Border Crossings: The Politics of Transnationality in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Frontier Region

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Resumo

Passagem de Fronteira: as Políticas da Transnacionalidade na Região Fronteiriça entre o Afeganistão e o Paquistão

As áreas fronteiriças entre o Afeganistão e o Paquistão são uma região complexa que desafia generalizações estáticas e estatistas – generalizações que muitas vezes traem os preconceitos deixados pelo período colonial, ou evidenciando o poder de um discurso orientalista ainda vigente, como sejam os discursos essencialistas acerca do tribalismo Pashtun ou a radicalização islamista. Este artigo argumenta que qualquer estudo útil da chamada 'região Af-Pak' deve afastar-se destas narrativas estereotípicas, e focar-se ao invés nas estratégias e repertórios (ou práticas) dos actores locais, como exemplos de mobilização transnacional que transcende tanto as instituições formais do Estado, como as restrições legais da Linha Durand. Adicionalmente, a lista de actores a estudar – sobretudo para os interessados em desenvolver recomendações para o desenvolvimento de políticas concretas – deverá ir além dos 'militantes tribais'. Ao invés, uma tal lista deverá incluir diversos movimentos e redes sócio-políticas, e examinar como se relacionam entre si, por exemplo formando coligações transnacionais. O estudo competente desta região fronteiriça deverá ainda prestar atenção às estratégias destes actores locais em relação ao espaço transnacional e transfronteiriço (espaço social bem como geográfico) no qual a sua mobilização se produz, como por exemplo nos casos dos refugiados, deslocados internos, ou diásporas (incluindo as comunidades étnicas espalhadas pela região). O artigo propõe que o caminho a seguir passa por adoptar estratégias de investigação que evitem a subalternização das perspectivas, conhecimento e práticas locais.

Abstract

The border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan are a complex setting that defies static, and statist generalizations – generalizations that often betray the prejudices left behind as traces of a bygone colonial era, or the ongoing power of Orientalist discourse, like the essentialist discourse on Pashtun tribalism or Islamist radicalization. This article contends that any useful study of the so-called Af-Pak border region should move away from such stereotypical narratives, and focus instead on the strategies and repertories (i.e. practices) of actors, as examples of transnational mobilization that transcends both formal state institutions, and the legal strictures of the Durand Line. Moreover, the list of actors to study – especially for those trying to develop policy – relevant recommendations – should go beyond 'tribal militants'. Instead, such a list should include diverse social and political movements and networks, and examine their relationship to one another, often in looser transnational coalitions. The competent study of the border region must also pay attention to the strategies of actors in relation to the transborder, transnational space they inhabit (social as well as geographic) in which mobilization occurs, as in the case of refugees, IDP's, or diasporas (including ethnic communities spread throughout regional urban settings). The article proposes that the way forward relies on strategies which avoid the subalternization of local perspectives, local knowledge, and local practices.

Introduction

The Afghanistan-Pakistan border region now routinely commands the limelight of international affairs and of Western policy debates, albeit with a highly specialized set of perceptions and issues at stake. Af-Pak, as the region has become known, is characterized as a 'borderland integrated into networks of global conflict' (Rubin and Siddique, 2006: 2), inhabited by 'resilient', 'war-mongering' and 'extremism-inclined' people. Perceived as a mono-ethnic Pahstun hinterland, the region is seen by the international community as a crucial element in the current fight against terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking endangering the cosmopolitan heartlands of our world. Forgotten seem to be times of this border region not being remote, at the periphery or even at the end of the world, but at the centre of crossing civilizations, their trading routes and thus a hub linking various countries or even this region being at the heart of a great game between colonial powers such as imperial Russia and Britain.

For decades now, the bilateral relations of Afghanistan and Pakistan have been marred by the issue of the Durand Line, a colonial legacy of demarcated border lines and socio-political interdependencies between both countries' political regimes and their respective foreign policy interests. The ethnic community of Pashtuns straddles both sides of the border – they are thus split by the Durand Line despite their ethnic and familial connections and loyalties. Furthermore, recent decades have seen the border region of Pakistan and Afghanistan as a transnational space for political interventions of different kinds. These have ranged from establishing a safe haven, training ground and operation basis for Afghan *mujahideen* and their Pakistani and Arab allies against the Soviet occupation in the 1980s, to turning the border into a hub for anti-Taliban forces in the 1990s, to the present day efforts at combating those insurgents fighting the UN-mandated and NATO-led International Stabilization Forces (ISAF) as well as the US-American-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

