

## **Assembling Marginality in Northern Pakistan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article illustrates how Gilgit-Baltistan in northern Pakistan—bordering Afghanistan, China, and India—has been part of an “assemblage of marginality” since the region was incorporated in 1947 and 1948. We situate our case amidst recent scholarship that seeks to go beyond mere location at the territorial limits of the nation-state as the defining feature of a border area. In addition, we emphasize the *temporal* aspects of how marginality in Gilgit-Baltistan has been assembled through four constituent processes: (1) the continuity of the colonial legacy in the western Himalaya, poignantly highlighted by the ongoing dispute between India and Pakistan that has resulted in Gilgit-Baltistan’s constitutionally ambiguous status today; (2) the pervasiveness of nationalist histories and cultural tropes about Gilgit-Baltistan that have been constructed for the post-colonial state; (3) a local political economy subservient to a centralist agenda that has been amplified by the introduction of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC); (4) the formation of local identities in Gilgit-Baltistan, marked by exclusion from the state, which offers insights into marginality as identity. In sum, we argue that this assemblage of marginality goes far beyond Gilgit-Baltistan and provides ample points of comparison with marginal spaces in other locations around the globe.

### **Keywords**

Borders; Marginality; Assemblages; Gilgit-Baltistan; Pakistan

## **INTRODUCTION**

Over the past decade, the study of borders and boundaries has gone through a number of shifts that have resulted in a readjustment of the research foci that now define the field. For instance, Wilson and Donnan (2012, p. 13) argue that there has been an overall turn away from an emphasis on nation, state, and periphery to culture, ethnography, process, social practice, and reverse margin–center relations. Recent scholarship has also explored borders as “epistemic angle” and “method” (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Sidaway, 2015, p. 217), and an abundance of historical and contemporary case studies have highlighted the complex relationship between the state, territory as a political technology, and everyday lives at the border (see, e.g., Gellner, 2013; Harris, 2013; Megoran, 2017; Newman, 1999; Paasi, 1996; Reeves, 2014; Rumford, 2012; Saxer & Zhang, 2017; Shneiderman, 2013; Van Schendel, 2003). Contributing to this literature, in their introduction to a special issue on borders in South Asia in this journal, Cons and Sanyal (2013) emphasize the potential of bringing border studies into conversation with the concept of marginality. They argue that calling borderlands “margins” has become “academic common sense” (6), but also note that the larger body of literature on marginality—especially studies deriving from research on South Asia—remains underexplored. In this respect, Cons and Sanyal (2013, p. 9) make the crucial point that the lens of marginality might free border studies from an inherent spatialization at the fringes of the nation-state by opening up a comparative perspective on a range of different locales. Such “articulations across space,” they argue, might also fruitfully engage with and remedy tendencies of equating margins with “non-elite” in the literature on marginality. Cons and Sanyal’s argument in favor of space as a means to overcome the shortage of research comparing borderlands and other margins is timely, and in this article we seek to take this angle to Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan’s northern administrative region on the border with Afghanistan, China, and India. However, we also attempt to add to Cons and Sanyal’s focus on spatialization by emphasizing the temporal aspects of marginality—the history of

assembling the margins that provides points of comparison and distinction vis-à-vis other “marginal spaces” in borderlands and elsewhere. Following DeLanda (2016, p. 2), we perceive this assemblage of marginality as consisting of “parts” that “are not uniform either in nature or origin” but that are nevertheless “fitted together.” These different parts—in the case of Gilgit-Baltistan, the legacy of colonial rule, nationalist histories constructed for the post-colonial state, a local political economy subservient to a statist agenda, and marginality as identity—stand in shifting relationships to each other. We describe the nature of these relationships as a “symbiosis” (Deleuze & Parnet 1977, p. 69) that co-functions with other assemblages of marginality far beyond Gilgit-Baltistan.

Our analysis of the process of assembling marginality in Gilgit-Baltistan is informed by three strains in political geography: the border at the territorial limits of the state; the border as part of a frontier and a zone of overlapping influence; and the border as a line that both divides and yet accommodates connections—personal, material, or emotive—across sovereign states (this last strain is characteristic of studies that focus on South Asia).

First, border areas’ geographical location on the fringes of the nation-state has remained a principal element in constituting borderlands, and propinquity continues to inform borderland scholarship. Studies have highlighted local agency and the borderland populations’ strategic and resourceful positioning (e.g., Baud & Van Schendel, 1997; Gellner, 2013; Giersch, 2006; Harris, 2013; Murton, 2017; Reeves, 2014; Saxer, 2016), as well as the transformative impact of national, geopolitical, and material forces at nation-state boundaries (Baghel & Nüsser, 2015; Fravel, 2008; Goldstein, 2006; Karrar, 2010; Steinberg & Kristoffersen, 2017). In his recent critique of this spatial fix, Jinba (2017) even goes so far as to compare the Sino-Tibetan borderlands with the city of Hong Kong—both a “center” and a borderland on the territorial fringes of China.

Second, while states may frequently project borders as demarcating sovereignty, borders have also been seen as part of the frontier and as zones of overlapping influence. For

instance, in his *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, Lattimore approached frontiers as overlapping zones of power, seeing variations in the Great Wall of China as evidence of ever-shifting political and military power at the margins of the state (1962[1940], p. 238). Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* describes frontiers as "contact zones" that "shift the center of gravity" and invoke "the space and time where subjects previously separated by geography and history are co-present, the point at which their trajectories now intersect" (2008[1992], p. 8). In *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier*, Marsden and Hopkins (2011, pp. 2–3) frame the frontier as a place of "complex dynamism" that is "continually occupied, defined and redefined by the people, communities and political entities that claim it as their own." Finally, in a recent article, Jones et al. similarly argue that "border barriers, corridors and transit camps become elements ... in a structuring of space that reconfigures ... geopolitics" (2017, p. 3), indicating how flows across borders influence national and regional polities. Certainly, in particular contexts—the influx of refugees, for example, or goods moving outside of state regulations, or the fluctuation of Arctic sea-ice edges—the border can be conceptualized as a shifting line of sovereignty (Mountz, 2011; Steinberg & Kristoffersen, 2017).

