

## Postdoctoral Research Project

### **Partitioned Borderlands: Ethics of Collaboration and Resistance in Postcolonial Pakistan**

This project extends my previous work on Political Anthropology, Migration Research and Postcolonial Studies into the fields of Partition Studies, Borderland Studies, and Anthropology of Ethics. Inquiring into the long-standing effects of the Partition of British India in 1947, the research explores the dialectical interplay of everyday ethics and postcolonial nation-building. Partition caused a religiously-charged genocide and mass migrations of Hindus and Sikhs to India, and Muslims to Pakistan, and had particular effects on borderland sites and the construction of majorities and minorities. This led, among others, to the destruction or neglect of heritage sites and various folk or “indigenous” forms of artistic expression.

The first aspect of research concerns ethical practices of collaboration *with* hegemonic forms of governing and practices of border-making, demonstrating the territorial and ideological effects of nation-building. Here, the project seeks to disentangle in which ways the nation state engenders moralizing discourses about Self and Other by paying attention to the public negotiation of cultural and religious norms, values, and practices. Second, the project elaborates on ethical dimensions of everyday resistance. It investigates how formations of resistance transgress and transcend various physical, semantic, metaphorical, and psychological borders and boundaries such as the manifold societal divisions imposed by the hegemonizing project of religious nationalism. The research also concentrates on documenting political, artistic, and spiritual collaborations, which may be preliminarily viewed as expressions and practices of an implicit “cross-border ethics”.

My ongoing fieldwork in the urban centers Lahore, Islamabad, and Karachi is currently being complemented by two localized case studies of peripheral borderlands and their subaltern minorities: First, the cross-border region of Baltistan, which continues to be affected by the long-standing legacy of the Kashmir conflict. Being separated from previous homelands in what has become Ladakh, India, across the Line of Control (LOC), a community of Balti refugees has deployed various strategies to collaborate with and to meet their kin across the border. Second, my research focuses on Cholistan, South Punjab, in the Thar desert, where contemporary lifeworlds are structured by the loss of access to previously shared religious, mythical, cultural, economic, and social sites in Rajasthan, India. The fieldwork currently concentrates on the Meghwal, a Hindu Dalit community whose everyday lives are shaped not only by their minority status, but also by their spiritual and artistic mobility across semantic and physical borders.