Geographies at the margins: borders in South Asia—an introduction

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A B S T R A C T

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This introduction to a special section exploring "Geographies at the Margins" of South Asia offers a discussion that links the literature on borders and margins to the regional complexities and geographies of South Asia. Specifically, we argue for linking of these literatures to develop an optic for thinking about external and internal borders that is at once relational and comparative. South Asia, as has often been observed, is a region marked with multiple borders and margins. It is also a space where the articulation between such spaces is at once suggestive and crucial for understanding the political geography of South Asia and the ways that borders and margins are similarly implicated in working out the postcolonial politics of nation, state, and space.

Introduction: geographies at the margins

On September 11, 2012, Reshma Bi, a seventy-year old woman living in the Indian village of Charonda in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, walked across the Line of Control (LoC) separating India from Pakistan-administered Kashmir to live with her sons and grandsons in Pakistan (The Hindu, 2013). This seemingly innocent transgression of the fiercely contested border set off a cascade of responses that, at once, dramatized tensions over borders in South Asia and highlighted the ongoing stakes in maintaining their tenuous political fictions. In response to the crossing, which Indian border security forces claimed highlighted the weakness of the border, troops from India's 9th Maratha Light Infantry began to construct "observation bunkers" around the village of Charonda. These bunkers were notable, not as measures to prevent illegal crossing from Pakistan into India, but rather, as measures to prevent those living in the Indian village of Charonda from crossing the border into Pakistan—as means to prevent egress, not ingress. The construction of bunkers so close to the border violated the 2003 LoC ceasefire agreement between the two countries. In doing so, it raised furious protests on the part of the Pakistani border security forces just across the line. Pakistani soldiers began making announcements over public address speakers, demanding that India stop construction. Tensions along the border continued to escalate over the ensuing four months, leading to cross border firing, mortar shelling, and raids. What started as an innocent border crossing by an elderly woman ultimately left soldiers on both sides of the border, as well as three villagers in Charonda, dead.

Reshma Bi's border crossing, and the events that it precipitated, raised a range of spectres that continue to haunt South Asia's border politics. The conflict over bunker construction overtly engaged the communal politics of the border and the fiction that the Partition borderline neatly divides populations along religious lines. It highlighted the military and paramilitary forces needed to enforce these communal divisions, the ways these policings constitute a savage marking of an interiority and exteriority to the nation-state, and the crystallization of uncertainty along the LoC that shapes not just its administration but also life proximate to it (Kabir, 2009). The conflict also raised a range of less overt, but none-the-less critical, problems of border politics in South Asia. These include: the politics of family division across borders (a central aspect in narratives of Partition); the ongoing rhetorics and realities of terrorist threat and cross-border smuggling (Reshma Bi's children had fled across the LoC after being implicated in a cross-border smuggling ring); and the ways that debates over borders turn everyday acts into international events, often with lethal results. Indeed, the incident demonstrated ways in which the border-line continues to marginalize and overdetermine possibilities of alternative politics and socialities in the borderlands. As such, the "runaway grandmother" incident, as The Hindu dubbed it, foregrounded the ways that borders—marginal spaces at the edge of nation—continue to be both problematic and central to national and state politics throughout the region.

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This special section confronts the imaginative and political geography of South Asian borderlands. It seeks to offer narratives that shed insight into the ways that seemingly innocent movements such as Reshma Bi's assume regional significance. It engages borders as *margins of the state and nation*, places at once removed from and central to debates about identity, security, risk, and survival. Responding to recent developments across two literatures—debates on boundaries and marginality—contributors seek to not just re-center borders in debates over South Asian political geography, but to also show their salience to, and resonance with, broader regional debates and problematic spaces.

To call borderlands "margins" has become, in recent years, academic common sense. Authors continue to productively identify borders and borderlands as critical zones at the margins of state control and nation imagination (Eilenberg, 2010; 2011; Gellner, 2013; Harris, 2013; Jones, 2012; Kalir & Sur 2013). Extending that line of inquiry, the contributors here explore the various meanings of marginality in border-zones. We do this to develop an optic for the study of the histories and geographies of borders that is at once relational *and* comparative. While moving away from codified models of state–society–space interactions (Baud & Van Schendel, 1997), we none-the-less insist on a perspective that not only links borders to "centers," but also to each other and to other spaces and process at the margins of normative and juridical framings of community.

