## Theme: Violence in the borderlands and forced migration in West Bengal-Bangladesh border

## Mobility across Borders and Continuums of Violence

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The modern state is a gendered state with power and security as its cornerstones (Mohsin, 2004). According to Kannabiran (2005:3-4), “Shame, guilt, honour, chastity, immorality, virginity, lust, bestiality, ravishment, modesty, outrage, molestation, penetration, consent, and rape are words that, by themselves, through usage alone, constitute sexual terrorism, which is deeply entrenched in the discourses of the state.” Gender inequality is inherent in the militarist security ideology and practices of a militarised state and society. It privileges homogenising and hegemonising processes geared towards creating a mutually exclusive identity of its citizens, one which distinguishes them from ‘foreigners’. Banerjee and Basu Ray Chaudhury (2011: xvii) observe, the border is a ‘site where this contest over inclusion and exclusion is played out every day’ and in turn ‘becomes a zone of endemic violence where masculinity is privileged’.

The trajectory of violence in the lives of women engaging in transborder mobility can be plotted along a continuum where the border becomes one moment and site of violence in a series of violent experiences. Being masculinised and militarised the border becomes the breeding ground for gender based violence. In this context, the paper will discuss the experiences of violence in the lives of Bangladeshi women in Correctional Homes in Kolkata. Their narratives suggest that perpetrators and sites of violence change but the Indo-Bangladesh border remains central to their experiences of violence. This paper will focus on the violence experienced by these women before crossing the border, while crossing the border to come to India, during their stay in India and while returning to Bangladesh; coupled with emotions of fear, anxiety and shame. Their experiences of violence need to be seen in the context of their non-normative ways of being – their challenge to the norms instituted for women by the family, state and society. Their so called deviations from normative modes of behaviour put them in situations of extreme vulnerability.

Violence, in this paper is being looked at in terms of its structural, material, legal, social and embodied forms. Experiences of violence faced by women at the borders are significantly marked by sexual violence. Their body is perceived as overtly sexualised and easily available. How does one then explain this contradiction with the sacrosanct image of the Bharat Mata that the Border Security Forces believe they are meant to guard? Or is it that the bodies of women who are not Indian can be violated for the sake of India’s security? This apart, violence inflicted on these women may not be directly at the border as a physical, geographical site but is induced by its exclusionary and inherently violent nature. This brings us to the question of whether we can look at the border as a merely political or geographical space or does it ramify itself into a normative socio-cultural space? What kind of subjectivities does this multi headed hydra known as the border creates? How does it further marginalise women and create situations of vulnerability? In turn, how do women subvert these situations of vulnerability and create safe spaces for themselves? These are some of the questions through which this paper will navigate.

## References:

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