to their connection to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and he was considered public enemy #1 by Pakistan. They mostly left for India and then went on a foreign effort to block off ties that could help Pakistan. However, that didn't

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stop Pakistan from continuing its most brutal crackdown on Bangladesh. This part is the most haunting memory of these war veterans because it attacked their personal lives. Pakistan grew angry with the Bengalis for disobeying them openly. Many of the surviving members of the older generation have family members who have died or are still alive but were tortured during this period. The Pakistani army put out their ultimate tactic: legalizing all methods of fear which included legalizing rape and rape camps.

Many wars have happened which have horrifying parts. For example, WW2 opened up camps with Japanese-Americans and Japanese and also forcing Jews to leave Germany and Europe. War of 1971 had the rape and rape camps. The numbers would shock people with its gruesome details. Any number between 200,000 to 400,000

women were raped, mutilated or put in rape camps. Also many of them were raped daily and cruelly. Dr. Geoffrey Davis, an Australian doctor noted that he was unusually busy with abortions from the victims that became pregnant. He saw the pain and agony behind the stories they told. . He also mentions that the people he saw were mainly young girls (Hussain). Many of these women live today, and have been changed as people because of what happened to them. These people have been depressed for the last 42 years their life and they can't change a thing. How these events happened was as cruel as the effect.

. Yahya Khan was quoted during a conference, before the war, "Kill three million of them and the rest will eat out of our hands" (Bangladesh Genocide Archive). Pakistan then started with Operation Searchlight in late March. Operation Searchlight was the first step in which Pakistani soldiers took control of many Bengali cities and started to kill all the civilians once the cities were all theirs. They had planned to complete this in a month and they did complete this by May 15th 1971 (Bangladesh Genocide Archives). This only enraged the Bengalis, who refused to leave their country. This operation opened the gate for more massacres in the region. One Pakistani soldier was quoted, "We were told to kill the Hindus and Kafirs (non-believer in God). One day in June, we cordoned a village and were ordered to kill the Kafirs in that area. We found all the village women reciting from the Holy Quran, and the men holding

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special congregational prayers seeking God's mercy. But they were unlucky. Our commanding officer ordered us not to waste any time" (Bangladesh Genocide Archives). Their plan worked. After one week, many people from Dacca and Chittagong attempted to flee and those that did survive lived in India for the next few months and caused India to help Bengal.

If there was one group that wasn't safe from the killings it was the young men and adults. Pakistani soldiers targeted them because they suspected that they were a part of the resistance army or they were going to be a part of the army in the near future. To prevent the resistance army to grow in size and influence, as well as fearing that they will lose their power, many soldiers killed them in the spot and dumped their bodies on the road or in a body of water with all wound opened. They also captured them as well as tortured them. This crackdown terrorized most of them and many young boys, aged between 15 and 25, fled from one village to another, until they reached India. Those that were willing to stay were forced to move by their mother and sisters, concerned about their safety (Bangladesh Genocide Archives).

Despite this war being small compared to the Vietnam War, and on the other side of the world, America took a lot of interest in this event once Operation Searchlight was completed. The two sides, Government and the general public, had different views on which side America should support. The government supported Pakistan because they had a problem with India. Kissinger told Nixon, "The Indians are bastards anyway. They are plotting a war" (Shritvasta). The problem was that India was aligned with the Soviet Union, and America did not want to help out the Russians. America had a big part during the end of the war, by sending out troops and ships to counter the Indian Army, who was then helping the Bengalis. The American government even sent out a nuclear submarine, containing weapons for the Pakistani Army. It is interesting to note that the American Government did not have a problem with the East Bengalis. No recorded documents that suggested that the Bengali's were distrustful to them. In fact many politicians supported the Bengali's during their time of crisis.

Politicians such as Senator Kennedy (Democrat) spoke against the unjust actions of the Pakistanis. On December 7th 1971, Kennedy

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noted, "Fear has gripped East Bengal since the devastating night of March 25th (Muhith 329). Senators, who supported the Bengalis, as proven in first hand documents, often criticized the government for being too slow in their actions in the event. Ted Kennedy in that same speech said, "Mr. President, we should also condemn the world's silence and apathy towards the massive human suffering caused by the refugee flow into India" (Muhith 330). They just didn't want a war in the Asia region after getting out of the Vietnam War. Even Congressman Seymour Halpern (Republican) viewed Nixon's action as unjust, stating that, "Ours should be a policy of non-involvement in the present conflict of Pakistan. Such a policy, I believe, will improve our relations with a number of Asian and

Middle Eastern Nations" (Muhith 270). The government supported Pakistan, but that doesn't mean that the public did. The public saw the actions the Pakistanis performed as barbarous and resonated with the Bengalis because they were the heavy underdog. The way they grew to defend the Bengalis was for a multiple of reasons. Perhaps they had a conscience, or they had sympathy for the Bengalis due to their activities and news reports. They did not feel proud of the fact that the American government sent out weapons for the Pakistanis to carry on with their mass genocide. Bengali activists stressed this point during their protests. They said, "They are mercenaries, we are freedom fighters. They are few, we are many. They are morally corroded, we are morally strong. They may win a few battle, but we will win the war" (Muhith 69). Perhaps the conscience reason why they supported the Bengalis was because their core values were related to their own fight of struggle: the American Revolution. America and Bangladesh were in the same position: fighting for freedom against abusive oppressors and ultimately defeating them. In fact, a few documents reveal that many Bengalis living in America used that comparison when participating in revolts: "It is no different from the struggle that the American people waged against their distant rulers two centuries ago" (Muhith 70). This is how the public came to feel about this situation. They were also swayed by scholars who talked to officials like McNamara, the World Bank President at the time, and the Bundy Brothers, who worked at Harvard. Over time Congress started to go on the side of the public, noting that Nixon needed to stop thinking about Bangladesh as Bengal/India and think about Bangladesh

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as Bengal (U.S Congress). They noted that aiding Pakistan will only end in disaster because if the Pakistanis succeeded then their reign would be a very bloody and cruel regime. Bengal would be a nation that they could trust for the long term (U.S Congress). But perhaps the main reason that the public supported the Bengalis was of the actions of the Bengali activists in America. They revolted and also created a national network which then drew from many sources such as "clandestine notes from India" in order to gain the popular support from the public (Muhith 10). Some of these students, as well as Indian and American students, revolted against the government and demanded that they stop arming Pakistani troops immediately (Muhith 13-14). During a rally on March 29, 1971, in Washington D.C the Bengali groups stated, "The promise was solemnly made by General Yahya when he illegally usurped power and was repeated before the General Assembly of the United Nations in October last year...Determined that Bangladesh should continue to remain a colony...even if it means decimating the entire population" (Muhith 69). Their tone during these protests sent a powerful message of resilience and ultimately gave the general public enough justification to go against their President and support the Bengalis. Due to the information that they gained, Bangladesh support organizations in America successfully turned the general public and even few members of congress against Pakistan (Muhith 11). Overall this support led into a historical event: the George Harrison concert for Bangladesh.

Articles such as these by Anthony Mascarenhas helped support Bengali's in their struggles due to them revealing the true nature of Pakistan's brutality (bbc.co.uk)

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Nowadays, charity concerts are a common event when there are events such as for Hurricane Sandy, Katrina or other events, but before 71, there was no such thought of an event to help raise money. The George Harrison concert for Bangladesh was the first charity concert that was documented (Friedman). It was also a very successful charity. During the summer of 71, George Harrison, an ex Beatle, was asked by his dear friend, Ravi Shankar, if he could help raise awareness for the tragedies of the war of liberation. Harrison, after reading about the war, agreed to do it and quickly asked his friends, Ringo Starr, Bob Dylan and Leon Russell to help him out. He also asked John Lennon and Paul McCartney if they wanted to participate but they refused because they thought it was too soon for a Beatles reunion (Friedman). George Harrison quickly set the concert up and even wrote an original song called, "Bangladesh", for the event.