In doing so, we respond to a recent symposium in this journal calling for a "re-placing" of the border in border studies (Johnson et al., 2011). By re-centering the border, this symposium called for a move away from the border as "metaphor" in much contemporary social science and humanities writing, and instead refocused attention on the empirical realties and theoretical implications of spatial and political borders. Contributors to this special section engage in this call in varying ways. However we also unsettle the notion that borders exist only on the physical margins of the state, and instead suggest that these spaces are "displaced" to the "centers" in different ways. In doing so, we seek to sharpen an empirically rich outlook on border spaces by drawing attention to processes at work within them, and by locating these processes within broader networks of marginalization, dislocation, subaltern theorization, and contested history.

Contributors, here, offer a range of South Asian border biographies—analyses that highlight the complex ways that borders "materialize, rematerialize, and dematerialize in different contexts, at different scales, and at different times" (Megoran, 2012, p. 477). We seek to firstly, theorize borders as one, among many, margins that are central to the political geography of postcolonial South Asia and, secondly, to use these spaces as optics to rethink postcolonial history, geography, and politics.

This introduction outlines our theoretical and empirical agenda. It makes two arguments. First, that South Asia is a particularly productive place to engage questions of borders and margins. Second, that the link between literature on borders and margins in geography and beyond is in need of more explicit conceptual linking. As such, we suggest that a focus on the empirical context of South Asia, on the one hand, provides a rich palate to engage specific border histories and, on the other, to build theories that at once locate borders in space and trace their troubling linkages to broader problematics of nation and state.

Borders and margins in regional context

To say that borders and boundaries are central to both imaginations and understandings of South Asia is, perhaps, to understate the case. As a key site of British imperialism, South Asia, like Ireland and the Middle East among other partitioned examples, has struggled with the legacy of often arbitrarily drawn borders (Coakley & O'Dowd, 2007; Kumar, 1999). These partitions, and borders, created especially in South Asia, partly to preserve the façade of British imperial power (Chester, 2008) were based on the premise that religious communities are fundamentally incompatible. Decades after the transitions, these partitions and borders have left lasting and often deleterious impacts on various communities, particularly minorities in these new nation-states.

The colonial production of space, in the service of defining governable subjects and zones of rule (Embree, 1977; Goswami, 2004; Ibrahim, 2009; Sivaramakrishnan, 1999) continues to pervade the policies and politics of South Asian countries, creating and exacerbating tensions between various ethno-linguistic and other communities, providing a messy template upon which to build and develop state and society. The struggle of challenging and upholding borders has occupied postcolonial politics and continues to trouble relationships between different countries and people. Whether thinking through the unfinished processes of the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 (Chatterji, 2007b; Feldman, 1999; Gilmartin, 1998; Naqvi, 2007; Van Schendel, 2005; Zamindar, 2007); the wars that have shaped contemporary geopolitical relations between South Asian states and their neighbours—especially the 1971 Liberation War in East Pakistan/Bangladesh and the on-going conflict over Kashmir (Bose, 2005; Rai, 2004; Robinson, 2013; Saikia, 2011); or the on-going sub-regional conflicts that continue to define identity and communal politics throughout much of the region (Axel, 2001; Baruah, 2006; Ghassem-Fachandi, 2012; Hutt, 2004; McDuie-Ra, 2008; Shah, 2011), anxiety over the creation and maintenance of borders is at the heart of discussions of violence, social conflict, and contemporary politics in South Asia. Such anxieties exist not only at the physical borders between countries, but play out in the internal spaces of nation-states, notably urban environments where divisions and conflict between communities of people invoke metaphors of state borders (Chatterji & Mehta, 2007; Desai, 2010).

As Krishna (1996) has argued, the instability, tenuousness, and (perceived) permeability of these borders are inexorably linked to a pervasive cartographic anxiety in South Asian politics—a collection of vaguely defined fears about national survival that are violently mapped onto territory (see also Samaddar, 1999). Yet, as contributors to this special section show, the suite of anxieties at play around South Asian borders cannot be simply reduced to fears about the tenuousness of comparatively new boundary lines, nor can all borders in South Asia be explained through the lens of Partition. Borders in South Asia, are spaces that engage a broader sweep of national and nationalist concerns—over security, identity, trade, and territory. As such, they are palimpsests that articulate a range of regional narratives.

