

Kashmir as Movement and Multitude

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Abstract

The Line of Control arbitrarily bifurcates Neelum valley, Kashmir into Pakistan and India. While the border attempts to constrain and categorize, the daily movements and flows of human and more-than-human bodies via “unofficial” routes and routines generate an understanding of Kashmir that is not dependent on geopolitics. Neelum as sculpted and carved by the masculine gaze such as those of the nation-state and humanitarians - indicates closure. But the intrusion of interconnected bodies through the valley’s vast landscapes suggest a continuous re-working and re-opening of its borders. These mobilities are stitched in the material inconveniences and intimacies of daily life in the valley. They are sustained by affective entanglements between human and more-than-human bodies constituting mutual processes of emplacement that are paradoxically unbounded and generative. In these movements and flows are analytical and philological opportunities to articulate fully formed visions of Kashmir. But this necessitates the location of theory and methodology as mutually constitutive within our literary genres (not outside of them) to elaborate narrative writing as praxis.

Key-words: Movement, flow, intimacies of landscape, more-than-human, Kashmir, Line of Control, illaqa (territory)

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Introduction¹

Since when have maps become so sacrosanct? - Arundhati Roy²

Despite attempts to bring to the forefront the very bodies which maps constrain and categorize,³ the multiply claimed region of Kashmir remains primarily a geopolitical concern.⁴ Internal dispute and diversity characterize Kashmir, making it difficult to consider it as a unitary political or socio-cultural zone, mark its absolute borders or even define a singular way of being Kashmiri.⁵ The heavily militarized Line of Control (LoC) dividing Kashmir transfixes its people into either India or Pakistan, obscuring more flexible notions of belonging.⁶ In this paper, I attempt to capture Kashmir as movement and multitude – unbounded – outside of geopolitics.

Zutshi argues that forced attempts at a territorial solution to Kashmir may in fact be counterproductive.⁷ For the struggle for Kashmir cannot be defined only in material terms, rather it “exceeds the world”⁸ and requires “a rethinking of sovereignty itself, as well as a radical revision of the violence and possibilities of the nation–states of India, Pakistan, and Kashmir, respectively.”⁹ What if we attempt to deprioritize the state as the sole adjudicator of all claims? What are then some other possibilities for life and politics in Kashmir if we locate our desires, aspirations and ambitions in the very human and more-than-human bodies the sovereign seeks to constrain?

By foregrounding the power of bodies to counter maps¹⁰ and the intimacies which frustrate

¹ This research would not have been possible without the assistance of my research assistants in alphabetical order: Fawad Aslam, Nusrat Jamal, Saeed Khan and Shahzad Aslam as well as our skillful driver Abdul Shakoor. I acknowledge Sukhi Development Foundation, a non-profit working in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, for facilitating my research. Financial support for this work was received from the USAID funded Competitive Grants Program—a joint initiative of the Planning Commission of Pakistan and the Pakistan Strategy Support Program: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI); the International Development Research Centre (IDRC Canada); the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC); the Public Scholar Initiative, Faculty of Education and Liu Institute for Global Issues at the University of British Columbia; and the Bullitt Foundation. I acknowledge the following for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper: Naeem Inayatullah, Shauna Butterwick, Erin Baines, Pilar Riano-Alcala, *Critical Kashmir Studies* and the UBC Himalaya Program.

² Roy, Arundhati. “Azadi.” *Outlook India: The Magazine*, July 25, 2016. www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/azadi/297536

³ Hyndman, Jennifer, “Towards a Feminist Geopolitics,” *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, 45, no. 2 (2001): 210-222; Hyndman, Jennifer, “Mind the Gap: Bridging Feminist and Political Geography through Geopolitics,” *Political Geography* 23, no. 3 (2004): 307-322; Hyndman, Jennifer, “Feminist Geopolitics Revisited: Body Counts in Iraq,” *The Professional Geographer* 59, no. 1 (2007): 35-46.

⁴ For example, see Ganguly, Sumit. *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions since 1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). There are some commendable exceptions, such as Kabir, Ananya Jahanara, *Territory of Desire: Representing the Valley of Kashmir* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

⁵ deBergh Robinson, Cabeiri, *Body of Victim, Body of Warrior: Refugee Families and the Making of Kashmiri Jihadists*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Sökefeld, Martin. “Jammu and Kashmir: Dispute and Diversity,” in P Berger and F. Heidemann, eds., *The Modern Anthropology of India: Ethnography, Themes and Theory*, (London: Routledge, 2013), 89-105; Sökefeld, Martin. “Jammu and Kashmir—Boundaries and Movements,” *Contemporary South Asia*, 23, no. 3 (2015): 251-265.

⁶ Aggarwal, Ravina, *Beyond Lines of Control: Performance and Politics on the Disputed Borders of Ladakh, India*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Banerjee, Paula, *Borders, Histories, Existences: Gender and Beyond*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010).

⁷ Zutshi, Chitrlekha, “An Ongoing Partition: Histories, Borders, and the Politics of Vivisection in Jammu and Kashmir,” *Contemporary South Asia*, 23, no. 3 (2015): 266-275.

⁸ Varma, Saiba. “Interrogating the ‘Post-Conflict’ in Indian-administered Kashmir,” *Cultural Anthropology*, 24 March 24, 2014. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/506-interrogating-the-post-conflict-in-indian-administered-kashmir>

⁹ Varma, “Interrogating the Post-Conflict.”

¹⁰ Devi, Mahasweta, *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories*, Translated by G. Spivak, (New York: Routledge, 1995); Goeman, Mishuana, *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping our Nations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013);

geopolitics,¹¹ I seek to disentangle what it may mean to be Kashmiri from the epistemic violence of the nation-state. Understanding space as *open yet embracing*,¹² I draw upon affective ecologies to trace the circulation of Kashmiri bodies in the region's vast landscapes via "unofficial" routes and routines. These intrusions contribute to the production of territory and the continuous *unfolding and enfolding*¹³ of Kashmir's borders. Affective ecologies draw attention to how human and more-than-human¹⁴ relations are implicated in the reproduction of ecological, social, economic, cultural, and political formations.¹⁵ This is a useful lens to understand the inter and intra relationships of bodies in "perpetual adjustments and motion."¹⁶

The paper is situated in Neelum valley, Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Daily life in Neelum is heavily reliant on its landscapes which are materially and existentially necessary for its residents and are sites where human and more-than-human relationships (or ecology) constitute processes of localization which are paradoxically unbounded and generative. Neelum is suitable for this work because of the gendered nature of life and mobility as in the rest of the Himalayan region,¹⁷ its geopolitical extremeness - the LoC cuts right through Neelum dividing it into India and Pakistan - and its environmental precarity. Between 1990-2003, Neelum was a tense battleground for Kashmiri Mujahideen (or "freedom" fighters), and the Indian and Pakistani militaries. Two years after the ceasefire, an earthquake devastated the region (2005) followed by massive flash flooding (2010), opening the valley to intense humanitarian action.¹⁸ Every now and then tensions flare at the border putting residents at risk and curtailing their movements.¹⁹

Are borders and their readjustments the only possible vocabulary for Kashmir? If we understand Kashmir as a series of fluid, heterogeneously-lived spaces, what understandings can emerge that are possible only by intimate and comparative area knowledge which considers Kashmir as a site of data collection *and* theory generation?²⁰

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Woman in Difference: Mahasweta Devi's 'Douloti the Bountiful.'" *Cultural Critique* 14 (1989): 105-128.

¹¹ Smith, Sara. "She says herself, 'I have no future': Love, Fate and Territory in Leh District, India." *Gender, Place & Culture* 18, no. 4 (2011): 455-476; Varma, Saiba. "Love in the Time of Occupation: Reveries, Longing, and Intoxication in Kashmir." *American Ethnologist*, 43, no. 1 (2016): 50-62.

