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TRADE, BOUNDARIES, AND SELF-DETERMINATION

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Introduction

In Kashmir, the political and symbolic importance of trade outstrips calculative statistical outcomes. Rather, the past and present of economic regulation in Kashmir, the political activism of traders' collectives, and the importance of the marketplace as a site for protest activities clarifies the political importance of trade in being deeply entangled with ideas of sovereignty. In my broader research, I argue that the networks of trade and exchange map out the political geography of a frontier, connecting the Kashmir region with heterogeneous highland spaces in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Afghanistan. Once trade partners in trans-Himalayan caravan networks – currently sundered by Asia's most militarized and intractable borders – these spaces bear out thorny relationships with forms of nationalism imposed upon them. In this context, trade concerns not only political economy but also serves to re-politicize the realm of the spatial conceived as “social relations stretched out” (Massey 1994).

A concept that provides a corresponding heuristic is that of “the frontier.” The term is generally used to refer to geographical and cultural peripheries: zones that are viewed as both political barriers and sites of contact and exchange. At the same time, the frontiers are also deeply implicated in histories of colonial violence, expansion as well as resistance. As such, frontiers dramatize unsettled questions of borders, identity, and community by manifesting histories and practices that had to be discounted in order to establish the self-presence of more dominant forms of space and identity, such as that of a bounded nation-state (Saraf 2020a). Kashmir's historical trade relationships that radiate beyond present-day borders into the highlands of south and central Asia offer a lens into precisely such material and affective geographies that extend national boundaries. Tracing the history of mobile trade networks, and efforts to control, usurp, or redirect them also helps us understand the paradox of the lines of control that territorially demarcate Kashmir as simultaneously violently entrenched and irrepressibly disputed.

Recent years have seen a renewed interest in frontiers as spaces of indeterminacy and volatility, conditions that are relevant to understanding the constraints and possibilities amidst which the work of trade occurs in the Kashmir region. Kashmir has been a zone of enduring struggle, both as site of an ongoing movement for self-determination and intense territorial rivalry since the Partition of British India in 1947. Three wars caused the lands of the former Himalayan kingdom to be divided between India, Pakistan, and China. The highly militarized Line of

Control (LoC) serves as the de facto border between the Indian and Pakistan administered parts of the former Himalayan kingdom. After years of disenchantment with Indian rule, a popular armed movement for freedom – *azaadi* – was launched in the Kashmir Valley in 1989 and resulted in more than a decade of armed militancy. Met with direct state violence and emergency laws that grant immunity to Indian military forces, various legal and extra-legal forms of coercion, torture, detention, and killings have constituted a “permanent state” of emergency (Duschinski and Ghosh 2017) for subduing the dissident population of an unstable border state. Since August 2019, the unilateral mutilation of Article 370, the removal of land rights and the bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir has heightened the violent forms of political intransigency and uncertainty that have characterized the Kashmir dispute since the beginning of the *Azaadi* movement.

The Moral and Political Economy of Trade

My fieldwork in Kashmir was provoked by the question of how quotidian activities of buying and selling, provisioning and payments, are publicly and privately sustained during prolonged political violence. Pursuing this query in the marketplaces of Kashmir, it became clear that one way of maintaining public lives and relationships was through reliance on historical trade relationships (Saraf 2020b). Cutting across rigid categories of communal identity and militarized boundaries, such networks are based on diverse religious and ethnic communities engaging in the common goals of exchange and provisioning. Supply chains for commodities and the material sediments of their human and nonhuman agents – brokers, but also bills, advertising pamphlets, and trade directories – extended networks not only into the Indian mainland but also westward and northward across heavily militarized borders, activating a field for expressing alliances and empathies that were not permitted in polarized political languages of the mainstream. Intersections of trade, commerce, and livelihoods in Kashmir, as elsewhere at frontier outposts, produced internal logics of autonomy and self-sufficiency that did not depend on external recognition for legitimacy (Hansen 2005). Training focus on the work of trade, as expressed in this setting, provided significant ways of marking the history of Kashmir as a frontier prior to its splitting and subsequent absorption by the Indian state – a history that is important for understanding contemporary idioms of freedom (*azaadi*) envisioned by traders as cross-border mobility and the ability to trade freely with all partners. Despite the hardening of de facto boundaries and the criminalization of crosscutting connections, frontiers are not coincident with national borders.

