

THE KASHMIR SPACE: BORDERING AND BELONGING ACROSS THE LINE OF CONTROL

EL ESPACIO DE CACHEMIRA: PROCESOS DE DIFERENCIACIÓN FRONTERIZA Y CUESTIONES DE PERTENENCIA A TRAVÉS DE LA LÍNEA DE CONTROL

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Summary: I. INTRODUCTION. II. DEFINING KASHMIR. III. THE KASHMIR BORDERLAND. IV. BORDERING PROCESSES AND BELONGING. V. CONCLUSIONS. VI. REFERENCES.

ABSTRACT: This article examines the Kashmir dispute by using the border – the ambivalent spatiality created by the Line of Control (LoC) – as a method to analyse the borderland. Through the adoption of a borderland perspective, it explores the way in which various sites in the divided territories are affected by territorialization processes related to transformations of the state space. By looking at how people there refer to the disputed context of Kashmir, the article highlights forms in which people are being bordered and the conditions of political life in these territories.

The Kashmir borderland thus emerges as a distinct political space and belonging becomes a conceptual tool with which to contextualize the cultural, social and spatial perceptions and experiences of individuals or groups about that space in contrast to objective political forms of membership. The focus on belonging unveils senses of loss, displacement and marginalization but also emerging forms of dissent against state making processes.

RESUMEN: El artículo examina la disputa de Cachemira desde la frontera – esto es, la espacialidad ambigua creada por la Línea de Control (LoC) en su condición de frontera disputada – como método para analizar el “borderland” o región fronteriza. A través de la adopción de un enfoque que se centra en la región fronteriza, el artículo explora como determinados procesos de territorialización en las zonas divididas por la LoC están influidos por transformaciones en la espacialidad del Estado. El trabajo destaca que el modo de entender la disputa por parte de los habitantes de los distintos territorios depende de procesos de diferenciación en curso en estas zonas fronterizas y del marco político-legal de estos territorios.

El trabajo señala que toda la región fronteriza de Cachemira – que incluye a los territorios bajo control de India y Pakistán – puede considerarse un espacio político diferenciado. Este estudio propone considerar el sentido de pertenencia o “belonging” como una herramienta conceptual adecuada para contextualizar las percepciones culturales, sociales y espaciales, así como las experiencias de los actores (individuos y grupos) sobre este espacio, en lugar de limitarse a expresiones políticas objetivas de

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pertenencia. El interés sobre el sentido de pertenencia o “belonging” permite aportar las experiencias de pérdida (sobre la situación anterior a 1947), la situación de la población desplazada (por el conflicto y las familias divididas), pero también dar cuenta de crecientes formas de expresión de disenso, como movimientos regionales, contra los procesos de formación estatal en curso.

KEY WORDS: Kashmir, Line of Control (LoC), border, borderland perspective, conflict, space of exception, belonging.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cachemira, Línea de Control (LoC), frontera, región fronteriza, conflicto, espacio de excepción, pertenencia.

I. INTRODUCTION

The term ‘Kashmir’ evokes different spatial references for different people living in the disputed areas across India and Pakistan. The articulation of these spatial references is a response to the bordering processes that affect them. People’s drawing of boundaries that consider the inclusion or exclusion of some territories as part of ‘Kashmir’ challenge dominant understandings of the dispute. Their views show that, rather than state peripheries, the territories they inhabit are the result of specific entangled historical trajectories of the borderland as a distinct space. In this respect, the way the border – in this case the Line of Control (LoC) – is addressed becomes crucial.

This article discusses these spatial references by problematizing the disputed character of the LoC that distinguishes between a Pakistani and an Indian Kashmir. Thus it takes the border as a method, as a research object and epistemological viewpoint, as defined by Mezzadra and Neilson (2013, 14–19). The work of these two scholars, however, focuses on borders in relation to their role in the multiplication of labour which produces new power hierarchies for which established forms for the organization of political life are unsuitable. Here I use the border as a method to refer to the border of the state, and attempt to analyse the exploitation of places, and the hierarchies involved in it, in relation to transformations in the state space. As Mezzadra and Neilson recognize, Kashmir is among those places where the claim of the nation-state to exclusively control its borders is effective to some degree (2013, 201–2). Thus, the reproduction of the border by force, and so the state form, situates border people neither in nor out of the state political container. The border is the method by which to examine the borderland, that is, the territories that are legally disputed (and divided by the LoC), according to the UN resolutions on Kashmir, and that were part of the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir before 1947. The argument that follows is that the consideration of Kashmir as a borderland, rather than as a divided peripheral area of two states, has two main epistemological consequences. On the one hand, it takes a critical view of perspectives that have presented the dispute as one between India and Pakistan or that have overestimated the role of identity – Kashmiri Muslims vs the rest – in the conflict in the Valley on the Indian side. On the other hand, by focusing on the borderland, it highlights the transformation of the contested territories – despite the apparent ‘immobile’ character of the dispute – in which various actors (from borderlanders to state agents)

interact and compete to give new meaning to the area. The analysis of the borderland attempts to locate people within the debates on borders and to question the normative character of the nation-state and its acolytes' 'national identity' vs 'other identities'. In so doing, this approach draws attention to the way in which people are being bordered and the conditions of political life in these territories.

Since the border is the method used here to examine the borderland, the article explores understandings of the Kashmir dispute by those affected on both sides of the LoC. It does so by focusing on belonging, defined as a context in which cultural or emotional senses of membership do not match political or civic ascriptions (Hedetoft and Hjort 2002, vii–x). In other words, belonging is examined through the articulation of multiple claims to places and spaces that question existing spatialities and illuminate the bordering processes. The study of belonging reveals issues in bordering processes manifested in the various exceptional legal frameworks that denote a sort of state of exception in these territories. However, it also shows how border inhabitants exercise some agency over the processes of bordering that affect them.

