Borders Without Consent: Partition Politics and the Enduring Crisis of Identity in Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

The long-standing identity crisis in Kashmir takes its origins in the politics of partition and the fact that boundaries were imposed in the region without the will of the people which is the force that is still continuing to influence political, social and cultural life in the country. This study takes a critical look at the processes of drawing of territorial boundaries in 1947 and the contested accession of the princely state and the subsequent state practices in the post-1947 period of Kashmir which have created and reproduced identity conflicts across Kashmiri communities. Drawing on the postcolonial theory of the border and identity frameworks, the study place Kashmir in a paradigmatic position of how the historical and cultural connections can be cut, the indigenous agency can be degraded and the political exclusion can become established. Via an interpretative qualitative analysis of archival material, policy reports, and academic writings, this article unravels the geopolitical games of the India-Pakistan antagonism, the experienced reality of identity fragmentation and how state practices contaminate the creation of political subjectivities. Results indicate that the unresolved status of the Kashmir boundaries which is frequently justified without the approval of the population contributes to a crisis of belonging and belonging which cannot be simply addressed through the idea of territorial resolutions. The use of a sophisticated view of the functioning of nonconsensual partition politics in keeping identity battles going and the offering of possibilities of refiguring peace processes with Kashmiri agency and voice makes the study advance the border and conflict scholarship.

Keywords: Borders without consent, Kashmir conflict, partition politics, identity crisis, postcolonial borders, contested sovereignty

INTRODUCTION

The conflict in Kashmir represents one of the most enduring territorial and identity crises in the post-colonial world which is deeply rooted in the politics of partition and is sustained by unequal processes of state formation and competing claims to sovereignty. The dark history of the 1947 Partition of British India essentially changed political geography of South Asia through formation of the two new independent nations of India and Pakistan with the resultant mass displacement, communal violence and political conflicts. Among the most disputed results was the destiny of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, the

demarcation of which occurred without any significant input of relevance to its population and created a slice of broken polity that has since become a symbol of unresolved colonial histories and disputed identities of making (Bhat & Ahmad, 2023; Mishra, 2021).

Being located in very strategic borders, Jammu and Kashmir, a princely state having the majority population of the Muslims and a Hindu ruler by the name of Maharaja Hari Singh, stood in a unique position of the sand-table between south and central Asian regions. To think its indecisive judgment in the troubled months of 1947 when it had initially favorable and peaceful intentions of seeking independence was suddenly followed by an imbalanced situation as the tribesmen militias of the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan elected into the country submerged the region into a crisis when the Maharaja sought the intervention of India military forces, subject to the provision that, the area needed to get Indian accession into the Indian Union (Chereshneva, 2025). The resultant accession, established by signing the Instrument of Accession on 26 October 1947, was accepted by the Governor General of India, Lord Mountbatten, and promised to undergo popular consultation in the future. However, this promise of plebiscite was never implemented and the question of the sovereign will of Kashmir remained unresolved and contested by all the parties involved (Instrument of Accession, 1947).

The direct consequences of the accession were the first India- Pakistan war (19471948), which resulted in an uncomfortable cease fire and the creation of a de facto boundary that later was dubbed the Line of Control. This cease fire line essentially divided the region between Indian and Pakistani government but did not address the fundamental political issue of Kashmiri self determination (India-Pakistan War of 1947-1948). The non-resolution of Kashmir boundaries itself is symbolic of what many commentators have chosen to refer to as the unfinished business of Partition as to the failure to harmonize the territorial demarcation with the political desires and visions of those subjected to these novel geopolitical realities (Le Monde, 2025).

Politically and militarily aside, the Kashmir border politics has had significant effects on identity, belonging and political agency. The arbitrary division of the territory along with its further occupation by the Kashmiri nationals without their genuine involvement led to the further feeling of alienation and marginalization among the Kashmiri societies as the Indian nationalist and Pakistani nationalistic bases superimposed local socio cultural identities. Governance in India was first designed under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution granting Jammu Kashmir special autonomous status, purportedly as a means to allow regional peculiarity into the Indian Union. However, with the course of time, this special status was seen by most political actors and civilians in Kashmir, as a symbolic and inadequate one, which sometimes intensified power hierarchies in the region and feelings of marginality (GNS Online News Portal, 2025).

