



The Bangladesh Liberation War Museum and the Inconclusivity of Architecture¹

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Muktijudda Jadughar under construction, 2016.



Figure 1, source: photo by Tanzim Hasan Salim.



Did the world need the Fifth Symphony before it was written? Did Beethoven need it? He designed it, he wrote it, and the world needed it. Desire is the creation of a new need. (Louis I. Kahn, architect of the Bangladesh *Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan* (National Parliament House) (Goldberger 2017))

The concept of nation which the Europeans have is very different from the concept of nation that we actually found ourselves. The nation is a very derogatory term—"imagined communities" and all these theories that have emerged. For us it's not an imagined community. It's a community which found strength in this identity. (Mofidul Hoque, trustee of the Bangladesh Muktiyudda Jadughar (Liberation War Museum))²

Ten days before Eid, on the third Wednesday of November in 2009, the Shahbagh area near the campus of Dhaka University became the site of an unlikely procession. Seventy teams of architects arrived late into the night, carrying models and drawings.³ They were to be dropped off in the Bangladesh National Museum for entry into a competition.

The work of these architects filled the Nalini Kanta Bhattasali Hall, named after the first curator appointed to the institution. He was a specialist in history, archaeology, iconography, and numismatics, and died six months before the 1947 territorial partition, which led to the creation of East Pakistan and prefigured the nation of Bangladesh, for which the institution is now a primary repository. The antiquities and artefacts he collected when it was the Dhaka Museum were maintained by his successors for the postcolonial institution, which was connected to Dhaka University at the time of independence from the British, and then briefly to the East Pakistan provincial government (during the final year that such an entity existed). Steps away from the rocks and minerals, pottery, coins, sculpture, arms and weapons, wood carvings, textiles and costumes, dolls, musical instruments, manuscripts, paintings, and sculpture collected by Bhattasali for the colonial museum, lay a gallery occupied by the designs that had been entered into the architectural competition.

For Bangladesh, in 2009, still a relatively young nation-state without a continuously reliable infrastructure for architectural education, there were a remarkable number of competition entries. In spite of what could have been an international scope for such a competition, the requirements stipulated that architects had to be Bangladeshi. Many teams were comprised of up to fifteen architects born or trained in Bangladesh, some living in Dhaka, some elsewhere in the country, and some abroad.



The designs by these Bangladeshi architects, amassed in the National Museum, competed for the people's imagination of another museum. That museum had been established to narrate and preserve the memory of the Muktijudda, the Liberation War. This war brought the nation of Bangladesh into being, and had been catalysed by a military action in the vicinity of Shahbagh, where the competition took place. The primary sponsor of the competition was the Muktijudda Jadughar, or the Liberation War Museum of Bangladesh.

The Liberation War Museum was established in 1996 to preserve memories and nurture inclusive narratives of 1971, so that histories of the Muktijudda might materialise in a museum that was driven by the people's articulation of identity, rather than the state's. 'This is actually a state project,' explained Mofidul Hoque, one of the Museum trustees, arguing for the needed locus and ontological kernel for such a museum.' And we also know if the state enters into this field, it will lead to distortion and denial. A state narrative would be a tragic thing for the nation.'⁴ His statement evoked a framework of individual and collective desire for the narration of identity—not an identity at the basis of 'imagined communities' constituting an abstract nation, but the identity the existing community 'found strength in' as it struggled toward liberation.⁵ A set of designs, spatial practices, and architectures were to articulate this desire for the narration of identity, in tangible form.

In this article, I examine the architectures of the Muktijudda Jadughar, which waded into tensions around desire, identity, and narration. I ask what work these architectures were called upon to perform, and how an institutional collaboration has culturally constituted an identity for the Bangladeshi people—whether modern, postmodern, *Bangali*, global, Muslim-majority, secular—through an architecture in many parts. These parts include a building imagined by seventy teams in 2009 and opened to the public in 2017, its site near the Sher-e-Bangla Nagar location of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan, or National Parliament House—a celebrated construction and one of the last works designed by the office of architect Louis I. Kahn during his lifetime—as well as many treasures donated by ordinary and extraordinary Bangladeshis, and collected, displayed, and archived as part of the institution's collaboration.

Without attempting to adjudicate on the events of 1971, I examine their historical narration through the spatial practices associated with the collaborations that form the Muktijudda Jadughar. This focus sharpens questions of desire, identity, and narration as they emerge through the



lenses of architecture, design, and aesthetics. Furthermore, it takes to task the material conclusiveness implied by a socioculturally prominent museum building and its collection.

If indeed a state narrative would be tragic, then, alternatively, I argue that the architectures of the Muktijudda Jadughar have laboured inadvertently toward framing an inconclusivity. This effect should not be conflated with an inconclusivity in a narration of the history of 1971. Narrations of that history remain open, whether or not acknowledged as being so. Instead, I argue that the Muktijudda Jadughar inscribes a desire for a conclusive *architectural* narrative, which seeks to establish 1971 as a generative seed, to be encircled, enclosed, and encased, yet held unresolved.

This desire relies on architecture to be a decided and determined fact, a condition that could lead to a claim that '[d]esire is the creation of a new need,' in considering architecture as a realisation of a historical process, rather than a theoretical one. This statement by Louis I. Kahn deserves a moment of attention here, because in it, a prominent international architect invited by the government of Pakistan to imagine its "second capitol" in Dhaka articulated a form of hubris that underlies expectations of architecture, and thus its capacity to make meaning. In the case of the Muktijudda Jadughar, the desire for architecture to concretely narrate the nation, in built form, was shared by at least seventy architectural teams, eight trustees, dozens of institutional staff members, and hundreds of contributors to the contents and programs of a museum, archive, and cultural centre capturing tangible, intangible, and living heritage. However, seen another way, architecture has no authority to be conclusive. It enables a wide margin of chance and interpretation, even within forms that are determinate, forms of material and conceptual overdetermination, or forms that have been literally fabricated from concrete—as in the built form of the new Liberation War Museum (Figure 1).

Why is this precondition of architecture important to consider vis-à-vis Bangladesh? Just as the editor of this special issue has argued, the Muktijudda Jadughar's invocation of 1971 sits upon a fulcrum: calling at once upon a 'specific "past event" at a fixed point in time' and a 'theoretical perspective.' I argue that the architecture that emerged, using 1971 as a referent, captures that sense of theory, through an "inconclusivity". This inconclusivity is the bedrock upon which one actualised and sixty-nine unbuilt proposals were negotiated. It is this negotiation and lack of resolution that the Muktijudda Jadughar as an architectural envelope makes concrete.



Narrative territories

The Muktiyudda Jadugar occupies a significant platform in a Bangladeshi historical imagination and critical culture. Scholarship is emerging to consider its interventions in wider discursive contexts, with Nayanika Mookherjee's research offering the precedent for examining this institution's history (Mookherjee 2011b). The institution was founded in 1996 by eight former youth freedom fighters, friends, who, later in life, assumed service as its trustees. This article draws in part from their words and those of architects, designers, and other stakeholders in the project. While a critical ethnography of the social and political backgrounds of these figures has not been the aim here, nor practical in this brief examination of spatial practices, these individuals and the entities with which they are associated must be understood as inhabiting a structure of empowerment. They have been empowered both to articulate concerns around the absence of nationalist narratives and desires to replace them, as well as to co-produce such narratives. No individual I interviewed made singular claims upon this narrative agency, yet, in future study of this Museum, nuanced interpretation of that empowerment is needed to provide critical social context and limn the motivations behind the Liberation War Museum's practices. The landscape of the present investigation is populated with other urgencies: namely, that the practices of the Muktiyudda Jadugar have been seeded within a milieu of contested histories and heritage claims, fissures that demand scrutiny.

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The group of individuals who became the Jadugar's trustees brought the argument for a museum and archive before Bangladeshi publics in 1996, intervening against an extraordinary backdrop of circumstances for the re-narrating of history. The country found itself under parliamentary republics in the 1990s, after nearly two decades of martial law that had followed in the years after the creation of the independent state in 1971. A wave of nostalgia and reinvention of sentiment around the war was felt in the aftermath of the *Gana Adalat*, a 'People's Tribunal' in 1992 to try accused collaborators.⁶ In 1995, Shahbagh was occupied by impassioned demonstrators demanding justice in the form of capital punishment for perpetrators of war crimes. In 1996, the proposal for the Muktiyudda Jadugar was floated.

If the Jadugar marinated in the turbulence of public discourse in the early period of its establishment, it did so equally within multiplicities of historical understanding. To date, a consequential set of denials, counter-accusations, and complicated contestations of the narrations of events of



the 1971 war has inflected the historiography on the transition from East Pakistan to Bangladesh. The citation of the numbers and demographics of people killed offers one example of the radical variances in historical acknowledgment and the analysis that follows it. According to Srinath Raghavan, the numbers vary so widely as merely to illustrate the limits and biases of enumeration, ranging between three million and twenty-six thousand, according to Bangladeshi and Pakistani accounts, respectively (Raghavan 2013).⁷ Vociferous arguments in the pages of the Indian journal *Economic & Political Weekly* took to task the damning arguments made in one book-length academic treatment of the history of the 1971 war, which denied the scope and scale of crimes that many Bangladeshis experienced first-hand including members of the elite readership for the book (Mohaiemen 2011).⁸

Endeavours to rigorously capture the history of 1971 have resulted in high stakes for historiography marked in the early turn of the 1978 government project of narration (to write the official history of the Muktiyudda) to the very different task of authentication (to collect and publish documents related to the war). As Hasan Hafizur Rahman wrote in the introduction to *History of Bangladesh War of Independence: documents*, 'we prioritised the presentation of documents and data related to the war, rather than the history of it in itself,' believing in the science, that 'resulting from it the data and documents will tell the story, will conserve the whole events unfolding through a chronological order, and will conserve the order of related incidents to the event during its lifetime.' (Rahman 1982-85)

The faith in this prognosis bore out in the work of one historian involved in that project from the start. Afsan Chowdhury's *Bangladesh 1971* marshalled thirty years of study that had begun in the Ministry of Information project toward producing an independently-written history in four volumes, financed without state, institutional, or corporate sponsorship (Chowdhury 2007). 'We do believe that no official history of 1971 can be written,' he noted of his team's endeavour, 'because our official and state culture does not have any objective space.'⁹ If it may be said that no state culture makes objective space, it may be the case as well that in Bangladesh, the adda has been the alibi, and an aporia has taken the place of the forum for debate.¹⁰ As part of the foreclosure of a critical forum on 1971, scholarly histories and counter-histories have been met with continued press editorials on the memory of 1971, the publication of several memoirs of freedom fighters, and spontaneous acts of memorialisation around the country. Iconography has beaten history.