Field research was carried out from 2009–14 at different locations on both sides of the LoC, with the exception of the divided Jammu areas.¹ The context in which fieldwork took place was marked by the start of cross-LoC initiatives (bus and truck services) to facilitate the reunion of separated families and trade between the Kashmir Valley and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) (see FIGURE 1) in the framework of the India–Pakistan dialogue process initiated in 2004. The LoC exchanges were not extended to the border areas of Baltistan and Kargil. People's views are reflected in a series of interviews and conversations I had with displaced and divided families, businessmen, and cultural, religious and social actors living in these territories. Since the Kashmir issue is quite sensitive, albeit in different ways in each place and also depending on the person, for ethical reasons I have chosen to maintain the anonymity of most of my sources, except where other conditions apply. Although the outcomes of the research shown here cannot be considered representative of the whole disputed area of Kashmir, they are intended as an illustration of how people's views call into question general understandings of the conflict as represented by the media and also by some academic works. The importance of this research lies in the basic premise that in order to understand a dispute, it is necessary to comprehend the views of those affected. For some reason, the states of India and Pakistan agree that people's views, at least the

¹ This was initially a research project developed at ZMO (2009–10) and then as part of the Crossroads Asia programme (2011–14). In both cases the research was funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF). The fieldwork consisted at first of interviews (questions and answers in written and registered form) but I increasingly noticed the limitations of this format, particularly depending on the context of the interaction. I still used the interviews in more formal settings – with bureaucrats, people working in various organizations, etc – but when people have problems openly expressing their views, they are often worried about somebody noting down their words. Besides, this can affect the fluidity and trust of an ongoing dialogue. Therefore, I maintained a number of conversations that were not properly transcribed, that is, quoting specific sentences, but that were later recorded in a diary recollection of these meetings and their content. Unless specified, names of interlocutors are identified by a letter of the alphabet and the year in order to protect anonymity.

views of those who question their respective sovereignties over the region, should not be acknowledged.

The bottom-up approach implied by the focus on people's perceptions of the area they inhabit and the conditions under which they live is undertaken in relation to the top-down political and economic processes in these territories that are driven by state agents such as militarization, limitation of political and civil rights, development and the promotion of tourism. In this way, the article seeks to propose a more inclusive study of conflicts and highlight the relevance of the conditions under which people are bordered for the understanding of conflicts. It also unveils the continuous modes by which state and non-state agents struggle to control these territories in the context of globalization processes that shrink the state space. In this sense, enduring border conflicts such as the one in Kashmir are not static or frozen in time, protracted and intractable, as is frequently asserted by conflict and international relations specialists; rather, they are essentially dynamic struggles resulting from the state-making process and the resistance to it. The examination of the borderland underlines this pluralistic and dynamic character.

The article is structured as follows: the first section discusses the meanings of 'Kashmir' territorially and politically; the second section elaborates on the implications of adopting a borderland perspective and the problem with viewing the entity of the former Princely State as cohesive; and the third section looks at how bordering processes affect senses of belonging that are connected to the exceptional character of these territories.

II. DEFINING KASHMIR

Broadly speaking, use of the name 'Kashmir' to denote a conflict zone can be in reference either to the dispute between India and Pakistan for the territories of the former Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir, or to the conflict occurring in the Kashmir Valley (and its surrounding mountains) controlled by India. These two are interconnected, but their normative study – either as an inter-state dispute (international domain) or a separatist conflict (domestic domain) – has different epistemological implications. In the first case, attention is drawn to whether Kashmir (the Princely State) should be entirely Indian, Pakistani or independent (Acharya and Acharya 2006), whereas in the second case the conflict in the Kashmir Valley is framed in relation to the Indian democracy (Widmalm 2002; Bose 2003; Behera 2006). From different angles, both perspectives assume some legitimacy of the LoC as delimiting a political space, the domain of the nation-state. The proposal by former Pakistani president Musharraf that included the creation of a self-autonomous territory without changes in its sovereignty status, though innovative, was also very limited by the state perspective (Musharraf 2006, 302–3). This domain, however, has implications which are problematic for those living on both sides of the border. On the one hand, the legal/political regime of these territories is quite different from that in other parts of the state and the inhabitants do not enjoy the same citizenship rights as those in other parts. On the other hand, the

assumption of a national domain implies that the state is the only possible in which to organize political life.

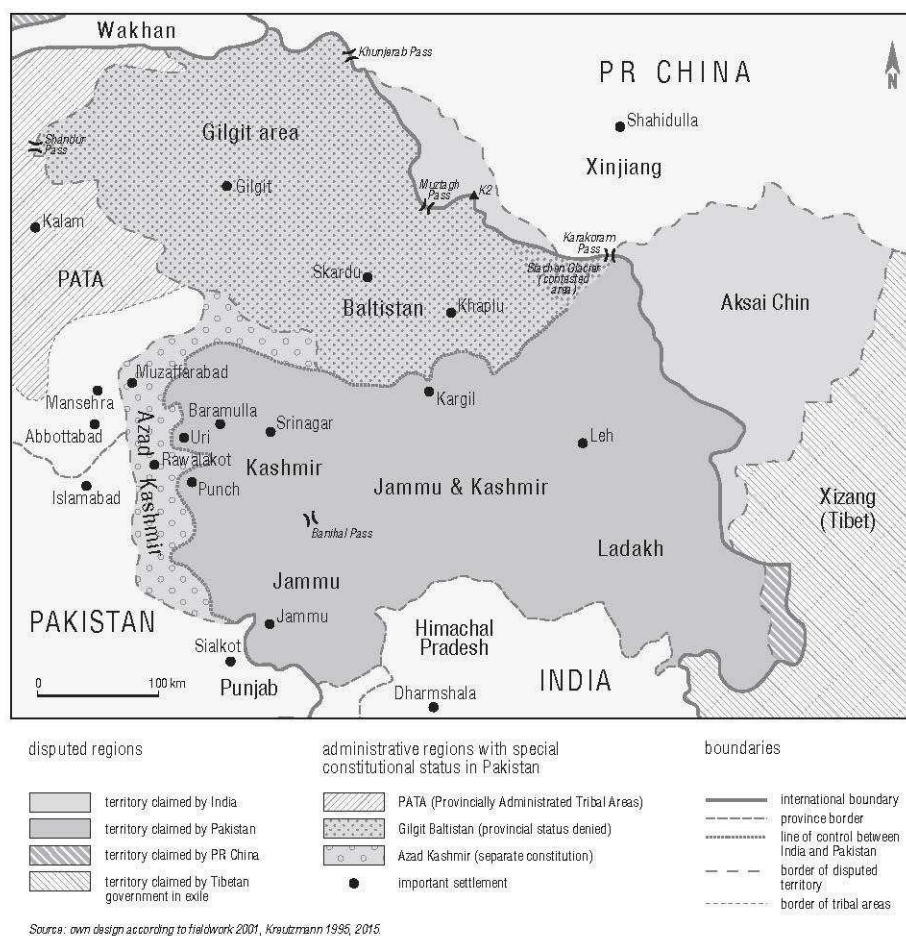


FIGURE 1. Map of the Kashmir disputed territories including important settlements. *Source:* Design Hermann Kreutzmann 2015, reproduced with permission.