These structural and historical impositions cannot be unraveled as far as politics of identity in Kashmir is concerned. The regional discourse of identity has undergone development in the interplay of competing claims: of being assimilated into the Indian constitutional order, of being in line with the ideological offer of Pakistan, or of being a separate Kashmiri polity (Cambridge, 2025). These discourses of identity are constantly being re-shaped through socio political developments such as state policies, regional insurgencies and international interventions, further complicating a coherent sense of political and cultural belonging. The repeal of article 370 in 2019 and the subsequent rearrangement of the administrative status of jammu and Kashmir evoked fuels of political properences and the sense of demographic shift and as such, highlights the continued importance of identity politics in the contentious territory (The Guardian, 2025).

Altogether, it can be stated that the Kashmir identity crisis is not only an objective of the territorial conflict but another effect of border politics where the consent, agency, and democratic involvement were

overlooked or postponed. The modern political terrain of the region is an indication of extensive history of disobligations in inclusion, alliances, and counterwoven accounts that sabotage monolithic versions of statehood. This article places the Kashmir conflict in much wider contexts of post colonial border theory and identity studies arguing that the imposition of borders without consent has perpetuated an ongoing crisis of identity that has continued to be at the heart of both academic enquiry and practical policy debates.

The Kashmir conflict has been the subject of much scholarly attention in the decades since, but the nexus of border politics and the construction of identities has still not been well-explored in a systematic, theoretical framework. Existing literature can broadly be classified into three strands: theoretical approaches to the issue of borders, historical and political literature on the partition, and studies dealing specifically with the issue of Kashmir's identity crisis. The strands each add to the knowledge about the processes of how non-consentual border-making has perpetuated the socio-political and cultural crisis in the region.

Theoretical Approaches to the Borders

Border studies has moved away from geographical interpretations to more socially constructed and politically embedded. The initial conceptualisations including the theory of territoriality by Sack (1986) focuses on the spatial domination of the state over physical space and the people inhabiting it. In this perspective, boundaries exist as sovereign or governmental practices, but not as the geographical delimitation. Newman and Paasi (1998) added to this understanding by conceptualising borders as being socially constructed entities with cultural, symbolic and political meanings. Borders are disputive; they are the means of authority indicating the contingencies of history, politics, and ideological conflicts. In the case of Kashmir, the demarcation of borders without the consent of the local people is a case in point on how borders can be simultaneously tools of control and sources of persistent conflict (Newman, 2006; Paasi, 2012).

The theory of the postcolonial borders offers a particularly relevant perspective to commenting on Kashmir since they pre-empt the historical contributions of imperial rule and colonial practices of dividing the country. Mamdani (2012) emphasizes how in most instances colonialists established arbitrary territorial delimitations in the pursuit of strategic and administrative agendas without taking into account prevailing social, ethnic, and political structure. He argues that these borders tend to surpass their colonial founders and still create conflict and marginalization in postcolonial countries. Using this model in relation to Kashmir sheds light on the role of the British colonial rule and the rushy way in which partition was done in 1947 as some of the reasons why the identity dilemma has persisted in the region (Mamdani, 2012).

Partition and its Socio-Political Implications

The partition of British India is well known to have been a watershed moment that changed the political and social landscape of the subcontinent. Scholars like Talbot and Singh (2009) stress on the violent, rapid and mostly unplanned nature of partition that resulted in mass migration, communal violence and the imposition of new borders. The princely states such as Jammu and Kashmir became the targets of the crossfire between the geopolitics whereby they were frequently forced to either go to one dominion or the other depending on the circumstances that undermined the local consent (Bose, 2003). Research suggests that these processes were not simply administrative processes, which fundamentally changed the nature of identity, by redefining communities along nationalistic and religious lines (Butalia, 2000). The disputed accession and military interventions in Kashmir further strengthened the feeling of political marginality and undermined confidence in the state institutions that provided a good breeding ground to sustained identity wrangles (Chopra, 2015).