George Harrison's effort was heard as about 243 million dollars were sent to UNICEF for the Bangladesh fund. Bengalis also appreciated what Harrison did for them. Shankar commented, "It was one of the most intense and moving musical experiences of the century" (Ami Bangladesh). This concert and the emergence of the Indians helped create hope for the Bengalis, who were getting slaughtered daily.

Bengal was outnumbered, outgunned and lacked a decent military. Almost all hope was lost. Many Bengalis were slaughtered and their bodies thrown into the river. However they had a key ally, who finally joined in the fighting: India. India was involved early on by helping bringing in the refugees from Bangladesh and allowing them to stay. However, the refugees and Indians proved to be straining the natural resources in India and the Indians wanted this war ended quickly, so that Bengalis can go back into their own land. This was only one of the reasons that India helped the Bengalis. Another was the pressure by the U.S, who feared the Soviet Union and tried to weaken them by pounding on the Indians, one of their allies. India wanted to get the American ships out of their harbors. They also despised Pakistan and still believed, after 24 years, that they did not deserve their own state. After joining in the battle, India and Bengal defeated the Pakistanis on December 16th 1971, and a new nation was born: Bangladesh.

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The Surrender of Pakistan was heard all around the World and Newspapers, just like the Tribune covered the event. (oocities.org)

After 42 years, there have been many debates about the war from all sides. Many historians argue that this event has raised many questions. One such debate is about India. The Indian government claimed that the only reason it helped Bangladesh was because it felt that the Bengalis shouldn't have to live under the Pakistanis. Mr. Bardhonray when interviewed relayed the same message.

However, there have been a few historians who questioned the role of India, i.e., were they helping for good morals or were they helping for their own altruistic purpose. One historian that shares this view point is Dawood I Ahmed. He writes that "India's claims of being the benevolent neighbor intervening for humanity's sake also, of course, need to be checked. It cleverly saw an opportunity to dismember its adversary into two and it was clearly troubled by the millions of refugees turning up at its door – so it acted mainly out of self-interest, not romantic and altruistic ideals of Bengali welfare" (Ahmed). He also notes that even after the war, the two sides (India and Bangladesh) did not get along. Even though Bangladesh did gain its independence, many historians questioned the reasonability of their attempts to tell the true story. One historian suggested perhaps that the Bengalis are afraid to reveal the true numbers (Ahmed). In many historiographies they argue that the amount that died was always changing. They claim that this is true

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because many Bengalis are afraid to know the true number of deaths in this war. However this is not the main issue many historians think about regarding this war. Historians got the story as a deeper meaning than what it is and they have emphasized the fact that the death toll is not known at this moment and that no one will ever know exactly how many people were killed until extensive research on the subject is completed.

Overall, the Bangladesh War covered many countries in a 9 month span. It has impacted Bangladesh because it gave birth to that country. Even though Bangladesh gained independence, they also experienced political turmoil. The government soon became corrupt with Sheikh Mujibur becoming more power hungry – in 1974 he banned all political parties and established one-party rule. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman died in 1975, when the military organized a coup, where they murdered him and almost his entire family. However, Rahman's death did not prevent another relative from being the leader: his daughter, Sheikh Hasina is now the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and this is her 2nd term as the PM. India and Pakistan still have struggles with the most recent altercation being during the filming of Zero Dark Thirty, the movie about the raid on Bin Laden. The producers wanted to film the raid scene in India. However, India refused and

started protests in the general area of the intended location. India has not gotten along with Bangladesh now, as both sides have refused to reach compromises most of the time on issues. America has had a mostly quiet relationship with Southeast Asia with the noise coming from the "invasion" of Pakistani land in order to kill Bin Laden. In a time where the U.S is targeting terrorism, Southeast Asia stands out because that is one of the areas that the U.S is mostly not so worried about. This can be thanked to the War of Independence. Even though the War of 1971 may be a small event in a bigger war, the effects have had a consequential effect.

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Interview Transcription

Interviewee: Professor Nurul Islam

Interviewer: Adit Mahmood

Location: Professor Islam's home in Potomac, Maryland

Date: December 16th 2012

This Interview was reviewed and edited by Adit Mahmood

Adit Mahmood: Hi, I am Adit and I am interviewing Professor Nurul Islam for the American Century Oral History Project. The interview took place on December 16, 2012 at 5:00 PM. Question number one. What was your childhood like?

Nurul Islam: I was born in Chittagong, which was a port city in Bengal during the British Regime. It was a period quite some years before independence of India. And it was relatively calm in the last days of British India, not much problem.

AM: Did you have any hard times while living as a child or even as a college student?

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NI: Ah yes, I had a hard time while I was a student in, well in your case it would be senior, but in our system, it was intermediate college. I had a serious eye problem. I had difficulty in reading and my doctors advised me to stop reading for a while and not to take any exam and come back to class a year later. I did not follow that advice and we decided not to stop studying but what we did is kept a reader to read out to me so that I do not have to read. I went to classes but I would not look too much at the blackboard but I would just write without looking at anything. It was a tough time.

AM: What was your first experience like in the United States?

NI: I came here in 1951; my first experience was I arrived in Kennedy airport. In those days it was not Kennedy, it was La Guardia Airport. Kennedy airport was not built at that time. And I was very tired, I vomited all the way from Karachi to New York and I had to leave on the same night by train from central station to Boston. So my memory was very bad of that time, was horrible.

AM: I read that, in 1952, the language movement was created in order to resist any Pakistani laws made to restrict religion and customs. How did you feel about the movement in general?

NI: The language movement?

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AM: Yes.

NI: The Language movement was in protest against Pakistani government decision that Urdu should be the state language of Pakistan and not both Urdu and Bengali. So this decision was not welcomed by all the students. In fact there was a protest when Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, came to address the Dhaka university students. He made the announcement that he expects that all of us will agree that Urdu will be the state language of Pakistan. We all protested, students protested and they said no, no and that was the beginning of the sort of the spirit of the protest against the Pakistani government decision.

AM: So basically what was the Bangladeshi life like during the time before 1952 and after 1952, did it become tenser, did it become more....

NI: Yes, between the periods of language movement which started in 1952 and 1971 there was a progression gradually. We were in protest against the policies and actions of the Pakistani government since we thought that we were being discriminated against. The language movement was only the beginning of our understanding that they were discriminating against us politically as well as economically.

AM: Were you involved in the movement?

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NI: In the language movement, no. In fact I was...the Language Movement started in 1949, and I left in 1951. During 1949, 1950, there was not much happening and I was not much involved, no I was not.

AM: Did you have any friends who were involved in it? Did you have any family members?

NI: No, no family members were involved but my friends, many of them were involved but they did not suffer much during this period.

AM: So none of your friends have a story to tell or any experience?

NI: Some of them did tell. One of them went to prison and one of them had to be hospitalized and the police attacked them... all kinds of things.

AM: I read that the college students were the most active during the movement.

NI: Language Movement?

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AM: Language Movement. Yes. So is this statement true and based on your research, how you think they were active. What do you think they did during the time?

NI: Basically, they protested, they demanded that they would want Bengali to be the state language along with Urdu. And in that, they protested all the time and in fact they went on a movement in the streets continuously against the government in East Pakistan which was the government of the same party which ruled Pakistan as a whole - the Muslim League - and they demanded that the Muslim League government in East Pakistan agree with them and fight with the Central Government. But it is not true because the East Pakistan government at that time belonged to the same party, the same establishment that the Pakistan government was. And it did not. There was a lot of problem with the students in the universities and a lot of people were arrested and harassed at that time.