Third, reference to South Asian borders inevitably raises the specter of conflict between the nuclear rivals India and Pakistan. We would be remiss not to mention here that Gilgit-Baltistan—an administrative unit within Pakistan that has a constitutionally ambiguous status—was born out of the Kashmir conflict. This conflict, now in its seventieth year, underscores the lasting trauma of division in South Asia not only in 1947, but also in 1971 (Saikia, 2011; Zamindar, 2010). At the same time, an exclusive emphasis on states of conflict runs the risk of overlooking how South Asian border regimes have steadily transformed ideas of sovereignty, citizenship, trajectories of material exchanges and, more broadly, daily life itself (Harris, 2013; Shneiderman, 2013). In this regard, memory allows affective connections within South Asia (as well as other parts of Asia) to traverse internal boundaries such as ethnic and sectarian divisions (Mostowlansky, 2018 and forthcoming; Smith, 2013).

These three strands—the border at the edge, the border as a zone of overlapping influence, and (South Asian) borders that are projected as impassable yet are permeable in a multitude of ways—are fundamental to how we approach Gilgit-Baltistan. Beyond being a contact zone with place-specific characteristics, Gilgit-Baltistan’s classification as a border area is not, we argue, a priori spatially fixed. Being located at the territorial limits of the nation-state is neither Gilgit-Baltistan’s primary marker nor the only reason why it is often described as a “border area”—an expression that has entered the Urdu language and replaced its vernacular counterparts in all but the most formal usage. Instead, we situate Gilgit-Baltistan’s border area classification in a historically continuous process of assembling cultural, economic, political, and spatial marginality, marked by exclusion through the erection of internal boundaries and “networks of marginalization, dislocation, subaltern theorization, and contested history” (Cons & Sanyal, 2013, p. 6). Disaggregating the meaning of Gilgit-Baltistan’s border area classification, our approach has applicability to any such term (for example, “borderlands,” “frontiers,” “margins”) that captures assemblages of marginality.

Thus, we offer an alternative approach to conceptualizing border areas in which the situatedness of such locales on the fringes of the nation-state is not the only determining variable. We draw on literature focusing on sites in Greece, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Tajikistan that frames marginality as an outcome of the interplay of multipolar forces that work toward constituting center and periphery (Anwar, 2016; Das & Poole, 2004; Green, 2005; Mostowlansky, 2017 and forthcoming; Tsing, 1993 and 1994; Williams, Vira & Chopra, 2011). Thus, if a border area is a marginal space—and if marginality can be argued to be constituted through polity, whether national, regional, or local—then a border area can be disengaged from the territorial limits of the state. By foregrounding the *process* of assembling marginality, our disaggregation of Gilgit-Baltistan’s border area status offers a framework for doing just that.

In this article, we—a Pakistani (Karrar) and a Swiss (Mostowlansky) academic—build on ethnographic and historical data from Gilgit-Baltistan. Karrar has been visiting the region for more than two decades; his ongoing research, which he has been developing since 2012, explores how cross-border connections with China impact local polities. Mostowlansky has conducted regular ethnographic and archival research in and on Gilgit-Baltistan since 2012. In the following, we will draw on field notes based on extensive participant observation, several dozen interviews conducted in the framework of long-term fieldwork (Karrar: 5 months from 2012 to 2017; Mostowlansky: 8 months from 2013 to 2016), and written sources and literature gathered in northern Pakistan during separate periods of research as well as during a month of joint fieldwork that we conducted while teaching a field course on the history and ecology of Gilgit-Baltistan in June 2016.

In the following, we analyze the historical and contemporary process of assembling marginality in Gilgit-Baltistan in four parts. In the first part, we explore the legacy of colonial rule in the region, offering an overview of its place within the larger schema of projecting colonial power along the Himalaya, and how, in the seventy years since independence, Gilgit-Baltistan has had to contend with a constitutionally ambiguous status as a result of Pakistan's geopolitical ambitions over greater Kashmir. In the second part, we discuss Gilgit-Baltistan's integration into Pakistan's cultural imagination, a process that has fostered marginality and actualized internal boundaries. In the third part, we analyze the amplification of marginality through local political economy subservient to the center. In this regard, we describe how the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor linking the two namesake countries mandates increased securitization and enforces marginality at different levels. Finally, in the fourth part, we show that marginality is not simply an imposition by the state, but is a component of local identity that people engage with, internalize, or reject. This process is framed by how people see themselves in the state, or what Sharp, referring to the pioneering work of hooks (1990), has

deftly described as “political identities ... established through geographical representations that are neither fully ‘inside’ nor ‘outside’” (2013, p. 22).

### **LEGACIES OF COLONIAL RULE**

Gilgit-Baltistan is Pakistan’s northernmost administrative region. The Karakoram and the western terminus of the Himalaya extend across this high mountain region, making it the most heavily glaciated region outside of the polar areas. Gilgit-Baltistan shares international boundaries with Afghanistan (along the Wakhan corridor in Badakshan province), India (along Jammu and Kashmir), and the People’s Republic of China (in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region). The 1,300-km-long Karakoram Highway, completed in 1976, links the region to down-country Pakistan and northwards to China. The majority of Gilgit-Baltistan’s two million residents live in towns and villages along this vital transport artery or directly accessible from it.

Despite its strategic importance, Gilgit-Baltistan does not have provincial status. The lack of provincial status restricts the region’s representation within the national polity: there is no mention of Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan’s constitution, no representation in the national legislature, and citizens have no access to the country’s highest courts. Gilgit-Baltistan’s status—which scholars have described as “legal and constitutional liminality” (Butz & Cook, 2016, pp. 200–201; Hong, 2013, esp. pp. 73–89)—sets the tenor for a difficult relationship between the region and the national polity. “Seventy years of wanting to be part of Pakistan, and nothing,” Rahim, a trader from Nagar, told Karrar in an interview in June 2017.<sup>1</sup> “We must be the only people in the world who want to be part of a state that the state won’t let in,” he added wryly. As connectivity with China increases, the benefits of which are purportedly

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<sup>1</sup> To protect our interlocutors we use pseudonyms throughout the article.

enjoyed by down-country Pakistan, local resentment at exclusion has amplified. We shall return to this idea in the penultimate section.