The role of international actors and strategy in the development of the borders is also highlighted in partition literature. The involvement of the United Nations in Kashmir in the form of resolutions demanding plebiscites and ceasefire arrangements brought in worldwide dimensions to local disputes (Wirsing, 2003). Researchers claim that the recurrent decision not to implement or postponement of such actions added to the inability of Kashmiris to have any idea of their political and cultural destinies on a long-term scale (Snedden, 2015). These dynamics are one of the many examples of how outside interventions, often justified in the name of the law or strategic considerations may inadvertently contribute to identity crises when the voices of the local population are marginalized.

Identity and Conflict Kashmir-Specific Studies

Within the Kashmir context, there is an emerging body of literature looking at the relationship between governance, identity and political unrest. In their analysis of the role of legal instruments like Article 370, Bhat and Ahmad (2023) note that local identity was celebrated at the same time as limiting the political expression of the ability to make decisions at local levels, such as Kashmiri identity. Others like Zutshi (2014) are more concerned with the cultural and social dimensions which point out the role of literature, oral histories, and everyday practices in articulating resistance to imposed political identities. There is a certain trend that might be observed in these studies: identity in Kashmir is not only a debatable issue, but also negotiated and reinvented by historical and political powers. Another quite prominent shift in recent research is the focus on the agency of local participants in the negotiation of imposed borders. Research focuses on civil society activities, grass-roots actions, and transnational engagement of the diaspora and highlights it as a critical space where Kashmir identity is established and challenged (Kazi, 2018; Khan, 2020). These reflections make simplistic conceptualizations of victimhood more difficult to prove, which shows that, despite forced imposing of borders, local communities will always challenge these spatial and political dominations and redefine them.

Despite extensive scholarship, there is underdevelopment of a comprehensive framework that relates to border politics, partition legacies and identity crisis in Kashmir. Much of the literature deals with these phenomena separately: historical accounts deal with accession and wars, geopolitical constructs are the object of border studies, and cultural identity is the subject of sociological studies. Integrative research needs to be conducted in a manner that explicitly maps the causal mechanisms that non-consensual border-making has resulted in the production of enduring identity conflict. The article attempts to fill this gap by gluing knowledge on postcolonial theories of borders, partitions, as well as Kashmir-specific discourses, giving a comprehensive account of how territorial and political postulates perpetuate long-term crises of identity.

Theoretical Framework: Borders, Power and the Politics of Identity

A way of understanding the crisis of identity which has been ongoing in Kashmir is to have a theoretical framework that moves away from a conventional state-centric or security-oriented approach and instead to foreground the politics of borders, consent, and identity formation. The paper relies on postcolonial theory of border, social identity theory, and critical conflict studies to come up with a conception of Kashmir as a political space as lived on the basis of historically contingent power relations over territory. Combining these theoretical approaches helps the framework emphasize the manner in which unimposed borders, through the implementation of a form of contestation, generate disaggregated identities and political turmoil.

The postcolonial theory of borders also highlights that borders are neither natural nor unavoidable phenomena of political existence but are constructed historically in the form of imperial interventions,

administrative convenience, and geopolitical calculation (Mamdani, 2012). Colonial boundary-making connections tended to ignore local modes of political organization and social identities in favor of imperial strategic agendas instead of local approval. These borders, after once being institutionalized, gain a false sense of permanence, even when they are essentially illegitimate in the eyes of the governed (Paasi, 2012). Kashmir is a good example of this process: the rush and externally posed partitioning of British India introduced non-democratic and non-socially rooted boundaries, depriving of which unanswered questions of sovereignty and belonging remained.

The notion of "borders without consent" plays a major role in this analysis. Consent, in the theory of politics, implies participation, legitimacy and recognition of will of the people (Dahl, 1989). In Kashmir, the border-making process was structurally exclusionary by the fact that no plebiscite was held or significant consultation undertaken. According to postcolonial theorists, these omissions are not accidental and are profound to the colonial models of governance that aim at control above representation (Chatterjee, 1993). The fact that these borders are being perpetuated in the postcolonial era is what Mamdani (2012) refers to as the afterlife of colonial power in that postcolonial states are the inheritors and breeders of colonial logic of territorial power. As a result, the borders of Kashmir serve as the tool of political resolutions less than a tool of continued domination and resistance.