Inhabiting the space of the frontier had a changing impact on the work practices of traders who never fully assimilated into the nation-state and its territorial legal regimes. Despite having to work consistently amid violence and indeterminacy that visibly curtailed trade, the flow of goods and payments persisted as traders participated in multiple networks – ethnic, historical, national, and para-statal. Participation in these networks in turn, allowed traders to sustain their practices in a contested zone where legal and regulatory institutions taken for granted elsewhere are rendered unstable, and forms of surveillance and security are all pervasive. At the same time, trade networks – past and present – also enable expressions of solidarity with Kashmiris living in areas under Pakistan’s administration, as well as connections with communities beyond the geopolitical entities of “India” and “Pakistan” – such as in Kabul and Kashgar – in the highlands that forged what I call the trans-Himalayan trade-ecumene.

In the context of the self-determination movement, this was particularly evident during the agitation that followed the Amarnath Land transfer in 2008, when the administrative decision to transfer about 100 acres of forest land for the construction of temporary facilities for Hindu

pilgrims caused the Muslim majority Kashmir Valley to erupt in protests against what was perceived as religiously motivated encroachment upon their lands. In response, an “economic blockade” was imposed on by the Hindu-majority neighboring district of Jammu by cutting off all transport and cargo on the Jammu-Srinagar highway, the main vehicular channel connecting the Kashmir Valley to the Indian mainland. Protestors in Kashmir then took out massive marches to the Line of Control (LoC), chanting slogans that expressed the desire to “break the LoC” and exchange in the markets of Muzaffarabad and Rawalpindi: cities in Pakistan that were conjoined with Srinagar in regional webs of trade before the partition of British India. Traders’ collectives entered the political sphere with vigorous demands to be allowed to trade freely with all partners. I was told during informal conversations in 2013 that due to the Amarnath land agitation, relations between the respective traders’ collectives in Kashmir and Jammu deteriorated to a point where their members stopped talking to their counterparts. Apparently, relations thawed only after intervention and mediation by their colleagues and trade delegates from Azad Jammu Kashmir (under Pakistan administration). In this way, trade and traders’ networks were a field for both expressing and mediating the politics of self-determination. These events also led to the inauguration of the regulatory artifact of “cross-LoC trade” that I discuss later in the chapter.

Reflecting on the widespread food riots in the English countryside in the late eighteenth century, the English historian E.P. Thompson (1971) elaborated the term “moral economy” to show how markets both dramatize and generate political and moral evaluations rooted in exchange communities. Thompson argued that political acts by the English peasants sought to establish commonly held notions of fair price, just exchange and right to charity that drew on feudal values to oppose the risks and uncertainties of the free market economy. Rather than think the moral economy as entrenched within an enclosed community, I conjugate the concept of the “moral economy” with that of “the frontier” to emphasize potentials for studying mobility together with the transecting nature of trade networks and social movements. That such concerns underpinned key aspects of sovereign control escaped neither the princely durbar nor the colonial and postcolonial state. Recognizing that trade networks were crucial for diplomatic mediation, economic provisioning, and self-sufficiency, colonial and postcolonial strategies of occupation and integration continue to be shaped by strategies of blocking, controlling, and redirecting networks of exchange.

In what follows, I first describe conceptual links among frontiers, mobility, and territoriality. I then describe how the marketplace or bazaar becomes a productive site for investigating social movements and solidarities. Finally, I show how colonial and postcolonial governments used the control of trade networks and routes to consolidate contested boundaries and argue that the contemporary scrutiny, surveillance, and suppression of trade and traders has become an increasingly important component of the Indian state’s militarized governmentality in Kashmir.

Frontiers and “Itinerant Territoriality”

Against global upheavals, frontier ethnography conspicuously moved from colonial concerns around how to govern an unruly people toward engagements with frontier regions as sites for studying political order outside the nation-state (Leach 1954; Phanjoubam 2015). Rather than view frontier societies as primitive or stagnant, such ethnographies adopted a synchronic and historical perspective to elaborate distinctive indigenous forms of order that emerge from a dynamic and unstable interface with broader political configurations, as well as “institutionalized dissidence” (Gellner 1969), self-consciously maintained through a balance between religious and secular authority.