Simon Dalby makes the interesting point that persistent inter-state conflict – and he cites Kashmir among other examples– is ‘related to attempts to redraw boundaries on new lines that do not follow the course of antecedent administrative units’ because the nation-state becomes the norm for political organization, regardless of its effectiveness (Dalby 2005, 420). However, the question is not only of the drawing of new boundaries that are different from previous administrative ones, but also of a change in their meaning and intensity as well as the suppression of political aspirations embodied, in the Kashmir case, in the fight against the tyrannical rule of the former maharajas. A common theme in my interviews in Skardu, Muzaffarabad, Kargil and Srinagar (with old men who lived during the Partition period, displaced families, local historians and others) was people’s emphasis on and memory of a discontent with the previous regime (at the time of Partition) and the desire to get rid of it one way or another when the

opportunity arose. However, my respondents generally argued that their expectations were not met after India and Pakistan took over the areas where they lived. For those affected by the redrawing of boundaries, the dispute concerns the abandonment of a space, that of the former Princely State and its tyrannical rule, for another polity that has the form of the state space but cannot qualify as such because the process of incorporation has been challenged since its inception and, as a result, has been unsuccessful.²

The division through warfare of the former Princely State in 1947–49³ gave way to the formation of new administrative entities in India and Pakistan.⁴ The territory controlled by India was gradually amalgamated under the state of Jammu and Kashmir and comprised three divisions or provinces (Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh) while the territories under the control of Pakistan, territorially discontinuous, became differentiated in administrative terms: AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan. The territories controlled by India have been formally incorporated into the federal republic, with special autonomy granted under Article 370 of India's constitution, but with the powers that the Kashmiri government once enjoyed curtailed. With respect to the territories under Pakistan's control, these are not proper state territories like the provinces or the indirectly administered Tribal Areas; AJK has a semi-independent status, while Gilgit-Baltistan is treated as an autonomous area. Yet both AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan are controlled by the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan and, due to their strategic significance, behind the scenes by the military.

The dispute in the Kashmir Valley (Kashmir Province, located in India) began in the late 1980s with violent confrontations led by Kashmiri nationalists of various political leanings (ranging from the secular left to Islamic modernists) demanding *azadi* or freedom from the Indian state. As mentioned previously, the conflict in the Valley is usually framed as a case of separatism in India, that is, within a national perspective in which the Muslim identity of the movement is highlighted. However, on a more local level, the term Kashmir as it is understood in non-Kashmiri-speaking or non-Kashmir Muslim areas, refers to being trapped in the dispute (between India and Pakistan) and the consequences for those living in the various territories considered 'disputed'.⁵ The ambivalent character of the LoC, the provisional border, blurs these scalar distinctions. For a number of people living in these territories, the LoC is the agent of division (for divided families) and the object of transgression (for militants and nationalists on either side). Besides, due to the unsettled nature of the dispute the LoC constitutes both the

² Despite India's integration, anyone who visits the Valley can see that the state's control over the territory is mostly military. Political manipulation of electoral processes has been common. See SANJAY KAK, 'Ballot, Bullet, Stone: What will the coming elections mean for Kashmir?', *The Caravan*, September 2014, accessed 27 March, 2015, <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/reportage/ballot-bullet-stone?page=0,2>.

³ Although officially the ceasefire agreement took effect on 1 January 1949, fighting continued for some half a year more in the border areas of Baltistan, Kargil and Zangskar.

⁴ The former Princely State also encompassed some areas, such as the inhospitable Aksai Chin, in China, in what is now Sinkiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

⁵ I want to make clear that my intention, by focusing on the territories that were part of the formerly Princely State, is not to reproduce a political space which is no longer there. However, this is the origin of the current dispute and is identified as such by those living on both sides of the LoC.

impediment to and the possibility of an alternative polity, in whatever manner this is defined. Hence, the border as a method serves to unveil the spatial problematic underlying the conflict as it draws attention to the exceptional legal framework of the Kashmir territories that shapes the conditions of life in the borderland.

The Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir is a highly militarized territory, both in order to protect the borders with Pakistan and China and to monitor the people within, particularly those in the Valley of Kashmir. India maintains that the state is an integral part of the country, what the historian Mridu Rai refers to as the Indian geographical body, which incorporates the land from 'Kashmir to Kanyakumari' (Rai 2011, 250–64). Control by the state in the past seven decades has been carried out through electoral manipulation and, for the past two and a half decades, through the legally sanctioned (Armed Forces Special Powers Act or AFSPA, Section 144, among others) militarization of urban and rural spaces, which restricts people's basic political and civil rights (Kazi 2009).

The Pakistani territories of AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan suffer a similar fate: although conflict does not occur (with the exception of episodes of sectarian violence) and the military does not occupy the streets and villages, there is constant monitoring of the population and criticism of the Pakistani state is discouraged from above. The Pakistani state to date links the future political status of Baltistan, jointly with Gilgit, and AJK to the resolution of the Kashmir dispute,⁶ despite the fact that the people living in those territories, based on their historical experiences in 1947–48, would choose otherwise. Moreover, there are almost no ties between AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan, although AJK's political leadership is normally keen to bring Gilgit-Baltistan into the Kashmir fold. Unlike AJK, which has a federal status with its own constitution, Gilgit-Baltistan has a confusing constitutional position because it is neither integrated in the state structure (like the provinces) nor considered federal (like AJK). Despite this situation, Gilgit-Baltistan is gradually beginning to be treated as a province and in early 2016 discussions were held on integrating the territory with Pakistan.⁷

By examining the Kashmir borderland, I attempt to problematize the spatial question and overcome some of the gaps inherent in the use of standard units of analysis; namely, the international scale that considers state space as homogeneously distributed *within* borders under national sovereignty, and the state scale that is only preoccupied with the domestic dimension *within* the borders. Both scales act as spatial containers that impede proper examination of the contested spatial dimension of the Kashmir dispute. The borderland perspective, on the other hand, tries to bridge such gaps and explore the complexity of what Kashmir means to different actors, existing across and at the margins of the LoC, where the idea of the state is very much contested. In the Kashmir

⁶ Pakistan has been ambivalent on the issue and has shifted its position from time to time. However, the strategy to link the future of Gilgit-Baltistan to that of Kashmir can be explained as an effort to emphasize the relevance of the size of the disputed territory and, probably, to increase the number of voters who would favour the union of the entire region to Pakistan in a hypothetical referendum.

⁷ AFP, 'Pakistan mulls elevating the status of Gilgit-Baltistan on Chinese insistence', *Dawn*, 8 January 2016, accessed 14 March 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1231394>.

borderland, despite strong state interventions aimed at various forms of territorial control, border inhabitants attempt to exercise some agency over the processes of bordering. The origins of the processes of bordering and urbanization might differ from each other, but they share similarities regarding the formation of spaces for capital accumulation and political control.