AM: Also during this time, obviously India and Pakistan split during 47 and...

NI: Yes.

AM: Now before 1971 when they assisted Bangladesh during the final months were they any factor? Did they matter much during 1952 to 1971?

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NI: Indians?

AM: India, Yes.

NI: No, not at all. This was entirely our own movement. Indians were not involved with any of these movements prior to 1971.

AM: So it is was only basically in the whole Pakistan area...East Pakistan and West Pakistan? NI: That's correct. Right, Right.

AM: As you know, Bangladesh won the election of 1970. However, Pakistan ignored the event and continued on their reign of terror. How do you feel about the actions following the event?

NI: Obviously it was...entire, all Bangladeshis, entire nation, revolted against it. We thought it was an outrageous action let loose by the army against us.

AM: How did you feel about the situation?

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NI: We all felt that they were negating the principles on which elections were held. After the elections were held they were supposed to have the parliament come into session and majority party was supposed to control the parliament and form the government.

AM: So Pakistan kept the control between 1952 and 1970. Was there ever a time between the time period where Bengalis had hope for reconciliation or did they ever hope that they could exist together?

NI: Well, there were hopes in the beginning. Let's say up to 1958, between 1952 and 1958, that possibly Pakistanis will agree to have a compromise. The problem was regards the constitution. The constitution of Pakistan was being formulated in a way that the East and West could not agree. Because the West so manipulated, Pakistan consisted in originally four ...five provinces in Pakistan. They united all the West Pakistan provinces into one and said that one will have the same number of votes as the East Pakistanis even though we were in the majority. When they did that, which was the first nail in the coffin of Pakistan.

AM: Did you ever think it was strange that Bengalis held the majority population, however they were considered the minority or they were the ones not in control of the situation?

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NI: That is exactly the point I was making, correct. Their method was that they made the majority equal to the minority. They said that, all of us, the majority and the minority, will be equal and have the same votes in the Parliament; therefore there was no agreement on the making of the constitution. And, therefore, in 1958, because there was no agreement, the military took over. Military is Pakistani army, there were very few Bengalis there. So it was considered an occupation by Pakistan army of East Pakistan. That was the second nail in the coffin.

AM: During the time, Bengalis did not have much power in the government. So did the military government during 1958, once they established military control that is when they realized they can't ever reach a compromise?

NI: The military control in a way left the impression that there was just no chance of a compromise constitution ... the majority with their voice in the parliament of Pakistan will have been reduced to a minority community ... and the army having come into the picture meant that the game was up. Because the army was overwhelmingly Pakistani, there were few Bengalis there. The civil service was overwhelmingly Pakistanis. So the all sources of power were in their hands.

AM: After the Bengalis rightfully won the election in 1970 and Pakistan overruled the results and instead ignored it. What was life like during the few months after the election?

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NI: Yes, that's a very good question. You see, after the election, it was expected that the military fellow who gave the election, General Yahya, he promised that as soon the election was out he would follow the results of the election and call the parliament and whoever wins the majority votes will run the parliament. He started delaying calling out the parliament, one month by another month, saying that we must first negotiate before I call the parliament with the leader of the West Pakistani political party, Mr. Bhutto. Unless Shaikh Mujibur Rahmanii and Bhutto agree on the principles of cooperation, he will not call the Parliament. Because when he calls the Parliament, automatically we will be in the majority and we will rule the results of whatever negotiations take place in the Parliament. Thus, he would not let the Parliament be called.

AM: Around this time, America and China engaged in the Ping Pong Diplomacy. This was the result since China was aided by Russia in the Cold war, and China had a breakup with them during the Vietnam War, so America had to go out and be friendly with them. How did the actions leading up to the diplomacy as well as the Cold War/Vietnam War that time in general impact the war of 1971?

NI: Yes, there are many aspects to it. First, you see, when the fight started in 1971 between Pakistan and Bangladesh...United States was already negotiating reapproachment with China and the negotiation was helped by General Yahya, President of Pakistan and Kissinger made a secret visit through Pakistan to Peking to arrange the visit of Nixon. So, therefore, they were heavily committed to Pakistan's intermediary role between China and United States. In that situation,

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Bangladesh problem, this war etc., was a distraction of the United States Government and Kissinger was totally against Nixon to have anything to do with this movement of the East Pakistanis. They were totally committed to Pakistan's support and their support for Pakistan in finding a reapproachment with China.

AM: This is a follow up question, how did the Bengalis, since the Vietnam War happened close by, did the Bengalis in East Pakistan and West Pakistan know about the Vietnam War, and if they did, did they think it was a justified war?

NI: About the Vietnam War, we didn't have much involvement or much opinion. But Vietnam War, as the world over, the same view, that it was ... the last stages of the Vietnam War we did not feel it was justified. There was no special Bangladeshi view; we shared the views of the rest of the world.

AM: Here is another question. You did say that there was some conflict on whether Nixon should have helped East Pakistan during 1971. During the time before 1971, how was the general American public perceived in Bangladesh?

NI: Before 1971?

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AM: Yes.

NI: Before 1971, Bangladesh didn't exist...

AM: No I meant in Pakistan, in that general area.

NI: Pakistan was a great friend of United States right from 1954, when I was a student here. Pakistan has been very closely linked to the United States by defense treaties since 1951. Therefore, and the treaty was in the context of the Cold War, the Soviet and United States rivalry, Pakistan was a great help to the United States because India was neutral so to speak and in the United States point of view India was in cohort with Soviet Union. There was an Indo Soviet camp and therefore there was a China-United States camp. That was the crude interpretation. Basically, therefore, the only thing the United States wanted in the sub-continent was to counter whatever policies India pursued, sometimes pro and sometimes anti. India was not considered a reliable partner by the United States at that time. Therefore, the only reliable partner in the sub-continent was Pakistan who was totally committed to US policy.

AM: Ok, you did mention that you were in America in 1954 during that time. Did the general public notice the Pakistan area?

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NI: Oh, yes. Pakistan was a friend. In fact, it was in 1954, the mutual defense pact was signed. The Pakistan Prime Minister was here. I was a student here. That was the first time the defense treaty was signed between Pakistan and United States. And right from then on, Pakistan was a darling to America, started being a darling to America. In fact, I can tell you an anecdote. The American ambassador to Pakistan, his daughter was married to the son of the first military President, not Ayub but Iskandar Mirza. The son of Iskandar Mirza¹, who took over and then Ayub took over after him, was married to the daughter of the American Ambassador. I was a student then and we all said, Ah Ha, it is not only political negotiation; it is also a family negotiation. Everything is being cemented very hard and fast.

AM: I heard during the time Bangladesh wanted to employ the six points program. I read your book and how you said you talk about that. Can you define the six-point program for anybody who didn't follow the topic?

NI: Yes...The Six-Points program basically, if you have read American history, remember the Confederate states ...

NI: ... before the Constitution was formed between 1776 and 1778, there were these Confederate States. The states had tremendous amount of power, all army and navy everything. So there were few subjects in common at the centre, so for an American student who would not be familiar

¹First President of Pakistan. He ruled from 1956 to 1959, where he was forced to abandon his power

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with our situation, the rough similarity would be those days, we wanted a situation in which East Pakistan would have almost all the powers besides defense and foreign affairs. That's the way you can understand it in simple language.

AM: What was the attitude of the general public of East Pakistan towards the six points program? Did they fully support it? Were they optimistic about it?