While Gilgit-Baltistan's current constitutional liminality results from Pakistan's dispute with India over Kashmir, historically, the region's political marginality predates the 1947 division of the subcontinent. Britain, an expansionist colonial power, grew interested in the region after Central Asia entered into the empire's strategic calculations at the end of the eighteenth century (Withers, 2013). British anxieties about—and policies toward—its northern colonial frontiers continued to evolve throughout the nineteenth century. Although they had awarded Jammu and Kashmir to the Dogra following the 1846 Treaty of Amritsar, within a quarter-century the British opted for a more assertive strategy. Truncating Dogra rule over Gilgit—but not neighboring Baltistan, seen as less strategic—in 1871 the British established the Gilgit Agency, which was overseen by a British political agent. In 1891, the princely states of Hunza and Nagar were brought under colonial rule, severing the former's tributary status with China's Qing dynasty. Crucially, Britain employed a strategy of indirect rule, with a political agent reporting to colonial authorities in Srinagar (Haines, 2004; Huttenback, 1975; Kreutzmann, 1998; Sökefeld, 2005).

Two weeks before the division of the subcontinent in mid-August 1947, the Gilgit Agency was returned to the Dogra rulers. Today's Gilgit-Baltistan became part of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, the maharaja of which had opted to join India. Gilgit-Baltistan joined Pakistan through local secession: Gilgit seceded from India and joined Pakistan in November 1947, and Baltistan the following spring. Even though it exercised control over a large swath of the Himalaya, Pakistan was—and has, since 1948, remained—fixated on Jammu and Kashmir under Indian control. In Pakistan's geopolitical schema, not granting provincial status to Gilgit-Baltistan is a strategic decision. Pakistan claims that Gilgit-Baltistan was historically part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. As a result, Pakistan has remained steadfast in its insistence that Gilgit-Baltistan not acquire provincial status until the

Kashmir dispute is settled as per United Nations Security Council Resolution 47 of 27 April 1948, which calls for a “free and impartial plebiscite” across *all* of historical Jammu and Kashmir to ascertain the will of the people (such a plebiscite would cover Gilgit-Baltistan, the semi-autonomous Azad Kashmir [also in Pakistan], and [Indian] Jammu and Kashmir). Providing provincial status for Gilgit-Baltistan in the meantime would undermine Pakistan’s ambitions of an undivided Kashmir within Pakistan,<sup>2</sup> and be a de facto admission that current international boundaries are acceptable (Bangash, 2010).

Since 1947, there have been two significant attempts at administrative restructuring. The first was in 1974 when, during the government of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1973–1977), the Gilgit Agency, Baltistan, and the princely states Hunza and Nagar were classified as one administrative unit, the Northern Areas (it was at this time that princely states were abolished, bringing the entire region under federal rule). The next major restructuring occurred in 2009 when, during the tenure of President Asif Ali Zardari (2008–2013), the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order was passed (as a result of which the Northern Areas were renamed “Gilgit-Baltistan”). The 2009 ordinance appeared to be a landmark decision: it gave more autonomy to the region through a legislative assembly and appointments of a chief minister (provincial premier) and a governor. But the legislation stopped short of providing provincial status. Instead, a Gilgit-Baltistan Council was set up under Article 33 of the 2009 Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order. The Gilgit-Baltistan Council is headed by the prime minister of Pakistan, while the governor of

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<sup>2</sup> Pakistan has continuously emphasized that all of Jammu and Kashmir should have been part of Pakistan at independence. There is also a multitude of stakeholders in the Kashmir dispute, not least politicians in (Pakistan-administered) Jammu and Kashmir—a fragment of historic Jammu and Kashmir presently governed from within Pakistan with its own legislative assembly—whose political leadership has remained steadfast that Gilgit-Baltistan should not be given provincial status, as doing so would undermine the struggle for a unified Kashmir (Mahmud 2016).

the region—a state appointee—serves as the vice-chair. The position of chief minister, who heads the local assembly, is popularly regarded in Gilgit-Baltistan as ceremonial.

Hence, Gilgit-Baltistan's historical legacy engenders political marginality.

Fundamentally, Pakistan's ambitions vis-à-vis Kashmir led to a constitutionally enshrined liminal status within the national polity. This is more than a legal impasse; it falls short of local aspirations for political representation at the national level. Residents of Gilgit-Baltistan are frustrated at how the state considers it an appendage of a greater Jammu and Kashmir. Many people from Gilgit-Baltistan consider themselves inalienable Pakistani citizens—recall Rahim who voiced widespread frustration at the lack of provincial status—who are nevertheless denied equal citizenship because of geopolitical positioning by the state (Sökefeld, 2015, p. 251). While Gilgit-Baltistan has been the recipient of focused state-led development projects since the 1970s, not to mention extensive non-state funding through non-governmental organizations (Kreutzmann, 2012, pp. 231–233)—local grievances in Gilgit-Baltistan are amplified because of the lack of representation.

Beyond geopolitics, the post-colonial state was slow to shed remnants of colonial administration. Consider how, in 1948, Pakistan's first governor-general (and leader of the Pakistan movement), Mohammed Ali Jinnah, extended the colonial Frontiers Crime Regulation (FCR) to the region. The FCR was drafted in 1901 during the viceroyalty of Lord Curzon (1898–1905). It attempted to bring codified law to the so-called tribal areas of the British Indian Empire through political agents who represented the colonial state and were empowered to exert legal jurisdiction (Shaw & Akhtar, 2012, p. 1498). The FCR—and indeed, the political agent, as representative of the state—remained in Gilgit-Baltistan until the 2009 Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Government legislation was enacted. What this illustrates, among other things, is that Pakistan was slow to transcend its colonial relationship with the region. Long after colonialism, Gilgit-Baltistan remained the veritable contact zone, a colonial frontier with a high degree of insecurity in the valleys and danger

beyond the mountains. And as we describe in the next section, the frontier is essentialized not just by the state, but in another way: through a nationalist imaginary—reinforced in popular culture—in which the frontier plays a pivotal role.

### **THE NATION GAZES AT THE FRONTIER**

The newly independent states of Asia, including China, India, and Pakistan, saw heavy investment in infrastructure that brought once distant regions more tightly under the control of post-colonial centralizing regimes (see, e.g., Bergmann, 2016; Cliff, 2016; Ispahani, 1989). In the case of Pakistan, where the colonial state had often been content to leave border regions as autonomous or self-governing entities, the post-colonial state sought closer control over these regions as an extension of sovereignty. At the same time, however, the post-colonial state appropriated and perpetuated the colonial gaze: Pakistan's frontiers remained the proverbial others, distant yet paradoxically central to national identity.