¹² Shands, Kerstin W. "(Em) bracing Space," *Nora: Nordic Journal of Women's Studies*, 6, no. 1 (1998): 21-30.

¹³ Deleuze, Gilles. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

¹⁴ The "affective body" is not limited to just humans, but includes landscape, waterways, animals, plants and even insects. See, for example, Hustak, Carla, and Natasha Myers, "Involutionary Momentum: Affective Ecologies and the Sciences of Plant/Insect Encounters." *Differences*, 23, no. 3 (2012): 74-118. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Gurez Valley, Indian-administered Kashmir, Bauer and Bhan urge us to note the very bodies and relations in which well-being gets invested. See, Bauer, Andrew M., and Mona Bhan, "Welfare and the Politics and Historicity of the Anthropocene," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115, no. 1 (2016): 61-87 and Bauer, Andrew M., and Mona Bhan, *Climate without Nature: A Critical Anthropology of the Anthropocene* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

¹⁵ Bhan, Mona, and Nishita Trisal, "Fluid Landscapes, Sovereign Nature: Conservation and Counterinsurgency in Indian-controlled Kashmir," *Critique of Anthropology*, 37, no. 1 (2017): 67-92; Cloke, Paul, and Eric Pawson, "Memorial Trees and Treescape Memories," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 26, no. 1 (2008): 107-122.

¹⁶ Aitken, Stuart C., and Li An, "Figured Worlds: Environmental Complexity and Affective Ecologies in Fanjingshan, China," *Ecological Modelling*, 229 (2012): 5-15, p. 7

¹⁷ Berry, Kim, and Shubhra Gururani, "Special Section: Gender in the Himalaya," *Himalaya*, 34, no. 1 (2014): 36-42.

¹⁸ Aijazi, Omer, *A Social Repair Orientation to Disaster Recovery: Evidence from Northern Pakistan*, New York: Humanitarian Research and Innovations, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2015.

¹⁹ Chughtai, Alia and Saifullah, Aurangzaeb, "Kashmir: Neelum Valley Shelled for First Time in 10 Years." *Al Jazeera*, October 29, 2016.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/10/kashmir-neelum-valley-shelled-time-years-161029180958447.html>; Naqash, Tariq, "9 Killed as Indian Troops Target Passenger Bus near LoC," *Dawn News*, November 24, 2016. www.dawn.com/news/1298130

²⁰ Anzaldúa, Gloria, *La frontera/Borderlands: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987); Bayat, Asef, "Areas and Ideas," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 33, no. 3 (2013): 260-263; Connell, Raewyn, *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2007); Das, Veena,



Underground bunkers provided refuge during periods of cross-border shelling. "Anticipatory structures" such as these are maintained to date in case fighting resumes. These exist side by side newly constructed homes, shops and guesthouses, photograph by Nusrat Jamal.

To answer these questions, I pay attention to the human and more-than-human bodies that animate Neelum, including my own, which in their movements and flows offer analytical and philological opportunity.

Illaqa

When I first got to Neelum, I noticed that the gestures of politeness which one gets used to in urban Pakistan were somewhat absent. My collaborators would snap at me when offended, and even ask me to come back another day if they got annoyed by my presence. One day, slightly beaten and broken, I mustered the courage to ask Shahzad - my research assistant and resident of Neelum - *why are people here so mean?* He responded with much amusement:

This is because you are in our *illaqa* (territory). When we are in Islamabad, we may appear friendlier. We might smile at you, appear agreeable. We just don't know the city, perhaps we feel out of place, out of our element. But when we come back to Neelum, we become *shair* (lions)! No one can harm us here, we are the *badshah* (king) of the land.

"Knowledge Production and Regional Scholarship," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 33, no. 3 (2013): 272-275.

Shahzad's response brings to light the importance of emplacement; that being in one's own illaqa provides confidence ("they turn into lions") and invites an almost abrasive truthfulness. This is intriguing, particularly for understanding belonging and attachment in ways that are not possible through a geopolitical understanding of citizenship and identity. Abrar, one of my research collaborators, shares a story concerning some Pakistani tourists:

I was leading a hike with these *amir zada* (rich or privileged) guests from Islamabad. One of them really had to pee. We were passing over a bridge over the Neelum river,²¹ and the guest exclaimed: 'I am just going to pee across the bridge, into the water, I can't wait any longer.' I grabbed him from his shirt and yelled: *Bharvay* (your wife is a whore!), this is not Pakistan that you can urinate as you please. This is Kashmir, and this is *our* water.

How can we understand these intense emotional entanglements with landscape and the confidence these connections inspire? More importantly, how can we use these insights to advance understandings of Kashmir which exceed the current offerings of geopolitics?

"Azad" Kashmir

In its narrative traditions, Kashmir has always existed at the intersections of the local and the universal.²² Shahzad narrates the origin of his home:

Hazrat Suleman²³ was flying over this region with his trusted Jinn on duty. He looked down and noticed a sparkling, crystalline body of water. He asked the Jinn: 'Can you create life here?' The Jinn replied: 'Yes, but I have a condition that you must marry me to the fairy, Mir.' Hazrat Suleman agreed, and therefore married the Jinn, Kash, with the fairy, Mir. The Jinn then inspired life in the region, shaping mountains and land. This is how Kashmir was created.

Narratives such as this (there are many others), are imaginative refusals against placing Kashmir in its current geopolitical emplotment. They insist that Kashmir has its own historicity, a freedom of sorts. Ironically, Pakistan-administered Kashmir is nationally referred to as "Azad Kashmir." "Azad" translates as "free". This implies that this Kashmir is free from the Indian military (but occupied by Pakistan's) and that its residents enjoy political, cultural and social freedoms.²⁴ Kashmiris in Pakistan are under constant surveillance and scrutiny by intelligence agencies and for reasons of self-preservation must actively demonstrate allegiance to the Pakistani state. Always under Pakistan's watchful eye, Kashmiris have to carefully distance themselves from any public conversations on Kashmir's sovereignty or risk interrogation, extra judicial imprisonment or worse - disappearance. The skepticism towards Kashmiris is also shared by ordinary Pakistanis and not just by the military and its secret police. A Kashmiri student studying at a university in Rawalpindi explains: "I have to be careful with what I say and how I voice my political opinions. The slightest of slips can be construed by my classmates as an indication of disloyalty to the Pakistani state." He continues: "It seems your trustworthiness as a human, and the merit of your character, is contingent on your loyalty to Pakistan."

²¹ The raging Neelum river flows through the entire length of the Neelum valley, fearlessly contesting the LoC, Pakistan → India → Pakistan in its ebb and flows.

²² Zutshi, "Ongoing Partition."

²³ "Hazrat" is an honorific title.

²⁴ For a preliminary discussion on human rights violations in Azad Kashmir, see the Human Rights Watch report, "With Friends like These: Human Rights Violations in Azad Kashmir," *Human Rights Watch*, 18, no. 12 (2006).



A sign in a government office in Neelum, photograph by the author.

Arrival

I first arrived in Neelum in 2014 to try to understand how residents negotiate the confluence of multiple forms of violence in their everyday lives. I wanted to understand social repair, how people enable the continuity life in some viable form despite being immersed in ongoing and overwhelming structures of constraint.²⁵ *Why was I drawn to Kashmir?* Kashmir is romanticized, fetishized and offers an allure of raw, untouched beauty and clear blue waters. Growing up in Pakistan, I was enthralled by the mysticism of Kashmir: a land inhabited by extraordinary, beautiful people with rosy cheeks and glowing skin, mountains dotted with apple orchards and walnut trees, and the mystical abundance this suggests. Kashmiri chai (a pink-colored tea), named after the region where it originates from, is extremely popular in Pakistan's urban centers, especially in winter, unusual on account of its pink color and pairing with dried fruits and nuts.²⁶ During the numerous years of active cross-border conflict, Pakistani TV channels showcased dramas on Kashmir valorizing the role of the Pakistani army in the conflict and the conduct of the Mujahideen. Admittedly, my foray into Neelum as a researcher is indeed a problematic extension of decades of objectification and romanticization of the Kashmiri people by the Pakistani state and its citizens. I am no exception.