Correspondingly, frontiers also emerged as privileged arenas for studying the formation and transformations of ethnic groups as well as the relations between them. In the 1969 publication of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Barth and his colleagues rejected the view that ethnic groups were organic bounded entities that were ecologically situated and shared a common culture. Drawing on his fieldwork amongst Pathans in the Swat Valley as well as among nomadic peoples in Kurdistan, Barth emphasized the mutual maintenance of boundaries and boundary-crossing flows and exchanges, arguing that boundaries were simultaneously stable and in constant flux. Barth's theoretical framework emphasized the continual negotiation of boundaries and ongoing interaction with proximate others in the process of group formation – in other words, that boundary production and boundary-crossing were two sides of the same coin. This resonated with Uberoi's structural configuration of the Hindu-Kush Himalayan region as a “wall [that] is also a corridor,” a “revolving door” rather than an “open and shut gate” (1978). Observing that human activity invariably “leaks” through boundaries (2000), Barth argued that the productivity of boundary zones provided opportunities not just for state-like entities such as military and customs officials, but also refuge and retreat for political dissidents. In the more quotidian dimension, boundaries activated a constant field of “affordances” for “mediators, traders and middlepersons of all kinds” (28–29).

These “affordances” ascribed to the frontier by Barth mark it out as a site of exchange, circulation, and mobility. Movements through frontiers and their crossings produce contingent notions of licit and illicit exchanges. Writing on endogenous ideas of space and boundaries in Africa, Achille Mbembe (2000) highlights the “relative lack of congruence between the territory of the state and areas of exchange,” arguing that rather than being delimited by boundaries in the classical sense, political entities were formed by “an imbrication of multiple spaces, constantly joined, rejoined and recombined through wars, conquests and the mobility of goods and persons” (263). Mbembe coins the term “itinerant territoriality” to designate precolonial territoriality operating through “thrusts, detachments and scissions,” but the analytic of itinerancy extends well into the postcolonial present.

Bringing the preceding perspectives to critically bear upon Kashmir studies helps to understand how mobile trade networks sustained social movements under repressive regimes. In addition, following these networks allows us to discern alternate geographies of belonging that cut across rigid categories of communalized identity and militarized boundaries. In Kashmir, the political dispute is seen in terms of territorial rivalry between India and Pakistan, correspondingly acquiring communal overtones of warfare between antagonistic categories of Hindus and Muslims. While conducting ethnographic fieldwork in the markets of Srinagar, however, I came across ideas of space and identity that questioned and subverted such statist discourses. They gestured toward alternative political claims and attachments forged in the distinctive regional histories of trade. For instance, through a striking riparian metaphor, one of my interlocutors urged me to visualize Kashmir as a tributary of the “Silk Road” imagined as a river, with Kashmir as part of a tributary that yoked together the “Kaaf” states [whose names began with the urdu letter *kaaf*]: Kabul, Kashgar, and Kashmir. As I encountered representations of spatial imaginaries that bypassed the cartographic entities of India and Pakistan, I was also struck by how many of these places – former trade partners such as Kabul and Kashgar but also Yarkand, Khotan, and Lhasa strain against forms of contemporary nationalism imposed upon them.

This focus on boundaries and movement (Aggarwal 2004; Sökefeld 2015) by engaging trade networks also intersects scholarship under “Indian Ocean” and “inter-Asian” studies of connection, circulation, partiality, and trans-regionality beyond the analytic foci of globalization, and which are extended into historical patterns of interaction and exchange. Such patterns occur between societies that have recognized each other over centuries, through social and religious

infrastructures that long precede the establishment of nation-states (Chatterjee 2013; Duara 1995; Ho 2017). Yet a focus on Kashmir also challenges some of the emphasis on mobility in this literature (Marsden 2018), where in the current context traders in Kashmir operate amidst an overwhelming sense of confinement amid curfews, communications blackouts, and militarized boundary maintenance through checkpoints, blockades, and the unyielding nature of the Line of Control.