III. THE KASHMIR BORDERLAND

Definitions of borderland identify an area on both sides of the border (that is, the border of the state) where social life in its multiple forms is affected by the border itself, forming a distinct ‘borderland milieu’ (Martínez 1994, 10). This definition does not imply interaction across the border per se, but it is often assumed that borderlands, as ‘frontier political zones’, are studied as sites where various forms of cooperation and management can take place for the benefit of the people living there, but also the relationship between the states in general (Newman 2006a, 2006b, 108; Minghi 1991; Samaddar 2002, Introduction). These definitions, however, tend to assume that the border is a relatively localized and stable construct, an institution that shapes relations on both sides. Other approaches, ranging from historiography to political philosophy have explored the relationship of borderlands to space, and more specifically to the reproduction of state space, by identifying borderlands as specific regions that constitute units (see Baud and van Schendel 1997, 221) and potential overlapping open regions shaping conditions for political life (Balibar 2009, 210). The latter approaches provide interesting insights for re-examining networks and relationships in conflict border zones, such as the Kashmir territories, where the boundaries remain contested because they suppress local histories and understandings and impede dialogue on both sides.

Thus, the definition of Kashmir as a borderland takes into account the historical territorialization process marked by conflict and accommodation (Zutshi 2010), but also considers the proximity of the territories to the contested LoC as a determinant turning point at which state spatiality is still under question. In this respect, it is possible to say that the Kashmir borderland does not qualify as a state space. On the one hand, a lasting struggle is going on to bring these territories under the state purview, one which is carried out through forms of open violence or the denial of political subjectivity. On the other hand, actors and groups in these territories face this struggle by challenging state spatiality.

Historically, the formation of the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846 was a product of British colonial policy of territorial expansion and Britain’s need to create a buffer zone in competition with the Russian Empire. The domestic consolidation of the Princely State as a political entity and its expansion through the conquests of Baltistan, Gilgit and Hunza served the former purpose, as well as the appropriation and reorganization of markets, that is, the control of the pashm wool and other equally important trading routes (Rizvi 2010, 50–68). During its hundred years of existence, Kashmir was barely integrated as a political unit, except for the Kashmir Valley area, where a democratic movement against the autocratic ruler developed in the third decade

of the 20th century. Most of the surrounding territories were indirectly ruled by local rajas (rulers), with various degrees of autonomy, and a few delegates sent from Srinagar to preserve order and collect revenues.

Ideas of modern sovereignty were absent, as the ruler did not exercise a homogeneous political authority over the various territories and the territorial integrity of the state was compromised by the interests of the British colonial power. For example, the Gilgit Agency established in 1877 was ruled by a confusing diarchy system comprising the ruler of the Princely State and the British, and later, in 1935, partially leased to the British, only to be returned to the Princely State shortly before Partition (see Haines 2012, 20–32; Lamb 1993, 29–30). Poonch Jagirdar, for example, which ended up divided between AJK and the province of Jammu on the Indian side, was ruled initially by a relative of the maharaja and enjoyed some autonomy within the Princely State (Snedden 2012, 29). Therefore, various forms of loyalty coexisted, with different implications for relations between rulers and ruled.

Moreover, forms of political subjecthood developed in the 1920s as a response to increasing demands for democratization in the Kashmir Valley, but they had a limited impact on the rest of the territories. At the time of independence, people in the different territories of the Princely State had various experiences of being part of ‘Kashmir’. For example, while those living in the Valley and Jammu began participating in restricted electoral processes in the 1930s, those in Baltistan had never cast a vote, as delegates from Baltistan were always nominated to the State Assembly and usually belonged to the influential raja families. This fact is crucial to understanding the various existent political cultures and why memories and expectations about the future of the Princely State were not shared by people living in the different territories. At the time of the Partition, the loose puzzle of the Princely State fell to pieces and opportunities were exploited by several local actors – ranging from the National Conference leaders, the main political force in the Kashmir Valley, to the Gilgit Scouts, a paramilitary force created in Gilgit to guard its frontiers – to favour different political options.

In an interview in 2011 in Skardu (Baltistan), the late Haider Shah (around 86 years old at the time) spoke of Partition-related events in the area, i.e. how the liberation war that began in Gilgit spread to the south and how the Baltistani people joined forces and assisted the rebel fighters logistically. At a certain point, I asked about the presence of Pakistani soldiers, specifically when they first reached the area, and his answer was, ‘The Pakistani Army came later’.⁸ Haider Shah proudly underscored the role of local and regional groups in liberating the territory during a period when several local militias took control of the area and were almost able to reach Leh (the capital of Ladakh),

⁸ Personal interview with Haider Shah, Skardu, 24 and 15 March, 2010. Two major events caused the division of the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir: the Tribal Invasion originally formed in Waziristan and what is today the Pakistani province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which advanced west to east and nearly reach Srinagar, and the Gilgit rebellion that spread from north to south. Whereas there is abundant information about the involvement of Pakistani officers and bureaucrats in the Tribal Invasion (see WHITEHEAD 2007), this does not seem to be the case for the so-called ‘liberation war’ initiated in Gilgit, despite the leaning of one of the instigators, Major Brown. For an account of events in Gilgit from a British source, see BROWN (1998).

before the Indian Army started to fight back. From his memories and other accounts I gathered that the political context at the time was confusing and that people were not necessarily fighting to be part of the state called Pakistan, but rather to get rid of the maharaja or for other more personal objectives.

On the Indian side of the border, not far from Skardu, a woman in her late sixties⁹ referred to the same militias from Gilgit and Baltistan as *qabailis* or ‘tribals’, not without a sense of horror. Because of them, her family had to abandon their home and find refuge somewhere else in Punjab. Her understanding of the events was shaped by her status as the daughter of a Sikh Kashmiri state bureaucrat. There are still many lacunas in the understanding of how the events in Gilgit-Baltistan relate to those evolving in the Kashmir Valley, especially concerning the roles and agendas of the actors involved on the northern side. Evidence from the interviews I conducted in Baltistan suggests that the idea of Pakistan was vague at the time, probably as vague as that of India. In the case of Baltistan, it appears that the primary aim was to fight an oppressive ruler in the figure of the maharaja and, in the process, to contest the power of some local rajas who were on good terms with the maharaja. Eventually, both the Indian and Pakistani armies took control of these territories and other, more local conflicts, were undermined by the state agendas.

The existing local histories of 1947–49 in the various territories of the former Princely State present a far more complex picture than that of their absorption by the larger polities of India and Pakistan. The various territories had different trajectories that have not been completely suppressed almost seven decades later. Indeed, the LoC is a reminder of that past. Until the 1990s, crossing the border was relatively easy for those civilians knowing the passes in the border areas of Baltistan and Ladakh and between AJK and the Valley, according to testimonies. However, as a consequence of the militancy between AJK and the Valley and later, in 1999, the eruption of the Kargil war, the border became more militarized, making the crossing impossible.