In a different historical and political context, the role of the frontier in the creation of national identity had been a central tenet in Frederick Jackson Turner's well-known address to the American Historical Association in 1892. Turner's thesis has been justifiably criticized for its lack of treatment of ethnic minorities and women (Cronon, 1987, pp. 158–159); nevertheless, in the popular imagination, the westward expansion of the American frontier continues to resonate powerfully as a nation-building endeavor. As Cronon (1987, p. 160) stated matter-of-factly: “[W]e have not yet figured out a way to escape [Turner] ... Why is it that the ‘vanishing frontier’ refuses to vanish?” This rhetorical question underscores the pervasiveness of the idea; Cronon notes that its popularity is rooted in scholarly inertia, the entrenchment of a lexicon about “frontiers” (which assumes that the word has an inherent meaning without precisely defining it) and, crucially, “longings many Americans still feel about their national experience” (ibid).

We invoke Turner not because we agree with his thesis—as Cumings (2009, p. 35) notes, Turner did not so much “investigate the frontier” as “invent it and exalt it”—but because Gilgit-Baltistan’s border area status plays a similar role in Pakistan. In the previous section, we approached the assembling of marginality from the vantage of the state and its prioritizing of a nationalist history for a geopolitical agenda. In this section, we consider marginality from another aspect of polity: the cultural and social imaginary through which Gilgit-Baltistan is perceived as a frontier zone that (1) experienced Islam’s unifying influence and (2) exhibits measured diversity essential to the imagination of the nation.

In the national imaginary, Muslim identity binds northern Pakistan to the rest of the country (Hussain, 2015, p. 109). This approach to religion and polity is grounded neither in anthropology nor in history. Instead, Islam is invoked to rationalize and consolidate the Pakistani nation. It is assigned the pivotal role in state formation and is even considered Pakistan’s *raison d’être*. In national narratives, Pakistan was created for the Muslims of South Asia, and Islam—literalist and strictly doctrinal—defines Muslim identity.<sup>3</sup>

Closer to our region of inquiry, Pakistan’s most well-known historian of Gilgit-Baltistan, the late Ahmad Hasan Dani, also saw Islam as playing a unifying role. In his magnum opus, *History of Northern Areas of Pakistan*, Dani’s discussion of regional pre-Islamic history (which he labels “Medieval History”) acknowledges the role of diverse influences from across Asia in the shaping of Gilgit-Baltistan (1989a, ch. 6). Yet in Dani’s

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, in an introduction to an anthology of documents tracing the foundations of Pakistan (to 1906, the year the Muslim League was founded), editor Sharifuddin Pirzada (1969, pp. ix–xi), who served as foreign minister (1966–1968) and twice as attorney general (1968–1971; 1977–1984), chooses to begin the narrative concerning the creation of Pakistan with South Asia’s Islamic background. His teleological narrative begins in the eighth century, breathlessly arriving at the demise of the Mughal empire in barely two pages without interrogating the relationship between religion and the geographical extent of the polity.

telling of the story, these external influences become less important as Islam spread across the region. The advent of Islam, according to Dani, had a binding role, with “the struggle for freedom by the people of [the] Northern Areas” being “not only directed against foreign aggressors [the British] but it was also connected with maintaining cultural identity with Islam since the time Islam became the formal religion and culture of the people as a whole” (p. 249).

Here we see the coming together of a singular anti-colonial freedom struggle, a singular people, and a singular cultural identity that is closely associated with a singular definition of Islam. For a region fraught with polarizing sectarian divisions between Sunni and Shi’a Islam (and indeed, further divisions within Shi’a Islam in the form of Ismaili and Twelver Shi’a sub-sects), Dani’s treatment of Islam in Gilgit-Baltistan serves a narrative of national cohesion. The dedication of the book itself—“To the Freedom Fighters of Gilgit and Skardu”—also privileges a unitary national imaginary in which historical actors converged on the creation of a cohesive nation-state. There is also a civilizational dimension, with Pakistan projected as a space that had an intrinsic geographical coherence which carried forward into the present. The present polity, we are told, occupies the geographical stretch of the Indus Valley (Dani, 1989b, pp. 27–28). This spatial imaginary, which assumes the presence of a distinct “civilization” along the river Indus dating back to the late Neolithic and Bronze age settlements from Mehrgarh to Harappa (c. 7000–1300 BCE), also uncritically subsumes Gilgit-Baltistan into national narratives. A similar idea has recently been described by one Pakistani author as “unity in diversity” (Ghaffar, 2005; Dani wrote the foreword). Despite the acknowledgement of cultural variations, this view is ultimately grounded in a nationalist ethos, as evidenced by the operative word *unity*.

The national discourse, however, stops short of claiming absolute homogeneity: given the geographical variation within the country, room is allowed for tempered diversity. Within the straightjacket of the nation, variations in religious identity and topography are tactfully

used to project Pakistan as more than a strictly homogeneous state and people. For example, a popular promotional poster for tourism depicts dancing Kalash women of Chitral as a token other for a purportedly multi-religious state, when in fact the people of Chitral are increasingly under pressure to convert to Islam. In other official posters and images of northern Pakistan, mountains and glaciers are meant to signify divine bounty. The frontier—when imagined in this way—has a role to play in constructing Pakistan as a diverse and bountiful nation. As an illustration, consider the cover of Quddus's (1990) *The North-West Frontier of Pakistan*, a book that not only covers the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province (formerly known as North-West Frontier Province), but also includes Gilgit-Baltistan. The cover features a painting of a bearded, turbaned, blue-eyed Pashtun—the book is purportedly about Pashtun—with a Kalashnikov and cartridge belt slung over his shoulder. On the back cover, a Kalash women in ceremonial dress peers intently at the reader, while to the side a mustachioed man with deep-set eyes does a sword dance. In the distance are snowcapped mountains, which recede into barren hills as dusk settles over the horizon. From this vantage point the frontier is discursive, and place-specific characteristics merge into one or vanish entirely.

These illustrations of an untamed and exotic frontier are important to the national imagination, but this is still a colonial imaginary. Consider this description from the book: “[Pashtuns] are men of swords and guns ... the life of tribal Pukhtoos is governed by Pakhtoonwali ... This code of honour contains values of life and embraces all the activities from the cradle to the grave. Hospitality, truce, vengeance...” (Quddus, 1990, p. 137). The Kalash: “The weapons of the Kafirs<sup>4</sup> are the dagger, bow and arrow, spear and matchlock ... Shields are all important. A few swords are received as gifts from Muslim friends” (p. 236). And here is a description of the Karakoram—located in Gilgit-Baltistan—from the epilogue:

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<sup>4</sup> In popular usage, Kafir is a pejorative term to denote a non-Muslim.