To say that South Asia is a space that is rife with physical and metaphorical margins is equally an understatement. The projects of both colonial and postcolonial state-making in South Asia have yielded myriad social and spatial exclusions, partial inclusions, and marginalizations of citizens and non-citizens. As such, the political dynamics of postcolonial South Asia tend to revolve around questions of belonging, membership, and access to substantive citizenship rights. As Partha Chatterjee (2004) argues, this range of inequalities necessitates an optic for understanding politics and governance in South Asia that moves beyond liberal normative notions of rights bearing citizens and instead focuses attention on the ways those outside the bounds of classically conceived civil society—on the margins of the state—encounter and shape projects of rule. This intervention usefully highlights the ways that much contemporary politics in South Asia hinges not around substantive democratic practice, but rather around the biopolitics of inclusion and exclusion (Cons, 2012, 2013; Gupta, 2012; Kohli,

2012; Mazzarella, 2006; Middleton, 2011; Shah, 2011; Sharma, 2008).

At the same time, Chatterjee reduces the politics of marginality to a binary of political/civil society and formality/informality. As a growing literature on urban politics in South Asia shows, informality and marginality are themselves terms which encompass a multitude of shades of gray. As such, Chatterjee's analysis neglects the ways in which informality has become the central tool by which development is undertaken in South Asian cities, and indeed, at its borders (Sur, 2013). Informality in South Asia is a weapon, but not just of the weak to shape projects of rule. It is also a tool of the rich, and paradoxically, of states that uses flexibility to appropriate and parcel out land, services and rights to achieve specific developmental ends (Desai, 2012; Ghertner, 2011; Gururani, 2013; Roy, 2009). Such flexible strategies of rule signal the ways in which notions of citizenship and belonging are in constant flux, even as they continue to shift in favour of the more powerful and wealthy classes in many South Asian countries.

Understanding marginality, particularly in South Asia, thus requires adopting a relational and negotiated view of margins and centers, broad and local histories, and regional politics—a view which embodies, rather than demarcates, a varied terrain of power. Such a perspective provides a useful lens in exploring relations of gender and the public sphere (Burton, 1999; Feldman, 2001; Sarkar, 2001), the politics of identity and recognition (Middleton, 2011; Shneiderman, 2011), the geography of urban space (Menon, 2010; Roy, 2002), the fate of South Asia's vast refugee populations (Chatterji, 2007a; Sanyal, 2009), the political-economy of regionalism and autonomy (Ahmed, 2006; van Beek, 2001), regional conflicts (Daniel, 1996; Jeganathan, 2000), or the violent terrain of religion and communal politics (Hansen, 1999, 2001; Ghassem-Fachandi, 2012; Tambiah, 1997).

It is increasingly impossible to understand the terrain of both contemporary and historical politics in South Asia without attending to these tensions. As Chatterjee argues in a different context, the project of historiography in South Asia, and one might add critical geography, is no longer to identify separate spaces of elite and marginal politics. "Now the task is to trace in their mutually conditioned historicities [and spatialities] the specific forms that have appeared, on the one hand, in the domain defined by the hegemonic project of nationalist modernity, and on the other, in the numerous fragmented resistances to that normalizing project" (Chatterjee, 1993, p. 13). In other words, the task at hand is to redefine an analytic space in which margins and centers are conceived as intimately linked and mutually constituting.

Border/margin thinking

Yet what might an analytic linkage between the literature on borders and the literature on margins yield? To what extent are these literatures different or already linked? And in what ways do these theoretical engagements appertain to contemporary discussions of South Asia's political geography?

Paradoxically, and with a few notable exceptions—especially Willem Van Schendel's path-breaking work on the Bengal Border (Van Schendel, 2001; 2002; 2005)—South Asia's borderlands have only recently emerged as sites within which the new literature on borders is being pushed, challenged, and theorized (Aggarwal, 2004; Aggarwal & Bhan, 2009; Banerjee, 2010; Cons, 2008; Gellner, 2013; Ibrahim, 2005; 2007; Jones, 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2010; Shewly, 2013; Zamindar, 2007). This absence is particularly notable, given that the twentieth century's first systemic study of frontiers, Curzon's well known 1907 treatise, was worked out against the backdrop of British Imperial expansion and security in the region (Curzon, 1907; see also Holdich, 1916).