²⁵ Aijazi, Omer, "Theorizing a Social Repair Orientation to Disaster Recovery: Developing Insights for Disaster Recovery Policy and Programming," *Global Social Welfare*, 2, no. 1 (2015): 15-28; Aijazi, Omer, "Social Repair and Structural Inequity: Implications for Disaster Recovery Practice." *International Journal of Disaster Resilience in the Built Environment*, 6, no. 4 (2015): 454-467; Aijazi, Omer, *A Social Repair Orientation to Disaster Recovery*.

²⁶ It is another story. This pink tea is nowhere to be found in Neelum, a tradition far too expensive to sustain.



The kitchen often generated the richest of conversations, photograph by the author.

Entry into Neelum resembles a heavily guarded border crossing. Foreigners are not allowed to enter, and Pakistanis are only tolerated as tourists and only after elaborate security checks. Luker points out that research methods are not truths in themselves, but normative choices which are historically, socially and politically located in both time and place.²⁷ My ethnographic intrusion in Neelum did not take any specific form or shape. I spent time with my collaborators in a variety of ways: we conversed around the fire and in the kitchen, took photographs, walked the difficult mountainous geography, got lost and incurred bodily injuries, harvested fields and forests for vegetables and mushrooms, cooked and ate together, visited state institutions such as the police station, attended school ceremonies, prayed in the *masjids* (mosques), gave and received gifts, provided assistance and asked for help when we needed it. We also shared numerous moments of vulnerability, accepting each other's imperfections and fragility. I maintained journals to record the collisions of our encounters, "creating images" for myself.²⁸

My presence in Neelum was nothing short of a spectacle. I asked baba, my host: "Can I pass as someone from Neelum?" He shook his head: "For one thing, you eat like a little child, just half a plate of rice. When you walk, you cannot walk straight, you are clumsy on these slopes. Sometimes, I worry about you." (At one point, another "worried" collaborator gave me a walking stick as a gift, to help with my "strange" mobility issues). He adds: "And you are afraid of spiders [for a man your age and size]."

Mobility is an important signifier for Neelum. In most other places that I have worked in (e.g. other parts of Pakistan, northern Uganda), mobility was never an issue and hardly a central concern for my research design. In Neelum, this was not the case. Firstly, the topography was at times so intense that I was physically unable to access certain spaces, community locations and neighborhoods. Secondly, mobility within the mountainscapes is gendered and particular, some routes are dedicated for women and children, others for animals and some for remaining villagers. Outsiders such as myself are not free to wander in Neelum's landscapes. For example, tourists are expected to only stick to the main road or popular hiking tracks. It was both an aberration and

²⁷ Luker, Kristin, *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

²⁸ Alvesson, Mats, and Kaj Sköldbberg, *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*, (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), p. 10.

somewhat disrespectful for me to be circulating freely in Neelum's mountainscapes unless accompanied by someone from Neelum and, even then, in moderation. Perhaps accentuated by its remoteness and the feeling of expansiveness, different rules were in place in Neelum regarding who is acceptable in the landscape and to what proximity to a community.

Therefore, instead of relying solely on my body to explore and experience various lived spaces, and keeping in mind the limitations of my mobility, it made sense to make extensive use of photo-voice or participatory photography, allowing the people I worked with to share with me only what they considered acceptable. Therefore, this paper includes photographs which open Neelum for us in ways that my words cannot.

Welcome to Neelum



“Unofficial” pathways crisscross Neelum’s mountainscapes, opening up the valley for its residents, photograph by Rihanna Tahir.

In Neelum, it was clear that I was in Kashmir and not in Pakistan. Residents went out of their way to remind me of where I am, by pointing in the direction of Islamabad and clarifying: “But this is Kashmir and that is Pakistan [far away].” It seemed that the notion of Kashmir as being outside of Pakistan had to be continuously repeated, circulated over and over again in the bazaars, tea shops, at home and in the masjids.

The LoC cuts right through Neelum, creating its own history and unique political entanglements.²⁹ Unfortunately, most writings on Kashmir have focused on the LoC as a territorial concern instead of its impact on the lived and felt sentimentalities of Kashmiri subjects, reducing

²⁹ The LoC is heavily monitored and guarded by the military on both sides. Since the early 1990s, in order to prevent “illegal” movement, India has initiated an elaborate fencing project. This comprises a double row of fencing and electrified wiring connected to a network of motion sensors, thermal imaging devices, lighting systems, alarms and land mines. See Swa Swami, Praveen, “Sealing the Border: After Strikes, Walking the Line of Control,” *The Indian Express*, October. 18, 2016 <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/sealing-the-india-pakistan-border-along-loc-after-surgical-strikes-walking-the-line-of-control-3086840/>

those in close proximities on either side of the LoC as geopolitical abstractions. In 2003, after a tense ceasefire between Pakistan and India, two bridges were inaugurated to link the valley across the LoC. Once a month, residents are permitted to cross on either side to reunite with relatives but only after elaborate paperwork and specialized travel documents. Depending on the political climate of the region, some months the crossings are even closed. The bridges and the difficulties they pose - administrative (specialized documents are required) and temporal (crossings only open certain time a year) - further highlight the absurdity of the LoC. Those who are lucky enough to cross bring back objects, stories and memories.³⁰ Shahzad has been denied access to the crossing several times. Finally, in 2012, after waiting for nearly 16 months for his documents to be “processed,” he was allowed to visit his relatives across the LoC. He shares his experiences of “border crossing”:

On my way back, the Indian soldier stationed at the bridge smiled at me and inquired: ‘How did you like Indian Kashmir? Is it any different from Pakistani Kashmir?’ I stared blankly at his face and replied as respectfully as I could, surpassing my rage: ‘What are you talking about? This is Kashmir and so is that, I have merely come to the same home.’

While I knew this was Shahzad’s way of refusing the division of Kashmir, I was cheeky enough to insist, *but were they any different?* Shahzad, slightly annoyed, snapped back at me: “Yes, the nature of the violence was indeed different. It is difficult for me to say which is better, an overt assault on our political freedoms and social sensibilities [India] or betrayal and false friendships [Pakistan]?”

As Always, Everyone is Really Concerned about Women’s Bodies

Over the years, Neelum has become a popular destination for Pakistani tourists.³¹ For many Pakistanis, the lush mountainscapes of Neelum represent the final frontier of the Pakistani state, literally on its edge, dancing precariously into another kind of collectivity. This adds to the thrill of visiting Neelum.³² Several restaurants overlook the banks of the Neelum River, where Pakistani tourists can lie back on charpoys optimally placed so they can “see” India, turning the business of borders into a theatre of sorts.

Perhaps due to its geopolitical edginess or perceived remoteness, Neelum is considered as a space outside of the realm of morality and sexual governance. While most tourists are either men or tidy families organized around heteronormative expectations, for some Pakistanis, Neelum lies outside the moral codes imposed on them by their citizenry. The caretaker of a popular guesthouse remarked that there is an increasing trend for men to bring their girlfriends or even prostitutes to Neelum for “unlawful” sexual activities. To mitigate this, guesthouses are required to check the marriage certificates of men and women travelling together. This practice is also enforced at various military and police checkpoints dotting the valley.

Female tourists are particularly scrutinized and judged on their placement within or outside the heteronormative, state-sanctioned familial unit. Those female tourists who are seen as being

³⁰ Gupta, Radhika, "Poetics and Politics of Borderland Dwelling: Baltis in Kargil," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, 10 (2014).