Identity Making and Social Boundary Making

Social identity theory offers a necessary framework for studying the role of imposed borders in collective identities. Tajfel and Turner (1979) propose that identity is formed in a process of categorization, comparison and differentiation, often in response to external political pressures. In conflict zones borders can be seen as powerful symbolic markers that create a divide between "us" and "them", blocking group consciousness and at the same time fragmenting internal identities (Barth, 1969). In Kashmir, the Line of Control and where the Constitution resides are not only territory defining, but have also been used to reassign not only religious, regional, and ideological social and political identities.

The identity in Kashmir is not a singular and unchanging entity; it is stratified and multiple. According to academics, Kashmiri identity is a fluctuation between several frames: regional nationalism, religious affiliation, and the political self-determination (Zutshi, 2014). These identities are always negotiated to respond to the actions of the state like militarization, restructuring the law and reformation of government. Social identity theory is useful in understanding the implications of the repeated experiences of exclusion, surveillance and political marginalisation that fostered collective consciousness and at the same time created internal fractures within Kashmiri society (Kazi, 2018). Therefore, identity is not only the location of resistance but also a space of vulnerability, determined by the same boundaries established to stabilize the political order.

Borders, Conflict and Political Subjectivity

Critical conflict theory further highlights the effect of borders that are imposed without consent in creating conditions for prolonged conflict. Critical scholars do not take conflict to be a deviation as conflict is actually inherent in the structural organization of power and governance (Azar, 1990). The continued existence of the conflict in Kashmir is an indication that the political institutions have failed to balance the territorial power with the support of the people. Unauthorized borders bring about what Azar describes as protracted social conflict, where identity, security and political participation are very interwoven.

Moreover, borders in conflict zones define political subjectivity - the ways people know themselves as political actors. Foucault's (1977) concept of governmentality is helpful here, as it underscores how the

practices of the state are disciplinary in their method of population surveillance, regulation and normalization. A high level of militarization and legal exceptionalism in Kashmir have created a political space where identity is questioned and politicized all the time. Such a situation contributes to what scholars refer to as a crisis of belonging whereby, one is formally part of a state but experiences none of the perks associated with being part of a political community (Agamben, 2005).

Integrative Framework for Kashmir Case

This framework integrates the postcolonial border theory, social identity theory, and critical conflict studies to theorize Kashmir as a place where boundaries' functions exist as a territory, symbol, and experience. Unsanctioned borders are not the lines on a map, but the way the power is established, the identities are shaped, and the conflict is perpetuated. This integrative approach is in a position to enable a fine breakdown of the manner in which historical politics of partition still form structure in contemporary identity crisis in Kashmir. It also previews Kashmiri agency, which acknowledges that identity is not only formed by state dictate but in the more ordinary ways of resistance, memory and political imagination.

This study takes a qualitative, interpretive approach to research to investigate the role played by non-consensual border-making in the Partition of British India in the long-standing crisis of identity in Kashmir. Due to the historically contingent, politically sensitive and socially complex nature of the research problem, a qualitative approach will best be able to capture the multi-layered nature, narratives in addition to power relations enshrined in the border politics of Kashmir. Rather than the quest for causal generalizations, the methodology is more focused on depth, contextualization, and analytical reflexivity, and permits a complex understanding of the formation of identities in contested political spaces (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH

The research design is based on the epistemology of interpretivism which holds that the political realities are socially constructed and interpreted through discourse, historical memory, and lived experiences (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012). Kashmir's identity crisis cannot be well analyzed by positivist measures alone, as it is intrinsically linked with subjective perceptions of belongingness, legitimacy and political exclusion. Therefore, this study uses a qualitative case study approach, where Kashmir is considered as a critical case and represents a wider postcolonial dilemmas in relation to borders without consent. Based on the case study method, it is possible to trace historical movement of Kashmir and the organizational structure as well as the narrative of identity and contextualize it in the broader theoretical discourse on postcolonial formation of states and the legitimacy of a border (Yin, 2018). This method is especially successful in conflict studies, where the meanings of politics are negotiated and the historical accounts of the events are frequently biased against the voices of the subaltern.