NI: The overwhelming majority supported it because Six Point Program originated over time. It was not a one-shot affair. It was pronounced officially in 1966, but the elements of the Six Points were part of East Pakistan's program in their struggle for autonomy from Pakistan. So, therefore they grew up with these various points. In 1966, they were all put together. So they were familiar with them already. But they didn't understand the full implications as I explained to you. They understood roughly that it is autonomy for East Pakistan, they will have more power over their resources, their foreign exchange resources, more power over participation in the army and civil service. But not to the extent that it really implied an almost independent state with just three or four subjects at the centre.

AM: I read that one of the most important political leaders during this time was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

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NI: Right.

AM: Now, where did you first hear about this guy, and did he appear in any event

before he rose to power?

NI: You see, even when I was in the University and later in the Institute of Development Economics in Karachi, I was involved almost continuously in various committees and commissions where we were discussing allocation of resources between East and West Pakistan. So I was already in a situation in which I was confronting the other side; academically, professionally, not politically. At the same time, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was following his political movement, which had nothing to do with us. We were the academics and he was a political leader. These two movements did not coincide or did not coordinate very well but then one benefited from the other without being totally combined. But then we came to sort of a united front by end of 1968-1969. My contact with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was in March 1969 when he came out of the prison. They had put him in prison for a long time, for conspiracy cases of all kinds. And there he requested me that I should help him in expanding ... make the Six Point Program implementable in detail in terms of constitutional provisions. So I was working on the expansion, the elaboration of the Six Points.

AM: How did you feel when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman asked you to help him with the Six Points Program?

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NI: I was very excited because I was already involved with the negotiations with those characters at a professional level. It was my chance to affect the political process. So I was very excited.

AM: Was this the beginning for you at the political level?

NI: Yes.

AM: What were your thoughts on the program?

NI: I fully supported it. I elaborated it in such a manner in a way that I just told you.

AM: What made the Six Points program successful and what may have hindered it or made it not successful?

NI: The Six Points Program would have been successful if the Pakistanis were willing to accept very little power, very limited power in the center. It would have been successful, no problem. European Union, let's say. You see, our Six Points was even looser form, much less integrated form than European Union. So, if you agree to these subjects, it is perfectly all right. It was a

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confederation after all, loose confederation, let's put it that way. Let me explain further. This confederation was envisaged in that if we can cooperate and coexist in this framework we continue. If we cannot, we can separate completely and become independent without bloodshed or without fight.

AM: During my research I found out that the beginning months of 1971 were important especially March. What was daily life like in March 1971?

NI: In Dhaka?

AM: In that area.

NI: It was very tough because the movement started. You see the final crackdown took place on 25th of March. But the movement all over the country started in late February and early March and on March 7th, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made a speech in which he said that because the Parliament has not been called, it was obvious that Pakistan did not want to compromise. So he gave his speech and said that "now we need to continue our movements more vigorously". I should say it was very hectic and also very exciting.

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AM: On March 5th, the President or leader of West Pakistan made a statement that rubbed the East Pakistanis in a wrong way. Now, I can imagine the people becoming Angrier and angrier. On a scale of 1-10, how tense was March 6th?

NI: Eight.

AM: On March 7th, how excited was people for Sheikh Mujibur's speech?

NI: Very excited, in fact the younger generation wanted him to declare independence in the clearest possible terms. But he did not want to do that. That would be considered treason as they were still one country and they will be saying he is indulging in treason and immediately the movement will be ... the rest of the world will also say he is not fighting for autonomy. He is being treasonous; he is revolting against an established government. So he avoided the word, but the way he made the speech was very interesting. You could draw whatever conclusion you liked, short of total independence.

AM: It's an interesting point you mention how the young people were involved. How did the older generation feel about the situation?

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NI: The older generation was divided in mind but majority...older generation you mean to say ... let's say those who were born and already young in 1947 they were pretty old...They were not very excited. But those who were in 1947, let's say my age or younger they were excited.

AM: Do you think after 23 years of abuse and containment, do you think they valued more a violent revolt or a peaceful revolt like Martin Luther King?

NI: No, peaceful revolt turned into violence when the Pakistan army unleashed their violence on the civilian population. They started killing ...you see on the night of 25th of March, I was in my house watching. The tanks started rolling from the cantonment to the civilian areas and started firing in the civilian areas, university students, teachers and the civilian population So that was the beginning of violence on one side, you might say, and the result was violence on both sides.

AM: When they called for independence on the 26th, what was the general feeling like around the 25th night time, the 26th, the 27th, 28th, what was the life like? How was the general public? How did they respond, how did they live through it? Were they scared?

NI: Scared because of the army in the towns, very much so. But they didn't stop agitation in the whole country.

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AM: The Pakistan government reacted negatively. I understand they had committed genocide; did it multiply it as soon as they called for independence?

NI: No, see the violence was unleashed that night, and it continued. It was violent right from day one. There was no deceleration or acceleration. It was very widespread and very violent.

AM: I understand that the situation became so tense that many scholars were forced to flee to India...

NI: Yes.

AM: ... and to America to Europe.

AM: While you guys were fleeing, what were your general thoughts, like were you scared? Were you scared for your loved ones?

NI: Yes, we were very scared for our loved ones. Because when I fled, I left my family behind, my wife and children; I didn't know until very much later whether they were dead or alive. I didn't even know their whereabouts. Many of us were like that.

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AM: How did India respond when the scholars came? Did they treat you nicely? Did they help you out?

NI: Not only scholars, but millions of Bangladeshis sought refuge. The scholars did come. Yes, they were very helpful to the scholars. In fact many scholars lived in Calcutta and went around India ... various universities, think-tanks, newspaper men talking about our movement. Some of us came out of the country and the Indian government was very helpful, yes.

AM: During the time when you were fleeing, during the time when you were in India, did you ever lose hope that East Pakistan would become a free nation? Did you ever lose hope that maybe West Pakistan would have actually won? They will continue the violence?

NI: Yes. There were many moments and months when we thought that we would never make it, that we would be stateless, those who had left the country. We started becoming more sure towards the middle of the year, let's say August, because we thought by that time India would possibly intervene.

AM: Did you ever feel that up to August, September did you ever feel that no one was really supporting East Bengal?

NI: No, you mean the rest of the world?

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AM: Yes, the rest of the world. Did you think that East Bengal had less support than the Pakistanis?

NI: No, no. You see, the entire world by that time had tremendous support, entire Europe. The only country, the government of only country where we had problem was the United States. Canada and the rest of the European governments were very sympathetic and the United States government, Nixon, was not. But

civil society was and lot of congressmen were, but not the government.

AM: Henry Kissinger once said to Nixon, "The Indians are bastards anyway. They are plotting a war". I read that America was supporting Pakistan because they did not have a good relationship with India. Now, when you hear that quote and the reasoning behind supporting Pakistan, what comes to your mind?

NI: No, no, as I said before, Pakistan at that time played a critical role in American foreign policy. It was a very essential role. Their reapproachment with China was a tremendous change in their foreign policy. So, there, Pakistan's role was so important, that they were committed to Pakistan. Historically, they were committed to Pakistan as I said because India was considered

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an unreliable country. You never know which side they will join and mostly they were on the Soviet side. So India was considered by America as an untrustworthy and unfriendly country.

AM: During this time, the Cold War happened and America and the Soviet Union were two big power. Did the American government actually think that Pakistan and India were big players or they were small players?

NI: Very small players. You see, India was in cohort with the Soviet Union and Pakistan with China. When America made up with China, they were 3 vs. 2. So the balance, therefore, now turned in our favor, US's favor, since it was now 2 vs. 3, and, in various international conferences and meetings they went for so-called neutrality. They said, we do not commit ourselves to American policies anywhere and, on various occasions, they were against American policies. In the perception of American policy makers, the perception of India was that they said, "Why should all the time we should follow American policy, sometimes we follow this policy, sometimes that policy, independent policy". This was considered totally unfriendly by the United States. In the context of the Cold War, you have to find reliable friends. This character was not. India was not a reliable friend.