³¹ Chowdhry, Affan, “Amid Deadly Skirmishes, Pakistanis Enjoy a Little Shangri-La in Kashmir,” *The Globe and Mail*, August 8, 2013.

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/amid-deadly-skirmishes-pakistanis-enjoy-a-little-shangri-la-in-kashmir/article13678263/>; Mughal, Roshan. “Tourists Flock to Kashmir’s ‘Ghost Valley.’” *Al Jazeera*, July 9, 2014.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/07/tourists-kashmir-pakistan-loc-ghost-valley-201477103912160932.html>

³² Soomro, Marvi, “Neelum Valley: A Song of Splendor and Separation,” *Dawn News*, June 28, 2015 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1189885>

outside the family, such as perceived to be with their boyfriends, unmarried partners or even with male colleagues are particularly vilified for being corrupted and corrupting the woman of Neelum. A young male resident angrily pointed at a bus of university students:

Look at the *besharam larkyan* (young women without modesty). They don't even wear *duppatas* (head coverings) and sit and walk next to men. Look at the clothes they wear, tightly fitted *shalwars* (trousers). They corrupt our girls who now want to follow similar fashions and behave in unacceptable ways around our men.

A large number of humanitarian and development NGOs set up shop in Neelum after the recent disasters. They too were very interested in women. In line with developmental vocabularies of "gender equity," they sought to hire local women, opening their bodies to further criticism and public scrutiny. According to a male collaborator, women working for NGOs are exceptionally immoral and possibly promiscuous:

NGOs have a bad reputation in Neelum. Take [organization's name] for example. During food distributions after the floods, they hired our young women. Within days their *duppatas* (head coverings) came off, and they would travel with men in big Pajeros late into the evening.

Women, along with other "vulnerable" bodies such as children and the elderly, were also the desired targets of numerous humanitarian interventions. Since humanitarian organizations are first and foremost rational organizations, requiring "scientific" ways to dispense their resources, women and others were rapidly brought into the folds of "vulnerability assessments" and "household consultations". One person I worked with remarked that, after the earthquake "women were in very high demand."

Neelum as Sculpted

Neelum's mountainscapes are sculpted and carved to accommodate certain bodies in particular ways. This is the outcome of specific and situated social practices and gendered norms, consistent with what we know about gender and the environment: that they are contingent and co-produced. I use the following series of photographs to further highlight this point.



Maizescapes leading to a home, photograph by the author.

Maize, the staple crop of the region, is grown in abundance in Neelum, typically around a homestead. It is usually hand-picked, the kernels are separated from the husk and stored in large wooden boxes. However, maize plantations provide more than just food and are equally appreciated for their dense networks and camouflaging ability. The local imam remarked: “Their dense growth provides a certain sense of *pardah*³³ (covering) around homes.” After the earthquake and floods, when most homes were destroyed, many chose to live within these maizescapes for reasons of practicality but also *pardah*, since at least the overgrowth provided some physical coverage and shelter.³⁴

The maizescapes also provide cover for defecation as attached latrines are uncommon. Women are expected to defecate only during daylight within the maize fields, very early in the morning, but men can go as they please (outside of the time generally reserved for women). Conversely, maizescapes are also considered as sites of danger and harm, and are feared to harbor snakes, scorpions and stray dogs - whose presence is amplified after sunset when visibility is greatly diminished. Women (and young children) are discouraged from navigating these maize plantations and, therefore, much of the landscape, after sunset. In this way, these maizescapes allow selective gendered mobilities and access to landscape - safe enough to defecate in and traverse the village with during daytime but dangerous enough to be harmful after nightfall.



A community-installed bridge, photograph by Shafiqa Butt.

³³ *Purdah*, a hotly contested concept within Muslim communities, generally points towards an understanding of privacy and modesty, mostly but not always directed at women.

³⁴ For further discussion on the centrality of “*pardah*” after the 2010 monsoon floods see, Aijazi, Omer, and Dilnoor Panjwani, “Religion in Spaces of Social Disruption: Re-Reading the Public Transcript of Disaster Relief in Pakistan,” *International Journal of Mass Emergencies & Disasters* 33, no. 1 (2015): 28-52.

The Pakistani state has minimal investments in infrastructure in Neelum. The road leading into Neelum was only upgraded after the 2005 earthquake and even today its condition is at best “jeepable.” Interconnectivity within and between villages is entirely dependent on the navigational ability and agility of people who live there. In response to this lack, in many places, residents have put in place their own micro-infrastructures such as the bridge pictured above. Bridges like this dot the valley and offer some respite in the seemingly inhospitable terrain.³⁵ While used by everyone, men are expected to make their way around regardless, and therefore micro-infrastructures such as this bridge are primarily for the convenience of those outside the conventions of masculinity, such as women, children and the elderly.



Unique rock formations ideal for soaking and washing clothes, photograph by Shafiq Butt.

³⁵ There are a few suspension bridges maintained by the Pakistani army at various strategic points in the valley, but these have more to do with providing the army with ready access to the LoC as opposed to alleviating the daily inconveniences of topography.



Freshly washed clothes drying on a rock, photograph by Razia Bano.

The timely and adequate completion of daily life chores is also contingent on one's ability to exploit the landscape and convert its apparent inhospitality into convenience. The photographs above show useful rock formations near a stream which are amenable to washing and drying clothes. Rock formations also provide features to the nondescript landscape and enhance people's navigational capacities by serving as identifiers. For example, the following photograph shows an oddly shaped rock formation, which serves as an identifier and even draws children, who play in its vicinity.



An unusual rock formation, photograph by Nusrat Jamal.

“Official” Pathways

After the earthquake and flooding, the landscape “shifted.” New cracks and fissures appeared, mountains split, and rocks changed their locations. Even the streams and various smaller water bodies crisscrossing the villages changed their pathways, rendering some bridges useless and creating the need for new ones. Land that was previously safe to live on became dangerous and the fertility of the soil changed, opening new opportunities in some areas and closing hope in others. There were even shifts in the water quality of the Neelum River and the types and quantity of fish it sustained. People described how they had to actively “re-learn” the landscape, discover new spaces and find other routes to access familiar (and new) destinations, as former pathways and routes were erased.³⁶

Humanitarian NGOs prioritized the re-construction of pathways after the disasters. Hundreds of “cash for work” or “food for work” schemes were initiated across Neelum, where local men with the help of civil engineers from Islamabad were compensated in cash or kind to “re-build” mountain pathways. After completion, these pathways were then “handed back” to communities (the men) who from that point onwards were responsible for their upkeep. These reconstructed pathways often took the form of a series of cemented steps crisscrossing the mountainscapes, as shown in the photograph below. Like most humanitarian interventions, and under the pretext of vulnerability, women, children and the elderly were considered the official beneficiaries for these initiatives. While I was in Neelum, I found most of these reconstructed pathways to be in shambles, indicating that they were not maintained by Neelum’s men despite their participation in the construction. The men interviewed

³⁶ Cook and Butz similarly argue that while disasters curtail mobility by destroying infrastructure, they also motivate communities (though at a different scale) to discover and create new routes for the continuity of daily life. See Cook, Nancy, and David Butz, “The Dialectical Constitution of Mobility and Imobility: Recovering from the Attabad Landslide Disaster, Gojal, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan,” *Contemporary South Asia*, 23, no. 4 (2015): 388-408.

during fieldwork shrugged and ridiculed the usefulness and practicality of these “reconstructed pathways.”



An NGO-supported cemented pathway. This one is in reasonably good shape, photograph by Rihana Tahir.