“This study unfolds what is most alluring in this admirable country ... No wonder that the metaphorical name of the Karakoram range is roof of the world. High above the snowline, somewhere amidst a sea of peaks and glaciers, which wall the northern areas of Pakistan, amidst the voiceless waste of a vast wilderness, 20,000 feet and more above the sea, absolutely inaccessible to man ... and no living creature except the Pamir eagle, lie the frontiers of Pakistan, China, Soviet Russia, Afghanistan and India” (p. 321).

The first two of these descriptions (of the Pashtun and the Kalash)—from an eminent civil servant and self-styled historian—present an orientalized depiction of the frontier and its people, not dissimilar to how the colonial state constructed frontier people and, indeed, periodically continues to do so through nostalgia for the Raj and the nineteenth-century Anglo–Afghan wars (Lindholm, 1980). But it is the third of these excerpts that poignantly illustrates the role of frontier regions within the post-colonial state: there is an acknowledgement of statehood (“this admirable country”), a nod to geographical enclosure (“which wall the northern areas of Pakistan”) juxtaposed against a constructed—and hyperbolic—expression of an ambiguous sovereignty (“somewhere amidst,” “vast wilderness,” “absolutely inaccessible,” “no living creature”). Quddus’s book—like Dani’s, which was published a year earlier—is dedicated to those who safeguard sovereignty on the frontier, “the Guardians of the North-West Frontier of Pakistan on whose vigilance international peace in the region [sic].” Published immediately following the Soviet retreat from Afghanistan, it is hard not to wonder if the “Guardians of the North-West Frontier” is a reference to the mujahidin.

The historical administrative challenges that resulted from poor infrastructure and lack of communication are slowly being erased. Popular narratives, as we noted, have successively subsumed Gilgit-Baltistan into a nationalist construct. However, many Pakistanis still view the region through the rubric of exceptionalism and exoticism, thus reinforcing Gilgit-Baltistan as a “border area.” Popularly, Gilgit-Baltistan is often conflated with Khyber-

Pakhtunkhwa, the former North-West Frontier. People we have spoken to in the region over the past five years—whether self-employed in the tourism industry, farmers, public-sector employees, or traders—complain that domestic tourists frequently assume that they are Pashtun and address them as “Khan,” a common Pashtun surname. At the same time, in the Hunza valley, whose population is predominantly Shia Ismaili Muslim, many people told us that down-country Pakistani visitors enter homes and take pictures of locals that they deem exotic and non-Muslim. The dramatic growth in domestic tourism since 2015 has exacerbated this problem, as the spatial demarcations between the tourist and non-tourist parts of Karimabad, the major tourist hub in Hunza, become blurred. Against the backdrop of these continuously emerging patterns of contact between people in Gilgit-Baltistan and the rest of Pakistan, which are marked by relations of power and frontier orientalism (Hussain, 2015; Mostowlansky, 2014; Sökefeld, 2005), the state, too, continues to gaze upon the region through a colonial lens, at some level a contested space that speaks to state anxieties about the extent of its control. As we describe in the following section, it is precisely Gilgit-Baltistan’s closer economic and material integration into the country through infrastructure development and capital mobility that has transformed and signposted marginality from political discourse and frontier orientalism to the realities of everyday life.

### **CORRIDORS, BYPASSING, AND SECURITIZATION**

In late May 2016, we (Karrar and Mostowlansky and our students from Lahore) arrived in Gilgit Town (pop. 250,000)—the administrative center of Gilgit-Baltistan—to teach a multi-sited field course on the history and ecology of the region. In the first session we read from Owen Lattimore’s (1962) *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, followed by James Scott’s (2009) *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Southeast Asia* in session two. We also experienced repeated encounters with Pakistan’s security services. While Mostowlansky’s Swiss citizenship had initially piqued their curiosity, our mobile university

course—conducted in hotel rooms, terraces, bazaars, and pastures—likewise became anomalous and “illegible” (Das & Poole, 2004, p. 8) from the security services’ perspective. Later meetings and phone calls with state representatives followed, even though we could not be faulted as our documents and activities did not violate regulations. Nevertheless, we were followed on our city walks through Gilgit Town, our state encounters easing only slightly after we traveled further north to the Hunza Valley, where the larger number of tourists has normalized the presence of outsiders.

Securitization and continuous attempts to demonstrate the all-pervasive power of the state are not new phenomena in Gilgit-Baltistan, having affected foreigners, people from Gilgit-Baltistan, and Pakistani citizens from other parts of the country for some time now. Grieser (2014) argues that the attribution of spying to foreigners and other “illegible” individuals, both historically and in contemporary perspective, is a common practice in the region. Such encounters with the state—in our case embodied in security officials in aviator sunglasses and *shalwar kameez* (the baggy trousers and knee-length shirt that are characteristic of the region)—are also situated in the longer history of Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistani state formation. In the previous sections, we discussed the region’s marginality against the backdrop of colonial legacies and post-colonial state formation; here we want to underscore how emotion, feeling, and affect play a crucial role in this history of assembling marginality, which leads from rivalry between the British and Russian Empires, via the fractures of a divided subcontinent, to the current ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Xinjiang. We argue that in this history, the state is “an object of emotional investment” (Laszkowski & Reeves, 2015, p. 3). Simultaneously, it is also “a site of fear, paranoia, or mutual suspicion,” one of “desire for political recognition and political participation,” and eventually one of hope for “order” (ibid.).

As we have also described, Gilgit-Baltistan’s political positioning within Pakistan is *deliberately* marginal: the region does not have constitutional status, nor do its inhabitants

have the same right to political representation as other citizens of Pakistan. Having emerged from the unresolved conflict in Kashmir, this status is marked by geopolitical considerations of both past and present governments. Besides the exclusion imposed on Gilgit-Baltistan by the state, there is also latent anxiety that Gilgit-Baltistan could break away from its protector, as evidenced by the presence of at least one mainstream political party—the Balawaristan National Front—which has an openly separatist agenda (Sökefeld, 1999).