AM: Do you think during this time, India was trying to go for socialism or communism or were they a capitalist nation?

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NI: India?

AM: Yes.

NI: Far from Socialism or Communism. They were a full-fledged capitalist nation always. State intervention in the economic activities was there all over the world ... France and England. England was heavily interventionist. The role of the state in the United Kingdom in those days was not less than that in India.

AM: I read in your book that you met with McNamara; you met with the Harvard Professors. What was the discussion about, how much you can actually tell me?

NI: The discussion was very straight forward and frank. My meeting was just to convince that where and how Pakistan went wrong, and where and how the justification existed for our demands. My brief was to plead that what we followed was perfectly legitimate and we want our demand for autonomy, Six Points, and that the war was totally legitimate. That was my brief and I said that to everyone. And, I think I persuaded in the sense for example, when I saw McGeorge Bundy, he was head of Ford Foundation in those days but he knew everybody in government, including Kissinger, and he thought that what Pakistan government is doing will create great instability in South Asia and that was neither good for the United States nor for our South Asia

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or anywhere because creating chaos in East Pakistan, they were afraid, supposing this war continued for a long time, how would you know which political color will it take, you never know, it could become violent, anti-democratic, communist, all kinds of things.

AM: Do you think, or from your information, did the CIA or the FBI, did they intervene in this conflict?

NI: I have no idea. FBI doesn't operate abroad so their intervention does not arise. CIA, all kinds of books have been written since then. I don't know how you evaluate these books. That CIA was negotiating with the dissident group in Calcutta, with the government in exile to negotiate with Pakistan and to forget the demand for Six Points etc. But these are written in books, all kinds of books have been written. Yes, CIA was very much at that time active in trying

to dissuade the Bangladesh exile government from pursuing this path of war with Pakistan.

AM: You told me that you were a student in America during the 1950's... NI: Yes, that's correct.

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AM: And you also said that the American general public loved the Pakistanis. However, during 1970, as soon as the general public heard about the crackdowns, now did their opinions actually change?

NI: Yes, in most of the universities in America, most of the universities and colleges, the younger population totally turned against Nixon and turned in favor of us when they read in the newspapers. You see the greatest help in those days was television and newspapers. Extensive coverage of the atrocities committed by the Pakistan Army in Bangladesh was all over the world, everyday, in the greatest possible detail in US news and television. So everybody here knew what was going on. Everything was clear. I was here and we saw from day to day, what was happening from the newspapers, televisions, all about Bangladesh in those days. So the sympathy of the general public was totally on our side. It was the government which was the problem.

AM: I read that the Congress drew away from Nixon because they were saying that, "if we help the Pakistanis, because of their barbaric tactics, it will help us in the long run, but if we help the Bangladeshis since they will be a new nation by themselves in the long run". Did you feel that the Congress honestly helped the Bengalis?

NI: Not Congress as a whole. It was the Democratic Party AKA The anti-Nixon party. The democrats were the opposition that was all in favor. Kennedy for example, almost gave his offices in the Senate to us. It were Bangladesh dissidents, the agitation group in the movement ...

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had his offices at their disposal. They were totally committed to us. The other fellow, Moynihan, the top ranking Democratic senators and politicians were totally working on our side. Not Congress at a whole since they were Republicans there. Nixon supporters, they couldn't have supported us.

AM: So you felt like during Congress, the Democrats were the ones supporting East Pakistan... NI: Yes, 100%...

AM: And the Republicans were the ones supporting Pakistan?

NI: Some of them supported, but kept quiet because of Nixon. Others did not...

AM: So did you feel that some people in Congress that openly said that we should support East Pakistan and there were some people were saying that in their head but they were scared. Do you feel that some...?

NI: No, everyone said they supported East Pakistan, and no one said they opposed them. But those who opposed kept quiet and they supported Nixon's policy.

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There was no opinion expressed loudly here in the public media, or among intellectuals, or among general politicians, against East Pakistan. That was the greatest point. Nixon would have done much worse but for that ...he had to stop sending arms to Pakistan because of these movements ... because they would go against him.

AM: When you went to the United States, were you welcomed warmly, or did they look at you strangely?

NI: When?

AM: When you arrived in 1971.

NI: No, no question. Very welcome.

AM: So during this time, the scholars were all welcomed.

NI: Very well. I went around to the universities, speaking all over the place, schools, universities, various functions, highly welcome.

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AM: Do you think, because of your work, by talking to the Universities, talking to all the people, do you think the general public kind of helped East Bengal win by trying to stop Nixon sending arms to Pakistan?

NI: It wasn't just me; there were many others.

AM: I meant the scholars.

NI: Not only scholars; there were journalists, others, civil society members, all of them agitated here in favor of East Pakistan. For example, you have heard about this famous song in Madison Square. Even the musicians, the artists

also started supporting us. So it was not a question of our doing it. Here, there was a tremendous upsurge of support, of popular opinion in favor of us, against Pakistan, because of atrocities. Because they saw on the television what they were doing.

AM: During this time also the famous George Harrison concert happened during this time. When they first announced it, was everyone excited; was everyone suspicious about how well it will work? Or was everyone like I am so excited, they went all for it.

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NI: Well everybody was excited about it, they gave support, yes.

AM: Did you feel like Pakistan was truly losing its edge as soon as the George Harrison concert because I heard the George Harrison concert raised about 24,000 dollars at least for Bangladeshi aid, the East Pakistan aid. Did you feel like the George Harrison concert, that event, do you feel that it actually helped East Pakistan win?

NI: It was more than the money. It was the support of popular opinion. Money was neither here nor there. There was not much money. The question is it helped organize public opinion even more in favor of East Pakistan. All of this was pressurizing the government of the US to desist from .., for example, if they sent all kinds of arms to Pakistan, which they were still sending but limited it, restrained it. Otherwise, it would be very difficult. They argued with me, with "look here, if we do not send help to them, they will divert whatever resources you are getting even today to buy arms elsewhere. It will be worse for you." That was the argument given. So it was all kinds of complications.

AM: Comparing the early part of the war to the later part of the war, when the journalists wrote their articles and their pictures and their information, did they technically grow more aggressive, and did they technically grow more intense, as time went on, or was it at about the same level?

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NI: Which one?

AM: The journalists' pieces: the articles, the pictures...

NI: They were more and more anti-Pakistan. More and more, I would say advocacy for East Pakistan and pressing upon the US government, please do something about this, please ask Pakistan to desist from the atrocities. The idea was to stop your friend, Pakistan, from this massacre that was the idea.

AM: Do you feel the War of 1971 made Nixon lose some support?

NI: Where?

AM: In the United States.

NI: I don't think the Pakistan-Bangladesh problem had anything to do with Nixon's support in the country, no way. It is Watergate etc. yes, but not the Bangladesh incident.

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AM: So I read some historiography on these facts. There is one historian, Ammar Ali Jahn, he wrote that, "There's not a more painful example of the national silence than the civil war of 1971". Do you think that the statement is true?

NI: What is he saying?

AM: That there is not a more painful example than

NI: He's regretting it?

AM: Yes.

NI: I see. He must be very unique. There are very few Pakistanis who ever expressed any regret for what happened to East Pakistan in those days. Now you will find, three, four, or five people, but that is nothing in a country of what ... 160-170 million or intellectuals of a few million. No.

AM: Yes...

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NI: They have never admitted, even at the top level of intellectuals in public, large number of them never did.

AM: All right, there are other historians with other points of view...

NI: Right...

