

Preface

This project effectively began over a decade ago when I started work on a series of articles on the historic Bandung conference of 1955, seen from the vantage point of its fiftieth anniversary. I had always taken for granted that Bandung was a singular moment in world history: the moment when newly independent leaders of Asia and Africa collectively articulated their own path to world peace in the face of global resistance. Once I began to read the primary documents related to this event, I was surprised to find that the first Asia-Africa conference was much more—and less—than its dominant representation. Bandung is usually positioned in relation to the *future*, as the event that led to the founding of the nonaligned movement. I came to the opposite conclusion. Not only was it an event where disagreement and conflict told us more than agreement, its significance could not be fully appreciated until set in the context of prior multicultural political gatherings I was only barely aware of. Fault lines—ethnic, religious, racial, and civilizational—made visible through the conference discussions went well beyond the usual tropes of Cold War politics and China’s arrival on the world scene and pointed to structures of hierarchy and exclusion that conventional accounts of international relations rarely addressed. I began to see Bandung as the *culmination* of a series of little-known “international” events that sought to confront and overcome global political subjection and racial division. I started to read more widely in the international history of the immediate postwar period, only to find myself going back into the Dark Ages of the twentieth century until I reached World

War I. That was the moment, I realized, when the current topography of what I was now beginning to think of as a new international scale was set in place.

It was not until a few years ago that I was able to synthesize these readings into a revised understanding of Indian foreign policy. Crucial to this end were the conceptual innovations and revisionist writings coming out of critical geography and postcolonial legal studies that helped me clarify the political stakes involved in coming to grips with a territorialized world of states and their interactions. That said, I began this project under the impression that I was writing an article addressing the one constant of Indian foreign policy behavior, namely New Delhi's seemingly endless search for international status, position, and, respect: in a word, *recognition*. Beginning from international recognition as an independent variable that I thought explained state behavior, I ended up with recognition as a dependent variable, a concept that itself needed to be explained. Captured in that complete turnaround is my own gradual realization of the complexity of the implications of a territorialized foreign policy. This turned out to be far more than just thinking about prestige and respect as drivers of international behavior. It also meant coming to terms with how foreign policy profoundly shapes domestic politics. My efforts to deal with this complexity have led what was to be an article into this book.

It will soon become apparent that this is not a conventional study of Indian foreign policy. This study does not try to establish realist, idealist, or constructivist frames with which to understand international relations and the state. It does not periodize Indian foreign policy behavior and change in relation to political leadership, for example, the Nehruvian moment, the Janata interregnum, or the BJP transformation. It neither focuses on bilateral relations between India and a now-familiar bestiary of Dragons, Bears, and Eagles, nor does it offer a microanalysis of Indian diplomacy in foreign capitals or the intricacies of bureaucratic infighting in South Block. Examples of these staples of Indian foreign policy analysis are to be found throughout this book but do not appear in their usual places.¹ Nevertheless, this book is centrally concerned with questions basic to the study of foreign policy, while at the same time questioning the conventional parameters of that field.

Perhaps the most visible divergence of this study from the conventional study of Indian foreign policy is the challenge to its familiar starting point. Indian foreign policy is typically assumed to begin in 1947 for the "obvious" reason that before August 15 of that year, there was no "India." If India as a sovereign state dates from 1947, the logic goes, so must its foreign policy. By contrast, I treat the beginning of the twentieth century as a more appropriate

beginning for the study of “Indian foreign policy.” I am not suggesting that India had complete autonomy in its foreign policy decision making from as early as, say, 1919, but it is clear that on certain issues, particularly the movement and protection of overseas Indians and the maintenance of strategic hegemony in an extended region that stretched from Aden to Singapore, it was able to make decisions based on what was good for Delhi and did not necessarily conform to London’s interests. Incomplete sovereignty, moreover, shaped future behavior in important ways. Delinking 1947 from the beginnings of Indian foreign policy permits the tracing of important continuities between colonial and postcolonial ways of thinking and acting across a number of foreign policy domains. What is genuinely new and different about sovereign India’s foreign policy thereby becomes much clearer.²

By tracing the genealogies of territory and its attendant inclusions and exclusions, this study demonstrates that foreign policy is much more than the habitual practice of a modern state embedded in and engaged with an international system. Understood as a boundary-making practice, foreign policy becomes central to what we understand by modern citizenship. Social as much as political boundaries are constituted through the institutionalization of difference. Once delinked from an unproblematic notion of territory, the exercise of “foreign policy” produces an uneven domestic space. The “body politic” comes to be internally divided and hierarchically organized on political, social, and economic lines through the boundary-making actions of foreign policy. Internal fissures, including the boundaries that mark majorities and minorities and that exclude populations from the national center on the basis of ethnicity, class, religion, gender, and civilization, are found to follow inevitably from the particular political intersection of territory and sovereignty that is dominant today. Unequal citizenship, this study argues, is endemic to the modern nation-state.

Although this is a book primarily about India (and by extension, China and Pakistan), my hope is that it also offers useful insights and approaches to scholars interested in the large set of countries that joined and remade the international system during the twentieth century. Often lumped under the label of “postcolonial,” this study is also very much about the travails of these new states entering an international order where the rules were already established and the reception from established states was less than warm and welcoming. By approaching this problem through a revisionist historical account, my intent is to also go beyond some of the intellectual stasis that has plagued recent debates on postcolonial, feminist, and poststructural theories as applied to international relations (IR). As an insurgent approach dating back to the

seminal work of Richard Ashley, Rob Walker, Mike Shapiro, Cynthia Enloe, Ann Tickner, Sankaran Krishna, Siba Grovogui, and others—and with which I wholly identify—feminist, critical, and postcolonial theories have proved immensely useful in offering a sustained and robust critique of mainstream approaches to international relations. Where these approaches have been less than successful is in offering an alternative approach to the study of IR, a self-imposed limit that in my opinion comes from not fully taking on the project of entirely rewriting the histories and geographies of states and people in international space.