The Public Life of Resistance

The bazaar or the marketplace has been a historically important public arena for investigating interaction, communication, and exchange in Muslim societies (Baig 2014; Gilmartin 1988; Gilsenan 1982; Geertz 1979; Javed 2018) – perhaps unsurprising given the doctrinal defense of commerce as useful and worthy within Islam and the role of the mercantile classes in the spread of Islam around the globe. The space of the market is considered to be an important arena of sociability and organization of communal life in the city outside the kinship group. The “bazaar-mosque” dyad has been an important trope in this regard, signaling not only the spatial proximity of the two but also the fact that the purpose of business calculations far exceeded exchanges of material commodities and assayed religious, political, and cultural values. Of course, in South Asia this is not unique to Islam – other historians have spoken of the temple and bazaar too as a central knot in the social fabric of cities (Freitag 1989; Ostor 1984). As a node of traffic for various persons and modes of exchange, the marketplace is thus both locally embedded and outwardly exposed. As a place without a single locus of authority, where exchange and politics interact in dynamic ways, bazaars become sites of investigation for forms of urban solidarity and collective action that ground and often develop into broad-based social movements (Keshavarzian 2007; see also Spector 2017).

In Kashmir, the built environment as well as everyday exchange activities in the marketplace directly register the imprint of political violence and resistance – material traces of marches and massacres, the shifting terrains of “normalcy” and losses caused by curfews and shutdowns. The resurgence of the *azaadi* movement since 2008 witnessed mass rallies and public protests against Indian rule gaining immense popular support (Kak 2011). In the summer of 2010, news of civilians being killed in yet another “fake encounter” caused the Valley to erupt in massive demonstrations. Cyclical waves of protests against civilian killings followed the incident, leading to further civilian mortality caused by the police and paramilitary forces opening fire at protest demonstrations, which in turn led to bigger processions.

The protests, programmed around calendars, often commenced in the summer to coincide with the rise in economic activity, and gained momentum around landmark symbolic anniversaries such as Martyr’s Day on July 13 and the Independence Days of Pakistan and India that fall on August 14 and 15, respectively. The calendars marked out periods for suspension of businesses, the shutting down of markets, banks, schools, and universities and indicated days of “slackening” (*dheel*) with concessions for shopping, fasting, and celebration of local festivals. The marketplace thus became an important site for publicly expressing and registering resistance against state authority. The bazaar and its inhabitants did not just comply with the shutdowns – indeed, their participation was essential to the success of the protests – but various traders’ collectives also vigorously implemented strikes or *hartals* of their own to suspend market transactions and frame political demands.

One of my key field sites, Srinagar’s main retail center Lal Chowk, adjoined the state secretariat as well as the volatile neighborhood of Maisuma (Sharma 2020), the location of the Srinagar office of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) – an important component part of the

Hurriyat coalition. Thus Lal Chowk was an important venue for carrying out protest marches, for implementing defiant hartals and shutdowns and for gauging ordinary responses toward the ongoing dispute. My interlocutors considered Lal Chowk to be a metonym for protests against Indian rule, particularly because of attention it received in TV news media: “Whenever there’s an uprising here, flocks of cameras descend upon Lal Chowk and beam it to drawing rooms in Delhi – most Indians know Kashmir through images of Lal Chowk.”

Traders in Lal Chowk generally complied with the hartal calls given by political leadership of traders’ bodies. Sometimes these extended for months, leading to losses amounting to millions of dollars for the trade and business communities and affiliated workers. In markets not as central or visible as Lal Chowk, I observed that traders, shopkeepers, and clients often adapted their daily rhythms with an eye to the shutdown: for example, by changing their opening and closing time to the period between the pre-dawn *fajr* prayers and sunrise, or by exchanging from the backdoor for a couple of hours in the day while staying shuttered down in order to maintain optics of the total hartal.