AM: For example, there is a historian named Dawood I Ahmed, who is neutral, he said... NI: Was he Indian, Pakistani, Bangladesh, what? Never mind, continue on.

AM: He said that, "Events in 1971 are in the past, but false narratives still remain". NI: False narratives still remain? Such as?

AM: For example, I read that the death toll; they can never really find the

right number. Do you think that...and he also said that the Bengalis are kind of scared to admit how many really died? Now, do you really think the fact that they were scared may have caused them to kind of hide the true evidence of 71? Mahmood 54

NI: Why would the Bengalis be afraid?

AM: Like...

NI: They would ... maybe exaggerate, rather than be afraid and willing to suppress it. AM: If they were not afraid, then why do you think the Bengalis ...?

NI: There is debate as to how many people were killed. Now it's impossible to give precise estimates. It is inconceivable that you will be able to get precise estimates all over the country of civilians who were killed. In a war, where two armies are fighting and killing each other, you can easily get the numbers. But how can you possibly get precise numbers when all over the country they are killing, women, children, unarmed civilians, how can you possibly get the right numbers? Numbers are huge, but how many? You can get rough estimate.

AM: Ahmed also says, that "India's claims of being the benevolent neighbor intervening for humanity's sake also need to be checked. It cleverly saw an opportunity to dismember its adversary into two and it was clearly troubled by the millions of refugees turning up at its door

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– so it acted mainly out of self-interest, not romantic and altruistic ideals of Bengali welfare". Do you agree with his assessment?

NI: No, you see no country ... Why did France come to the aid of United States during the 1776 war? It wasn't just because they hated England or they loved some interest here; it all combined together. India's interest in independent Bangladesh, derived from first that yes, if Bangladesh becomes independent, possibly we would have less of an enemy, half of an enemy will be gone because Pakistan was enemy. Secondly, if you have 10 million refugees at your doors, you can continue to have them on you unless they go back. And they will never go back unless Pakistan was willing to compromise, which it was not, it was too late, and the only way they can go back was in an independent Bangladesh. So you might say self interest in a broader sense, yes, half of an enemy and also interest in getting rid of the refugees. It is self-interest or, benevolent interest; you can say whatever you like. The question is that they had to intervene to get rid of the refugees, period. When Indira Gandhi came here, what was her suggestion to Nixon? Simple. She came here after being armed with the Indo-Soviet treaty, which said if one country is attacked; the other will join and defend that country. So if India was attacked under any circumstance, Soviet Union will join India to defend India. That pact was signed in August or so, then she came to see Nixon, armed with the Pact. Say, if India intervened, then America would send Seventh Fleet in the Bay of Bengal. Say, if Soviet Union intervened, then there will be third world war. She came to Nixon with the suggestion, Mr. President, your friend is doing that. You have a choice, either you ask Yahya to compromise, meet Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, negotiate

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with him and accept what he wants, or I have to intervene. I have no choice. I have to get rid of this. That is why Nixon got mad with her.

AM: From August to December, was daily life, from what you heard from your family, your loved ones, your friends, was it scarier than what it was from May to July?

NI: No, no, we were very hopeful. The moment it was clear that India will intervene, then our hopes revived that we will have a state, we will have an independent nation. It was impossible that, in the intervention, India will lose. It was inconceivable. If India intervened, it was bound to win.

AM: There is an older generation, who has remembered this well and lived through it. If you would tell any person from the younger generations, Bengali Americans or any Bengali, what would you say to them about the war? What do you want them to take from the war of 1971?

NI: I want them to go back to the history of Bangladesh. Most of the Bangladeshis here, your generation or older, those who are not following the history of Bangladesh, they don't know why Bangladesh was created in the first place. What were the historical origins during Pakistan time that led to this? So unless they know it, there is no way they would appreciate what is going on Mahmood 57

today. So what I expect them to do, this is all my urging that you should try to read about the emergence of Bangladesh.

AM: During this time, obviously the Cold War happened between the 1950 and 1990. Now do you think...?

NI: 1950-90?

AM: No, around the end of World War 2 to 1991-92.

NI: That's right.

AM: Do you think that the Bangladesh War of 1971, do you think in a global perspective, it can be considered a big battle in the Cold War, or was it overshadowed by events such as the Vietnam War and...

NI: Vietnam War was much earlier...

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AM: Right, when you think of the Cold War...

NI: You see, Bangladesh war is not a world event...

AM: Right...

NI: It's a South Asian event. In the view of the United States, it changed the balance of power in South Asia because when you have another independent country which is not aligned with you with in the same way as China and Pakistan, then you have one more factor of uncertainty. So, from that point of view it did create a zone of uncertainty of U.S policy in South Asia. It was not an historical event that changed the world political alignment.

AM: Other than the fact that Pakistan became Pakistan and Bangladesh, what else changed in that area, not just near India but the whole Southeast Asia?

NI: Because of emergence of Bangladesh?

AM: Yes.

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NI: Yes, you might say ... that's an interesting question. You see, emergence of Bangladesh firstly creates problems for India in a way. Unless there is a friendly Bangladesh, if you look at the map, on the eastern side of Bangladesh, there are six states of India, we are in between. So India's stability in the eastern part of India is critically dependent on Bangladesh's stability. So in a way, we have created a problem for India in the sense that if we are not friendly with India and those states are not, they are revolting most of the time against India, so India can control them with only our help. If we do not cooperate with India, they will always get asylum, all the refugees, from us for years; which creates problem for India. That way, you might say we have a problem or a solution for India. The problem because, with the emergence of Bangladesh, it should have been there if Pakistan was there and that is what has changed. The new factor would be that a friendly Bangladesh would help India resolve India's instability on the Eastern frontier. Now mind you, India has a problem with China. The border problem. You see, Bangladesh, you might say in the South Asia context of stability, China, South Asia context, Bangladesh has a very critical role to play. Because any instability of Bangladesh will affect eastern India, will affect India's strength in dealing with other countries including China.

AM: As you say, America and Pakistan has had a good relationship in the 1950's and 1960's. NI: Right.

AM: Do you think that, after the war of 1971, America's standing with Pakistan changed?

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NI: No, even greater, more friends. Pakistan has been, even today...you see now United States has a problem, they neither solve it nor accept it. Pakistan has been their solid friend until now. Now Pakistan is playing games because of Afghanistan. Otherwise, Pakistan and America has no problem. The problem in Afghanistan is because their interests don't converge there.

AM: Why should, when talking about the war of independence today, and if you could relate it to the real world today including the war on terror, why should historians care about the war of 1971?

NI: They should care because of the emergence of a new country which may be a force for stability because, unlike Pakistan, Bangladesh has not been a hotbed for Islamic extremism. So historians and today's policy makers have a great interest in seeing Bangladesh prosper and be stable because here is a country right in the middle of South Asia, a Muslim majority country, which unlike Pakistan, does not breed religious extremism, does not support religious

extremism. That is why historians and current policy makers should be interested in the stability of Bangladesh.

AM: Also, during the time, I did draw many comparisons to the American Revolution. Do you think that the general public supported Bangladesh during this time, or East Pakistan as it was

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called back then, was because of them remembering, or knowing about the American Revolution. Do you think it gave them a little connection?

NI: I don't think that they related it that much to their own history. I think they saw injustice being done to the legitimate demands of the population and they were fighting against the civilian population. I will tell you an anecdote, from my book. When Henry Kissinger and Nancy Kissinger went to Bangladesh, in a party in 1974, I happened to sit next to Nancy Kissinger in a dinner party. Nancy Kissinger asked me, "Mr. Islam, explain to me. How come, you were fighting against Pakistan, why did you invite India? This made life complicated for us. Why did you invite India to fight with you in East Pakistan?" I said to Nancy Kissinger, "You are very right; I will give the detailed interpretation to my political colleagues. But I would like to ask you, Mrs. Kissinger, why did you invite France to intervene against the British?" She blasted and did not answer. Because she read the briefing book of her husband, in the plane, possibly. She heard about East Pakistan and Bangladesh, what's going on here, why did we intervene. So she asked me why we invited India.