The historiographical ambiguity around the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 is ironic for a modern nation with an iconic birth. Its liberation war is commonly narrated externally as a civil war between East and West Pakistan or as the third Indo-Pakistani conflict. Internally, various forms of overdetermination of collective memory of the war predominate, particularly around the Gana Adalat of the 1990s and the more recent International Crimes Tribunals. Yet, both external and internal perspectives put the political aspects of the history before the common, "human" aspects, both negatively and positively so. That effacement of a universalism is, I argue, the catalyst and seedbed for the Museum's broader aesthetics and specific architectural narration.

While the events related above shaped contested histories in Bangladesh, or at least in its capital city Dhaka, another significant element emerged globally at the time of this institution's inception, relevant to its wider reception: the genre of the genocide museum. The opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1993, the formation of the International Association of Genocide Scholars in 1994, and the 1999 meeting at the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center for the establishment of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience demonstrated increased public and scholarly attention to the rhetorical and analytical conceptualisation of genocide as well as its affective memorialisation. The Muktijudda Jadugar, among eight institutions around the world, was invited to be a founder and steering committee member of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience. This summons signalled not only the emergent institution's readiness to take on questions of conscience, but its recognition within a wider discursive field as possessing some historical claim to intervene in those questions.

By the 1990s, profound social change in the first decades of Bangladeshi sovereignty, years of military rule, unevenness in development, incipient globalisation, and the drainage of human and other resources together weakened historical consciousness of the nation and seeded desires for it. According to Mofidul Hoque, head of the design and display of the Muktijudda Jadugar's collection, and director of its Centre for the Study of Genocide and Justice, the trustees took up the cause of establishing a museum in response to what they saw as a need for 'Bangladeshi' perspectives on the historical struggle for political liberation and nationhood. The case they made for re-narrating a history of the Liberation War in the wake of the electrifying People's Tribunal coincided with meaningful global events, which generated a point of reflection for Bangladesh. The failure of



the Soviet state signified a lost promise to liberation movements around the world. Conversely, the end of apartheid in South Africa proposed new liberatory governmental orders. Hoque and his colleagues anticipated that the heritage narratives that had fuelled the freedom struggle might become inaccessible to the generation born following the nationalist struggle. Future Bangladeshis might desire historical connections and a specifically articulated identification with the past.

The story of a design aspiration, a competition, and architects who had no personal experience of the events of 1971, stands against the backdrop of the complicated local, regional, and international politics of this heritage, as well as the contested narratives of the 1971 war. The claims of this narrative upon the universalist dimensions of humanity, genocide, global history, and architectural monumentality proposed an alternative to a state vocalisation. As a result, a set of architectures—including the designs that resulted from the 2009 competition, the building that was constructed, the museology and museography of its content, its affective programming, and its siting and spatial satellites—array and situate a variety of expressions and representations of a people’s museum of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh, as-built

At the time of Partition, Pakistan was to be a non-contiguous state. Two relatively equal populations were divided East and West by approximately two thousand kilometres of Indian territory, one time zone, radically distant majority and minority languages and literary traditions, multiple visions of the social practice of Islam, other religions, and secularism, and significant asymmetries in resources as well as political and financial capital (van Schendel 2009).¹¹ The impossibilities of this bifurcate cultural and political geography were iterated as early as 1947, immediately following Independence, with agitations over the official state language. Student protestors in East Pakistan organised and formed a Language Action Committee in order to advocate for Bangla to be recognised alongside Urdu as an official language, as a majority language among the dozens spoken in the recently partitioned country.

Language would produce a pragmatic and aesthetic nexus. In 1947, the practical concerns around language had to do with the material impacts that would be felt in lost opportunities for education and employment if an Urdu-only strategy were implemented, which would favour a small elite. These were coupled with existential anxieties, which surfaced over the suppression of a mother tongue and oral and literary culture. However,



while East Pakistanis had many practical concerns about political and economic asymmetry, of importance here—in analysing the architectures of the Muktijudda Jadugar—is their narration as such. To emphasise the determinations around language as practical rather than ideational elides an attentiveness to a distinction between the Urdu and Bangla native-speaking populations in Pakistan, felt strongly in East Pakistan, which had to do with the quantity and quality of the national population. In 1947, the former constituted three per cent of the total population, and the latter fifty-six per cent (ibid.: 110).

Urdu speakers included elites in the administration and *muhajirs*—a term used to denote the post-Partition refugee in Pakistan, respectfully recalling travellers *en route* to perform the Hajj, and especially connoting those socially and symbolically constructed as essential to the *Nazriya-e-Pakistan*, or the idea of Pakistan: the core constituent for whom the yet-abstracted Pakistan was to be home. The tensions between the core citizenries of Urdu-speaking refugee elites in West Pakistan and Bangla speakers in East Pakistan who often self-identified as autochthonous, fuelled the *Bhasa Andalan*, or Bangla language movement. The shocking and catalysing events of 'Ekushey February' erupted in 1952, fewer than five years into the life of the new nation of Pakistan. On the twenty-first of February in 1952, several students were killed by armed police opening fire on the Dhaka University campus in order to halt protests against the Urdu-only policy instituted by the government. The popular, and later official, memorialisation of this date as the *Sahid Dibash*, or Martyr's Day, and the conceptualisation of those who died in the protests precisely as *bhasa sahid*—language martyrs—illustrates a curious intersection between a cultural expression by "the people" and an esthetic depiction seized upon in a nationalist struggle.

The Bhasa Andalan raised conundrums of identity and representation, which prefigured the narrative paradoxes that the Museum and its architectures engaged decades later.¹² The Bhasa Andalan complicated the central question of how Islam would be figured in the new state of Pakistan, and particularly in the movement for the *Nazriya-e-Pakistan*—especially if it was to produce the epistemic framework for a dialectical opposition to Hindu India. As Willem van Schendel discusses, with Islam as the political idiom of the new Pakistani state, the East Pakistani language movement was anchored in a quandary: that Urdu-speaking elites in West Pakistan, who perceived themselves as the caretakers of Islam on the subcontinent, did not deem the Sanskrit-derived Bangla language, a literary tradition



valorising a pantheon of Hindus, and cultural practices too closely resembling those of India, as properly Islamic (Schendel 2009: 111; Mookherjee 2011a).¹³

In Nayanika Mookerjee's analysis, Bengalis were cast as socially inferior within the racialised discourse of 'the "Hinduised Muslim", the *Kafer* who were seen to be small-boned, short, dark, lazy, effeminate, *bheto* (rice and fish-eating and cowardly), half-Muslim Bengalis of the river plains,' in contrast to the 'broad-boned, tall, fair, wheat-eating, warrior-like, resilient, manly, brave Muslims of the rough topography of Pakistan,' justifying the Pakistani army's mass rapes in 1971, as a tactic of racial purification (Mookherjee 2012: 1582).¹⁴ After 1971, there emerged a figuration of the *birangana*, or war heroine, an iconic essentialisation of the masses of women raped during the liberation war, and whose rehabilitation was called for through the re-establishment of their social value (albeit in patriarchal terms)—all which were rather immediately appropriated in widespread iconography, propaganda, and other cultural representations (Mookherjee 2016: 22).¹⁵ Such distillation points animated the Muktijudda Jadugar's permanent exhibition and programming at its original and new sites, propagating esthetic languages, which provide one archive of the complexities and inhibitions that possessed public discourse and thought in the years after the Liberation War.

In spite of the ready violence the Pakistani state demonstrated at Dhaka University in 1952 and the continued structuring of political and economic asymmetry, the design and construction of a capitol complex was slated, in order to house the government of East Pakistan.¹⁶ The capitol complex was located in the newly planned citadel Ayub Nagar (renamed Sher-e-Bangla Nagar after independence), which Kazi Khaleed Ashraf describes as 'an exclusive enclave' that 'does not seem to make any visual correlation to the rest of the city, for there was not much in the neighbourhood to make connections to,' and which instead 'alludes to the world beyond Dhaka, to the primordial and perennial landscape of the delta' resonating in the built forms of giant blocks and cylinders rising out of the water (Ashraf 2012: 60-5, 62f.) (Figures 2 & 3). In 1967, Kafiluddin Ahmad, the Public Works Department deputy chief engineer in Dhaka during the building construction, saw 'a happy blend of the rich Muslim cultural heritage and the dynamic spirit of a progressive Pakistan.'¹⁷ His twinned articulation of commitment to the heritage and the progressive together, however bureaucratically positivist, illuminates the cultural ecosystem of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, the vicinity of the city into which the Muktijudda



Jadughar would be set, and the monumental scope and architectural aspiration that this site elicited.

Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan and government hostels.



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Figure 2 & 3, source: photos by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, 2008.



Muktijudda Jadughar in Segun Bagicha.



Figure 4, 5 & 6, source: courtesy of Bangladesh Liberation War Museum.



The story of the 2009 architectural competition to design the Muktijudda Jadugar opens onto the meaning the museum acquired in its transfer to its new site from its original location at 5 Segun Bagicha, near Dhaka University: a sensorium teeming with its own cultural sedimentation and collective memory. Its first home was a two-story colonial-style residential building, with balconies overlooking thatch-roofed seating areas in the courtyard (Figures 4, 5 & 6).¹⁸ In the yard, an "eternal flame" was lit by families of the martyrs at the Museum inauguration on 22 March 1996. It remained continuously aflame through the years, in honour of martyrs and soldiers. As a core element of the building that would be transposed to its new setting, its essentialising and material argument for the teleology of 1971 prefigured inconclusivities in the architectures to come.

The building in Segun Bagicha was perhaps integral to the establishment of the Muktijudda Jadugar. The 1931 building, named 'Anand Bhavan'—ironically, the appellation of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's home in New Delhi—was owned by the family of A. Majid, and had been occupied by the headquarters of nearly ten daily newspapers. In September 1995, three months after the registration of the trust for the Liberation War Museum and following some negotiation between the owners and occupants, the presses moved out and the eight trustees, including Rabiul Hussain, an architect among them, rented and began refurbishing the building. They did this work in advance of a tour that would take them to several *zilas* (districts) across Bangladesh and dozens of *thanas* (precincts) in major towns to publicise the museum's mission and gather documents and artefacts for the collection.¹⁹

The preparation of the building was intended to demonstrate the integrity of the mission, and yet, the trustees could little anticipate the overwhelming response they would receive. By October 1995, the Jadugar began the official collection of memorabilia. Noted poet Begum Sufia Kamal chaired the initial ceremonies in the yard of the house in Segun Bagicha. The trustees conducted many public ceremonies on the premises in which celebrated figures accepted donations of artefacts and personal effects.²⁰ This strategy spurred a mediatic afterlife, which in turn attracted press attention and built support for museum activities, helping to construct and cement an imaginary of the Jadugar.

When the call for a Liberation War Museum was issued in 1995, as the trustees published announcements in the newspapers and travelled around Bangladesh to raise awareness and garner support, the response could hardly have been anticipated.²¹ Families and individuals entrusted to the



fledgling institution scores of precious artefacts which they had conserved in private for twenty-five years.²² This initial outpouring defied sense; that people would part with treasures they had maintained for a quarter century should have been impossible. During a gathering in 1996 with freedom fighters organised by a local administration in Khulna, at the site of the war's largest killing field, a man approached trustee Akku Chowdhury with a bundle wrapped in newspaper. In it, the dress of his four-month-old daughter Rehana was cleaned and preserved, and has since formed a cornerstone of the permanent exhibition.²³ 'This was the moment we knew the museum could be real,' Mofidul Hoque recalled.²⁴

Ultimately, the move from 5 Segun Bagicha to a site near Sher-e-Bangla Nagar inscribed an archive. From its inception, the collection has been extensively and carefully maintained and monitored by Amena Khatun, the Liberation War Museum Conservator and Archivist. The title is honorary, as archival training has yet to be formalised in Bangladesh, beyond limited professional development sessions. Khatun's dedication and development of the collection plainly follows the impetus of her connection to its mission. Her father was killed in the war.²⁵ In 1999, the Jadugar's collection contained 800 photographs, 506 documents, 500 newspaper cuttings, and 665 objects. Of these, 310 photographs, 84 documents, 227 newspaper cuttings, and 470 objects could be displayed in the museum galleries, and the others were kept in controlled storage.²⁶ By December 2007, the total collection had grown exponentially to 14,932 artefacts: 3,439 photographs, 2,055 documents, 77,488 newspapers (from Bangladesh and abroad), 1,690 memorabilia of freedom fighters and martyrs. Of these, 1,300 were exhibited.²⁷

The collection includes human remains, which were exhibited in the former museum site, and will not be exhibited in the new site. (In this, the Museum has taken a cue from the display strategies of its international counterparts, as it has served as a noted stop on foreigners' tours from its inauguration on.) In Segun Bagicha, housing diverse materials in a small facility lacking environmental controls for preserving delicate artefacts presented a challenge. Moving to the new facility entailed custom design and construction of portable archival boxes, bureaus, filing cabinets, and armoires, to contain artefacts of all shapes and sizes. The archive presently inhabits a glazed, trussed box that protrudes from the front façade of the building, on the second floor, adjacent to the library. If a sunny room seems an unlikely home for an archival function, its prominence speaks to the centrality it has assumed in the Jadugar's overall work.



Cast-in-place heritage

According to Dr. Abu Sayeed M. Ahmed, an expert on early Islamic architecture in Bengal and the Educational Secretary of the Institute of Architects, Bangladesh (IAB), Member-Secretary of the Liberation War Museum Mofidul Hoque approached the IAB with the idea of a competition.²⁸ The primary goal of the organisation, founded in 1972 amid nation-building efforts to institute professional structure and culture, was to promote the work of young architects. It did so primarily through the promotion of competitions for building and urban design commissions.

'Competitions between architects functioning as artists,' writes H  l  ne Lipstadt, are among 'the oldest and least changed elements of architectural practice' (Lipstadt 1989: 119). However, in Bangladesh in 2009, such a system of patronage executed a distinct goal. It retained its aim to produce for the client multiple polemical positions and solutions to a problem. Yet, it also worked to enable those less established and connected architects to advance meritocratically. It hindered forms of corruption rampant in the construction industry, such as bribery, through a thorough process of administrative transparency and regulation.

Ahmed's first task as competition director was to write a brief that gave a history of the museum, the requirements of the architect for participation (for example, a government-stipulated minimum of eight years of experience), the format of the entry, the building program, size of the collection, and so on (Figures 7 & 8). Based on the fifteen-year organigramme supplied by the trustees and an inventory of artefacts, the programme was set to include twenty-thousand square feet of galleries as well as administrative offices, a library, and an archive. The eternal flame was to occupy the main axis.



FOCUS

Page from Muktiyudda Jadughar competition brief, with the header: Muktiyudda Jadughar; Agargaon, Dhaka; Sthapatya Design/Naksha Pratijagita (Liberation War Museum; Agargaon, Dhaka; Architectural Design Competition).

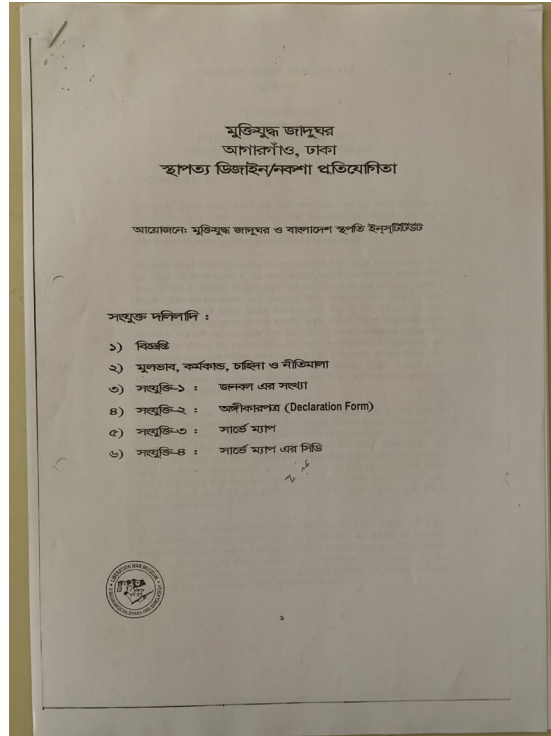


Figure 7, source: courtesy of Institute of Architects, Bangladesh.

Muktiyudda Jadughar competition advertisement.

Notice for
OPEN ARCHITECTURAL
DESIGN COMPETITION
of LIBERATION WAR MUSEUM

THE LIBERATION WAR MUSEUM (LWM) has taken the initiative to construct the new building of LWM at Agargaon, Dhaka.

With this view, LWM in association with the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB), is organizing an Open Architectural Design Competition to select the most appropriate design. Selected architect/firm shall have to render comprehensive services (architectural and engineering design, supervision etc.) as required for the successful completion of the project. A panel of Jurors, nominated by LWM and IAB as per the competition guidelines of IAB, will select the best design from the entries. The three best designs shall receive the following awards—

- ◆ First Prize Tk. 5,00,000/- (Taka Five lakh only)
- ◆ Second Prize Tk. 3,00,000/- (Taka Three lakh only)
- ◆ Third Prize Tk. 2,00,000/- (Taka two lakh only)

Interested architects should note the following information—

01. Eligibility:

- a. Architects willing to participate in the Open Design Competition must meet the eligibility conditions specified in the Dhaka Mohanogor Imarat Nirman Sidhantia 2008 for designing museum building (Type-C)
- b. In case of Firms, Owner or at least 01(One) of the Partners/Directors must fulfill the criteria above.
- c. Firms and Architects may participate as a Joint Venture, in which case the Firm or Architect, fulfilling the eligibility conditions shall be the lead Firm.

02. Competition Documents: Interested architect/firm may obtain Competition Documents from the office of the undersigned on everyday of the week except Sunday between 11.00 am to 5.00 pm paying an amount of Tk. 1,000.00 in cash. A written application for the competition documents has to be submitted. Last date of collecting Competition Documents is Thursday the 3rd September 2009.