Humanitarian intentions might be noble, the yearning to build community infrastructure through wider participation even commendable - but the cemented pathways reflect humanitarian desires of order, control and technocracy more than anything else. This is apparent just from the way connectivity is imagined and its ideals reproduced as infrastructure. The differences in NGO pathways (above) and those that exist otherwise (see earlier photographs) are not just reflective of a lack of technical and engineering skills but hinge on other considerations, such as what kind of connectivity is desired, by whom and for what purpose?

It rains and snows much of the year in Neelum. The cemented pathways turn dangerously slippery under these weather conditions and residents find it safer to walk outside of them. I noted narrow pathways created by regular foot traffic crisscrossing the mountains, often adjacent to these cemented stairways. Not surprisingly, livestock and carrier animals (such as donkeys and mules) also find it incredibly difficult to walk on the cemented pathways, even outside of the rainy season. The cemented pathways cannot withstand Neelum’s harsh weather. Their upkeep requires monetary expenditure and specialized tools which communities cannot sustain. While connectivity between villages and even within villages from one house to the next is strained, efficiency and time are important considerations which are taken into account when choosing a particular route. Often this means choosing the shortest route as opposed to the safest or easiest route. Cemented pathways do not necessarily adhere to this consideration of timeliness.

I often chose the cemented pathway since they appeared easier to navigate. One day, a

passerby asked me in awe: “Why are you taking this route to get to Sehri [a village]? This will take you over an hour. Go from here, between these rocks, past the shrubs, across the waterfall—you will get there *fatafat* (immediately, at the snap of your fingers).”

On my way back, I followed the villager’s recommendation and decided to take the “quicker route.” That turned out to be a big *faux pas* and in part provides the inspiration for this paper. It took me nearly 2.5 hours to navigate the “quick route”. I had to carefully make my way across very narrow pathways, get on my feet and hands on extremely steep slopes (which one passerby described as *janwar jaisa* [just like an animal]), take numerous breaks, suppress several panic attacks and at one point requested two elderly villagers to take my hand and walk me across a five foot long stretch which was too terrifying to cross on my own.

Humanitarian pathways are not too different, at least in intention, from the micro-infrastructure put in place by Neelum’s able-bodied men. Both are efforts to sculpt and tame Neelum (but to a very different degree) for those who are considered to be “non-experts” of the landscape. The humanitarians were keen to bring in engineers, foreign materials such as cement and specialized tools to work towards a particular kind of built environment. For Neelum’s men, it was more plausible to do just enough, to make the landscape *slightly* more hospitable for particular bodies - i.e., women, children, elderly, animals - but for nobody else.

Bodies Opening Routes and Routines



A resident makes his way home via an “unofficial” pathway,” photograph by Razia Bano.

“Unofficial” mountain pathways encourage the circulation of bodies within the valley’s mountainscapes and allow the fulfilment of daily life tasks. Additionally, the mobility of Neelum’s residents is supported by the notion of multiple homesteads; one being in the village, others being on

their route to the *malis*. *Malis* are grazing pastures and forests at dizzying altitudes which are collectively accessed by communities. *Malis* are not bounded geographies with a fixed address but refer to a conglomeration of ancestral spaces which offer increased access to resources, cool temperatures and even respite from the male gaze. During summer, women and children along with their livestock migrate to the *malis*. Men are normally not allowed to access the *malis*, though specific accommodations are sometimes made.³⁷

Migrations to the *malis* during the summer are examples of very practical (and gendered) engagements with landscape. The animals are fattened in the *malis* and the forests are combed for vegetables, mushrooms and medicinal plants. On account of their altitude, the *malis* also provide respite from the summer heat.



Transient houses (beheks), en route to the malis, photograph by Mohammed Zaheer.

Sometimes, in their search for food in the *malis*, women and their livestock will venture dangerously close to the LoC - swaths of landscape which are littered with landmines to prohibit “illegal” crossings into Indian-administered Kashmir. Other times, landmines are swept by rain or mudslides into Neelum’s forests and near the *beheks* (transient houses). The Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) works in the valley to educate residents about landmines. The safety advice they impart in their training of civilians is to discourage residents (specifically women and children) from taking their animals on unfamiliar routes for grazing. Per their records, hundreds of livestock die every year due to landmines and dozens of women and children either die or suffer from lifelong disabilities.

³⁷ Men have their own seasonal migratory patterns to Pakistan’s urban centers where they typically seek poorly compensated employment during the winter months.

The PRCS encourages residents not to venture into uncharted territories, and by doing so they are perpetuating yet another border within Neelum, which runs in parallel to the LoC.

In the following sections, I highlight how the circulation of bodies within Neelum's mountainscapes is encouraged by affective attachments with more-than human bodies, namely plants, vegetables and animals found in landscape.

More-than-Human Bodies

As my collaborators became more confident in our relationship, the nature of the food I was served also shifted. It went from the usual *biryani* and *chicken karhai* to more region-specific dishes such as locally sourced *saags* (spinaches) and mushrooms. The sugar in the tea changed from regular refined sugar to *gur* (unprocessed brown sugar) and the milk from Milkpack (a very popular brand of pasteurized milk) to unpasteurized, raw milk. I read this in two ways: one, as people's comfort increased they didn't find it necessary to cater to my urban taste-buds or expectations of food. And second, that local foods communicated a profound sense of pride, belonging and rootedness which cannot be articulated through the language of geopolitics. In this section I examine more-than-human bodies, such as edible plants, mushrooms and animals and how they open up landscape.

Intimacies of food

Hameeda only uses *jangli payyaz* for cooking which she handpicks from the malis. Jangli payyaz, a variety of green onion (translates literally as "wild onions") are bold in flavor and fragrance. Hameeda dries them in the sun and stores them in little plastic containers for use during winter. She explains:

They have a strong taste and smell and food does not taste the same without them. I dislike the onions you can purchase from the bazaar which are trucked in from Pakistan. They have no flavor and they are grown using harmful fertilizers and chemicals. Jangli payyaz smells of Neelum and tastes like Neelum.

Jangli payyaz are found at dizzying heights and often in very dangerous spots, in areas prone to landslides or close to the ledge - spaces which one would not consider accessing otherwise. Collecting jangli payyaz puts the body at tangible risk. They grow far in between and therefore large tracts of inaccessible landscape have to be carefully navigated for their collection.

Andaza speaks about shirley, a local variety of mushrooms also found in the malis. She describes:

Shirley do not grow everywhere. They grow on specific trees and there is no guarantee that they will re-appear in the same spot they did last season. They are very delicate. I go to the malis with our animals [goats, cows], as they graze, I scan the forest for shirley. They must be collected within 3 days of appearing. Upon appearing, within 2-3 days they ripen, it is at this point they have to be collected or they dry out and are no longer edible.

Shirley are very delicate mushrooms, and women are invested in their protection over repeated trips to the same areas where they were initially spotted. Shirley draws the same bodies back to the landscape in relationships of care and anticipation.



Shirley: these are boiled and then cooked with a sauce of onions and tomatoes, photograph by the author.

Jangli payyaz and shirley are not only symbolic of the affective ecologies of Neelum (expressions like “they smell of Neelum and taste like Neelum” provide us clues), but they also compel gendered bodies to navigate uncharted and inhospitable landscapes or re-open existing ones, contributing to their renewal and expansion.

The interconnectivities and the circulations of bodies in landscapes are also interlinked with ideas of the social and how it is produced, maintained and preserved. For example, the malis also have their own culinary traditions. Since animals have better access to grazing opportunities, they produce more milk. The shelf life of milk is increased by turning milk into *lassi* (a watered yoghurt drink), *bhagoray* (cheese curds) and *ghee* (clarified butter). These are consumed in the *beheks* but also brought back to the villages where their circulation amongst friends, family and neighbors creates and maintains kinship and closeness. Since the malis are predominately accessed by women and children, they also serve as amenable spaces of interconnectivity and interactivity exclusively between women. Such spaces of relatability minimally exist in village lived spaces, where sharp distinctions between public and private life are maintained and scrutinized.