This book takes a small step in that direction. It does so in the introduction by first sketching an outline of the meaning and making of the “international” itself, a necessary condition for beginning this major empirical-theoretical project. I argue that international space should be seen as an unstable space produced by constant struggle between status quo and insurgent forces. What this means, among other things, is to see international space as “naturally” populated by entities other than states, as well as a space that is undergoing constant transformation through the dialectic of control and resistance. Drawing on the insights of Michel Foucault, this allows me to propose that international space is not an extra-domestic “level of analysis,” as IR would have it, but is best understood as a political field, a *regime*.

A second major objective of this study is to bring the findings of human geography into the study of IR. It is ironic that a field that accepts territoriality as one of the key foundations of its scholarly apparatus has spent so little time understanding the theoretical foundations of territory and why it matters as much as it does. Human and political geographers have been concerned with precisely these questions for decades now, and it is important for scholars of IR to learn from and internalize the common sense of their debates. Much of the first chapter seeks to bring territory “in” and to show what it means for the study of international relations. This “territorial turn,” I show in the second half of the book, offers us important new tools for the study of classic themes of international relations, notably for geopolitics and diaspora, and demonstrates how the intersection of the nation and IR becomes central in shaping the contours of modern citizenship.

The final objective of this study is to offer a constructive way of thinking about a “real-world” problem that is likely to become a flashpoint for international conflict, namely interstate territorial disputes. In my view, it is also not unreasonable to criticize postcolonial approaches to the study of IR for the relatively small number of studies that take on the big issues of our times—nuclear weapons, international power transitions, “humanitarian”

interventions, international and ethnic conflict, to name a few of the most obvious ones. The task of understanding and offering ways of thinking about these issues have been ceded, for the most part, to mainstream approaches, which are then roundly (and rightly) criticized for their reductionist and positivist framing of problem(s). While it may even be correct to castigate the mainstream for being complicit in the reproduction of the unequal and unjust structure of contemporary international relations, giving up this ground too soon permanently relegates critical approaches to the margins of intellectual discourse where they continue to mutter, "I told you so." Although not being in the least bit naïve about the willingness of mainstream discourse to accept points of view that offer truly alternative perspectives on current problems of world politics, it is ducking a considerable responsibility, in my view, not to take on these and other "big questions" centrally and to try, as much as possible, to get critical perspectives taken seriously.

In this study I offer a new way of understanding one of the foremost problems of Indian and, for that matter, Asian, foreign policies, namely, interstate territorial disputes. Indian foreign policy has long been shaped by protracted and deeply emotive disputes with its immediate neighbors over contested lands, notably Pakistan over Kashmir and China over Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin. It would not be an overstatement to say that until these disputes are resolved to the mutual satisfaction of all parties, they remain the most likely causes of interstate conflict—old-fashioned war—in the South Asia region. To understand the general phenomenon of interstate territorial disputes, however, it is not enough to explore the origins of particular disputes. That is precisely what the forensic approach of international law does and, in the same moment, demonstrates its limits. For me, the answer lies with the fluid and contentious concept of the nation, a still incomplete formation. Bringing competing spatial imaginaries of the nation and the emotive power of territorial nationalism together allows me to explain why some disputes become highly contentious and protracted while others do not. Not seeing the nation as the critical mediating factor in producing interstate contentions over territory leads us to see territorial loss as a loss of state power and hence something to be avoided at all costs. The more pertinent question is: Why is territorial loss overwhelmingly construed as a loss of state power when, as we know, territory has been given up in the past without leading to the breakdown of the state?

The answer begins from the conjuncture of nation, state, and territory at a particular moment in world history, the end of World War I, when the call for national self-determination was proclaimed as a universal global standard.

Aspirations for political freedom were now, and for the first time, defined solely in terms of collective membership of a sovereign territorial nation-state. This was a moment when most nations of the world lacked political freedoms and were held subordinate as the colonial possessions of imperial powers. To be recognized as sovereign, subjugated peoples seeking freedom had to meet the new standard of national self-determination: they needed to conform to the identity of one nation—one state—one territory. Few subordinated entities could conform to that impossible standard due to ambiguities over the boundaries of nations and borders of states. Given this radical uncertainty, political control over a defined territory—that is, territorial sovereignty—became the practical condition from which peoples seeking freedom could make a legitimate claim to sovereignty and recognition. Once territorial control had become the *fons et origo* for a state to claim international legitimacy and recognition, a loss of territory became equivalent to the loss of state power. The burning question for us today is whether there is a way out of this “territorial trap”? I believe there is and spell out my thinking in the conclusion to this book.

Even if my conclusion is relatively optimistic, the overall picture I sketch in this book is not. This is a study that sees hierarchy as a structural feature of international relations, an outcome that is hardly surprising in a world created by the extension of colonial difference to the global stage. The original fear of the postcolonial nations—that the new international order would never be more than a two-tier world with what Vijay Prashad calls the “darker nations” in its outer perimeter—has been shown to be well founded. This book argues that the world-historical project of decolonization is a struggle that is far from over. Standing firmly in its way are the territorial foundations of modern political life and identity.