03. Queries: Written queries, if any, shall have to be submitted to the undersigned on or before Thursday, 10th September 2009, at 11:30 am at the office of the undersigned.

04. Submission: Entries shall be submitted on Wednesday the 18th November 2009, between 11.00 am and 4.00 pm at the Nalinikanta Bhattashali Hall of National Museum, Shahbag, Dhaka.

05. Result: Result to the competition will be announced on 23 November 2009.

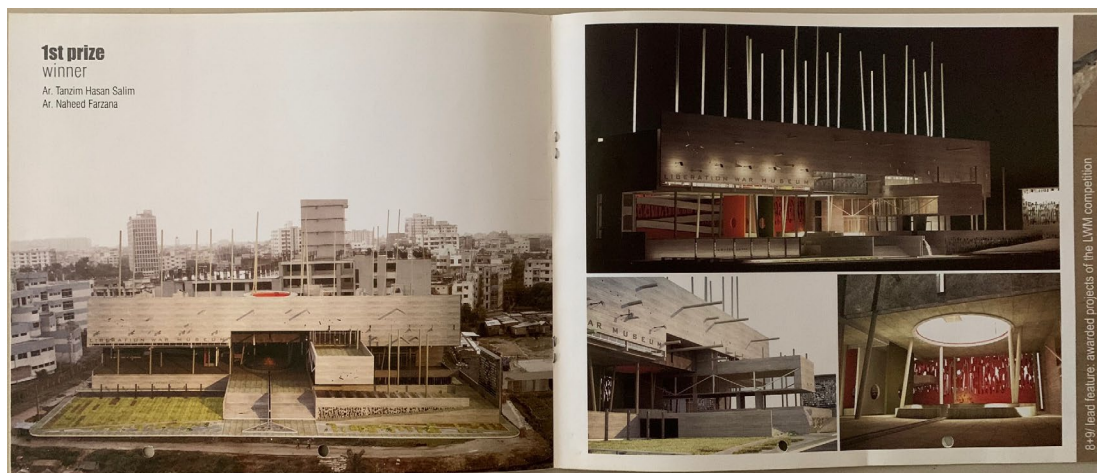
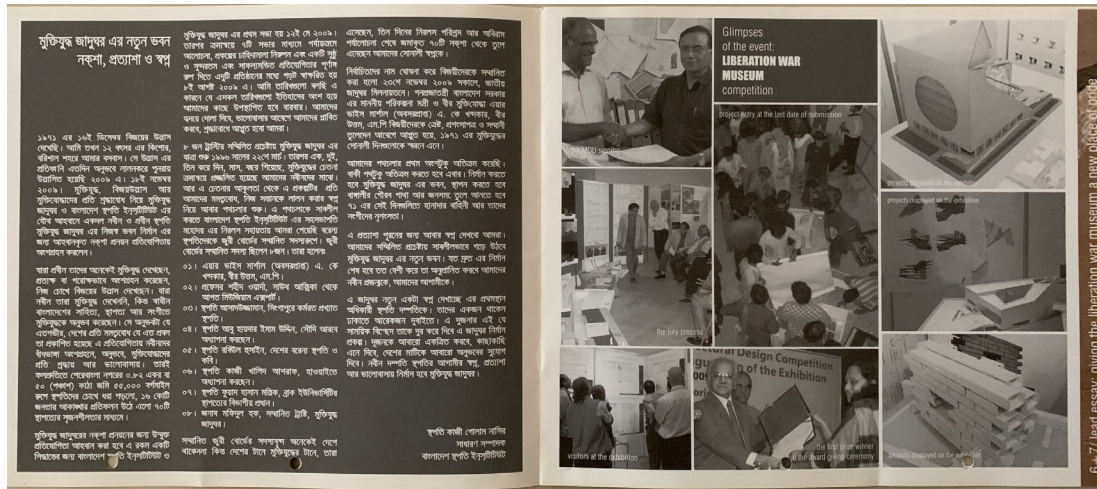
MOFIDUL HOQUE
 Trustee and Member Secretary
 LIBERATION WAR MUSEUM

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Figure 8, source: courtesy of Institute of Architects, Bangladesh.



Pages from IAB newsletter showing awarded projects of the Liberation War Museum competition.



Figures 9, 10 & 11, source: courtesy of Institute of Architects, Bangladesh.



The IAB advertised the competition in English- and Bangla-language news media and held an open meeting for architects to discuss questions.²⁹ The deadline for registration and published timeline provided approximately three months for the design before the submission date of 18 November 2009.³⁰ Competitors and jurors alike came from Bangladesh, except for one jury member from South Africa recommended by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), who added expertise on museology.³¹ Although the brief set the deadline for submissions between 11:00 A.M. and 4:00 P.M., 'due to traffic problem [sic],' the IAB extended the period of submission at the National Museum in Shahbagh to later that evening.³² 'It was a celebration,' remarked the competition director on the unexpected number of drawings and models.³³ One of the trustees could not help but note that the quantity of submissions fell just short of the meaningful number seventy-one.³⁴ Yet, that poignancy was eclipsed by the sheer volume of seventy teams' submissions, representing the fullness of the field of Bangladeshi practitioners.

The IAB rented the Nalini Kanta Bhattasali Hall for a one-day exhibition of the competition entries, and a two-day period of sequestered deliberation before the announcement of first, second, and third place awardees and honourable mentions (Figures 9, 10 & 11). 'With more time, the jury could have been influenced,' Ahmed noted. The selection of jury members was not a public process, and developed in discussions between the Liberation War Museum and the IAB. Of the seven jury members, four were to be architects—Bangladeshi, with international exposure—and three names were to be forwarded by the trustees. 'We could have invited a famous foreign architect, but that was not our goal,' Ahmed recalled.³⁵ The jury decision was required to be unanimous. More urgently, it had to offer the imprimatur of unanimity—which perhaps created greater possibility for the jury to support a radical decision.

When architects Naheed Farzana and Tanzim Hasan Salim were awarded the commission, their astonishment perhaps exceeded that of all the others involved. They were in their mid-thirties, had no direct memory of the Muktijudda, no previous experience with such a prominent single commission, nor the infrastructure of a larger and more seasoned architectural firm.³⁶ The decision underscored the humanist intentions with which the Jadugarh intended to enter its next phase of operations, and its own aspirations to reckon with global practices of conscience and legacy, including aesthetic practices.



The awardees, a married couple, brought to the Jadughar carefully cultivated aesthetic practices. As graduates of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, they moved to Weimar to study in the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism at Bauhaus. They left the programme to make an autodidactic study of buildings and urban form across Europe. Afterwards, they returned to Dhaka, established a small practice, and maintained it for three years until Salim took work with a firm in Abu Dhabi and Farzana with one in Dhaka. She submitted the competition entry while he was abroad and, according to Salim, during the period of several months between the award and the contract, they laboured to convince the committee that he would indeed return to manage the design and construction project. He often spent days and nights on site.

The work of the makers of the Muktijudda Jadughar extended the futurity of 1971. Architect Salim, as one member of the collaboration, instituted a daily aesthetic practice that involved photographic documentation of laborers' lives and bodies as they built the Museum building (Figures 12, 13, 14, 15 & 16). In the critical poetics of the photo series, workers built a museum for the people as if building the national heritage itself.

The everyday art of work and life on this historically meaningful construction site expanded the narrative futures and the heritage practices the Jadughar sought to recuperate and enable. It emphasised the fungibility of hope and the future-oriented discourse offered by 1971 in the present. As postcolonial thinkers and activists around the world have succumbed to dysfunctional states, ethnic feuds, and the conflicts instigated by local and international forces, they have abandoned the idea of decolonisation and the independent nation-state as the final destination of "history" and adopted a new future-oriented optimism, around multiple liberated futures. Following decades of disappointment, the Jadughar's advocates built on this emerging desire for postcolonial hope, presenting 1971 as the liberatory root of a quintessential vernacular agency, which could enable continual social transformation.³⁷ That futurity of 1971, embedded in an architectural inconclusivity, was the latent outcome of this architectural exercise.



Helal, Muktijudda Jadughar construction worker on site.



Figure 12, source: photo by Tanzim Hasan Salim, 2014.

Muktijudda Jadughar construction worker on site. Name Unknown.



Figure 13, source: photo by Tanzim Hasan Salim, 2014.



Ismail, Muktijudda Jadughar construction worker on site.

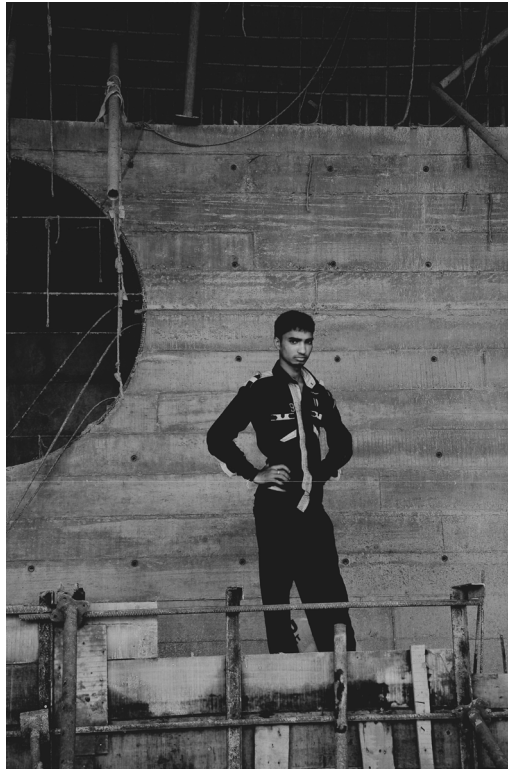


Figure 14, source: photo by Tanzim Hasan Salim, 2014.