The analysis is based on multiple qualitative data sources to ensure triangulation and robustness of the analysis. Historical documents, including accession records, United Nations resolutions, constitutional provisions (especially Article 370 and a later abrogation of it), official speeches, and many policy statements issued by the authorities of India and Pakistan, are considered to be primary sources. These sources offer an insight on the institutional articulation of the claims of borders and sovereignity and its legitimation throughout the years. Secondary sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books and authoritative reports written on partition politics, the theory of the border and Kashmiri identity. Particular attention is given to interdisciplinary scholarship in the fields of political science, history, sociology, and anthropology, which enables the study to capture the multidimensionality of the process of identity formation (Bose, 2003; Zutshi, 2014). In addition, cultural texts such as memoirs, literary works and

journalistic accounts are selectively referenced to show how the issues of identity and belonging are narrated outside of formal political discourse.

ANALYTICAL TECHNIQUES

The study uses qualitative discourse analysis as the main analytical technique. Discourse analysis allows the analysis of how language, symbols, and narratives are used to create political realities and to define identity claims (Fairclough, 1995). The study reveals the existence of common themes based on consent, sovereignty, and legitimacy by examining state documents, political speeches and scholarly accounts. Such an approach is also especially effective in showing how boundaries are normalized, using legal and bureaucratic discourses, although their legitimacy may continue to be challenged by those who are impacted. Besides this, the historical analysis helps trace the development of the border politics and the narratives of identity of the time before the period of Partition to the current times. This diachronic method emphasizes the continuities and discontinuities between the past and present governance and identity making and provenance of how the colonial past carries into the postcolonial politics (Mamdani, 2012). A combination of historical and discursive analysis leads to the possibility of experiencing a comprehensive analysis of how past choices still influence the present day political subjectivities in Kashmir.

Kashmir Research has a lot of ethical responsibility attached to it, as the Kashmir region is politically sensitive and highly conflicted. This study is entirely based on publicly available sources and published materials and thus does not involve direct field work which may result in potential risks to participants or researchers. Competing narratives have been represented fairly and critically without favoritism to one national or one ideological point of view. Nevertheless, the study has some limitations. Lack of primary interview information makes it hard to have face-to-face interaction with lived experience although excessive reliance on ethnographic and narrative scholarship helps to curb the problem. Also, the interpretive character of the analysis implies that the results are not highly general and therefore, are specific to the context. Nonetheless, this weakness is also a strength since it allows providing a rich contextual understanding that can be applied to the wider theoretical discourse on borders and identity.

Politics of the Time and Partition Politics

Kashmir identity crisis has historical causes in that politics of partition, that transformed imperial boundaries into postcolonial boundaries against the will of its people. Before 1947, Jammu and Kashmir was a princely state of the British paramountcy, being characterized by heterogeneity on the religious bases, geographical heterogeneity, and a semi-autonomous political system. Despite being governed by a Hindu ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, the state's people were overwhelmingly Muslim with large Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist minorities. This intricate social composition defied the logic of binary that guided the Partition of British India along religious lines (Talbot & Singh, 2009). Prior to the partition, localized systems of governance and reform movements shaped Kashmir politically and not the nationalistic loyalty to India or Pakistan. The political parties like the All-Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference and subsequently the National Conference came into existence indicating the increasingly high demands in the representatives of government and social justice as opposed to the secessionist intentions (Zutshi, 2014). According to these movements, there was the articulation of the political consciousness of the regions, which were based on the Kashmiri unique identity, which made it difficult to assume that the religious demography was the primary factor in the political fate.