Upon asking how they remembered the long summer of protests in 2010, I occasionally received divided, ambivalent responses from some traders in Lal Chowk. While no one disputed the importance of the *tehrreek* (movement), the role of class in shaping these responses was striking. Well-to-do traders with long, intergenerational practices and resources that saw their families through the furlough period remembered the protests enthusiastically. Some insisted that local networks of *mohalla* (neighborhood) committees and *bait ul-maal* (house of wealth/provisions) mobilized to ensure workers (*mazdoor*) who carried out tasks like lifting, weighing, and transporting goods did not suffer from lack of food or shelter. Some who were visibly less prosperous, and more precarious, hinted at elements of coercion and fervently hoped never to experience such disruption again. The threat to livelihoods that long periods of shutdown posed has also been actively mobilized as a punitive counterinsurgency strategy, evinced in prolonged curfews and the lockdowns enforced by the Indian state apparatus. The lockdown that followed the mutilation of Article 370 in August 2019 reportedly cost the economy in Kashmir more than 2.4 billion dollars (Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry, notification dated December 17, 2019).

Undoubtedly Lal Chowk is space of not just commercial but also immense symbolic potential. Traders often mentioned the area’s political significance for the liberation movement: named after the Red Square in Moscow, this is where India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, following the Dogra accession in 1947, publicly promised that Kashmir’s political future would be “decided by the people.” Viewed as the promise of plebiscite, it was subsequently aggressively revoked. Since, Lal Chowk has witnessed some of the most explosive confrontations of the *azaadi* movement. The ruins of the Palladium Cinema – that now functions as a bunker where soldiers keep watch behind barricades and barbed wire, is a prominent feature of the space. In 1985, I was told, crowds that filed out from Palladium after watching the *Lion of the Desert* – a historical action film based on Omar Mukhtar, the Libyan Bedouin leader who fought the Italians in the Second World War – were inspired by the protagonist’s story to launch an armed insurrection against Indian rule.

The clock tower, Ghantaghar, was another important landmark. The tallest structure situated in the market’s square, it zoomed into focus in the Indian mainstream media in the early 1990s when the president of the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) insisted on hoisting the Indian flag on top of the tower, particularly to mark the culmination of an infamous *rath yatra* – “chariot pilgrimage” – undertaken in a Toyota truck bedecked like an Aryan chariot to extend the sacred cartography of Hindu India into Kashmir (Jaffrelot 2009). For a while thereafter, the *ghantaghar* became the locus of competitive flag-hoisting by state officials, Indian soldiers and Kashmiri rebels until the ritual of flag-hoisting at the clock tower was disallowed in 2009.

Lal Chowk's terrain carries marks of devastating state violence. The Lal Chowk fire of April 1993 was allegedly started by soldiers from the Border Security Force (BSF) in retaliation for local residents burning down an abandoned army bunker (Report by Human Rights Watch 1995). More than a hundred civilians were killed in the blaze, which was followed by indiscriminate shooting – many died while trying to escape by jumping into the nearby river Jhelum. The graves of some of the victims lie on the banks, close to the market. Over the decades, several establishments in the area had witnessed deaths and destruction following grenade attacks and exchange of gunfire between rebels and state forces. Tracks of violence accumulated on the material landscape of the market and became a part of local teratology. At a different location, the decrepit red-brick facade of the Qausa building overlooked a busy crossing in downtown Srinagar. The building was once used as a torture and interrogation center by the state forces, and since then no one dared inhabit it again. The owner of the shop at the opposite corner said that on certain nights, disembodied screams from tortured souls emanated from its empty shell. These public, prominently located structures served as reminders of the horrors inflicted on ordinary people in the ongoing war, especially by the state's brutal counterinsurgency strategies.

The marketplace did not simply bear witness to performances of state power and resistance. Traders' networks also kept up the flow of essential provisions during prolonged curfews, strikes, and other forms of depredation. Commodities were secured through informal networks as well as informal practices of "credit" or deferred payment. Traders were also cognizant of political influences that seeped in from beyond the geographical coordinates of subcontinental South Asia. Recalling the rise of the armed movement in 1989, some traders suggested that the protest in Kashmir were inspired by independence movements that were being launched in parts of central Asia around the breakup of the Soviet Union. The political significance of trade and the political activism of traders can be better understood against the history of the enduring entanglements of commerce and sovereignty in the region, that we turn to in the next section.