**Name unknown (left) and Mintu (right),
Muktijudda Jadughar construction workers on site.**



Figure 15, source: photo by Tanzim Hasan Salim, 2014.



Baka Mollah, Muktijudda Jadughar construction worker on site.



Figure 16, source: photo by Tanzim Hasan Salim, 2014.

Fossil to nation

The architectures of the Muktijudda Jadughar have been called upon to do many things. The building has had to negotiate the vacuity of the urban fabric. It has had to comport itself with sobriety as well as joy, together memorialising the dead and celebrating the future.³⁸ It has shouldered these tasks with an open narrative of 1971 at its centre.

The building brims with affect. Punctures in the façade mirror fractures in the urban landscape and also recall bullet holes. The vertical and horizontal masts mime the bamboo poles and other makeshift weapons of the spontaneous soldiers in "the people's" fight. The sombre, monolithic blocks themselves project masculine strength, hardly subliminal as a corrective to a narrative of victimhood.

If the building was designed with any pact with the Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan, it was to bear weight on the site, to visually overpower, utilising scant few materials. It employed a massing geometry of large blocks, uninterrupted surfaces, deep shadows, and long spans, which would pull the southern breezes into the concourse sheltered under the galleries, which hover atop the grand entry stair on axis with the reflecting pool and eternal flame (Figures 17 & 18). Iconically, the multiple gestures of this



design reincarnated on a monumental scale the courtyard at 5 Segun Bagicha.

Muktijudda Jadughar concourse.



Figure 17, source: photo by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, 2018.

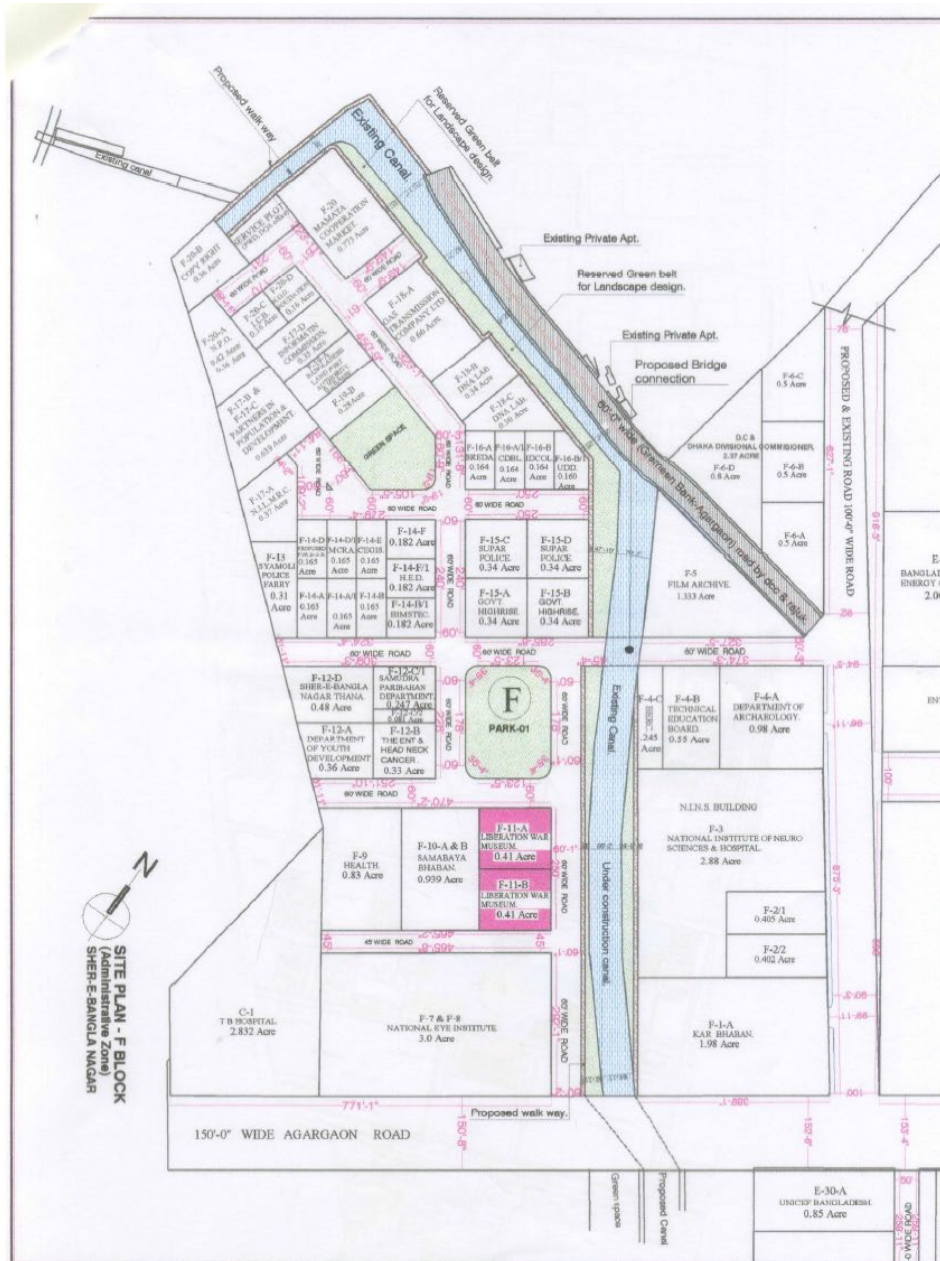
Muktijudda Jadughar concourse ramp.



Figure 18, source: photo by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, 2018.



Muktijudda Jadughar, site plan.
Drawing by Chief Architect Kazi Golam Nasir.



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Figure 19, source: courtesy of Bangladesh Liberation War Museum.

The Museum and the architects were charged to respond to vacuous surroundings with the awarded project receiving a commendation in the Juror's Statement because it 'attempted to create a landmark urban event in a rather unremarkable site.'³⁹ In his 'manifesto for a better city', Kazi Khaleed Ashraf, a juror in the competition, criticised Dhaka's 'absurd' urbanism for



its lack of usable public space (Ashraf 2012). Following years of the Parliament building's disuse during the period of military government, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and its environs had transformed into one of the few precincts where the open yet clandestine needs of lovers as well as criminals might be met. The museum's one acre of land and the building concourse would serve as a sort of public porch, offering a counterpoint to what one stakeholder described as the 'drug den' around it (Figure 19).⁴⁰

The building's large trusses mirrored a city composed of many small modules of bricks and block with long, planar expanses. A high, narrow, skylit chamber contoured the path of travel to the upper floors, an open ramp sitting between the galleries, the rear exterior wall, and the concourse below, its vertical surfaces textured in contrast to the smooth concrete floor finish (Figure 20). This sunlight-drenched cavity is planned to become a hall for martyrs. The horizontal striations on its gallery wall side are the remnants of the boards lashed together to provide the structural formwork to cast the concrete wall (Figure 21). For Salim, the rusticity of cast-in-place concrete recalled bunker technology and the 'ruggedness of war.'⁴¹ On the opposite side, the building's exterior wall is chequered with square-patterned castings modelled on coin designs, and pierced with deep trapezoidal window openings (Figure 22). These bas-reliefs cast in place familiar architectural plans of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan and the Dhaka University Faculty of Fine Arts, as well as patterns recalling those ingrained into the city's sartorial landscape by high-end clothing boutiques such as Jatra and Aranya (Figures 23 & 24). Salim cited Le Corbusier's experiments with plasticity, in these exercises responding to the jurors' recommendations to break up the large expanse of the exterior blank wall.⁴²

Muktijudda Jadughar, skylit chamber above concourse ramp.

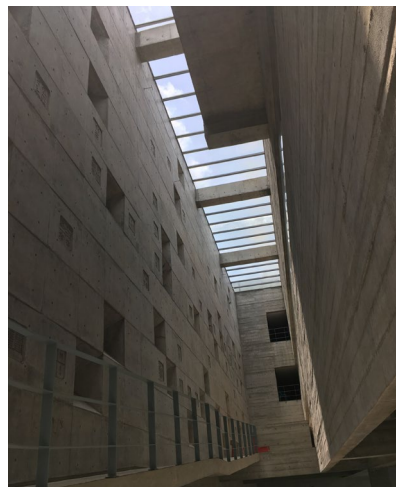


Figure 20, source: photo by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, 2018.



The brutalist concrete esthetic, a material narration of land, recalls some of the tensions raised in the Bhasa Andalan around a sense of autochthony and rootedness. Bangla speakers in East Pakistan, a middle and working class, were understood and often self-identified as belonging to the land, even if they were not landowning. For that majority population, the land carried with it anticolonial sentiment, having been subject for centuries to regimes of extraction by European colonial powers and local zamindars alike. This sense of grounded belonging for the East Pakistan Bangali elite and non-elite eluded, for example, a cosmopolitan elite or muhajir in West Pakistan, who was perceived to have been transposed, as drawing upon or adopting the minority language and courtly traditions of Urdu as a symbol of aristocratic power. The sense of regional belonging or membership in the majority social community of Bangladesh is complex and has not been shared among all citizens. Representations of dominant constituencies have been criticised across issues of class, gender, ethnicity, and other political and social intersections—particularly in relation to non-Bangalis in Bangladesh, for example, in Bihari camps or the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Yet, in the period following the anticolonial struggle, during which self-determination continued to forge a battleground, the concerns and anxieties produced by a sense of belonging to the land undergirded a political movement. The rugged undertone of this movement, conferred upon popular claims for sovereignty, seems to have materialised in concrete in the architectures of the Jadughar (Chowdhury 2017; Mohsin 1997).