These interventions were accompanied by floods of refugees transgressing national borders through rather informal pathways. In this fluid and highly penetrable border region context, the flows people and goods (as well as weapons) are seen as a particular challenge to stabilize both countries in their quest for democratic state-building and their fight against terrorism. Given the current military operations against insurgents and Islamist militants conducted in this highly interdependent and transnational space, a humanitarian emergency led to a wave of refugees entering Afghanistan for protection, or travelling further away from

the border region and into urban centers such as Peshawar in search of protection from the fighting, as civilians were caught up between both fronts. In other words, the international militaries as well as the international insurgents both mounted enormous pressure on the local civilian population.

Having said that, it is ironic that much of the related academic literature on transnationalization focuses primarily on migration, economy and civil society activism (Harpviken, 2006), and yet so little policy-relevant literature on the Af-Pak strategy has picked up on the insights of transnationalism research. Indeed, the border region between Kabul and Islamabad – with its diverse coalitions, networks and movements and their local, regional and global dimensions – can serve as a prime example of transnational contentious politics and transnational mobilization of resources. This border region also challenges commonly used concepts of state and statehood, especially with regard to border regimes and their practices. Furthermore, policy reports, journalist and activist accounts as well as academic literature all too often generate a problematic account of the daily realities of the local people "in the field". Such approaches all too often focus on the engagement of "expert outsiders" the encounters they experienced – while routinely ignoring the practices and voices of local civilians. As a result of this, the inhabitants of this border region are often depicted through (rather neocolonial) terms of the outside civilizer, as benevolent and considerate s/he might be.

Take for example the following quotation of bestselling author and education activist Greg Mortenson (Three Cups of Tea: Stones into Schools) in a 2009 chapter entitled "The People at the End of the Road":

"The good people who inhabit the frontiers of civilization do not, as a rule, tend to be the world's most sophisticated or cosmopolitan human beings. Often, they aren't even especially well educated or refined, nor all that conversant with cutting-edge trends in areas like, say, fashion and current events. Sometimes, they're not even all that friendly. But the folks who live at the end of the road are among the most resilient and the most resourceful human beings you will ever meet. They possess a combination of courage, tenacity, hospitality, and grace that leaves me in awe." (Mortenson 2009: 35-36)

International media also employ similar portrayals of the border region. In a similar vein, *Time* magazine's description of the area and its socio-political make-up in a 2007 article on "The Truth about Talibanistan"[1] treads a well-worn, almost stereotypical path:

Remote, tribal and deeply conservative, the border region is less a part of either country then a world unto itself, a lawless frontier so beyond the control of the

1 Disponível em http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1601850,00.html

West and its allies that it has earned a name of its own: Talibanistan. In fact, the territory at the heart of Talibanistan – a heavily forested band of mountains that is officially called North and South Waziristan – has never fully submitted to the rule of any country. (…) Fueled by zealotry and hardened by war, young religious extremists have overrun scores of towns and villages in the border areas, with the intention of imposing their strict interpretation of Islam on a population unable to fight back.

In contrast, local experts – for instance, anthropologists like Magnus Marsden – strongly criticize such narratives, and instead attempt to draw a different picture of the border region and its inhabitants, their practices, agency, capacities and regimes (Marsden 2005, 2008). This chapter will thus engage in a critical dialogue with the existing mainstream accounts of the border region, and examine the different social and political actors and (in)formal institutions operating in this highly transnational, diverse border region. We will analyze the different legacies and political struggles in recent decades with a special focus on the post-9/11 developments in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region[2], and propose a broad post-colonial, transnationalist approach to studying the area and its peoples, thus moving away from dominant narratives and the securitization/militarization they have engendered.

"Donkey *vs.* Durand": The Fiction of a Border

"The borders that divide the region's people open as they close".
Marsden (2008: 227).