In more recent years, and particularly since 2001 following the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the onset of the global war on terror, state anxieties have resulted in everyday suspicion against outsiders as potential spies and against those people in Gilgit-Baltistan who welcome them. For instance, local government officials as well as villagers in Hunza, Nagar, and the outskirts of Gilgit have told Mostowlansky since 2012 that there was the need to be vigilant, as one could never know who marks the targets for US drone strikes. Yet, while drone strikes along Pakistan’s border with Afghanistan began in 2004 and continue to the present (Bashir & Crews, 2012), no such attacks have occurred in Gilgit-Baltistan. This anxiety over a loss of sovereignty, expressed in a region where no drone strike has ever taken place, indexes Gilgit-Baltistan as an object of emotional investment. In the broader framework of Pakistan, this object is both “integral” and kept at bay. It therefore needs to be secured horizontally and vertically (Elden, 2013) to prevent uncontrolled intrusions on the ground and aerial breaches of sovereignty by those who betray Pakistan’s hospitality.

The interplay between Gilgit-Baltistan’s marginal status and its defining role for Pakistan as a nation has recently intensified through the emergence of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Ch. *Zhongba jingji zoulang*; Ur: *Pakistan Chin iqtesadi rahdari*), discussions about which are now all-pervasive, not only in Gilgit-Baltistan but across Pakistan. CPEC is an appendage to China’s One Belt, One Road policy (Ch. *yidai yilu*), President Xi Jinping’s signature initiative for infrastructure connectivity across Afro-Eurasia (Karrar, 2016; Sidaway & Woon, 2017). CPEC was unveiled during Premier Li

Keqiang's visit to Pakistan in May 2013, and was initially meant to channel approximately US\$46 billion of Chinese investment in Pakistan in the coming decade; since then, pledges of Chinese investment have crossed the US\$50 billion mark. While much of this investment is earmarked for energy generation, communications and transport infrastructure are also meant to get an upgrade in an attempt to enhance connectivity between Khunjerab, located in Gilgit-Baltistan, and the Arabian Sea port of Gwadar (in Baluchistan province), which is operated by the China Overseas Port Holding Company. Gilgit-Baltistan, by virtue of its boundary with China, is seen as a gateway region.

Both while conducting fieldwork in northern Pakistan in recent years and while traveling in the region with our students, we observed that state representatives and common citizens alike used the idea of emergent connectivity with China to legitimize a range of practices. For instance, in June 2016 police informed us that mobility along the Karakoram Highway was being monitored and the border area was under increasing surveillance to ensure tighter control and security because of CPEC. Delays and the mandatory registration of travelers resulted from this surveillance regime. These checks on mobility were accompanied by resignation and comments that investments under CPEC needed to be guarded. Locals sometimes reflect state narratives by apologetically mentioning that the military was “nervous” due to CPEC.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, others sarcastically assessed the twenty-five overly luxurious and shiny police pick-ups, labeled “CPEC GB Police Patrol,” which the Chinese government had gifted to Gilgit-Baltistan in early 2016 (Mir, 2016). For instance,

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<sup>5</sup> CPEC has led to attempts to legitimize state control elsewhere in Pakistan. For instance, when Mostowlansky planned to stay at an interlocutor's residence in Islamabad in June 2016, he was denied permission by the apartment block manager, who explained that the capital was along the corridor within which official permission was required for non-citizens to stay at private residences. Later, in August 2016, Pakistan's chief of army staff, General Raheel Sahrif, declared that a suicide attack on a Quetta hospital was in fact an attack on CPEC by “enemies of the country” (Dawn, 2016b).

Aman, a teacher in a village in Gojal, told Mostowlansky in June 2016: “It’s good they kept it short and used CPEC; this way it can actually be translated as ‘China–*Punjab* Economic Corridor.’” This alteration of the acronym’s meaning reflects the widespread opinion in Gilgit-Baltistan that the country’s elite, traditionally situated in the province of Punjab, do not work for Pakistan as a whole, but gain benefits from the region and try to fill their own pockets.

The state’s upbeat narrative that CPEC will result in benefits for all finds little traction in Gilgit-Baltistan. Connectivity with China is not resulting in the benefits that were promised. As Karrar’s ongoing field research along the Karakoram Highway shows, a new border regime was initiated with the introduction of CPEC. Where previously traders who could demonstrate that they were domiciled in Gilgit-Baltistan were allowed to self-import small quantities of merchandise from Xinjiang duty-free, the new border regime restricts cross-border peddling. CPEC aims to streamline management of sea and land ports, thereby controlling the exit and entry of merchandise, people, and capital. As a result, local traders, who even prior to CPEC were operating on very thin profit margins, have found their profits diminishing further. Larger traders—who tend to be from either the Punjab or Khyber-Paktunkhwa—can sustain the newly imposed tariffs because of the greater volume they trade in. There is, moreover, growing concern about the environmental impact of the corridor: What will the impact of hundreds of containers suddenly rolling down the Karakoram Highway on a daily basis be? How will this affect the rhythm of rural life in close-knit communities? Children who walk to school and play along the road? Privacy?

These issues are compounded by the region’s ambiguous constitutional status. Since January 2016, the government has been under renewed pressure to grant provincial status in order to provide constitutional cover to the extensive Chinese investments. As mentioned earlier, China is investing in a region that is disputed between India and Pakistan (Dawn, 2016a). In this context, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s statement on 15 August 2016

that the people of Gilgit-Baltistan had approached him with grievances signals how providing provincial status could benefit the state. Writing in a local news blog, *Pamir Times*, Ali (2016), a former judge of the supreme appellate court of Gilgit-Baltistan, stated categorically that the “[c]onstitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan must be ascertained in accordance with the wishes of Gilgit-Baltistan. The people of Gilgit-Baltistan are demanding the extension of the constitution of Pakistan and provincial status since their independence.” Besides calling for the extension of the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Pakistan to the region, Ali concluded his opinion piece by calling upon the government to underscore, yet again, the benefit that CPEC would provide to the region.

Situated within a longer history of connectivity, the purported emphasis behind the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor is not new. Plans to link Kashgar in Xinjiang with the port of Gwadar on the Arabian Sea date back to the 1950s and had already served as the backdrop to the construction of the Karakoram Highway (Ispahani, 1989, p. 159). Both the Cold War and post-Cold War periods in Gilgit-Baltistan have been marked by the Pakistani and Chinese governments’ continuous efforts to connect their urban centers by traversing the region. While the area has thus always been central to Pakistani visions of political stability and economic success, Gilgit-Baltistan has also persistently been located at the country’s spatial and societal margins. In the wake of China’s current One Belt, One Road initiative, the idea of connecting major urban centers in a global system of supply chains emphasizes this paradox of colonial and Cold War histories in Gilgit-Baltistan, in which the frontier is both crucial to the state’s existence, but also a mere place of passing-through and transit. Much of the general dissatisfaction with political processes in Gilgit-Baltistan is directly linked to this paradoxical situation in which promises of prosperity are continuously uttered in political discourse, yet never quite materialize and keep being postponed to a near future.