Muktijudda Jadughar concourse wall.



Figure 21, source: photo by Anooradha Iyer



Muktijudda Jadughar concourse wall.



Figure 22, source: photo by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, 2018.

Relief detail, far left: Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan plan.



Figure 23, source: photo by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, 2018.



Design patterns for shutters used in concrete framework.

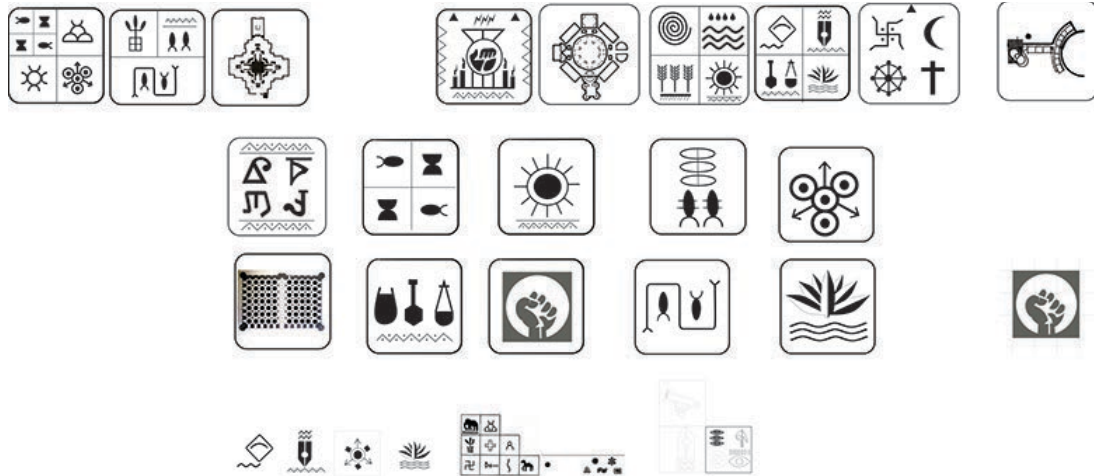


Figure 24, source: courtesy of Tanzim Hasan Salim.

If the mimetic building material is yet inconclusive about its referent, but other ambivalent signs appear elsewhere in a museum that was constructed—notably—*almost* as designed. At the ground level entrance, below the concourse, a row of seven freestanding columns intended to memorialise martyrs was modified from an abstract orthogonal form in the design proposal to copy an ornamented monument depicted in the permanent exhibition upstairs: a Victory Pillar memorialising a resistance led by King Dibboka in the Naogaon district in the eleventh century.⁴³ While historians may take issue with the genealogy of the claim, just as the architects took with the trustees’ revision of the design, the stakes in the Muktijudda narrative at this moment were evident in an architecture rooted in the theoretical possibilities of 1971.

The permanent exhibition was displayed in the main galleries, two rooms per floor, bisected by a contemplative space overlooking the reflecting pool. During the design process, one floor of galleries was added within the proposed elevation, keeping the building within the government district’s height restrictions (imposed because of this precinct’s once-proximity to the main airport), but reducing the floor-to-ceiling dimension of two gallery levels. This resulted in intimate volumes for the galleries. Tall crimson dyed *khadi* drapes flanked the four gallery entrances, silkscreen-printed with text in the sequence of travel: 'Our Heritage, Our Struggle' and 'Our Rights, Our Sacrifices' on the third floor, and 'Our Battles, Our Friends' and 'Our Victory, Our Values' on the fourth. Here again in the permanent exhibition, the Museum preserved the narrative structure from its original in Segun Bagicha.⁴⁴



The gallery design was developed in multiple workshops held in the old museum in 2016 and 2017.⁴⁵ The goal of these workshops was to develop the permanent exhibition storyline and rhythm, determine the order of the artefacts, and decide where breaks in the visual structure should occur, vis-à-vis the architectural barriers of the four major galleries. According to consulting designer Barbara Fahs Charles, the question emerged of whether to exhibit the 1970 election as a coda in the first gallery or a preamble in the second.

The first gallery provides a heritage narrative of Bengal. Moving chronologically from a segment of fossilised wood and a map of the Bengal delta to the December 1970 election, the storyline produces a teleological link between heritage and historical struggle. The terminal exhibit depicts the fateful election decision in favour of the Awami League party candidate, '*Bangabandhu*' ('Friend of Bengal') Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, which followed in the immediate aftermath of a devastating cyclone. The procession through the first gallery culminates in an image of East Pakistan's readiness to push forward its consensus-derived six points for greater political, economic, and military autonomy, with the dramatic declaration that 'Pakistan shall remain intact.'

The second gallery focuses on human slaughter and the fight that followed, centring on the events of 'Operation Searchlight' on 25 March 1971, beginning with a dark tunnel experience, an exhibit conceived around a Pakistani army jeep. It imbricates the political with the universal, commingling the personal artifacts of martyrs and soldiers with didactic text on the definitions of rights and genocide (silkscreened on khadi cloth). The decision to locate the 1970 election in the first gallery constructed a thematic arc in which it created an opening, not a foreclosure—here again, emphasising futurity.

Few participants in the Muktijudda Jadughar collaboration experienced the war first-hand, and if they did, they did so as children or younger siblings of fighters. However, the general manager of the Liberation War Museum, Mahbub Alam, had been a soldier. According to Charles, Alam noted that soldiers did not always identify with the storyline in the old museum. Many could not 'see themselves' in it, or even climb the stairs to the third floor. He advocated for a position contrary to those that would place this museum's narrative into the global languages of culture and history museums, emphasising that genocide would not be a discussion point at all if Bangladesh had not won the war. His advocacy prevailed during the course of the workshops, and the narrative shifted to reflect the



work of the insurgency parallel to the practices of genocide, grounding stories of politics alongside poetics.

On the floor above, a diverse collection of material and documentary artifacts drives a set of extraordinary and ordinary microhistories along local, regional, and international lines. The third gallery places the events of the Muktiyudda into a global history, situating political and cultural entanglements with India, Britain, and the U.S. through an assemblage of documentary evidence. The fourth gallery examines topical aspects of the war through poignant events and objects, for example, the killing of intellectuals, the formation of a naval commando, the sacrifices of the Indian army, and sexual violence as a weapon of war (in a segregated space dedicated to birangana).

Shelter made from concrete pipe sections in the Salt Lake refugee camps, Calcutta.



Figure 25, source: photo by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, 2018.



Likeness of boat used in the Bakunda Bridge Operation, in which Hasna Khan Rani, an eight-year-old girl, helped to smuggle ammunition in a riverboat.



Figure 26, source: photo by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, 2018.

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Long play record, ticket, and brochure of "The concert for Bangladesh", organised by George Harrison.



Figure 27, source: photo by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, 2018.



These two rooms include photographs, newspaper clippings, and other documents, as well as an array of personal effects, from martyrs' clothing to soldiers' weapons, diaries, artworks, spectacles, and musical instruments, a freedom fighter's automobile, a radio receiver used to monitor external broadcasts, and a handmade cyclostyle printing machine. The museography sequences complex hierarchies of information and scales of history along a wide thematic range, moving between the intensity of localised struggles and the drama of the global atrocity of 1971. The exhibition explores the organisational structure of the Pakistan army and the unique narratives of individual resistance cells. It invites the viewer to directly interrogate the government of Pakistan's infamous *White Paper on the crisis in East Pakistan*, of 5 August 1971, arranged without wall text alongside other documentary evidence, some with stained or torn pages, heightening the "archival" affect. The exhibition highlights the refugee camps, most prominently those in Salt Lake, Calcutta, in which children lived in shelters constructed of concrete pipe sections. A recreated cylinder punctures a gallery partition, encouraging children to pass through it and interact with the display through play (Figure 25).

The collections re-enact stories of individual battles and acts of heroism, for example, in the replica of a riverboat fronted by eight-year-old Hasna Khan Rani, her mother, and a boatman who together cached and carried ammunition and explosives twenty miles across water from Faridpur (Figure 26). Through reprints of news clippings, photographs, and documents such as a telegram from Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to President Richard Nixon, the exhibition gives flesh to India's intervention. The long play album and program from "The concert for Bangladesh" at Madison Square Garden in New York on 1 August 1971, organised by George Harrison and Ravi Shankar (for which Bob Dylan made a then-rare appearance) situate a public reaction to 'Bangladesh' as the global precedent to the now-familiar aesthetic technique of relief aid fundraising through musical events (Figure 27).

A photograph of Paul Connett at a rally in Trafalgar Square on the same date introduces the radical Operation Omega undertaken by European and American activists, to hand-deliver humanitarian relief supplies to East Pakistan and instigate nonviolent confrontation with West Pakistani forces. Some participating foreigners were jailed with two-year sentences. Ellen Connett learned of her pregnancy while held in a district jail near Jessore, and received support from fellow prisoners who introduced her to another mother who had given birth there. Prisoners were released within months,



at the end of the war, and in 2013, the government of Bangladesh honoured the Connetts, among 60 foreign nationals.⁴⁶ The permanent exhibition ends with a display of the legal document of the nation's constitution donated by former student activist and later political leader Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, and a copy of the daily Bangla-language newspaper *Dainik Pakistan Bangladesh*, with a cross through the word 'Pakistan' and the headline, 'Joy Banglar Joy' (Victory to the Bengali Liberation Movement).⁴⁷

What to make of a museological narrative that emphasises militaristic triumph with genocidal atrocity, a local and global intellectual and artistic tradition, the works of children and of states? What labour is performed by a storyline that begins with Pleistocene fossilised wood from a tract of the Lalmai hills in Sylhet and Chittagong, and ends with a bound copy of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh? How to think of their encasement in a volume of concrete that has been imagined, designed, handcrafted—laboured over—by Bangali workers who comprise the very people to be represented by these artefacts? Along with the museography, the history of the collection and the activist practices of the museum may begin to outline the stakes of 1971.