Manipulating Boundaries, Redirecting Trade

At least since the colonial era, regulatory fabrications that suspended ordinary trade in order to redirect goods and people – what I term "trade artifacts" – were regularly deployed in the Kashmir region. As such, trade artifacts were harnessed to imperial, national as well as vernacular projects of boundary-making. Focusing on "reorientations" in the northern areas of Gilgit-Baltistan, Chad Haines writes how the "structuring of circulation" both constituted and transformed the frontier under colonial rule (2004). Rather than the mappable space, Haines describes how the frontier demarcated a "sphere" of state policy, in which ensuring *access* to trans-Karakorum trade (routes, ease of transport, availability of fodder for pack animals, and espionage) initially consumed colonial anxieties and insinuated colonial domination. Territorial demarcations remained vague and more importantly, manipulable, until the establishment of the Gilgit Agency encoded frontier spatiality through administrative reforms, the control of trans-frontier linkages, and integration of the region through new routes and their securitization (see also Ali 2019; Gupta 2019). Haines also notes that such transformations offered new possibilities to the inhabitants of these spaces while cutting off others.

After independence and partition of British India, the control of routes and access intensified along with increased militarization and securitization of the disputed region. Partition blocked off historical caravan trade routes extending from Kashmir through lands presently under territorial control of China and Pakistan. As part of the territorializing project, the Indian state made strategic infrastructural interventions in Kashmir and Ladakh to secure connectivity against its rivals Pakistan and China and redirect routes of access, provisioning and

mobility exclusively to the Indian mainland. Territorial control also became closely associated with economic integration through allocating massive economic packages and developmental spending, thereby producing a heavily indebted state economy in Jammu and Kashmir (Schaffer 2005). Simultaneously, the disputed rims of the former Himalayan kingdom were built up, militarized, and rigidified in contrast to the manipulability of mid-colonial boundaries. Scholars working in Kashmir have described the impact of such developments not just on borderland residents but also as a way of theorizing the operations of a paranoid state apparatus (Bhan 2013; Robinson 2013; Zia 2019). At present the highly militarized Line of Control (LoC) divides Indian-administered from Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Despite not being an internationally recognized border, the *de facto* nature of the LoC has dire implications for inhabitants on either side.

What follows is a brief description of a recent trade artifact colloquially termed as “cross-LoC trade” that was evolved as a “confidence building measure” in the bitterly contested region. Cross-LoC trade was established in 2008 against the backdrop of long-standing economic dependency and civilian anger toward state violence. A Joint Chamber was established to promote economic interaction, with representatives from the business elite from both India and Pakistan administered areas of Jammu Kashmir. Following several talks, meetings, and mediations, two Trade Facilitation Centres or TFCs were opened on one of Asia’s most hostile borders. One connected Chakan da Bagh in the Jammu sector to Rawalkot in AJK, and the other Uri in the Kashmir sector to Muzaffarabad in AJK. Publicized with much fanfare, cross-LoC trade was welcomed as a “pragmatic” and “normalizing” gesture to enhance goodwill and social interaction across the LoC.

With both India and Pakistan claiming authority over the highland region through distinct framings, strange customs were evolved to ensure that protocols of exchange were not legally tantamount to acknowledging the LoC as an international border. Therefore, trade was restricted to bartering in primary produce procured “originally” in either part of divided Kashmir. Special care toward language meant goods were “traded in” and “traded out” instead of “imported” and “exported,” and the exchange was not monetized. As non-monetized barter trade, no customs or taxes were paid on the goods that complied with the “origin clause” of being produced locally either part of divided Kashmir, although contentiously, non-local goods often formed the bulk of cross-LoC exchange. Furthermore, neither formal banking nor phone communication linking the divided region. Statistically speaking the actual commerce was negligible but the exchange was suffused by outsized symbolism, particularly for supposedly facilitating “social” connections across the LoC. As a regulatory fabrication, it was relegated to a remote and highly militarized border region cordoned off from everyday spaces of exchange, watched over by several security and intelligence agencies, and circumscribed by highly specified and cumbersome “standard operating procedures.”