The LoC is a reminder of the political uncertainty concerning the status of the divided territories. Apart from the clear impediment to crossing it, there is a general lack of understanding of what the border means, despite norms and practices that have been instituted on its behalf. For example, it is not rare that while travelling in the proximity of the LoC, ordinary people and officials (civilian and military) are not certain about what norms and practices prevail, and it is interesting how people define the border (the line) as an India–Pakistan military issue to which they are helpless spectators. As an interviewee put it: ‘In the end, India and Pakistan are fighting for a line somewhere in the mountains’.¹⁰ This government servant, a Pahari speaker from the border area of Uri living in Srinagar, described the LoC as if the border did not concern him. He said this in the middle of a conversation in which he was explaining how, due to the establishment of the cross-LoC buses in 2005, he was able to visit his family on the other side (and they to visit him) and arrange his daughter’s marriage with a relative in AJK. Similarly, in meetings with members of the Pahari community in Muzaffarabad, I

⁹ Personal interview, Kargil sub-district, 16 July 2012.

¹⁰ Personal interview with L-11, Srinagar, 5 May 2011.

noted that marriages between separated families across the LoC are increasing in number due to facilitation of travel provided by the buses (as well as the relaxation of visa policy). However, respondents tend to disassociate the importance of the LoC from their own life trajectories, as if the LoC were something not explicitly material and intertwined with their biographies. This somehow coincides with more political views expressed by respondents identified with the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), who do not recognize the LoC as a border. The JKLF has threatened to march toward the LoC in periods of tension, as a symbol of the unity of the divided parts, such as during the Amarnath land transfer crisis in summer 2008 when the Valley's main highway with India was blocked by Jammu right-wing groups. Yet they have never been successful.

Neither Indian nor Pakistani Kashmiri-divided territories have been integrated into the political systems of their respective states. Although India considers Jammu and Kashmir a state of the federal republic, but with a special autonomy, New Delhi has frequently interfered in the development of democratic politics there, and this situation has led to discontent resulting in an insurgency in the Valley in the late 1980s (see Widmalm 2002; Bose 2003, 100–1). Besides, the state's constitutional link to the Indian Republic is equally problematic. This has been highlighted since the rise to power of the coalition led by the BJP leader Narendra Modi in 2014. A controversy arose regarding the long-standing demand by the most radical elements of the BJP to rescind the special autonomy of the state, as provided for in the article 370 of the Indian constitution, in order to equate it with the other Indian states. Through a writ petition by a BJP-oriented think tank challenging Article 35a in the Supreme Court of India, the petitioners wanted to remove the presidential constitutional provision that oversees the application of constitutional provisions to the state. Ironically, as some senior advocates have pointed out, the article is the only constitutional link between Kashmir and India and without it the constitutional relation would cease to exist.¹¹ Pakistan officially maintains a status quo policy in Gilgit-Baltistan and AJK. The state only deals with matters crucial to governance because it considers that Gilgit-Baltistan and AJK are 'disputed' territories and that their future depends on holding a plebiscite for the whole of Kashmir. In practice, such a status quo has been greatly altered because the Pakistani bureaucracy, military, and security apparatus seek to control dissent and favour merging the whole region (including the Kashmir Valley) with Pakistan (see Mato Bouzas 2012; Snedden 2012, 83–110).

If one looks at Kashmir from the border, what emerges is not only the securitization of the militarized border zones, but the distinct legal/political regimes of the divided territories as compared with proper state areas. These regimes serve to control and convert untrustworthy and rebel borderlanders among Indian and Pakistani citizens by changing the 'disputed' character of these areas. This task is carried out differently on the India and the Pakistani sides of the border. Despite the militarization of the Kashmir

¹¹ D.A. RASHID, 'If Article 35a goes, all Presidential Orders between 1950-70 will go', *Greater Kashmir*, 17 September 2015, accessed 8 February 2016, <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/interviews/-if-article-35a-goes-all-presidential-orders-from-1950-75-will-go/196811.html>.

Valley, which is an observable feature of the urban landscape, mostly in Srinagar, the governments of India have insisted on the normalization of the political situation after the dialogue process initiated with Pakistan in 2004 and the decline in violence associated with militancy. The most visible sign of normalization in recent years has been the expansion of tourism which is incentivized by the different administrations in various ways – from fiscal incentives and loans to build hotels, to its promotion as a preferred destiny for paid holidays by Indian bureaucrats and the relatives of the military stationed there. At the same time, the development of Hindu religious pilgrimages – the most successful case is the Amarnath Yatra, that brings some several hundred thousand pilgrims every spring to a cave near Pahalgam – serves the same purpose. This normalization, however, is about not only changing the conflict character of the Valley, but also presenting Kashmir as a docile and idyllic space and, to some extent, to overstate the Hindu heritage that connects the area to India (see Reader 2016, 42–3). Normalization coexists with militarization and its consequences, such as episodes in which innocent civilians are killed, and curfews in the downtown areas do not greatly affect the tourists visiting the Dal Lake areas, as I have noticed in my visits between 2010 and 2014.

Although civilian areas the Pakistani Kashmir territories of AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan are not militarized, because formally there exists no any movement against the state, intelligence agencies exercise a significant amount of control over the population. This is due in part to the fear of Indian infiltration but also to the need to control those supporting the independence of the entire Kashmir region and to instead advocate the merging of the Valley with Pakistan. The situation of AJK is also different from that of Baltistan. Whereas support for the Kashmiri movement exists in AJK, it is absent in Gilgit-Baltistan, where, at least in the past, a pro-Pakistani sentiment prevailed. However, Pakistan's claim that the future political status of Gilgit-Baltistan depends on the resolution of the Kashmir dispute has created a particular situation there. In discussions concerning the matter in Baltistan (with middle-aged educated men), some of those I interviewed commented that they cannot proudly say they are Pakistanis because they are neither proper state citizens – as they do not cast a vote to the National Assembly elections and are exempted from federal and provincial tax regimes – nor supporters of the Kashmir dispute or an independent movement, as they might be seen as 'anti-national' by Pakistan. Furthermore, the government of Pakistan, through an executive order of 2009, administratively equated the territory with the other Pakistani provinces by using a similar nomenclature – for example, the former figure of Chief Executive of the Legislative Assembly is now the Chief Minister. This, however, has not altered the power structures that grant Islamabad – through the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan – the final word on some legislative matters, or that deprive the residents of Gilgit-Baltistan to appeal to the Supreme Appellate Court of Pakistan on legal issues. In sum, the legal-political context in AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan reflects the Pakistani state's control over these territories which, far from being the maintenance of a status quo until such time that the Kashmir dispute is solved, reflects the state's aim to control affairs there in order to retains its aspirations for the Kashmir Valley.