The Crisis of Accession and Partition

In 1947, British India was partitioned and this raised a lot of uncertainty among princely states, where they were left to choose whether to accede either to India or Pakistan. In Kashmir, this decision-making process took place amid circumstances of massive pressure, violence and geopolitical maneuvering. Consecutive rises in unrest, coupled with the intrusion of tribal militias on the frontier territories of Pakistan, made the first onslaught by Maharaja Hari Singh to hold on to independence unsustainable. His later accession to India, which was formalized by the Instrument of Accession, was done without public consultation and in military exigency (Bose, 2003). The accession led to the first Indo-Pakistani war, and internationalization of the Kashmir dispute. Though India pledged to conduct a plebiscite to determine popular will, this was never fulfilled but it became a natural aspect of Kashmir politics, making it permanent (Wirsing, 2003). The formation of the ceasefire line subsequently followed by the Line of Control was a successful partitioning of the area dividing whole communities, trade routes, and cultural connections.

The division of Kashmir solidified antagonistic sovereignties and discontinuity identities. While India based its claim of accession to be legal and final, Pakistan challenged its legitimacy on the grounds of self-determination. This political rivalry also revealed itself as political marginalization since the goals of Kashmiris were pushed to the background to the geopolitical lenses of state-based discourses on territorial integrity and national security. According to scholars, that exclusion resulted in the creation of a familiarity of a democratic deficit and deteriorated trust towards political institutions and aggravated identity contestation (Snedden, 2015). Through partition politics, over time, Kashmir, rather than being a space of multiethnic political potential, had turned into a militarized borderland, where identity is always being negotiated in a condition of observation and threat. This forced political closure of the Kashmiri territory against their will, therefore, paved the way to an unresolved crisis of belonging - the one that persists to influence the political present and imagined futures of Kashmir.

The formation of political borders in Kashmir after Partition did not simply mark the territories; the structure of governance, as a result, electrified the state-society interactions and consequently reconstructed the forms of political power in the region. The borders in Kashmir were not formed as the results of the negotiation process showing the popular will but rather as the lines that were created on an administrative level and supported by the law, military forces, and bureaucracy. These borders became the centerpiece of the exercise of state power, which resulted in a governance regime marked by exceptionalism, securitization, and weak democratic accountability (Agamben, 2005; Paasi, 2012).

Borders and Legal Exceptionalism as an Institution

After the Instrument of Accession, India wanted to make Jammu and Kashmir a part of its constitutional system but at the same time admit to their disputed nature. The Indian Constitution, in article 370, granted the region special autonomy to have its own constitution, flag and internal structures of government. Although this structure was presented as a way of maintaining Kashmiri uniqueness, researchers claim that it also formalized vagueness by making Kashmir to be both a part and beyond the Indian polity (Bose, 2003; Bhat and Ahmad, 2023). This statutory exceptionalism was the symptom of unresolved consent, a handful of constitutional designed solutions replaced by solutions in the shape of democracy. The gradual erosion of Article 370 by presidential decree and legislative intervention limited the bounds of the local autonomy, which strengthened the attitude of the imposed rules. In 2019, the abrogation of Article 370 altered the negotiated accommodation by unilateral integration, further fueling the fears of the political marginalization and identity decay (Chandrachud, 2020). These legal changes indicate that borders are not only maintained by physical power but also by juridical systems which naturalize exceptional rules.

Political boundaries in Kashmir have been strengthened by high levels of militarization of the region and it is considered as one of the most heavily militarized territories on the planet. This armed presence, with the support of the national security discourses, has had an immense influence on the lives and political subjectivity. Laws like Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) give sweeping powers to security personnel, which suspend normal protection of law and enshrine a permanent state of exception (Agamben, 2005; Verma, 2018). According to scholars, militarization is shifting borders to lived experiences of surveillance, restriction, and coercion and neutralizing the distinction between internal governance and external defense (Kazi, 2018). The border has thus turned into not only a geopolitical boundary it has become an omnipresent social situation governing mobility, expression on and social engagement. This securitized government supports the idea that borders are safeguarded by force and not consent, which subverses democratic legitimacy.