For more than a decade, despite several logistical and political setbacks, cross-LoC trade was sustained by numerous traders and civil society actors, particularly those inhabiting areas adjoining the LoC and deeply invested in fostering and reviving cross-border kinship and social ties through economic exchange (Hussain and Singla 2020; Kira 2011). Since “blind trade” through barter had to be carried out without financial infrastructure or face-to-face interaction, much of cross-LoC exchange was carried out by traders with relatives across the *de facto* border – members of divided families – which itself, however, resulted in increased scrutiny and suspicion (Mir and Gattoo 2018; Qadri 2013). Traders’ representatives too also refused to impose or pay tax on contentious non-local goods coming in from the “other side,” insisting that divided Jammu Kashmir was to be treated as a single “free economic zone” (personal communication, February 2013).

On April 18, 2019, India's Ministry of Home Affairs announced the sudden, indefinite suspension of cross-LoC trade, citing that the trade routes were being "misused by the Pakistan based elements for funneling illegal weapons, narcotics and fake currency etc" (MHA notice). Timed to demonstrate the central government's resolve to erase cross-border support for militancy before the national elections commenced, in Kashmir the suspension caused prices of high-demand commodities like dates and prayer mats that were sourced through the trade and affected the livelihoods of traders, transporters, and laborers engaged in cross-LoC trade.

Many lamented that cross-LoC trade was doomed from the beginning due to its genesis in a "political" rather than an "economic" decision, that is, in being oriented toward generating social connections across the LoC rather than developing business relationships (Drabu 2019). While cross-LoC trade was definitely more a political than commercial exercise, I suggest that with its bizarre protocols it was less significant for producing cross-border social connections than for managing contested sovereignty in this deeply disputed frontier region. As an artifice of highly securitized, non-monetized and therefore non-taxed barter trade, it became important for enacting forms of boundary construction around questions of the payment or non-payment of customs, what commodities were to be permitted for barter trade, and for surveying and regulating mobility across the Line of Control. Since 2014, the rise of the BJP at the center and aggressive suppression of Kashmiri political demands made cross-LoC trade increasingly vulnerable. Right-wing politicians lobbying for its closure attacked cross-LoC trade as a threat to national security, a conduit for drugs as well as informal *hawala* transfers that funded anti-state activities from Pakistan. After demonetization in November 2016, financial intelligence and anti-terror agencies became particularly active in Kashmir and Uri, subjecting a large number of traders both at the LoC and elsewhere to increased scrutiny, investigations, and arrests.

Conclusion

The bizarre protocols of cross-LoC trade thus become comprehensible as being devised and enforced primarily to repress older geographies of contiguity and commerce in the borderlands for establishing the self-presence of nation-states. In this functional-farcical role of managing conflict, cross-LoC trade falls into an arena of political-economic negotiations over – and performances of – sovereignty, thus partaking in the history of political control through trade in the frontier borderlands. For the Indian state, it offered a means to defer the political problem of Kashmir's self-determination by "connecting" a divided region through trade, thereby suppressing the history of its violent severance. It also provided the state ample possibility for criminalizing the same "connections," depending on political expedience. For traders, however, who engaged cross-LoC commerce in all its absurdity and elasticity, its artifactual form served to activate transversal ideas of belonging, community, profit within an undivided political-economic zone, that are not permissible under the national regulatory regimes of rival states.

Thus, what looks like an aberration from the vantage of international trade takes on new significance when set against the archive of trade and politics. The establishment of cross-LoC trade was yet another attempt to control, redirect and trespass upon the vital networks of exchange that have historically ranged across the region, mixing political and cultural with economic exchange. As a canvas for expressing alternative forms of sovereignty, community, and belonging, networks of exchange and boundary making have consistently challenged colonial, princely, and postcolonial nation-statist authority. Presently, the sudden demise of cross-LoC trade is congruent with a more aggressive approach toward occupying the frontier, through the removal of all regulatory artifacts in which contestations of state sovereignty may be expressed, including Article 370 and 35A. Establishing intensified forms of economic integration (national

marketing agencies such as NAFED India taking over the procurement of horticultural produce), resource extraction (exclusive mining rights granted to external companies), and punitive measures (criminalization of traders engaged in cross-border trade), the Indian state has demonstrated its intransigence toward the rivaling potentials expressed in crosscutting networks of trade and exchange. Yet, since the history of trade persistently accounts for the region's political defiance, the impact of the various laws put in place for its control and regulation cannot be assessed from a perspective confined to the present moment.

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