The borderland perspective focuses on the different historical trajectories of the divided territories, rather than considering the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir as a cohesive entity. Moreover, it grasps in the analysis the ambivalent condition of the LoC, as it is disputed, in relation to bordering processes in the divided territories after Partition. The establishment of the LoC has effected more than disconnection (separating families and peoples of the same cultural group, cutting communications, dividing former administrative districts, etc.). It has created a permanent context of insecurity about the present and the future due to the possibility of conflict and personal and group horizons of expectations (such as investments in border areas). This context is marked by distrust among people (concerning their allegiances, their collaboration with state agencies or their opposition to them), economic dependency and displacement – to name a few consequences. Hence, although the Kashmir borderland has been formally absorbed as a state space, it does not qualify as such as these territories are ruled through exceptional legal mechanisms – despite the holding of electoral processes, often manipulated – that have become permanent over time. Furthermore, ongoing transformations in the economic and developmental fields in these areas on the Indian and Pakistani sides are carried out from above, in an autocratic manner, creating new dependencies, and without considering people's views and senses of belonging. The Kashmir borderland is a distinct space in which the brutality of the state-making process is still evident.

Bordering processes on both sides of the LoC have created a distinct political space where, drawing parallels with Agamben's (2003) work, the rule of exception applies and has acquired a degree of permanence. Despite the fact that the LoC has been opened to bus and truck services (in 2005 and 2008 respectively) between the Valley and AJK, with great fanfare, benefiting some divided families who are able to meet and some business activities, its impact on these societies has been minimal. True, it has had a symbolic significance and, as mentioned above in the case of the normalization in the Valley and the development processes at work, it aims at transforming the conflict character of these territories. However, it does so by denying that the conflict itself exists. This is an issue for those living under militarization in the Valley, and for the political freedom of those in AJK. Besides, the cross-LoC service becomes an irony for the divided families in Baltistan and Kargil who, having not participated in the violence, have not benefited so far from these initiatives.

In the Kashmir borderland, however, the 'normality of the exception' does not occur in a territory or 'camp' – borrowing from Agamben's conceptualization – that can qualify as proper state space and under conditions which increase sovereignty. On the contrary, it takes place in a territory whose sovereign status is unclear and only nominal. Moreover, the normality of the exception in the 'camp' is produced by singling out an 'Other' in an enclosure, preventing that Other's outward mobility, whilst in the Kashmir borderland, the intention is to bring the 'Other' within, in line with the larger polity (the Indian or the Pakistani state) under a normality which is exceptional. In this light, mobility in the Kashmir borderland is not a problem, as long as it constitutes movement towards the state (India and Pakistan) or abroad (diaspora communities) and not across the LoC. Movement across the LoC is discouraged unless strictly regulated by state agencies.

Furthermore, the existence of mobility on both sides of the LoC in a context of legal exceptionalism that, amongst other characteristics, implies the monitoring of people, shows that the aim is to control them as long as they live in this particular territory – the Kashmir borderland.

The political geographer Stuart Elden stresses the increasing dissociation of the relationship of territory and sovereignty as a basis for examining world power transformations as forming ‘spaces of exception’. He draws upon the cases of terrorist training camps (in Afghanistan and along the Afghanistan–Pakistan border) and al-Qaeda’s territorial strategies to demonstrate that ‘places are exploited when there is an absence or weakness of sovereign power rather than an intensification of such power’ (Elden 2010, 61). Elden’s examples echo the case of the Kashmir borderland.

Militancy in Indian Kashmir and infiltration activities are organized mainly on the Pakistani side across the LoC, in AJK and to a lesser extent in Gilgit-Baltistan. As mentioned previously, these two territories are not constitutionally integrated into Pakistan, although the state exercises indirect control there in various ways, and these activities take place with the complicity of Pakistani intelligence agencies and sections of the Pakistani military.¹² Similarly, counter-insurgency operations by Indian forces – military and paramilitary – in the Kashmir Valley take place within a legal context close to the state of exception, since the army and paramilitary forces have extra powers to arrest and detain people – powers which they abuse. The main characteristic of these activities on both sides of the LoC is that the state, as such, appears indistinguishable from non-state actors and, in fact, conducts itself similarly to them, as a ‘gang’ using the same tactics as militants or guerrillas and on a par with them.¹³ In so doing, the legitimacy of sovereign control of the territory is called into question.

The Kashmir borderland shows that the exploitation of certain places by actors or groups linked to state institutions can also be seen as a strategy of spatial control and the exertion of state sovereignty, that is, the exercise of sovereignty over territories whose territoriality previously was dubious. In this regard, the post-colonial condition of many states where contested territories are located matters, as does the fact that modern territorial sovereignty is a relatively recent development. Conflict and exceptionality allow for interventions to deal with this condition in order to ultimately transform these territories into state spaces.

¹²The question can always arise as to whether these intelligence agencies and the military act in the state’s or their own interests. Responding to this question involves a reflection on the state beyond the scope of this article.

¹³ I refer to the fact that Indian military and paramilitary forces operating in Kashmir did not limit their activities to securing the borders and curbing militancy with the supposed goal of protecting Indian citizens, but acted as a kind of mafia gang state. An account of what this means can be found in: LEVY and SCOTT-CLARK (2012).

IV. BORDERING PROCESS AND BELONGING

The Kashmir borderland is often described on the basis of its cultural and social diversity, its lack of significant majority communities, and the often complicated coexistence among different groups that bordering processes have accentuated. Nonetheless, discussing community and identity formation in this context remains highly problematic and must be regarded in relation to, or as a consequence of, bordering practices imposed from above, mainly from the distant state centres and their institutions but also from dominant groups in a particular area. When ordinary people cannot publicly express their views – through political mobilization and public participation – because of fear, it is difficult to know how they identify themselves in terms of membership.

In addressing the cultural and social heterogeneity of the Kashmir borderland, the notion of belonging allows us to better grasp the different existing constellations that form the so-called ‘Kashmir dispute’, and to unveil the dichotomies of being in one place and time but feeling part of another (Hedetoft and Hjort 2000, vii–xv). Belonging, in this context, is mostly informed by the cultural, social and spatial perceptions and experiences of individuals or groups rather than objective political forms of membership. In contexts under high surveillance, such as contested border areas where ethnic differences have been exploited politically, asking how people trace their ties to particular places appears less problematic for them than whether they define themselves as part of a particular group.