In addition to militarization, the state activities in Kashmir are marked with centralized bureaucracy that restricts effective political representation. Frequent dissolutions of elected governments, long periods of rule by governors or presidents, and limits on political mobilization have limited institutional possibilities for expressing dissent (Snedden, 2015). These activities have been known to result in a so-called democratic deficit whereby formal electoral processes can be held alongside a substantive political marginalization (Chatterjee, 2004). A different form of identity reformer is bureaucratic governance reconstructing citizenship in administrational means at the expense of participation and loyalty. In Kashmir this has led to a political culture characterised by distrust, alienation and delegitimization of state institutions. The borders that are made under such practices work as symbols of exclusion and solidify identity-based grievances and perpetuate resistance and repression cycles.

The Identity Enduring Crisis of Kashmir

The identity crisis experienced in Kashmir is not just a singular and fixed state; it is in a state of construction due to historical traumas, political marginalization and daily life existencies within disputed territories. Identity in Kashmir cannot be limited to religious belonging and nationalist orientation only. Rather, it is constructed through the overlapping and often contradictory narratives of belonging, resistance and aspiration which are continuously reshaped by the practices of the state and geopolitical rivalries (Zutshi, 2014). Partition shredded the social fabric of Kashmir with the result that political identities were formed in divergent ways between regions and communities. While some of the segments express Indian constitutional nationalism, others express aspirations for autonomy, self-determination, or independence. These standpoints are not exclusive and exist side by side in a wider framework of ambiguity and contention (Bose, 2003). These divisions were enhanced by the establishment of border without consent since identity served as an area of power and survival bargaining.

Social identity theory is useful in explaining how long-term conflict can heighten group boundaries while at the same time fragmenting internal cohesion (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Recurrent patterns of marginalization and oppression in Kashmir have enhanced shared consciousness among particular groups and excluded other voices and generated multiple identities that are not easily categorized. The identity crisis is manifested in profound social consequences, such as displacement, migration and intergenerational trauma. Cycles of violence and political instability have disrupted education, livelihoods and social trust, and contribute to a general sense of uncertainty about the future (Duschinski et al., 2018). Young Kashmiris in particular, grow up in a political environment in which identity is constantly scrutinized and politicized and this shapes aspirations and forms of political engagement.

Poetry, literature, music, and digital media have become cultural spaces of cultural statement and resistance. The cultural practices interfere with the mainstream narratives of the state and impose other imagined

versions of belonging that cross imposed borders (Zutshi, 2014). These words indicate the strength of Kashmiri identity and demonstrate the cost of this emotional and mental price of long-standing dispute. Kashmiri resistance does not just take the form of coordinated political movements or an armed movement but also through acts of defiance, remembering and telling of history. According to scholars, identity is transformed to political imagination, which allows people and communities to think about what lies ahead of the existing boundaries (Scott, 1990). This fantasy maintains its opposition even in highly repressed situations, depicting the way in which the borders, which lack consent, do not completely enumerate subjectivity in politics. At the same time, the continuity of the crisis of identity is the lack of inclusive political frameworks that can reconcile sovereignty and popular will. Devoid of mechanisms of meaningful participation and recognition, identity is a disputable and vulnerable construct, constantly sub-influenced by the absence of power instead of empowerment.

Although Kashmir has been characterized by the major imposition and containment of borders by foreign political repressions and militarized administrations, local agency has never been completely neglected. Forms of political, cultural, and social contestation have continuously emerged in Kashmiri society and contested the legitimacy of the imposed borders as well as expressed new visions of belonging. In this part, the more immediate foregrounding of the local agency is to be anticipated as a dynamic force that is responsive and adjustive but not as the neutralizing force that would neutralize the power of the state (Scott, 1990). Grassroots movements have played a major role in challenging political authority in Kashmir. Since the mainly politically mobilization through National Conference resulted in the early social movements to subsequent mass uprisings and civil resistance movements, there have been local agents who have attempted to claim agency within a structurally exclusionary political system (Bose, 2003). Civil society groups, student organizations and informative groups have been provided as a channel through which grievances on political disenfranchisement, abuse of human rights in addition to cultural erosion have been voiced.