This void has meant that much recent writing addressing new border configurations has drawn heavily on European and US contexts, occasionally taking border configurations in the West as paradigms for borders throughout the global south. Brown's (2010) recent exploration of border walls, for example, takes the US–Mexico border as a paradigmatic case and uses it to launch a broad-based theorization of the performance of sovereignty in a globalizing world, assuming, erroneously, that her narrative is easily transposed onto other borders and other walls.[2]

This implicit assumption that borders have a modular form unconsciously replicates much of the well-worn debate over the modularity of nationalism (Anderson, 1991; Chakrabarty, 2000; Chatterjee, 1986; 1993). It suggests that all experiences of walling are not only similar, but grounded and based-upon Western experience. Such an assumption, of course, dismisses the possibility that bordering and walling practices in other parts of the world have their own distinct histories and trajectories. More critically, it effaces the possibility that spaces such as South Asia are key sites in the shaping of broader patterns of bordering and walling, as opposed to simply locations to which these practices are exported. We posit that even a cursory examination of recent South Asian history belies this modular assumption. This tendency towards a modular thinking about borders and margins is something that authors in this special section question by providing grounded, ethnographic explorations of the contextual production of marginality and border practices.

If borders have, until comparatively recently, been a less central aspect of critical geographic scholarship in South Asia, the notion of margins have been more central to discussions of South Asian state, nation, and political power (Das, 2004; Williams, Vira, & Chopra, 2011). Indeed, as indicated above, relational thinking about place and power that the notion of marginality implies, has long been a central aspect of postcolonial scholarship and theory in South Asian Studies. Here, we make a claim that these two theoretical bodies of thought might productively be brought together as a means of animating discussions of South Asian borders, and indeed, borders and boundaries beyond the region. It is our suggestion that doing so provides one way to move beyond modular theorizations of border zones, while at the same time, offering explanatory and theoretical power that transcends the specificity of particular cases (Jukarainan, 2006). As such, the region and its border politics offer the opportunity to rethink walls and borders and productively engage with the literature on marginality.

In essence, scholars of margins make analogous claims to those of scholars of borders: that such spaces are privileged zones for understanding processes unfolding in "centers" and that, indeed, the very notion of centers is fundamentally predicated on the relational production of margins, borders, and zones of exclusion (Aggarwal & Bhan, 2009; Ong, 2006; Sahlins, 1991; Tsing, 1993; Yiftachel, 2009a; 2009b). Among urban scholars and those working on the political economy of the global South, margins and marginality have been long-standing issues in studying the relationships of racial and ethnic minorities and the urban poor. Margins and marginality for example have signalled the lack of citizenship rights for large numbers of the urban poor (de la Rocha et al., 2004). More recently, scholars have re-engaged with the study of marginality to understand how neoliberal capitalism, racism and other exclusionary practices drive people into deeper forms of poverty (Perlman, 2003; Wacquant, 2008).

The concept of urban marginality traces its roots back to Simmel and Durkheim and explorations of 19th century Europe (Bayat, 2000, p. 536). The term itself, first used by Robert Park in 1928, has been deeply debated.[3] It has given rise to conceptualizing marginality in various ways including cultural, social and structural forms. As Billson (1988, p. 185) points out, cross-fertilization

between the original "marginal man" idea and perspectives on oppression and exploitation were used to create conceptualizations of structural marginality that encompassed "political, social, and economic powerlessness of certain disenfranchised and/or disadvantaged segments within societies." This theory of marginality was significant through the 1960s and 1970s with regards to analysis of Latin American urbanization. As Teresa Caldeira (2009, p. 849) points out "…the 1960s/70s theory of marginality assumed that the societies that generated a 'marginal mass' — this was the language then — were characterized by dualism. They would be split between a modern capitalist sector and a marginal sector. This theory has been repeatedly criticized. The main counter-argument was that the dualist argument made no sense since the 'irrelevant' population excluded from the formal labour market was nevertheless highly functional for the reproduction and expansion of capitalism." Critiquing the work of Loic Waquant on advanced marginality, Caldiera argues that this current work on marginality continues to use Fordist visions of industrial capitalism to define the cores and the margins of economies and societies. These theories of marginality she argues are thus "based on a similar anxiety: the need to theorize deviance from a standard" (ibid). Thus marginality has moved from a position of blaming the poor for their poverty and inability to adjust to new cultures to more recent examinations of spatial and structural conditions that "marginalize" people and their place within society.

The intersections of spatial and structural perspectives on marginality are useful in interrogating the complex politics of peripheries at various scales. For example, using urban colonialism as a tool for analysizing contemporary urban politics, Oren Yiftachel (2009a; 2009b) notes that the politics of margins are complex and that studies of them need to take into account the ways in which those who are marginalized also fragment the apparatus of power from below. Using the example of Bedouin Arabs from Beersheba, Yiftachel draws our attention to the fact that "gray spacing"—a process in which the state attempts to use flexibility to control populations—becomes a process by which state power is challenged through subaltern politics that move beyond a struggle for citizenship and equality to become intertwined with struggles for autonomous spaces of development and identity.