AM: In what ways was the war in 1971 successful and in what ways was it not successful? NI: 1971 War?

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AM: Yes.

NI: It was not successful...no it was successful. I mean we did get our independence, what we wanted. But success, no, but it resulted in a lot of destruction of our economy, political destabilization. You see, after independence, we were faced with forces that we did not anticipate that would destabilize us. For example, the Chinese-aligned parties in Bangladesh were against us and Pakistani-aligned parties, Islamic parties, were against us. So we had a new government facing all these problems. It was the consequences of the then world situation in which we were born and we were faced with destabilizing forces within our own country, new born country was facing an unfriendly America, Pakistani intrigues and old party supporters, and Chinese supporters were against us.

AM: This question has two parts. First, was there any event in America that stood out for support? What was that event? Which was the one event after which many people were saying that now I really want to help them? Was there any one event?

NI: I think I would say that the continuous coverage, day and night, of the atrocities in Bangladesh in the radio and newspapers, plus the plight of the refugees - there were 10 million refugees in India - and Edward Kennedy, he was the first one who visited those refugee camps and he came and made speeches here about how these refugees are being taken care of, after all India has limited capacities. So far the international agencies have helped them. So I think this

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added to the scenes of atrocities they are watching on TV, plus this huge amount of refugees, homeless people in India, that must have turned the public even more forcibly in our favor.

AM: As you know, today is the 41th anniversary of Independence. What do you reflect on, as time goes on? What will be a couple of things you remember?

NI: For the War for Independence?

AM: Yes, from the War of Independence.

NI: In my life or in terms of general development?

AM: In general development.

NI: I suppose, I remember that how we became very hopeful and very optimistic after the visit of Indira Gandhi here. She went and said, "I have no choice but I have to find a solution to this problem". Then our hopes were raised greatly because we were very despondent till that time. We thought we will never make it. So that is the only thing I can remember. Besides that, I do not see what I

can think of.

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AM: Obviously, America had a big public support. But was there anything that America could have done better during the 1971 events to prevent a lot of the murders that were happening?

NI: Murder?

AM: A lot of the genocides from happening.

NI: Oh yes, they could have intervened with the Pakistani government. For example, they didn't stop all aid to Pakistan. In fact, military aid was not stopped totally even though Congress said it should be. They said, that "we are not giving them military aid, we are only giving replacement of existing equipment. It is not military aid, not additional aid". There were all kinds of arguments. They could have pressurized Pakistan very easily by stopping aid. But they did not stop aid during Pakistan time. Not only that, Pakistan borrowed a huge amount of money before the war. After the war was over, and we became independent, Pakistan's debt - Pakistan had incurred huge foreign aid - they insisted that we should share the burden. We said, "how come?" The debt they incurred was used in large part for their development and meanwhile we were exploited in terms of our resources. Now you want, and the US government wants, that we share Pakistan's debt. We said "Nothing doing". You see, you might even come to the conclusion that the US was very unhappy with the Government of Bangladesh which possibly is right. From the United State point of view, Kissinger was possibly right. Here is a new country which is aligned with India. Therefore, we have a third enemy here. Because Pakistan and China are fine. But

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India is enemy number one. Now there is another, Bangladesh. He did not realize that Bangladesh is not anti-American. Bangladesh is independent and Bangladesh should be supported fully as an independent country. He did not get that point. His successors got that point, he didn't.

AM: Do you think that America-Bangladeshi relations have got better? Do you think they can get along with each other now?

NI: Yes much better. You see, relationship changed gradually, and immediately. You see, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman did something very significant which the rest of the world does not understand, even American foreign policy people and general public does not know. You see, when we became independent, America did not recognize us, right? Much later they recognized us. Now, there was an American Consulate General in Dhaka. Whole office was there. Now if you become independent and this office is there and their country does not recognize you, that Consulate withdraws. This is the standard system. They don't have the right to stay there. They can't get diplomatic protection. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman went out of his way saying, No, they should be kept as it is and I'll give them diplomatic protection. Even though he did not get their support even then he said, No, the Consulate General stays as it is, and everything stays and they will be given exactly the same protection I am giving to everyone else. So, that was the first move he made to show that I am not against you. I have nothing against you. You supported my enemy, fine. But this is a new chapter now.

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AM: That's all the questions I have.

NI: Oh good, fine. I'm relieved! How long was it? It is alright. You can edit.

AM: Thank you very much for talking to me about the war.

NI: That's very nice. You're welcome. You have to edit it now?

AM: Yes.

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Interview Analysis

When he was asked what should future generations of Bengalis or Bengali-Americans take from the Bangladesh War of Independence, Professor Nurul Islam suggested that they should "go back to the history of Bangladesh...unless they know it, there is no way they would appreciate what is going on today" (Mahmood 58). Through this statement, Professor Islam is highlighting the importance of studying history, not only to understand the past but also comprehend the

present and get guidance for the future. Professor Islam's answer revealed how much the War for Independence impacted Bangladesh and many Bangladeshis, especially of the generation that, like Professor Islam, lived through the War of Independence. His answer is the same answer of the generation of Bengalis from that time in 1971. The Bangladesh war of Independence took place in 1971 when Bangladesh, known at that time as East Bengal, fought against Pakistan which was known at that time as West Pakistan. The rest of the world was in the midst of the Cold War and this battle was long since forgotten. Mr. Islam's answer to that basic question defined the true reason that people do Oral History: collecting information and stories that cannot be found in text books. Ritchie Donald, a historian, defines Oral History as: "a way of collecting memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through historical interviews" (Donald). If people read the War of Independence in a textbook, they would only get the big picture and learn about President Yahya Khan of Pakistan and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of East Bengal. Oral History is different because the stories are a little more personal. However, while it produces valuable information it does also create biased information. It is not a perfect system. Historical sources are not perfect. Professor Islam's statements examine Mahmood 68

valuable oral history by talking about his experiences with political leaders of that time. In some instances, he contradicts other historians on their views about the motives of, and after-effects on, other countries involved in the 1971 War, such as Pakistan and India. In some cases, he validates what historians have said in formal history books.

Mr. Islam's oral history began with a discussion of his childhood in Chittagong and his difficulties as a student. He started by recalling the early years after the formation of Pakistan, of which East Bengal (later renamed East Pakistan and now Bangladesh) was a part, spanning from 1947 to 1970. First, Mr. Islam slowly recounted his times during the language movement of 1952 and how that affected him personally. Even though he wasn't present at the situation, the minor details in the story such as, "One of them went to prison" (Mahmood 28), show how eye opening the event was to him even though he wasn't there. The clarity of his words shows that at that time, he soon found out how the Bengalis were wronged by the Pakistanis. By using phrases such as, "The same establishment that the Pakistan government was" (Mahmood 5), Professor Islam exposed the hypocrisy of the Pakistani government. This was just one example of how they were mistreated. When the topic of discussion was the 1970 election, Professor Islam's answer almost turned to malice against the Pakistanis. Noteworthy quotes including, "We thought it was an outrageous action" (Mahmood 30), showed how everyday Bengalis felt about the situation. His recollection of daily life and the Pakistani treatment proved useful as it gave considerable background information and explanation for the actions that happened in 1971 from both sides. It was impressive to hear him recount the small details during the time including those involving the government and the people. His views and information were impressive but during his time, he knew as much as the other journalists in his area. He also talked at length about his experiences while in America. An important part of the interview and the project was