These movements do not always serve within formal political structures, they represent much of the mistrust towards the electoral process seen as an instrument of corruption or a figurative one. According to scholars, this kind of mobilization is a parallel political space, in which people already have legitimacy based on the experience instead of state acknowledgment (Chatterjee, 2004). The way angered activism has remained in the state highlights the inadequacy of border control in the making of political stability and that political power cannot be entirely stabilized by the means of territory usage only.

DISCOURSES OF SELF DETERMINATION

The discourse of self-determination is at the centre of the political imagination in Kashmir. While the interpretations of the notion of self-determination are diverse - from autonomy within India to independence or accession to Pakistan the unifying point is the demand for political consent (Snedden, 2015). This discourse calls the foundational logic of borders diagonally and non-participatory as it re-capitulates sovereignty as a lived and negotiated process and not as a territorial claim. Self-determination discourse also exposes internal pluralism in the Kashmiri society. Contrary to monolithic accounts, Kashmiri political aspirations are heterogeneous because they are subject to regional, religious and generational differences (Zutshi, 2014). That this diversity is recognised is extremely important if we are to achieve an understanding of agency as relational and contested, rather than unified or static. The Kashmiri diaspora has become an important transnational player, giving more voice to local voices and redefining the conflict in global human rights terms. Through advocacy, media interactions and cultural production, diasporic communities disrupt dominant state narratives and place Kashmir within broader discourses of postcolonial justice and minority rights (Khan, 2020).

Diaspora engagement depicts the failure of the border to contain identity. Political belonging is not restricted to territorial space, and thus this notion of belonging confirms that identity formation is not restricted to a state-defined space. There are certain transnational narratives which complicate the claims for sovereignty and emphasize the global nature of local contestation. The foregoing analysis shows that the Kashmir identity crisis is neither a by-product of geopolitical rivalry nor an incidental occurrence but is structural in nature since the borders were imposed without democratic consent. Integrating postcolonial theory of borders, identity studies and conflict analysis highlights the processes through which territorial demarcation when separated from participation and legitimacy brings about permanent political instability.

Borders in Kashmir serve as tools of domination and a symbol of exclusion at the same time. Legal exceptionalism, militarization and bureaucratic control make normal what is actually a state of political suspension, where democratic participation is always postponed (Agamben, 2005). This condition reproduces the problem of identity fragmentation, in which people operate in competing discourses about who they belong to under conditions of coercion. The findings also challenge state-based approaches to conflicts resolutions that favour the territorial integrity of states over their political legality. As long as sovereignty claims trump local agencies, identity crises are likely to remain. The Kashmiri case thus contributes to broader theoretical debates by demonstrating how borders without consent dent the foundation assumptions of modern statehood i.e. of there being a culmination of territory, authority, and legitimacy (Paasi, 2012).

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This article has contended that the crisis of identity in Kashmir that has been persistent is intrinsically linked to the politics of partition and imposition of borders without consent. Through an analysis of the past and illuminating the theory, it has established the link between non-consensual border-making, creating fragmented identities, perpetuating political exclusion, and normalizing exceptional governance. First, the study shows that the borders of Kashmir are outcomes of colonial and postcolonial power arrangements and not democratic negotiations. Second, it shows how state practices of the legal, military, and bureaucratic reproduce the crisis of identity through prioritizing control over participation. Third, it emphasizes the strength of local agency manifested in the form of the mobilization of grassroots, the production of culture, and transnational advocacy. From the policy angle, for a stable peace in Kashmir, there has to be a move from territorial management towards participatory management.

Confidence-building measures need to focus on political dialogue, civil liberties and representative inclusiveness. International actors should go beyond mediation that is based only on state interests and rather endorse mechanisms that can amplify people's voices at the local level. Future research could include ethnographic fieldwork to gain some insight into the negotiation of everyday identities, or comparative research involving other postcolonial borderlands. Such work would further shed light on the global relevance of borders without consent as a structure of conflict. In conclusion, Kashmir is an important reminder that borders that are drawn without legitimacy cannot answer political questions of where one belongs. Until consent, agency and recognition are put in the center of political processes, the crisis of identity in Kashmir and such postcolonial spaces will remain unresolved.

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