During interviews and conversations in Baltistan in August 2009, it was not uncommon to hear ‘you know, we were Buddhist in the past’ as a form of explanation for aspects of Baltistan’s history, or even for local idiosyncrasies (such as being a peaceful and egalitarian society). In trying to explain the meaning of such expressions, my interlocutors referred to previously close cultural affinities with the neighbouring areas of Ladakh and with the Tibetan world at large (Mato Bouzas 2012; see also MacDonald 2006), now almost extinct as a result of the closing of boundaries, compared to limited cultural ties with the neighbouring district of Gilgit, which is part of the political unit of Gilgit-Baltistan. However, if I posed direct questions about Kashmir and conditions in Baltistan as a result of the dispute, interviewees normally provided evasive answers. In this regard, during my first meeting with one educated man, whom I have continued to meet over several years, when I asked him about Baltistan being part of the Kashmir dispute he answered, ‘Baltistan has nothing to do with Kashmir [the Princely State] because there was the war [in 1947–49] and we opted for Pakistan. The case of Gilgit is different’.¹⁴ When I spoke to him again five years later and referred to the disputed condition of Baltistan, he gave an entirely different answer, saying that Baltistan was indeed part of Kashmir (of the Princely State). And to support his argument, he mentioned the divided families in Baltistan and the Kargil and Chorbat La border areas who cannot visit one another because of the dispute. Although there are other issues involved in these re-appropriations of the past, I want to emphasize that ‘belonging’

¹⁴ Personal interview with C-09, Skardu, 26 August 2009.

refers to a relationship in a context where it is difficult to talk about the self. In the case of Baltistan, to define oneself as Balti is not a problem, but to claim to be Pakistani is highly controversial, given the peculiarity of Gilgit-Baltistan's undefined status within Pakistan. People in Gilgit-Baltistan may carry Pakistani passports, because some citizenship laws apply, but they are excluded from participation in the country's general electoral processes.

At the same time, respondents in Baltistan have argued that the conflict in the Kashmir Valley had nothing to do with them [Baltis], but admitting to having ambiguous feelings. A local doctor in his mid-thirties explained that, because of the conflict in the Valley, they are suffering. 'You know what happened during Kargil [the conflict in 1999]. Foreigners [probably Kashmiris and non-Kashmiris] came here [to Skardu] and they were armed. They bothered local people, women. Youth protested and there was a lot of tension. Some were detained in the army camp.'¹⁵ His account referred to the local episode preceding the occupation of winter-vacated Indian military posts of the Kargil peaks in late spring in 1999 by militants and soldiers in civilian clothes. The presence of armed outsiders moving around in Skardu disturbed locals, as they felt their place was being used for activities of which they did not approved. During the conversation with this doctor, however, he later admitted that if the Kashmiris in the Valley were able to achieve something (politically), those in Baltistan would demand comparable treatment. Similar views have been expressed by other interviewees on condition of anonymity and reflect the complexity of the problem. A number of people in Baltistan (and, to a certain extent, in Gilgit-Baltistan) make claims about the Kashmir dispute on the basis of their unwanted attachment to it and having suffered from it, but at the same time, they refrain from being identified with Kashmir by claiming they belong to the Ladakhi-Tibetan cultural milieu.

Bordering processes in the Kashmir borderland across the LoC and other administrative boundaries have accentuated forms of inclusion – forced socialization in the state polity – and exclusion – from the community, deprivation of rights and forced displacement. In this context, belonging is usually articulated as a sense of loss – by Kashmiris from the Valley who fled to AJK and Pakistan, by Baltis who lost their ties to Ladakh, by Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus) who suffered displacement and marginalization after the conflict in the 1990s, among others. It refers to the basic sense of longing for home, rather than a sense of a shared past, which is problematic to various degrees. In the course of my fieldwork in different sites on both sides of the LoC, people described the situation before 1947 in terms of loss (relations, mobility, economic relations, etc.). This does not mean, however, that they were supportive of the former Princely State – because they had memories of being exploited by the ruling elite – or that they considered themselves part of the Kashmir dispute because they were divided from their relatives on the other side of the LoC. Their sense of loss was mainly expressed through references to 'localized' historical and political developments in these territories rather than to regional or state developments.

¹⁵ Personal interview with M-10, Skardu, 25 March 2010.

The Valley of Kashmir is considered the place where the whole Kashmir question, the right to self-determination, has evolved. In this regard, the understanding of place is defined in terms of the social and physical interrelations based on which the Valley became the hub of Kashmir politics and the development of a Kashmir nationalist movement beginning in the first decades of the last century. This movement split into various factions over time. Hundreds of thousands of people from the Valley crossed the LoC to Pakistani Kashmir during periods of fighting between India and Pakistan, thereby becoming a displaced population (Robinson 2005, 48–53). Despite massive militarization, the Valley continues to be the main centre of contestation for an independent and reunited Jammu and Kashmir state, as was made evident by recent mobilizations in 2008 and 2010 (Kak 2011).

For those who left the Valley before 1971 (mainly Kashmiri speakers) and moved to the Pakistani side in AJK, to districts such as Muzaffarabad and other places such as Rawalpindi and Islamabad (among others), the decision to abandon the area seems to have been based on fear of persecution after India's takeover and the establishment of Indian rule. One Kashmir businessman, now living between Islamabad and Muzaffarabad, who had left the Valley as a child in the 1950s and had recently travelled on the cross-LoC bus service, explained to me why he still considered Kashmir (he referred to the Valley and Srinagar indistinctively) as his 'home'. He argued that his property was still there, as was part of his family.¹⁶ In many cases, descriptions of the Valley correspond to an idealized past. Yet, for those civilians who left for the Pakistani side in the late 1980s and during the 1990s, mostly Pahari speakers living in the nearby mountains and now staying in camps near Muzaffarabad, border insecurity (crossfire) was their primary reason for deciding to abandon their homes. A university student from a border village near Uri explained how several families left once for the 'other side' after a crossfire exchange between the armies in the mid-1990s. He explained that people were afraid to stay (on the Indian side), but that leaving was also risky. In the end, he said, 'What to do? We are in India and it is not too bad'.¹⁷

A case apart is that of the militants who crossed the LoC to receive military training with the intention to return to the Valley and 'liberate' their country.¹⁸ Toward the end of an interview in Rawalpindi, a former militant with whom I had met several times confessed that he wanted to return to his home in the Valley (despite being in Pakistan, his family arranged a marriage with a relative, and he and his wife live with their son in Rawalpindi). He still supported militancy but expressed his dislike of AJK because 'it has nothing to do with the Valley. On this side [Muzaffarabad] there are only

¹⁶ Personal interview with D-10, Muzaffarabad, 10 March 2010.

¹⁷ Personal interview with A-10, Srinagar, 13 May 2010. This student referred to India in connection to an organized trip he made to Agra and Rajasthan, where, in his own words, he 'saw India'. The military organizes trips for the youth of the border areas to popular places in India such as Agra, Rajasthan and Goa, among others, as a form of state socialization.