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how America was involved in the Bangladesh War of Independence, which he observed closely by being in America during much of the War in 1971. However, to set the stage, he talks at the beginning of his student days in the US in the mid-1950s. It appears that his views about how close the American establishment was to Pakistan were formed during his student days in the US. This may have influenced his views about the American attitudes in 1971 towards Bangladesh and Pakistan. When asked about the U.S government's role in 1971, it was interesting to see how Congress was split in its views and its reaction to the Bangladesh war of Independence with significant differences between the Democrats, who supported Bangladesh, and Republicans. He noted how Nixon's power hid the true views of the Congress. This section of the interview showed how much power and influence Nixon really had on the Republicans in the Congress. Professor Islam knew about American politics as well as Bengali politics. In fact, later in the interview, he talked about Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his influence as well as his first experience with him. Certain

political agendas were discussed such as the Six Points program and it was impressive to see that the Bengalis were well structured in their struggle, for example, in terms of the concreteness of their demands, despite them being the minority. When he talked about his personal experiences with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, one could sense the power of Oral History – formal history could not have brought out as well the excitement he felt working with this great leader. Professor Islam helped put many things in perspective. While some historians exaggerated the details of some events like the George Harrison Concert, Professor Islam toned down the significance, noting that even though it did raise awareness of the situation, there were previous events that contributed as well.

On some issues, his answers, through well informed, revealed his biased views. Some historians question the benevolent motives behind India's support to Bangladesh during the War

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for Liberation. Dawood I. Ahmed wrote that, "India's claims of being the benevolent neighbor intervening for humanity's sake also need to be checked" (Ahmed). What he meant by that was that although India's involvement at the end of the war ultimately gave Bangladesh the strength to win the war, the motives of the Indians need to be checked. He questioned the motives and he has a right to do so. Millions of refugees fled from Pakistan into India and the Indians treated them morally. However they also placed a burden on India's resources. Hence, India may have been motivated by a desire to see these refugees return to their homes as soon as possible; also, the prospect of weakening their enemy Pakistan by dividing that country was also appealing to them. Ahmed thus has a point. However, Professor Islam contradicts Ahmed's point of view by referring to comparisons of the French involvement in the American Revolution, another fight for independence which the War of 1971 strangely mirrors: Pakistan is Britain, Bangladesh was like the colonies and India had a similar role to the French. "It wasn't just because they hated England or they loved some interest here; it all combined together" (Mahmood 56), explained Professor Islam. He accepts that India may have had its own selfish reasons but wonders whether it had any alternative; for example, he points out Indira Gandhi's visit to Nixon in late August, 1971, in which she gave him an ultimatum: if India was attacked anyway, then the Soviet Union would come and defend India and another big war would start. By using concrete evidence and real life experiences, Professor Islam contests the viewpoint of some historians and also makes a legitimate argument that the motives for India were not dishonest.

There has been a massive debate on whether Bangladesh is afraid to reveal the true number of deaths during '71. Some historians have doubted Bangladesh's truthfulness about the war. The common reports suggest that anywhere between 200,000 to 400,000 women were raped, killed or mutilated. Other reports suggest that more than 1,000,000 people were killed.

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However, some think the number could be lower. Some historians seem to blame Bangladesh and its supporters for not coming up with true figures even 41 years after the war ended. For example, Historian Dawood I. Ahmed commented, "false narratives still remain" (Ahmed). When this quote was presented to Professor Islam, he vehemently disagreed with it. He defends the Bengalis by referring to war and how, during a war, people are focused on killing the enemies and not counting the casualties. He states, "But how can you possibly get precise numbers when all over the country they are killing, women, children, unarmed civilians, how can you possibly get the right numbers" (Mahmood 33)? He argues that this is the reason the true numbers cannot be found. Even though Professor Islam agreed partly with Ahmed's argument about the Indians, he does not agree at all about the debate on the death toll. Oral History is vital because it will give readers different interpretations of a school of thought on a particular event. Professor Islam's answers show this because his points present a counter argument to other historians.

The role of India and Bangladesh has been discussed. The role of Pakistan is also a very important subject. Now, Britain does not despise America because they had lost controlled land due to the American Revolution, rather they ignore the American Revolution. Many historians, however, think that Pakistan

does not have the same attitude as the British after losing land that they have owned for 20 plus years. Ammar Ali Jhan, a Pakistani historian claimed, "There's not a more painful example of the national silence than the civil war of 1971" (Jhan). What he means is that even though Pakistan has not had any violent conflict in Bangladesh since 71, they have not accepted that they lost land which was originally theirs. However, Professor Islam argued that Jhan must be very unique since Professor Islam claims that many Pakistanis do not care about the war and now live the rest of their lives not caring about it. He states that "There are very few Pakistanis who ever expressed any regret" (Mahmood 31).

Professor Islam differed on

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these issues from these historians and because of that, created an alternative argument to the situation. Here, the interview could have pursued the topic more by asking some further questions. Did this outcome surprise him? Did he expect that after the war ended, especially after Pakistan recognized Bangladesh, which it would apologize to? Or was he not surprised? Since, he know many Pakistanis first-hand, have they apologized in private? The answers to these questions, especially the last, can come out more vividly through Oral History. Then, you may also say that, however, what he said is also very vivid and brings out the power of Oral History.

Going into this project, I knew about this event since I already studied this event three times before. However, by the end, I learned more than I did those previously. Listening to Professor Islam taught me about everything going on, not just the big picture. For example I didn't know much how the government felt and if they were divided. When Professor Islam told me about how "Ted Kennedy almost gave away his office for use by Bengali activities during their war of Independence in 1971" (Mahmood 25), I was very impressed to see the extent to which an American politician can be passionate about supporting the cause of a distant nation which was not important at all in global politics. Professor Islam's knowledge of the time, derived from his experiences during the time period, gave insight that textbooks never provided about this event. His views and his story should help young Bengalis or mixed Bengalis, such as Bangladeshi-Americans, better understand this subject. So when he answered the question, What should future generations of Bengalis or Mixed Bengalis take from this war, I think that he meant that they should ask their parents or grandparents for their stories. I also think that he may have given a hint about reading his work. My reflection on this interview also told me where I

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could have explored the subjects more, for example, on the issue of apology by Pakistanis, I could have asked if there have been private apologies by Professor Islam's Pakistani friends. Perhaps, that question, whether Pakistanis have a private view not reflected in documented history, can be explored through Oral History. Overall Oral History proves that sometimes textbooks miss out important information and perspectives. Oral History helps fill these gaps and sometimes raises new questions.

iA place that was located on a waterway that was used for loading and unloading ships. ii Major Political Figure of East Pakistan later became President after 1971 and ruled into 1975, where he was brutally murdered in a coup.

iii Prime Minister of India during the 1970's

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Time Log

Background.....0:00

Context #1: 1952.....5:00

Context #2: Pakistani Government.....10:00

Context #3: Early American Perceptive Pre 1971.....15:00

Context #4: Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.....20:00

Context #5: 1970.....25:00

Context #6: America, India, Pakistan Policies.....30:00

Context #7: U.S Government during 1971.....35:00

Context #8: General Public Support.....40:00

Historiography #1: India.....45:00

Concluding Statements.....50:00
Concluding Statements: Future Effects of Independence.....55:00
Ending Statements.....1:00:00

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Appendix I

Partition of 1947 from India and Pakistan (Bangladeshdefence.blogspot.com)

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The Language Movement of 1952 (Banglamusic.com)

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The Shahid Minar, a monument dedicated to the lost lives of the 1952 movement
(tahmidsdesh.weebly.com)

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Pakistan Atrocities (bp.blogspot.com)

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Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (wikimedia.org)