Bhagoray (cheese) prepared in the beheks, these are fried in ghee with spices, photograph by the author.

Women, (particularly senior women, such as the mother-in-law or grandmother) take pride in growing vegetables, which in addition to food sovereignty allow for the circulation of diverse forms of relationality. These practices not only directly emplace women within landscape but also cement them to other people. One of my collaborators explains:

My dadi [paternal grandmother] has a passion for growing vegetables. She regularly tends to them and even takes her shoes off before entering the vegetable garden [out of respect]. She strictly instructs other to do the same. We often have surplus vegetables and regularly send cucumbers, potatoes [and other produce] to neighbors and family members. Our neighbors and relatives do the same.

Animals in mountainscapes

One morning, seated on the verandah of my host's home in Neelum, I intently watched chickens running around the courtyard. My host interrupted my gaze: "*Tumhari nazar na lag jaye*" (don't stare at them so intently, you will give them an evil eye). As affective bodies - much like the jangli



Bhala and Tani resting in the shade, photograph by the author.

payyaz and shirley - animals form unique relationships with their care-takers and extend their emplacement in landscapes as well as their navigational capacity of it. Livestock in particular are referred to as *maal* (wealth), reflecting not only their status as assets but the value they bring to everyday life. Children often introduced me to their goats and told me their names. The act of naming implies love and attachment, perhaps formed as a result of large amounts of solitary time spent with animals.

Birke, Bryld and Lykke encourage us to think about the complexities of human/animal

relationships as a “kind of choreography, a co-creation of behavior.”³⁸ Everyday life, migratory patterns, even spatial practices are purposefully instituted around animals and their needs. As legitimate bodies in Neelum, animals are very closely intertwined with the opening and maintenance of illaqa. Since ambulatory animals such as cows and goats are also prohibited from crossing over the LoC (they get blown away by landmines), they, too, are geopolitically restricted. Additionally, migrations to the malis are intrinsically tied to the sustenance of livestock, who accompany their caretakers to benefit from unrestricted grazing pastures.



A woman tends her livestock. She challenges conventions of flatness and acceptable topography by expertly operating on a slope, photograph by Rihana Tahir.

³⁸ Birke, Lynda, Mette Bryld, and Nina Lykke, "Animal Performances: An Exploration of Intersections between Feminist Science Studies and Studies of Human/Animal Relationships," *Feminist Theory*, 5, no. 2 (2004): 167-183, p. 167.



An “unofficial” pathway leading to the malis. Notice the difference in surface from the NGO-supported cemented steps. Different bodies work in the landscape to create routes and routines that do not depend on geopolitics, photograph by Rihana Tahir.

The two recent disasters that struck Neelum killed large numbers of livestock. Despite the number of years gone by, most households have been unable to regain the same numbers of animals as before. This means there is less and less incentive for households to invest their bodily labor and time in trekking to the malis. Several women reported that they no longer go to the malis since they only have a handful of livestock and it does not make much sense to trek all the way up. Instead they now



An elderly man resting with his cattle on the way back from the malis, photograph by Farhat Shaheen

send their animals with a neighbor or someone else who has a bigger herd and pay them some money for their help. In this way, animals such as cows and goats both allow and deny movement of residents in their landscape, and therefore can expand or foreclose illaqa.

Animals help sustain the circulation of bodies within Neelum in ways beyond those afforded by infrastructure like bridges and pathways. For example, the goats are slaughtered on special occasions, such as weddings and funerals, which draws relatives and friends from far and near. Similarly, home grown chickens (referred to as “desi” chickens) are consumed only on important occasions such as a marriage or an important family visit. Therefore, goats and chickens as sources of food maintain familial and diasporic linkages. The examples of various milk products whose production is increased by accessing the malis also speak to this. Animals allow humans to create and maintain modes of relationality, which are difficult to sustain otherwise. Surprisingly, this also includes the creation of virtual communities. One of my collaborators explains:

Girls often steal eggs from chickens. Usually, they are the ones put in charge of collecting eggs, [and] they often hide some for themselves. They sell the eggs in the bazaar and use the money to purchase credit for their mobile phones. They then send text messages to their *sahailees* (close friends).

Open Yet Embracing, Closed Yet Expansive, Shrinking Yet Unfolding



A fan wearing a T-shirt with the slogan “Winner takes Kashmir” during a recent cricket match between Pakistan and India, photograph courtesy of Facebook.

The photograph above depicts a man wearing a shirt with the slogan “Winner takes Kashmir” at a cricket match between Pakistan and India. The slogan is an excellent reminder that the people of Kashmir remain transfixed within someone else’s imagination. In fact, amongst Kashmiris themselves, there is ample diversity on visions for its future, ranging from a combative approach to accommodation and negotiation with India and Pakistan.³⁹ Junaid points out that while many Kashmiris in Pakistan acknowledge how Pakistan has stood by them, behind the Pakistani state’s support “lies a form of manipulation, which must be pointed out,” a support which encourages independence from India but only a merger with Pakistan.⁴⁰

The LoC and its militarization significantly restrict movement in the region. Additionally, the uncertainty and irresolution caused by the LoC creates unique conceptual and material affects, which shape collective Kashmiri identity.⁴¹ *The Herald* (a popular Pakistani magazine) published a story about a woman who waited 45 years and travelled some 3,000 kilometers to be reunited with her mother on the other side of the LoC, while in terms of actual distance is only some 30 kilometers apart.⁴² Another local newspaper features the story of a Kashmiri groom who, while just few kilometres away from his bride’s home across the LoC, is forced to travel some 1,100 km to enter Pakistan from a border crossing near Lahore.⁴³ Several people have advocated to make the LoC more permeable to allow for familial and commercial linkages, opening the possibilities of new kinds of solutions (and questions) for Kashmir.⁴⁴

Life in Neelum remains hostage to the possibility that cross-border hostilities may resume at any point.⁴⁵ During the 14 years of border conflict, the people I worked with described how they were cut off from their illaqa, often reduced to taking refuge in underground shelters for extended periods of time. This impacted their ability to tend the land, raise cattle and engage in the many practices necessary for sustaining everyday life in Neelum. Nusrat, who was in grade 5 when a ceasefire was reached between India and Pakistan, recalls: “When the firing stopped, we felt so strange. We could now go out, freely roam the land and just be.”

How can we understand Neelum (and by extension Kashmir) outside of geopolitics? Neelum, like much of Kashmir, is heavily mediated by nation-states, disasters, humanitarians and other (often masculine) discourses. Bodies in Neelum work in the landscape to create routes and routines that are disentangled from geopolitics and other prescriptive forces. The mountainscapes and more-than-human bodies of Neelum generate unique affective and situated intimacies. These affective ecologies are very much tied to the production of illaqa by drawing residents back to the landscape or opening new spaces for bodily incursion, such as the remote edges of mountains where the jangli payyaz grows or the chicken eggs that allow young women to text their friends, opening other kinds of (virtual) spaces. The very circulation of bodies stitched within the materiality of everyday life such as washing clothes, collecting food and grazing are forms of ambulatory emplacement which disrupt the

³⁹ Yasmeeen, Samina, "Pakistan's Kashmir Policy: Voices of Moderation?" *Contemporary South Asia*, 12, no. 2 (2003): 187-202.

⁴⁰ Junaid, Mohamad, “Kashmiri View of Pakistan: Solidarity without Demands,” *Tanqeed: A Magazine of Politics and Culture*, October 2017, www.tanqeed.org/2016/10/a-kashmiri-view-of-pakistan-solidarity-without-demands/

⁴¹ Kabir, Ananya Jahanara, "Cartographic Irresolution and the Line of Control," *Social Text*, 27, no. 4 101 (2009): 45-66.