¹⁸ In a question by an MP in the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly on the figures that the government has for Kashmir youth who crossed the LoC and are currently present in Pakistani Kashmir, the answer was 4,000. See U. Maqbool, '4000 Kashmir youth in Pak, Pakistan: Gov', *Greater Kashmir*, 6 April 2015, accessed 8 February 2016, <http://www.jammu-kashmir.com/archives/archives2015/kashmir20150406b.html>

mountains.’¹⁹ Similarly negative views of AJK as something different from the Kashmir Valley were expressed by two returned former militants I interviewed in Srinagar in July 2012. Whereas their dislike for AJK was expressed in terms of the landscape – describing it as a mountainous region, and Muzaffarabad a noisy and chaotic town – and had nothing to do with the people, it was probably in part due to their disenchantment with militancy and the feeling that they were ‘wasting time’, as one confessed, as well as a sense of having been manipulated (by other militants or Pakistani agencies).²⁰ For those involved in conflict, their claims to the Valley as the ‘true Kashmir’ are permeated by the impossibility of return – due to their activities – and, for those who were able to do so and now live in Srinagar, their sentiments are expressed by a sense of frustration with their biographies. Interestingly, those ‘returned militants’ underline positive feelings about how they were well treated by ordinary people in Muzaffarabad and in places like Rawalpindi (in one case, living for a period of five to eight years with a Pakistani family), and distinguish between ordinary people and the world of militant organizations and agencies in which they have been immersed.

The Kashmir Valley, the place to be claimed and regained, is also longed for as a home by the thousands of Kashmiri-speaking Pandits forced to leave when the conflict began, either because of fear after receiving threats or because of political manipulation (Evans 2002, 20–3; Duschinski 2008; Rai 2011, 56–9). A number of them are now living in precarious situations, mainly in Jammu and Delhi. Among those who remained, there is a sense of being ‘caretakers’, which is how one of my interviewees described his situation. A government employee in Srinagar who sent part of his family, including his daughter, to Delhi when the conflict erupted, he remained in the Valley ‘in order to maintain the property’. Despite blaming the separatists (and Muslims in general) for all the suffering he incurred, he conceded: ‘If they would have asked us [the Pandits], we would have gone along with them’.²¹ The remark came as a surprise in the narration because, in spite of all his suffering, he admitted sharing sympathies with the movement, even if only because they are from the same soil. In late October 2014 I met in Srinagar with Sanjay Tickoo, president of the Kashmiri Sangharsh Samiti. He also remained in the Valley during the conflict, and narrated how in his personal case his Muslim neighbours were supportive, but acknowledged that there was a general feeling that the Pandits as a minority were unprotected by their Muslim neighbours and felt vulnerable.

Similar opinions have been expressed to me by members of other minorities, such as the Sikhs or the Paharis, who, while recognizing that they had been threatened in the past, would still identify themselves as belonging to the same place and the same community. In the interview I mentioned above with the Pahari government servant residing in Srinagar, he initially told me there were no distinctions between Paharis (the mountains

¹⁹ Personal interview with A-09, Rawalpindi, 18 August 2009.

²⁰ It seems that the former militants returning to the Kashmir Valley were not involved in significant violent activities and were not in key ranks of militant organisations that allow them access to sensitive information. My interviewees commented that once in the AJK, after being in one or two training camps, they gradually disengaged from militancy and started to do other activities, such as petty jobs in places like Rawalpindi. Similar stories have been reported by journalists.

²¹ Personal interview with R-10, Srinagar, 12 May, 2010.

surrounding the Valley, speaking Pahari) and Kashmiris (the Kashmiri speakers of the Valley) and he told me about his support for the ‘movement’ (the nationalists). Certainly, a number of accounts, now novelized,²² show how Paharis living close to the LoC would participate in and support the insurgency with their knowledge of mountain passes. However, my interviewee later admitted that he sometimes felt coerced, namely by the ‘movement’, to participate in demonstrations. In the case of the Kashmiri Sikhs, also affected by the conflict, they opted mostly to stay in the Valley during the insurgency. These testimonies show how the political space suddenly shrank in the 1990s, when people had to fend for themselves, and event today prevents a fluid dialogue among the different minorities and the nationalists. But at the same time, these views hint at the fact that their ‘being part of’ the Valley was not significantly contested – in the case of Pandits, they were targeted mainly because they were perceived as pro-Indian – since they laid the blame on the nationalists’ failure, in their fight against the Indian state, to consider them.

By exploring senses of belonging in the territories of the Kashmir borderland, the continuing violence of the state-making process (territorialization) is revealed. Peoples’ claims to a place, or a space, serve to disentangle the narratives about the dispute and address the plurality of places and spaces contained in ‘Kashmir’. Belonging is expressed in the case of those in Baltistan as dissent with an ascribed attachment, that of Kashmir, and the reclaiming of a past (Ladakh–Tibet) which is considered less problematic. It also refers to a past context in which borders were flexible as compared with the current immobility that has isolated and marginalized Baltistan. In the Kashmir Valley and AJK, however, belonging is articulated by those separated and displaced by the violence along the LoC as a sense of loss, but also, in the case of minorities of the Kashmir Valley, as a reappropriation of the soil from which, at some point, they felt excluded.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The border as the departure point, as a method to study the Kashmir borderland, implies a shift in perspective that not only takes into account historical processes of boundary-making and bordering, but also equally allows for considering how the people living in these territories deal with the ongoing bordering processes that affect them. Thus, the border as a method serves to unveil the spatial problematic underlying the conflict as it draws attention to the exceptional legal framework of the Kashmir territories that shapes life conditions in the borderland.

The study of the Kashmir borderland shows how existing local histories underline ideas of freedom regarding the events surrounding the Partition, and how these have not been fulfilled by the automatic absorption of these territories by the states of India and Pakistan. Furthermore, ongoing socio-economic transformations in the border areas are carried out from above and with the intention to create new dependencies, regardless of

²² Such as *The Collaborator* (2011) and *The Book of Gold Leaves* (2014) by MIRZA WAHEED.

people's sense of belonging. These transformations occur under the exceptional legal character of these territories. In other words, the borderland is a distinct political space. The exceptional legal condition of the Kashmir borderland makes it difficult for those living there to identify and position themselves in terms of membership, given the uncertain political context. This is the core of the problem in the disputed territories, because discursive understandings of belonging cannot be publicly articulated either due to the shrinking of the political space or because they are directly suppressed. However, as the views of the respondents in this article show, senses of belonging illustrate various claims to places (and spaces) that show a more flexible approach to territoriality than the one provided by state and identity discourses. Belonging in the Kashmir borderland is articulated as a sense of loss, characterized by displacement and marginalization, but also as dissent from an ascribed, certainly fixed, attachment. The latter indicates some agency by the border inhabitants over bordering processes that affect them.

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