How then do we relate the debates on urban marginality to those of physical borders and borderlands between nation-states that are also popularly seen as problematic zones occupied by "deviant" populations? Margins are seen variously as spaces of exception, spaces of contradiction, spaces of danger and violence, and spaces of ambiguity. A focus on margins through marginality perhaps provides a way to understand how broad processes of exclusion are constituted similarly in diverse spaces with both shared and divergent histories and to make apparent the ways that spatial and social status overlaps. Here, a trans-regional analytical move is useful, where debates on urban marginality that have been so useful in unpacking class and ethnic dimensions of social exclusion in cities can be used to probe the politics of marginalization of different border communities. Rather than seeing such sites as being the exceptions to the norms, marginality enables us to understand how larger structural processes mould communities that live here. This move reinforces our original intention to demonstrate the interrelationships between centers and peripheries. Moreover, as the contributors to this special section show, it highlights the ways that populations at borders struggle to reframe their identities in ways that move beyond characterizations of them as "marginal" groups and reassert their own centrality to various framings of community.

But what exactly these spaces have in common with each other beyond a problematic relationship with various different constructions of nation and state and rights and entitlements remains hazy. As such, the recent proliferation of the concept of margins in South Asia and beyond has been coupled with a lack of analytic clarity as to what margins actually are. This lack of clarity poses challenges to understanding the conceptual and empirical articulation between different spaces.

Clarifying this issue, we suggest, is a particularly critical project for contemporary scholars of South Asia. This is the case not just because of the preponderance of marginal spaces within the region, as discussed above. We suggest that in failing to clarify what, specifically, margins are replicates a number of the conceptual limits and critiques of the Subaltern Studies project which dominated and radically transformed research on South Asia and post-colonial theory throughout the 1980s and 1990s.[4] The promise of Subaltern Studies was to re-center debates in Indian historiography on marginalized groups who tended to be left out of nationalist histories of South Asia. Yet, the radical intervention also fell under criticism for its own lack of clarity on the meanings and centralities of the "subaltern" subject (Ludden, 2001; Sarkar, 1997; Sivaramakrishnan, 2002). Similarly, a focus on "the state and its margins" which does not seek to unpack the dynamics of marginality, risks reproducing a limiting analytic binary in which margins are reduced to a spatialized code meaning little more than "non-elite."

Writings on borders and boundaries, particularly recent discussions amongst political geographers attending to the nuanced practices of bordering, offer a promising paliative to this problem. Through a broad-based and active discussion spanning numerous collected volumes, special issues, and methodological missives, border studies scholars have articulated grounded ways of attending to the social production of borders that highlight the specific ways macropolitical agendas are materialized in space (to name but a few, Berg & Van Houtum, 2003; Diener & Hagen, 2010; 2012; Donnan & Wilson, 1999; 2010; Kumar-Rajaram & Grundy-Warr, 2007; Migdal, 2008; Newman & Paasi, 1998; Parker et al., 2009; Van Houtum, Kramsch, & Ziefhofer, 2005; Wasti-Walter, 2011; Wilson & Donnan, 1998; 2012; Zartman, 2010).

Border studies as a field has carried an explicit comparative empirical focus and a set of loose theoretical linkage that have facilitated a range of critical case studies of geopolitical transformation. These have been instrumental in undermining homogenizing theories of globalization and calling attention to the dynamics of state territorialization (Aggrawal, 2004; Banerjee, 2010; Banerjee & Chen, 2012; Newman, 2006). The field has been regularly summed up and schematized in various ways. Megoran (2012), has recently and helpfully characterized the history of border studies as a transition from a search for the "laws" of political boundaries, to an elaboration of the taxonomies of borders, to an attempt to model border interactions, and finally to a project of developing theories of boundaries of social processes. In each of these iterations, border studies, as distinct from various forms of so called "border thinking" in the humanities and social sciences, have maintained an intensely empirical focus on the specific locations of boundary production and maintenance—borderlines and borderlands.

This attention to space has arguably lent the field of border studies a focus that discussions of marginality have lacked. However, recent questions have emerged as to the limits of the project and the growing tension between expanding case studies of borders around the world and a desire to theorize about borders more generally (Jukarainan, 2006). For example, Sidaway (2011) calls for an effective deparochialization of border studies as a way to "think about how a variety of bordering illustrates changing configurations of the social and political" (Sidaway, 2011, p. 974). Similarly, Megoran (2012) suggests that the framework of border studies has served to constrict the breadth of work in the field, limiting the

possibilities for using borders as a lens to understand a broader set of social processes.