We argue that this is part of the process of assembling marginality in Gilgit-Baltistan. This ever-evolving assemblage emerges from the interaction of frontier history and a political

economy that is both imposed by the outside and locally reinforced. Thus, Gilgit-Baltistan's "border area" status is only one part in this assemblage of marginality, which provides other analytical points of connection with marginal spaces beyond the classical borderland. For instance, Karachi's neighborhood of Lyari allows for ample comparison via the rubric of marginality. As recent scholarship on Lyari shows, the neighborhood's history has been marked by a continuous process of marginalization that is based on patterns of migration, economic diversion, contested state power, and a discourse of danger tied to Balochi gangs with links to the Afghan frontier (Gayer, 2014; Kirmani, 2015; Viqar, 2014). This is contrasted by the gigantic, yet dysfunctional and exclusionary road development surrounding the Lyari Expressway (Hasan, 2005), as well as by new forms of securitization emerging from *Operation Karachi*, an ongoing effort of various security forces, including the Frontier Constabulary, to counter gang violence and organized crime. Yet the most striking strand of comparison between locales in Gilgit-Baltistan and Lyari is the extent to which marginality provides identificatory potential to people who live in such spaces. For instance, Viqar (2014, p. 372) argues that in Lyari discourses of subversion and local communal harmony go hand in hand with developmental aspirations. In the following section we discuss this paradoxical process based on our fieldwork in Gilgit-Baltistan, where desire for and disappointment with state institutions are often part and parcel of people's marginal identities, which play a pivotal role in this assemblage of marginality.

### **TO WAIT OR NOT TO WAIT FOR THE STATE**

As pointed out in the previous sections of this article, literature on contemporary Gilgit-Baltistan which stays within the national framework of Pakistan often accurately depicts a region that has not yet reached full integration into a larger political and economic whole due to its liminal constitutional status. From this perspective, Gilgit-Baltistan seems either to evade the nation-state or to remain desperately dependent on lines of connectivity to

Pakistan's down-country centers Karachi and Islamabad (Dani, 1989a; Haines, 2012). In contrast, Kreutzmann's (2015) study of Gilgit-Baltistan as part of a broader transnational crossroads, including adjacent borderlands in Afghanistan, China, and Tajikistan, suggests transcending this national gaze. Instead of taking the nation-state for granted in the sense of an a priori scale, his study looks at modes of connection and disconnection between the different borderlands dissecting the Pamir-Karakoram. In the context of a broader comparative perspective on marginal spaces, we would again like to emphasize that such an outlook is not uniquely tied to the proximity of international borders. Rather, the existence of international borders in the area highlights such processes, which might be less obvious in other locales. For example, in the case of the neighborhood of Lyari in Karachi (discussed in the previous section), Kirmani (2015) argues that local violence, and the area's resulting marginality, cannot be understood without considering broader transregional forces that act upon Lyari and enmesh its inhabitant in multiple forms of mobility.

In historical perspective, Kreutzmann (2015) employs the category of "desire" to refer to the ways outside forces—particularly colonial and nation-state powers—have sought to make inroads into Gilgit-Baltistan and its surrounding borderlands and to bring the region under their control. This approach to how centers far beyond the borderlands have lustfully worked upon Gilgit-Baltistan and its neighboring stretches of land is important for an understanding of the region's colonial and post-colonial histories. At the same time, little work has been done on the role of desire in how people in Gilgit-Baltistan position themselves toward processes of state-making (Laszkowski & Reeves, 2015). Scott's (2009) influential study on the state in the borderlands of highland Southeast Asia—a region which he, invoking Van Schendel (2002), dubbed "Zomia"—highlights historical processes of cross-border scale-jumping and state evasion. Kreutzmann (2015, p. 34) points to the theoretical potential that Scott's alternate scale brings to Pakistan's north, whose people have employed changing patterns of mobility throughout the region to adapt and position themselves toward

different emerging political actors. Evading specific polities has been part of these movements at different points in time, including the present. Yet based on our ethnography presented in this section, we argue that local people's desire *for* the state—in the sense of an affective political relationship—underlines both the ambivalence of marginality as an identity and its salience for the regional political economy.

In the context of Gilgit-Baltistan's lukewarm integration into the larger framework of the Pakistani nation, the establishment of state power in the region has been a slow and continuous process throughout the second half of the twentieth century. For people who live along the Karakoram Highway—and this is the majority of people in Gilgit-Baltistan—the emergence of the Pakistani state has also been intricately linked to the construction of infrastructure, which has gone hand in hand with growing Chinese influence and the establishment of development projects that tie in with local religious and ethnic identities (Butz & Cook, 2011; Haines, 2012; Hussain, 2015; Kreutzmann, 1991 and 2015; Mostowlansky, 2016; Ripa, 2014). However, increasing mobility along the main road and the linking of specific places in Gilgit-Baltistan to urban centers in other parts of Pakistan have also led to experiences of disconnection and to an acute sense of the absence of the state in other locales. For instance, in Shimshal, an assemblage of three village communities in Gojal, upper Hunza, a road linking the villages to the Karakoram Highway was only completed in the fall of 2003. While the speed of connectivity to down-country Pakistan had accelerated along the highway from the early 1980s onward, people from Shimshal still had to walk for several days to reach the road (Hussain, 2015, p. 130). Initially, the road-building project was supported by the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, which is part of the international Aga Khan Development Network and intimately tied to Shia Ismaili Muslims in the region. Only at a much later stage did the Pakistani government emerge as a patron of road building. In addition, the construction and continuous maintenance of the Shimshal road

has also always been linked to communal contributions and local efforts to facilitate access to other parts of the country (Ali & Butz, 2005, p. 3).