⁴² Shah, Danial and Jariwala, Mithila, “Homecoming: a Pakistani Daughter Reunites with her Indian Mother,” *The Herald*, January 29, 2017. <http://herald.dawn.com/news/1153651/homecoming-a-pakistani-daughter-reunites-with-her-indian-mother>

⁴³ Naqash, Tariq, “Islamabad, New Delhi asked to allow wedding parties to travel across LoC,” *Dawn News*, April 7, 2015.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1174421/islamabad-new-delhi-asked-to-allow-wedding-parties-to-travel-across-loc>

⁴⁴ Chari, PR., Hassan Askari Rizvi, Rashid Ahmed Khan and Suba Chandran, *The Kashmir Dispute: Making Borders Irrelevant*, (New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. 2009).

⁴⁵ Masood, Salman, “In Kashmir, Pakistan Questions India’s ‘Surgical Strikes’ on Militants,” *New York Times*, October 1, 2016. https://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/10/02/world/asia/kashmir-pakistan-india.html?_r=0&referrer=https://m.facebook.com/

geopolitical boundedness of territory.⁴⁶

Understood this way, Neelum is open yet embracing, closed yet expansive, shrinking yet unfolding, determined by the circulation and movement of Kashmiri bodies in its landscapes. The affective entanglements between human and more-than-human bodies play an important role in maintaining and preserving relationality in an otherwise “remote” and “un-navigable” region.

Kleinman conceptualizes moral life as “carrying on our existence, negotiating important relations with others, doing work that means something to us, and living in some particular local place where others are also passionately engaged in these same existence activities.”⁴⁷ He argues that “moral experience is always about practical engagements in a particular local world, a social space that carries cultural, political, and economic specificity.”⁴⁸ I extend this notion to moral life *in landscape*, to encapsulate the social labor and daily life chores performed by residents of Neelum as placed within their landscapes. Remaining emplaced within Neelum despite ongoing conditions of colonial occupation - particularly restrictions on movement - is a powerful example of a life in the meantime, a *pragmatic presentism*,⁴⁹ where life-work is diligently performed to achieve undefined, multiple and possible futures. Living off the land and waterways in Neelum and understanding relationships with landscape as a conglomeration of public and private intimacies allows us to understand the bodily presence and circulation of residents in Neelum as a maintenance of place, integral to ongoing struggles for Kashmir.

There are many forces that discourage mobility in Neelum. These include numerous military checkpoints and landmines as well as the LoC itself. Based on self-serving commercial interests and technocratic understandings of nature conservation,⁵⁰ there are also other kinds of restrictions on landscapes and waterscapes put in place by the Pakistani state. For example, fishing the Neelum river is prohibited, as is collecting certain medicinal plants and mushrooms from its forests.

Everyday life in Neelum challenges the notion of spatial homogeneity demanded by the Pakistani state and its borders. As described previously, even the location of home is multiple, as is land ownership, which is rarely consolidated into a singular spatial block. For example, a household might have land where they grow maize adjacent to their village house, but also in various patches spread throughout the mountainscapes at varying altitudes and locations. These dispersed land-holdings are inherited, based in memory and undermine spatial homogeneity, but also reconfigure how one understands proximity and distance, space and landscape, as being unbounded, fragmented, dispersed and varied.

Neelum has been cut off from Srinagar (the cultural capital of the once unified Kashmir) for decades. During my research in Neelum and its surrounding mountainscapes (including other valleys in the region which do not fall under the ambit of Kashmir), I noted similarities in terms of land-based lifestyles, migratory practices and other forms of ecological knowledges and consciousness that stem from making life hospitable in the mountainscapes as opposed to simply being Pakistani or Kashmiri. The common language spoken in the mountainous region (Hindko) also speaks of another shared similarity. Collectively known as “pahari” people (or “mountain” people) as opposed to only Kashmiris or Pakistanis, people in this mountainous region are united by a mode of life built upon reliance, respect and attachment to landscape as well as the difficulties and dangers of doing so.

⁴⁶ Smith, Sara, "Intimate Geopolitics: Religion, Marriage, and Reproductive Bodies in Leh, Ladakh," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 102, no. 6 (2012): 1511-1528; Smith, Sara, Nathan W. Swanson, and Banu Gökarıksel, "Territory, Bodies and Borders," *Area*, 48, no. 3 (2016): 258-261.

⁴⁷ Kleinman, Arthur, *What Really Matters: Living a Moral Life Amidst Uncertainty and Danger*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1-2.

⁴⁸ Kleinman, Arthur, "Experience and its Moral Modes: Culture, Human Conditions, and Disorder," *Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, 20 (1999): 355-420, p. 365.

⁴⁹ See Muñoz, José Esteban, *Cruising Utopia: The then and there of Queer Futurity*, (New York: NYU Press, 2009).

⁵⁰ Ali, Nosheen, "Spaces of Nature: Producing Gilgit-Baltistan as the Eco-body of the Nation," *Ethnoscripts*, 16, no. 1 (2014): 115-123.

Intellectually and culturally, Neelum was perhaps never an “important” part of unified Kashmir. I also noticed some resentment from Kashmiri-speaking residents (essentially “migrants” from Indian-administered Kashmir) towards Hindko speakers, as being “unhygienic and uneducated”, hinting at possible histories of internal colonialism within Kashmir. Having no or limited access to Indian-administered Kashmir (being a Pakistani citizen, the practicalities of border-crossing are rather complex), I find it more compelling to understand Neelum as part of a heterogeneous Kashmir, defined by the intimacies of living in landscape rather than a historic configuration within a unified polity, knowledge of which is impossible for me to access. I understand Neelum as a unique space, caught between allegiance to Srinagar and forced inclusion within Pakistan, and an everyday pahari (mountain) way of life - a lived territory in its own right.

The bakherwals are a nomadic group of people who raise livestock and move from one mali to another regardless of whether it is situated in Kashmir or Pakistan. Their large caravans can be seen defiantly crossing provincial and territorial borders. They have been raising livestock across the malis in Northern Pakistan and Kashmir long before the firming up of geopolitical borders, indicating that connections and routes have always existed. An understanding of Kashmir rooted in movement and flow, interconnectivity, intimacy and landscape – pahari modes of life – can perhaps inspire new language which is generative and does not seek to constrain, constrict or categorize.

Conclusion

Inayatullah and Blaney suggest that instead of rejecting sovereignty altogether, it is perhaps more useful to reimagine sovereignty as “multiple and overlapping” to accommodate the transnational flows and multilayered processes that disallow boundaries from being absolute.⁵¹ Shneiderman’s ethnographic work shows us that states may even create alternative citizenship categories for border residents in response to demands and practices from below, in non-postcolonial trajectories of state formation.⁵² However, I remain skeptical of centering the state as the principal adjudicator and the only valid complement to life and politics, regardless of how we understand the sovereign. State-centered writings, in my opinion, further epistemic violence by permitting only particular conversations rooted in specific normative assumptions mistaken for absolute truths. They also fail to provide safeguards against co-optation by the sovereign. In fact, I find the language of refusal far more sophisticated and generative to reflect life in Kashmir.⁵³

Karrar and Mostowlansky argue that perhaps instead of approaching Northern Pakistan [and Kashmir] as a “border area”, what if they are approached as an “assemblage of marginality” that extends beyond location to integrate regional experiences of colonialism, nationalist histories of inclusion/exclusion, political economy and local identity formation?⁵⁴ I have purposefully chosen not to emphasize marginality as a unifying marker for the region but have instead drawn attention to the situated intimacies and movements which anchor residents to an ambulatory and shape-shifting notion of a territory. This is not because I want to romanticize and mute certain elements of life (for example those of political economy) but because there is “something” about illaqa that does not adequately make its way into our writings on Kashmir (or on Northern Pakistan).