Theoretical debates over borders and margins, thus, appear at opposite ends of a similar problematic—the former arguably over-specified and empirical, the latter, again arguably, under-specified and vague. In this special section, we engage a link between marginality and bordering as one way to move beyond this double impasse. We suggest that viewing borders as one among a range of locations in which the spatial processes of framing national identities, exclusions, and imaginations allows a broader base for understanding the shifting terrain of regional and local politics and their transgressions in South Asia and beyond. Our focus, here is on articulation across space—an attention to the ways that processes that unfold in borders are, far from unique, relationally linked to other margins as well as to centers. Indeed, there are empirical bleed-throughs between borders and various different marginal spaces that are critical to understanding their articulations. Insidiously, border imagery infiltrates the everyday spaces of South Asia, particularly in cities that are far removed from border regions. This imagery is deployed to legitimize notions of "living together but separately" that emerge before and after bouts of communal violence such as the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 or the pogroms in Gujarat in 2002 (Chatterji, 2005; Chatterji & Mehta, 2007). Such forms of segregation enable increasing forms of marginalization of those communities that do not "fit" the imagination of the nation-state at the same time that they justify new forms of rule in border-zones.

Attending to place

We have been making two linked claims in this introduction. First, if the notion of marginality is to reflect more than a vaguely spatialized framing of the notion of subalternity, it is in need of analytic development. Second, if we are to understand borders in the broader regional context of South Asia (or beyond) they need to be located relationally to other sites where community and marginality are worked out. The essays in this special section collectively suggest that if borders and borderlands are empirical spaces of engagement—zones in which bordering practices are deployed by various actors in various ways—margins might best be conceived of as an optic for understanding a set of relationships which constrain (or enable) both particular opportunities and various forms of movement. Each of the authors in this special section engage geography at the margins of South Asia by exploring the way that borders are situated in dialogue with other kinds of spaces and practices *as well as* with centers.

In such a view, borders indeed remain spaces of securitization, violence, uncertainty, and fluidity. Moreover, they remain spaces that are in constant historical flux, emerging and disappearing as critical points of tension in subregional dialogue (O'Dowd, 2010). At the same time, this view shows that part of what makes borders and borderlands complex are their intimate relations to other forms of margins, politics of marginalization, and tenuous negotiations over belonging. To borrow from the language of Johnson et al. (2011), this is to suggest a *perspective* that sees the various social, political, and spatial formations of borders as bound to broader struggles over the creation, maintenance, and survival of nation and state and the marginal spaces, topics, and populations that such debates, by definition, create (Balibar, 1991). To put this statement concretely, we suggest that it is impossible to understand the broad nexus of events triggered by the movement of Reshma Bi across the LoC in reference to the border alone. Rather, it articulates with a range of histories—central and marginal, nationalist and subaltern—as well as a range of other spaces and spatial practices. We further suggest that attending to this

relational articulation (and disarticulation) across the region destabilizes South Asian area studies perspectives that, as Ghosh (2011) argues often remain tied to particular nationalist frames and foreign policy objectives.

Contributors develop this perspective as a way to push and challenge a set of themes that have become central to studies of borders and other marginal spaces in South Asia and beyond—identity, risk, and socio-spatial change. While these themes certainly do not represent the full battery of potential linkages that might be engaged in discussions of borders and margins, they offer a set of investigatory points to a broader discussion of marginality, borders, and the postcolonial politics of South Asia.

Taking up the question of identity, Middleton (2013) explores the historical and contemporary ways in which borders impact the reckonings and politics of indigineity and recognition—framed against colonial and postcolonial logics of ethnology and ethno-centric nationalism. Seeking to understand what forms of difference count as viable and what do not in border zones, Middleton argues that in the geographically, culturally, and racially different and marginalized region of Darjeeling, Gorkhas face a continued struggle to resolve an 'identity crisis'. The border, in this case, has served as a tool for producing political marginality by shaping identities and identity politics significantly. The identities produced from the borders have been transformed, constrained or stymied by particular paradigms of recognition in India. As such, the politics of recognition in Darjeeling articulate with long histories of political inclusion and exclusion throughout India, colonial and postcolonial debates over the meanings of "tribe," and struggles over the politics of recognition that take place across the country and indeed the region. Here, the border is inscribed with various meanings. On the one hand, it is a problematic marker, one that signals "foreignness" through its proximity to another nation state (Nepal) which has its own part to play in the negotiation over identity in the Darjeeling Hills. On the other, it is strategically deployed by local populations as a means for negotiating a more ideal fit within conceptions of nation and state.