As Butz and Cook (2011) and Hussain (2015, p. 135) note, the opening of the Shimshal road has not simply resulted in positive attitudes toward connectivity to other parts of Pakistan. While future-oriented visions of economic and social development play an important role, nostalgia for a lost remoteness does, too. During our most recent fieldwork in the area in summer 2016, Shimshalis described the road to us as a local achievement that provides access to work and education in Gilgit and the cities of down-country Pakistan. Yet often the very same people told us that the construction of the road and the discontinuation of the footpath to Passu had made Shimshalis weak and complacent. Frequent floods and landslides that block the road, at times for weeks on end, are landmark events in Shimshal that bundle up local people's ambivalent attitudes toward place, community, and state. For instance, while returning from the high pastures (4700 m.a.s.l.) to the village, Mostowlansky spent many hours interviewing Fareed, who grew up in Shimshal and who is now a student in a Pakistani city. In summer 2015, Fareed got stuck in the village for two months when the road was blocked due to torrential rains. He described the process of fixing the road as follows:

First we waited for the state to come. Nothing happened. We always wait. Then we started to do repair work on the road ourselves. People around here have to do most things themselves. So, you wait for the state; it is nice and quiet and nobody comes. And then you need the road too much. By the time officials show up we are done already.

Several themes that are important to a discussion of marginal identity and the state in Gilgit-Baltistan emerge from Fareed's description of the blocked Shimshal road: the wish for the

state to be there and the state's absence, the nexus between quietness and disconnection, and local agency in re-establishing access. While Fared talked about the temporary advantages of forced "state evasion" resulting from the blocked road, his statement also reflects a desire for the state to show up in time. The view that Shimshalis can perform construction activities and other acts of statecraft themselves—an opinion uttered by many we spoke with—emphasizes a sense of local agency and the role of physical place-making. Yet in the final analysis it is the state that is supposed to coordinate and perform these acts, at least from a Shimshali perspective. Literature on marginality and the state from around the world has emphasized both the forms of exclusion and the creative potential that emerge from positions of marginalization (see, e.g., Anwar, 2016; Das & Poole, 2004; Green, 2005; Mostowlansky, 2017 and forthcoming; Tsing, 1993 and 1994; Williams, Vira & Chopra, 2011). As much as marginality implies suffering brought on by political disregard and economic neglect, it also often forms an identity. In the case of Shimshal—and Gilgit-Baltistan more generally—criticism of the state does not stand in contradistinction to the desire for the state to be there. In fact, Gilgit-Baltistan's liminal constitutional status has informed local identities, which draw heavily on marginality, on difference from the center, and on being the state's other. Pakistan's efforts to align with China and to increase the capacity for trade and the speed of exchange along the Karakoram Highway expose these identities to processes of geopolitical scale. Against this backdrop, local desire for the state suggests an important counter-narrative to a view of marginal spaces as marked by greedy engagements by outside forces and local attempts to evade such efforts. We argue instead that complex interactions between local and outside actors in past and present have co-constituted an assemblage of marginality in Gilgit-Baltistan that continues to evolve in and beyond the region.

## **CONCLUSION**

State-led megaprojects, the most notable being the Karakoram Highway, have continuously drawn Pakistan's distant frontier regions more tightly into the state's administration network. Travel times between Gilgit-Baltistan and central Pakistan, as well as within Gilgit-Baltistan itself, have declined dramatically. In 2001, when Karrar first visited Shimshal, it took two days to walk from the end of the jeep track to the village; now that same route can be traversed by car in three hours. Likewise, the growing net of cellular telecommunication has allowed the region to shed its label of remoteness. By December 2016, cellular communication had reached Shimshal, whereas earlier, even in towns and villages directly along the Karakoram Highway, communication linkages with down-country Pakistan were patchy. In the 1990s and the early 2000s, the Karakoram Highway was in a state of perpetual disrepair, flights to the region were delayed for weeks on end, the latest newspaper was many days old, and when telephone lines were down—which was often—it was understood that they would be down indefinitely. Rapid development in Gilgit-Baltistan has made all of this history in an extremely short period of time. Projected infrastructure upgrades under CPEC—which envisions the Karakoram Highway as a major transport corridor linking western China to the Arabian Sea—will bring the region closer to Pakistan's centralizing state machinery. Yet herein lies the paradox: although Gilgit-Baltistan is being brought into the state ambit at rapid rate—through the influx of state officials and flows of transnational capital as well as infrastructural development—marginality in the region has not declined.

In this article, we have argued that marginality—which is captured in Gilgit-Baltistan's "border area" status—has been assembled throughout the twentieth century up until today. We identified four "parts" that inform this process: (1) A residual colonial legacy that stems from the nature of colonial rule along the Himalayan frontier. After 1947, exclusion was imposed on Gilgit-Baltistan, as the region became an appendage to post-colonial Pakistan's positioning vis-à-vis its territorial dispute with India. (2) The appropriation of Gilgit-Baltistan into a national imagination about the nation-state. In part,

this is a continuation of a colonial gaze that saw the frontier—and its inhabitants—as different. Simultaneously, there was a need for a frontier in the post-colonial imagination. This frontier remains a space that is created—through the writing of history and in cultural tropes—and perpetrated in society, making the frontier essential to the imagination of a national polity. (3) The exigency of security. The wave of securitization that blanketed the country in the wake of 9/11 has gotten its second wind in the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor. In Gilgit-Baltistan, securitization—in the form of state practices and resulting changes in people’s perceptions—has amplified the marginality of the region. (4) Marginality as identity. Marginality does not only refer to a lack of resources or distance from state services. Rather, in continuous interaction with the other three parts, it also opens up possibilities for people to position themselves vis-à-vis the state.

This article was inspired by the authors’ long-term fieldwork in northern Pakistan and a rich joint pedagogical exercise in the region. We want to conclude, however, by underlining that our view of marginality as an assemblage—such as the one we have described here—extends far beyond the region at the territorial limits of Pakistan. In this regard we have mentioned the neighborhood of Lyari in Karachi, but also suggest considering other “no-go areas” in megacities of the South. At the same time we see ample analytical potential in looking at less obvious cases, for instance gender dynamics in Karachi’s multi-ethnic high-rise buildings, which Ring (2008) aptly analyzes through the rubric of the “vertical village.” Parallels can also be found in indigenous struggles over natural resources—land, water, and forests—from South Asia to South America, where local narratives of belonging and rights clash with the purported interests of a national polity and capital. Although an in-depth discussion of such comparisons lies outside the scope of this article, they hint at the sort of analytical linkages that are possible once we disengage the border area from its traditional location. In these cases, it is helpful to consider how other assemblages of marginality are

marked by divisions of class and capital, race and gender, mobility and immobility, allowing for a wider applicability, we believe, of these lessons from northern Pakistan.

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