On the inconclusivity of architecture

This overall work resembles that of other activist museums in the world, which use spatial extensions to produce an epistemic scaffolding. Like the Tenement Museum and other Sites of Conscience, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the District Six Museum, or the 1947 Partition Archive, it supports public events, cultural programming, and educational outreach. A mobile museum travels to schools around Bangladesh. The Jadugar has incorporated satellite sites, constructing a wide architecture for its narratives of the Muktijudda. In 2014, the Muktijudda Jadugar established the Centre for the Study of Genocide and Justice, whose active research agenda and awareness-raising has recently focused on the violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar and its ramifications for refugees in Bangladesh.

The Muktijudda Jadugar maintains external memorial sites, such as the Jalladkhana killing field, a garden tucked behind a wall on a busy street in Mirpur, near sari and textile shopping bazaars. During excavation in 1998 to extend the Nuri mosque, the demolition crew unearthed human remains and eventually found seventy skulls (including children's), 5,392 pieces of bone, and personal effects.⁴⁸ Jadugar trustee Akku Chowdhury made an



almirah to contain some of the personal effects retrieved, and the community expanded this work, beginning a process of memorialisation on the site.⁴⁹ The Jadughar eventually contributed documentary resources and instigated an oral history project. Architect and Jadughar trustee Rabiul Hussain contributed the landscape design and the artist Rafiq Nobi produced a tile mural (Figures 28, 29 & 30).

Satellite sites have come to convey and retain varying meanings, mounting historically specific narrations for governments, in examples from the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide at the former Khmer Rouge S-21 prison and the Cheung Ek killing fields in Cambodia to the many 'schools, churches, and local government offices embedded in communities where people sought refuge' in Rwanda, which, according to Delia Wendel, were preserved as testimonial sites or sometimes called upon symbolically and materially in 'the consolidation of the country's burial landscape' (Wendel 2022: 3, 8; Lorey & Beezley 2002; Brown & Millington 2015; Tyner et al. 2012; Chandler 1999). The logic of the constellation of affective sites has come to undergird the architecture of the genocide museum. As such, the Jalladkhana killing field has come to behave as a performative satellite to the Jadughar, producing a wider architecture of 1971.

Jalladkhana killing field.



Figure 28, source: photo by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, 2018.



Jalladkhana killing field.



Figure 29, source: photo by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, 2018.

Jalladkhana killing field.



Figure 30, source: photo by Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, 2018.



This wider architecture—of collections, research agendas, public programming, pedagogy, urban engagements and satellite sites, and the building itself—speaks to a profound attempt at concretisation. A memory museum might instead follow internal logics delinked from the constitutions and mobilities of time and space that surround it. The Jadughar's architectures, constituting object, site, field, and practice, might lie among 'the complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of "the people"' that Homi K. Bhabha identifies as producing an immanent subjecthood which contributes to narrating the nation (Bhabha 1994: 140). 'The people,' he writes, are 'the historical "objects" of a nationalist pedagogy' and

the "subjects" of a process of signification [...] through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process. The scraps, patches and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a coherent national culture while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects [...] (ibid.: 145).

For this, a public architectural competition produced a surprising spectacle, a demonstration of futurity rooted in mutual pedagogy with great rhetorical potential. As the Muktijudda Jadughar has evolved, its narrative of liberation has shifted from a focus on a movement spearheaded by Bengali elites in East Pakistan, to underwrite something much broader, liberal, universal—a "people's museum" including 'aboriginal people', empowered women, the Rohingya...⁵⁰ These thrusts, *to include all*, have occasioned modernist design idioms. Their universalist elements, from a reflecting pool to an urban living room, and their liberal infrastructures of archive, exhibition, and multidisciplinary programming relocate the Jadughar far beyond Bangladesh, and beyond the vexing questions and politics its history poses. Desiring a cast-in-place heritage, this Museum demands of architecture a great deal. It asks that concrete forms—literally and figuratively—act to counter spatial and epistemic sprawl. For the Muktijudda Jadughar, and for 1971 as theory, the inconclusivity of architecture may be the ultimate refuge.

Endnotes

¹ The author would like to thank Dr. Farhan Karim for his insight, encouragement, and pedagogy; three anonymous reviewers for their engagement and criticisms; named and unnamed interviewees who took me in as a guest and shared their perspectives on grief and liberation; and Dr. Asif Siddiqi for thoughtful perspectives on the Muktijudda and its afterlives. This article celebrates the spirit of



Muktijudda Jadughar Trustee Tariq Ali, who made this research possible, and is dedicated to Dr. Hafiz G. A. Siddiqi and Professor Najma Siddiqi, in honour of their scholarship and the complexity of their commitment to the idea of Bangladesh.

² Interview with Mofidul Hoque, Trustee, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 3 June, Dhaka.

³ Interview with Dr. Abu Sayeed M. Ahmed, Head of the Department of Architecture, University of Asia Pacific, and former President, Institute of Architects Bangladesh. 2018, 4 June, Dhaka.

⁴ Interview with Mofidul Hoque, Trustee, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 3 June, Dhaka.

⁵ Hoque's comment in this article's epigraph referred to Benedict Anderson's widely-cited text (Anderson 1983); it was raised spontaneously during the interview, not through questions from the author. Interview with Mofidul Hoque, Trustee, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 3 June, Dhaka.

⁶ The Gana Adalat of 1992 was an unofficial trial of collaborators that held great popular interest, and focused attention on 1971. It was supported by then opposition party, the Bangladesh Awami League. The International Criminal Tribunal of Bangladesh eventually found collaborators guilty during the 2013 proceedings (for example, Ghulam Azam, whose punishment had been demanded in 1992).

⁷ According to Raghavan, three million well exceeds the counts of Armenians killed under Ottoman rule during the events beginning in 1915 that have framed scholarly and public understandings of genocide and its contestations.

⁸ The book's author was a member of the prominent family of Bengali freedom fighter Netaji Subash Chandra Bose, recognised heroically and with filial feeling in Bangladesh, as a Bengali freedom fighter in the anticolonial movement.

⁹ Afsan Chowdhury's four-volume history of 1971. *The Daily Star*, 19 May 2007.

¹⁰ Recent scholarship confronts this (Mohaiemen 2019).

¹¹ According to Pakistan's first census in 1951, a majority—fourty-four of the seventy-eight million inhabitants, or fifty-five per cent—lived in East Pakistan.

¹² Elements of this history have been well rehearsed, and continue to be debated; here I capture those that provide background for thinking on the architectures of the Jadughar in the context of the questions of this journal issue's theme, at the real risk of omitting details that some would deem significant and privileging others that some would prefer to disinvest of value.

¹³ This pantheon included Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, whose song *Sonar Bangla* (meaning golden or beloved Bengal) would become the national anthem of Bangladesh; only the first ten lines were adopted, stopping short of the imagery of a pre-1905 Bengal delta, before the British partitioned East Bengal (now Bangladesh) from West Bengal (now a state in India). If the anthem signalled a Bengali identity, for some it did not acknowledge the Liberation War or the Muslim identity of Bangladesh, illuminating some of the tensions and contestations inherent in the Bengali Muslim identity discourse.

¹⁴ Mookherjee zeroes in on a violent racial narrative, which built upon British colonial scriptings of virile martial races of the subcontinent's North and West and effeminate riverine races of the East and South. The violent term Kafer is a slur denoting a non-Muslim, which parallels hate speech elsewhere, for example, in South Africa. Mookherjee analysed this issue from a social and aesthetic perspective of the gendering and racializing aftereffects of 1971.

¹⁵ A section of the Liberation War Museum is devoted to iconic imagery of the birangana and photographs of threatening, sexually violent graffiti on the walls of holding cells. However, the accompanying wall text in the Jadughar does not situate the mediatic gendering practices that have been an important part of the slim critical historical scholarship on the events of 1971. Like the enumeration of East Pakistanis killed, the account of women raped during the liberation war varied widely, ranging from one hundred thousand to four hundred thousand.



¹⁶ In the coming decades, Dhaka became the unlikely site of nothing short of a modern architectural masterpiece, built precisely during the uncertainties of the breakup of the country, with work occurring on both sides of the events of 1971. The strangeness of the genre of the architectural monograph is no better illustrated than in the neutrality imposed by the well-known catalogue from the 1991 Louis I. Kahn retrospective exhibition held at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, which dates the work innocuously from 1962 to 1983, little acknowledging the terrors of the war that interrupted construction on the Parliament House four years after it had begun. 'On March 26, 1971, war broke out in Pakistan when Bangladesh (East Pakistan) claimed independence from West Pakistan. Kahn's contract was immediately terminated and his architects closed the field office and evacuated Dhaka. Kahn nevertheless decided to finish the design of the assembly building roof so that construction could resume when peace was restored.' Peter S. Reed. 1991. *Sher-e-Bangla Nagar: capital of Bangladesh*, 381. A photo in the third gallery of the Muktiujudda Jadughar shows construction cranes atop the building, with wall text that reads, 'The Pakistani military occupied the under-construction National Assembly building to be used as military command headquarter.'

¹⁷ Louis I. Kahn collection, University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Box LK 32, Minutes August 7, 1967.