Similarly using space as a means to unpack tensions around the normative production of identities, Shneiderman (2013) engages the historical formation of a Himalayan border zone that allows for free transit of residents within 30 km of the Nepal/China border. She demonstrates how the border zone and border citizenship provides a compelling example of how states create alternative categories of citizenship in response to practices from below that complicate the process of managing borders and the movements of people across them. She argues that this form of border citizenship emerges out of non-postcolonial trajectories of state formation in the Himalayan region, which contrast with better-known processes of postcolonial state formation and their attendant regimes of citizenship elsewhere in South Asia and the rest of the world. Here, the border produces subjects that are able to co-opt their political and spatial marginality and use the exceptionality of this marginal space to their advantage.

As such, both Middleton and Shneiderman provide ways to think about borders as spatial margins where the politics of identity articulate with national, transnational, and local framings of codified ethno-religious categories. In doing so, they pose challenges to Yiftachel's idea of 'grey spacing' (2009a; 2009b) by highlighting how forms of state recognition are not only central to the formation of identity, but also how states in fact co-opt these forms of 'grey spacing' through flexibilized forms of 'border citizenship.' They further show how such negotiations have grave consequences for questions of both movement and belonging.

At the heart of debates around security and danger in border regions are the problematics of various forms of risk. Cons (2012,

2013) takes up this theme by exploring the internal politics of Dahagram, an enclave along the India–Bangladesh border. Drawing theoretically from work on urban slums, he argues for a perspective that is attentive both to the *claims* residents of Dahagram make about membership in the Bangladeshi state and the counter-histories that such claims occlude. Here, the question of articulation becomes important. Cons argues that academic discourse on suffering and exception that often mark discussions of margins and border alike tend to reflect a self-conscious framing of marginalization for residents of such spaces. This narrative reflects historical and contemporary inequalities, yet it also marks a particular form of risk navigation and negotiation for residents of these spaces. On the one hand, narratives of exception and suffering frame border areas as spaces worthy of inclusion in national territory; on the other, it challenges narratives of border residents as unruly and suspect peoples. In other words, it reflects a narrative that people in such zones often foreground as a claim—for greater political membership, economic benefits, and development assistance.

Such claims are often legitimate. Indeed they reflect real grievances, expropriations, and histories of marginalization. Yet, they do not tell the whole story. By definition, they themselves marginalize narratives, histories, and community members that cannot be easily reconciled with such claims of suffering for territory (Moore, 2005). Cons urges attention to both of these relational narratives, the one formed in dialogue with broader patterns and claims of inclusion by those who fall outside of normatively defined notions of national belonging (Chatterjee, 2004), the other a set of voices that articulate different sensibilities towards land, marginality, and membership. In doing so, he demonstrates the ways that the internal politics of this border community articulate with the broader politics of the border itself as well as ethno-nationalist understandings of citizenship in Bangladesh.

Drawing further, on urban work, Smith (2013) addresses the interplay between urban space and intimate geopolitics. Smith explores political transformations of Ladakh—a remote and contested region bordering Pakistan and Tibet in which the tense relations between a Buddhist majority and Muslim minority reproduce border sensibilities in Leh, the region's capital. Here the presence of the border dominates the relationships between people, marginalizing the possibility of other forms of socializing, and indeed the possibility of being cosmopolitan again. Smith grounds her discussion at more personal scales—those of bodies and of buildings. As she shows, tensions between Buddhists and Muslims in Leh, particularly fears about demographic change, are played out against a backdrop of the physical restructuring of buildings and the interpretation of public space along more globalized understandings of Buddhism and Islam. In doing so, she calls for attention to when, and how political borders are recalled and embodied in relationships between people, in the spaces of habitation and the interpretation of those spaces in what she calls 'a border sensibility' raising questions of how borders can produce new and insidious forms of marginality.