I often asked the people I interviewed: “Why don’t you leave Neelum, given the difficulties of life here?” The question typically catches people off-guard; perhaps they have never thought about

⁵¹ Inayatullah, Naeem and David Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 171.

⁵² Shneiderman, Sara B., "Himalayan Border Citizens: Sovereignty and Mobility in the Nepal–Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) of China Border Zone," *Political Geography*, 35 (2013): 25-36.

⁵³ For example, see Simpson, Audra, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*, (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2014).

⁵⁴ Karrar, Hasan H., and Till Mostowlansky, "Assembling Marginality in Northern Pakistan," *Political Geography*, 63 (2018): 65-74, p. 65.

leaving. Some would retaliate with an even stronger provocation: “Why should we leave? Regardless of the hardships we face, this is our illaqa. Even those who have left eventually make their way back home.” The rich, productive imaginations and social labor that goes into the circulation of the illaqa is an important analytical space, one that I have attempted to centralize in this writing. Landscapes are not just location - geopoints *A* and *B* - but *agentive* spaces which inform the aspirations, skepticism and betrayals of life therein. They act upon and are acted upon by human and more-than-human bodies and are central to the stories of chronicity and social repair I seek to write about the region.⁵⁵



Shahida Bibi's siblings praying at their mother's grave on the way to school, photograph by Shahida Bibi.

It is difficult to initiate any conversation on Kashmir without acknowledging the elephant in the room: colonial occupation. For me, this is a necessary etiquette of engagement without which I become a direct participant in the silences and erasures that sustain the fictions of Pakistan-“administered” Kashmir. I stand resolute in this position and am thankful to the people I worked with for often reminding me that I am not “one of them” and that any solidarity I may offer is really insufficient until I am prepared to engage in a radical repositioning and redistribution of the benefits and protections that I embody as a Pakistani citizen - readjustments I am not yet prepared to undertake. Let me offer an example:

One evening, the small guesthouse in Neelum where I stayed (it only has two rooms) was suddenly filled by a large number of men. These were members of Pakistan-administered

⁵⁵ For example, see Aijazi, Omer, "Who Is Chandni Bibi?: Survival as Embodiment in Disaster Disrupted Northern Pakistan," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, 44, no. 1 (2016): 95-110.

Kashmir's last remaining nationalist political party. Within minutes, the courtyard was full. As they waited for their leader to arrive, the caretaker of the guesthouse strongly suggested that I lock myself in my room and draw the curtains, as things could get rowdy. Plus, I had no business in being a part of this "internal" conversation. He suggested that for my own safety, I should not let anyone in. I did as I was requested. From my room, I could hear people clapping, possibly indicating that their leader had arrived. Shortly after someone started to speak on a loudspeaker, I heard hurried knocks on my door. I didn't open as instructed. Eventually, the person gave up. But sooner or later, I heard another knock. After every 10 minutes or so, someone would want to get into my room. Sometimes they would just knock, other times they would yell: "jaldi, darwaza kholo" (hurry, open the door!). I counted at least 10 different people wanting in. Later, I learned that participants of the rally needed to go to the bathroom! The bathroom in the other room was in a state of disrepair and only my room offered some hope. By placing my safety and comfort at the center of the universe (not sure if I would be comfortable letting strangers use my bathroom even if I had known), I was a material impediment to the internal political processes of Kashmir even if in a trivial way, such as blocking the dignified gastric releases of political party workers. I learned they had to go do their "business" in the jungle.

I have always wondered why works of fiction on Kashmir are far more satisfying and enriching than their academic counterparts. For example, writings by Basharat Peer (*Curfewed Night*), Mirza Waheed (*The Collaborator*), Salman Rushdie (*Shalimar the Clown*), Arundhati Roy (*The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*), Malik Sajjad (*Munnu*), and Ather Zia (poetry) offer valuable narrative and rhetorical resources for imagining an alternative to a militarized postcolonial colonial sovereignty and even sovereignty itself. Conversely, most academic writings on Kashmir remain stuck, apologetic and underwhelming. Hence, this paper is also about developing the courage to attempt counter-projects of seeing, analyzing and representation to "agitate the dominant imaginaries, trouble the subtle ruses of state power, and, in the process, train a new disobedient sensorium"⁵⁶ - whether this is by paying attention to Neelum's onions, mushrooms, chickens and goats or my own (clumsy) navigation of the terrain.

While I have attempted to invoke a Deleuze-inspired working of movement, space and its re/de-territorialization, I admit my devotion to Deleuze begins and ends with Wikipedia. *Do I really need a dead white guy to help me understand Kashmir?* When the resources to do so are right here: the human and more-than-human bodies which situate and are situated by Neelum. Their attachments, movements and flows demonstrate life vocabularies as do the landscapes which act as the stage on which these genres of life unfold. My own ambulatory challenges in Neelum, how I struggled just to get from one place to another, provides me further evidence that the body in movement is indeed a site of data and theory, expressed through not just the navigation of mountainscapes, but also the investments made in the land and in food.

⁵⁶ Junaid, Mohamad, "Seeing Not like a State," *RAIOT: Challenging the Consensus*, May 2016, http://raiot.in/seeing-not-like-a-state-on-rollie-mukherjees-images-of-kashmir/#_ftnref1.



The body in movement is a repository of data and theory, photograph by Abdul Basit.

I would like to momentarily focus on my *own* body, its movement, flow (and stasis), and how my sweat, tears, blisters, rashes and bruises are also sites of knowledge. For one thing, I would not have written this paper in this way, if I had not gotten lost, injured, tired and broken down by Neelum’s landscapes. Known as “motta bhai” (fat brother) by the village children, I was both amused and thrilled to learn how my daily descent and ascent into the mountainscapes inspired an excitement amongst them. In anticipation of my incursions, children would excitedly congregate on their rooftops and place friendly bets on how long I would take to get down, how many times I would stop to catch my breath or drink water. When leaving, one child even professed that he would “miss me”, even though we had never met before. I was certainly an important character in the drama of Neelum.

I also picked up countless theoretical cues by eating in company. Initially, I was hesitant in accepting people’s invitations to break bread. The following excerpt from my journal walks us through my thinking:

There is such little food to eat in general, but I am beginning to think if rejecting an invitation, refusing to eat after someone has gone through the trouble of preparing a meal, making chai, running to the bazaar to buy biscuits, or even cut up a cucumber is actually more damaging... and counterproductive to what I seek to understand in Neelum. It seems I am understanding accepting an invitation to eat as an act of ‘taking away’. While the engagement far exceeds a mere taking away of food (resources). It signals an acceptance of someone’s generosity, it

means taking the time to go to someone's house (no matter how far away they might live or how difficult it may be to get there). It means allowing yourself to be further enveloped by landscape, sociality and experience. The home is an extremely private space and an extremely privileged site to which most strangers are not privy. Can accepting an invitation to eat even within the context of scarcity be understood as a gift, a form of reciprocity, as method and theory generation? *Shit, I think I had it wrong all this time.*



Dasterkhwan ("table cloth" or "great spread"), photograph by the author.

In this paper, I have attempted to rethink Kashmir's sovereignty as much as I have attempted to take analytical and literary risks, simply because we cannot break new ground on Kashmir using the same tired tools. If we are really committed to understanding and articulating visions of Kashmir which are fully formed and realized, we must locate theory and methodology as mutually constitutive *within* our literary genres (not outside of them) to elaborate narrative writing as praxis. Otherwise the rich textures and features of life and world will continue to evade our analytical purview. I take Arundhati Roy's challenge to heart:

[On Kashmir] we have to be able to think clearly, speak freely and listen fearlessly to things we may not want to hear. We have to find a new imagination. This applies to everybody, on all sides of the dispute. Something beautiful could come of it. Why not? Why ever not?⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Roy, "Azadi."



Odd perspective, photograph by the author.