¹⁸ My first visit to the first site of the Liberation War Museum was in December 2003.

¹⁹ Interview with Tariq Ali, Member-Secretary and Trustee, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 29 May, Dhaka. Interview with Mofidul Hoque, Trustee, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 3 June, Dhaka. See also "Liberation War Museum activities" under the museum website, <http://www.liberationwarmuseumbd.org/liberation-war-museum-activities-2/> [retrieved 07.01.21]. For more on the first site of the Liberation War Museum, see Nayanika Mookherjee. 2011b. 'Never Again', S80-S85.

²⁰ Interview with Mofidul Hoque, Trustee, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 3 June, Dhaka. See also "Liberation War Museum activities" under the museum website, <http://www.liberationwarmuseumbd.org/liberation-war-museum-activities-2/> [retrieved 07.01.21].

²¹ Advertisements appeared in *Protom Alo*, *Bhorer Kagoj*, *Jugantor*, *Ittefaq*, *Shangbad*, *The Daily Star*, *New Age*.

²² Interview with Mofidul Hoque, Trustee, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 3 June, Dhaka.

²³ The text accompanying the exhibit reads: 'She was the daughter of Abdus Salam Khan, commander of freedom fighters that he had trained during the non co-operation movement. On 30 April local collaborators guided Pakistani soldiers to his home failed to capture commander Khan, they flung his new-born child on the yard and trampled her to death with their boots. [sic]'

²⁴ Interview with Mofidul Hoque, Trustee, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 3 June, Dhaka.

²⁵ Amena Khatun, Archivist, Liberation War Museum. Interview with author, Dhaka, 7 and 9 June 2018. Khatun has painstakingly supplemented the documentary archive with the production of several binders of relevant news clippings in Bangla and English.

²⁶ Akku Chowdhury, Director/Member Secretary's speech, 22 March 1999.

²⁷ Dr. Sarwar Ali, Twelfth Anniversary report, 22 March 2008.

²⁸ Interview with Dr. Abu Sayeed M. Ahmed, Head of the Department of Architecture, University of Asia Pacific, and former President, Institute of Architects Bangladesh. 2018, 4 June, Dhaka. See also Abu Sayeed Mostaque Ahmed. 1997. *The Choṭo Sonā Mosque in Gaur: an example of the early Islamic architecture of Bengal*. Karlsruhe: Institut für Baugeschichte der Universität Karlsruhe.

²⁹ Interview with Dr. Abu Sayeed M. Ahmed, Head of the Department of Architecture, University of Asia Pacific, and former President, Institute of Architects Bangladesh. 2018, 4 June, Dhaka.



³⁰ Muktijudda Jadughar, Agargaon, Dhaka, Sthapatha Design / Naksha Pratijagita (Notice for Open Architectural Design Competition of Liberation War Museum), undated document.

³¹ Invited jurors included Arch. M. Asaduzzaman (from Singapore), Arch. Kazi Khaleed Ashraf (from Hawaii), Prof. Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, Mofidul Hoque (Founder Trustee, Liberation War Museum), Arch. Rabiul Hussain, Arch. A.H. Imamuddin (from Saudi Arabia), A.V.M. (retired) A.K. Khondker, B.U., M.P., Arch. Fuad H. Mallik, and ICOM nominee Dr Shahid Vawda (from South Africa). Chowdhury was unable to attend the jury deliberation, and Khandker attended on the first and third days only (delegating authority to the other jury members to make the short list on the second day). Letter from Mofidul Hoque to members of the competition jury, 16 October 2009, courtesy of Institute of Architects, Bangladesh. Jury Board meeting minutes, 19-22 November 2009. Interview with Mofidul Hoque, Trustee, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 3 June, Dhaka.

³² Jury Board meeting minutes, 19 November 2009.

³³ Interview with Dr. Abu Sayeed M. Ahmed, Head of the Department of Architecture, University of Asia Pacific, and former President, Institute of Architects Bangladesh. 2018, 4 June, Dhaka.

³⁴ Muktijudda Jadughar, Agargaon, Dhaka, Sthapatha Design / Naksha Pratijagita (Notice for Open Architectural Design Competition of Liberation War Museum), undated document; Interview with Dr. Abu Sayeed M. Ahmed, Head of the Department of Architecture, University of Asia Pacific, and former President, Institute of Architects Bangladesh. 2018, 4 June, Dhaka; Interview with Mofidul Hoque, Trustee, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 3 June, Dhaka.

³⁵ Interview with Dr. Abu Sayeed M. Ahmed, Head of the Department of Architecture, University of Asia Pacific, and former President, Institute of Architects Bangladesh. 2018, 4 June, Dhaka.

³⁶ Interview with Tanzim Hasan Salim. 2018, 8 June, Dhaka. My request to interview both architects could not be accommodated at the time it was made. Second prize went to the team of Ehsan Khan, Ishtiaque Zahir, Iqbal Habib, Jubair Hasan, Mehedi Amin, and Shoeb-Al-Rahe, and third prize went to the team of Nazmul Ahsan, Saiqa Iqbal Meghna, Md. Shajedur Rahman, Suvro Sovon Chowdury, and Bhuiyan A. R. M. Tareque. Two teams received honorable mentions; Honorable Mention 1 went to Abid Hasan Noor, Haroon Ur Rashid, Ismat Hossain, and Md. Rabiul Islam, and Honorable Mention 2 went to Mohammad Foyez Ullah, Md. Didarul Islam, Md. Nymul Haque, Md. Hedayet Hossain, Md. Imtiazul Alam, Towfiqur Rahman, and Farah Saud. In the IAB competition report, distinctions based on forms of labor were not made between team members, and myriad hierarchies are suggested by the non-alphabetical listing of team member names. For example, the first-place team lists its male member first (out of alphabetical sequence), an irregularity that stands out in the context of an all-male juried competition. IAB Newsletter. 2010, issue 1.

³⁷ I am grateful to Farhan Karim for this insight.

³⁸ Juror's Statement: National Liberation War Museum Competition, November 22, 2009, courtesy of Institute of Architects, Bangladesh.

³⁹ Juror's Statement: National Liberation War Museum Competition, November 22, 2009, courtesy of Institute of Architects, Bangladesh. Interview with Tanzim Hasan Salim. 2018, 8 June, Dhaka.

⁴⁰ Email from Aly Zaker to Liberation War Museum Trustees, 26 September 2008, including email from Mofidul Hoque to Trustees, 25 September 2008.

⁴¹ Interview with Tanzim Hasan Salim. 2018, 8 June, Dhaka. The trustees have remarked that these graphic designs were too abstract, and had little to do with the museum.

⁴² Juror's Statement: National Liberation War Museum Competition, November 22, 2009, courtesy of Institute of Architects, Bangladesh.

⁴³ The wall text reads that the Victory Pillar 'symbolizes the rebellious spirit of Bengal.'



⁴⁴ Interview with Barbara Fahs Charles, consulting designer, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 23 August; Mofidul Hoque, email to author, 4 July 2019. The design collaboration involved contributions of skill and memory from many participants including, but not limited to: the trustees and others from the Liberation War Museum with Mofidul Hoque (as lead), Tariq Ali (an engineer), Rabiul Hussain (an architect), Amena Khatun (with archival materials and artifacts from the museum collection), Ashok Karmaker as lead artist with two assistants, the firm Staples & Charles as consulting designers (Barbara Fahs Charles as lead and Jared Arp providing technical advice), artists Imrul Choudhury and Arafat Karim (who procured and provided elements for installations), and Mahbub Alam, freedom fighter. (Karmaker was chief art director of Prothom Alo, the world's largest bangla-language newspaper and second-largest daily in Bangladesh, and graduated from Dhaka Art College in 1988, emerging in a robust generation of artists focused on 1971. Barbara Fahs Charles described her firm's attention to the narrative structure of the permanent exhibition of the Liberation War Museum as similar to the work of a book editor, in three dimensions; she and her partner Robert Staples began their careers in the office of Charles and Ray Eames, and specialised in interpretive planning and design for museums, with projects including Monticello and the Yale Center for British Art).

⁴⁵ Interview with Barbara Fahs Charles, consulting designer, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 23 August.

⁴⁶ Interview with Mofidul Hoque, Trustee, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 3 June, Dhaka. See also Amitava Kar. 2013. Accidental Activists. *The Daily Star*, 1 Nov., <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/accidental-activists> [retrieved 07.01.21]. Peter and Ellen Connett's child was named Peter William Mujib, after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

⁴⁷ Manik, Saifuddin Ahmed, *Banglapedia*.

⁴⁸ These numbers are cited in the wall text at the memorial.

⁴⁹ Interview with Mofidul Hoque, Trustee, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 3 June, Dhaka.

⁵⁰ Through display of self-fashioned spears, bows and arrows, and shields, 'aboriginal people' are shown contributing to the resistance. Through evocative photographs, women martyrs are described as intellectuals, soldiers, medics—not as victims. Through research on genocide, the Jadughar has intervened in discourse and action on the humanitarian crisis faced by Rohingya refugees.

Interviews

Interview with Mofidul Hoque, Trustee, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 3 June, Dhaka.

Interview with Dr. Abu Sayeed M. Ahmed, Head of the Department of Architecture, University of Asia Pacific, and former President, Institute of Architects Bangladesh. 2018, 4 June, Dhaka.

Interview with Tariq Ali, Member-Secretary and Trustee, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 29 May, Dhaka.

Interview with Tanzim Hasan Salim. 2018, 8 June, Dhaka.

Interview with Barbara Fahs Charles, consulting designer, Liberation War Museum. 2018, 23 August.



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