Researchers have long highlighted border zones as spaces of particular forms of transience and flux. In an era of rapid globalization, it is useful to consider not only the national or the global, but as Harris (2013) argues, the regional as well, as it matters significantly for people living in these areas. Harris focuses on individual traders' differential experiences of the effects of infrastructural developments in the eastern Himalayan region. Tracing the commodities they exchange, she studies the new economic geographies produced as responses to and part of a heavily Chinese driven Asian economy. As such, she joins with authors who have examined the micro and macro political economies of border zones, highlighting the ways proximate and distant cross border networks constitute both economic winners and losers (Eilenberg, 2012;

Sturgeon, 2005; Walker, 1999). In doing so, she shows how new political economic developments within the marginal space of the Himalayan region have caused a veritable reshuffling of marginalizations, in which some old spaces of trade are peripheralized while new ones are simultaneously opened up and certain trade practices, while concealed, continue to operate. Harris thus shows that theorizing places and people narrowly through marginality is problematic because they are not static. Rather, they mirror global changes and remain intimately linked to key nodes and centres in other parts of the world. Here, both borders and processes of marginalization must be understood as both in flux, and in dialogue with broader networks of economy, power, connectivity.

Harris and Smith, in different ways, illustrate how the marginal spaces of borders are linked to, on the one hand, a broader set of marginalized locals and, on the other, to intimate forms of marginalization carried out on gendered bodies and spaces of minority worship. Both these essays also emphasize how change at the margins is far from isolated, but is located and carried out in direct relation to broader political economic and socio-cultural shifts in a rapidly globalizing environment. These essays, then, highlight a critical aspect of our theme of linking marginality and borders. If relationships that cut across zones of marginality are historical, they are also evolving. Their linkages are dynamic and constantly shifting as broader political economic relations restructure them differently. Connections between margins are thus unstable things that are in need of close and on-going examination.

Collectively, then, the essays in this special section offer clues as to how, and why, one might engage the joint project of de-parochializing borders and grounding marginality. We posit that this endeavour offers fruitful possibilities for scholars who are, at once, interested in understanding the specific patterns of marginalization in place and their relational link to broader regional and geo politics. Central to this endeavour is an understanding of borders as at once rooted in their specific histories, complexities, and contexts. Equally critical, however, is an understanding of the ways that these complexities are not formed in isolation, but rather in relation to a broader network of marginalized and marginalizing spaces, processes, and patterns.

We choose South Asia as our specific location for this project for a range of reasons. As discussed above, it is a space that is veritably bursting both with borders, margins, and bordering/marginalizing practices. It is a space that is rich with new postcolonial scholarship in which the connected problematics of borders and margins are being explored and worked out. And it is a space that articulates with broader debates about borders and marginalization, though not in ways that can be reduced to modular understandings of border practices. As such, detailed, grounded, and regionally located ethnographic engagements with geographies at the margins of South Asia, such as the essays included here, have much to contribute to political geographies of borders and margins.

South Asia further offers a critical space to examine the ways that borders transcend border spaces in ways that are more than just metaphorical. Here, the politics of marginality and the insecurities of borders intermesh and shape one another in ways that are instructive to understandings of marginal space elsewhere. Thus, South Asia is one, among many, spaces in which the complex politics of margins and marginality can be productively rethought through careful attention to a range of different borders and bordering practices. As such, the movements of people such as Reshma Bi should have more than narrowly local or even regional interest. Untangling the puzzles of borders and margins that they offer are of critical importance in understanding how borders and marginality constitute nodes of engagement within which broader patterns are negotiated and worked out in unequal dialogue with

those living within them. Here, then, the process of relocating the border (Johnson et al., 2011) requires a view that is at once narrow—seeing borders within their specific and deeply contextual space—and synoptic—understanding the ways that border spaces are linked nodes in broader arguments and negotiations over political and spatial power.

Endnotes

[2] Likewise, work from the North on biometric borders (Amoore, 2006) has less relevance to South Asia and the European Union case of borders as sites of integration (Walters, 2002) only applies in very partial and limited ways in South Asia. The discourse of 'natural borders' that developed elsewhere is rarely heard in South Asia − although the Himalayas are sometimes invoked in this way (Fall, 2010).

[3] Park originally discusses the Marginal Man in reference to Jewish men who leave the ghetto and who live as cultural hybrid −" ..a man on the margin of two cultures and two societies, which never completely interpenetrated and fused" (Park 1928, 892). He then extrapolates this to talk about migrants and people of embracing conflicting identities as well arguing that they live in a relatively permanent state of crisis over their sense of identity and home.

[4] The literature on and debate over subaltern studies is vast. For introductions to these debates, see essays in Guha and Spivak (1988), Guha (1997), Chakrabarty (2002), Ludden (2002), Morris (2010), and Chaturvedi (2000).

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