A 'border' functions as a region, not as a dividing 'line'; it is a transitory, hybrid area which is negotiated daily by diverse actors such as refugees, migrants, smugglers, militants, traders, truckers as well as (inter-)national security forces. The so-called 'Durand Line' – the actual frontier line, so to speak – is routinely overran by a daily movement of capital, trade, population, arms, ideologies and identities. One can say that it does not serve – for most part of the population and actors involved – as a "frontier of separation" (as envisioned by the imperial British) but rather as a "frontier of contact" (Rubin and Siddique, 2006: 5). For centuries, if not

2 This border region does not only include the much talked about Federal Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan, bordering the insurgent-prone southern and south-eastern provinces of Afghanistan, but also the border provinces of Balochistan and North-West Frontier Province (NWFP)

millennia, it has been marked by socioeconomic porosity in terms of cross-border movements control such as the more recent fencing initiative of former Pakistani President, General Pervaiz Musharraf, or different border closures under different political regimes in Afghanistan and Pakistan since 1947.[3] However, the penetrability of the border depends of the actor seeking access or crossing. While international forces, in particular US troops, are not allowed to cross over the border from Afghanistan to Pakistan and thus resort to high-tech forms of border crossing and cross border fighting via military drone attacks, ordinary people apparently do not face such hurdles.

> (…) Afghans say they can easily enter Pakistan by bribing guards on either side of the border with the equivalent of less than a dollar, or by paying taxi drivers a similar token amount to drive them across. The guards do not ask those in the taxi for identification or search the trunk. The way the Taliban use Pakistan's tribal areas to launch cross-border attacks inside Afghanistan, is perhaps the most contentious issue between Pakistan and the United States. But the problem is hardly contained to Pakistan's lawless tribal areas. Gaping holes in security checks along the border also remain at heavily trafficked crossings (…). (Mekhennet and Oppel Jr., 2010).

As can be witnessed (especially by standing at any of a number of local border crossings), socioeconomic and political mobilization – indeed daily life patterns in general – have been and still are inherently 'transnational': they pre-date the creation of the modern states we call Afghanistan and Pakistan, and continue despite them, regardless of the quality of their statehood, along this ancient South and Central Asian trade, trafficking and smuggling route[4].

The current 2,400 km-long frontier between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Durand Line, remains a contested international border since 1893 – a colonial legacy

3 The most recent call for a border fencing was uttered in July 2009 by the current Pakistani Prime Minister Gilani in order „to curb illegal crossings, especially militants' inflitration into its territory" as well as of drug traffickers (Pajwok Monitor, 04.07.2009, Pakistan renews calls for border fencing, www.pajhwok.com (as of 13.07.2009). Previously, both Afghan and Pakistani governments attempted to implement border closures, e.g in the late 1950s and in 1961, which were largely circumvented by people's continued practices of crossborder socioeconomic activities (Rubin and Siddique, 2006: 7; Modrzejewska-Lesniewska, 2002: 75).

4 For accounts that emphasise the existence and importance of the border routes, and the flows of peoples, goods and ideas that criss-crossed them, specifically before or during the state-formation periods of both Afghanistan and Pakistan. See for instance B. D. Hopkins's history of modern-day Afghanistan (Hopkins, 2008: 110-162), or Sana Haroon's examination of the religious-familial character of networks that bound the polities of the border area with power centres beyond (Haroon, 2007).

inherited by Pakistan upon its partition from British India in 1947 (Kakar, 2006: 183-189; Runion, 2007: 82-83, 88-89). The border has never fully been recognized by consecutive Afghan governments, which claimed a territorial stake in Baluch and Pashtun territories in Pakistan, and subsequently strained bilateral relations. (Rubin, Siddique, 2006: 1-2, 6; Modrjejewska-Lesnjewska, 2002). Attempts to demarcate spheres of influence through a border and its regimes predate the current conflict between Kabul and Islamabad and take one back to the so called Great Game of Russian and British Empires in the 19th century (Rasanayagam, 2005: xviii, 7-10). In more recent times, other geopolitical discourses and agendas are linked to the contested Durand Line. During the Cold War, Western and Arab governments used the borderland as a training ground and a safe haven for anti-Soviet mujahideen in the 1980s after the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, kindly facilitated by various Pakistani military and civilian regimes and the Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI), Pakistan's secret service agency, which controlled most of the dispersed funding, training and weapons proliferation (Crile, 2004).

Moreover, since the country's foundation, the conflict with India is at the core of Pakistan's foreign policy and military agenda-setting. As a consequence, Pakistan's military employs the concept of 'strategic depth' vis-a-vis Afghanistan in case of conflict, for example over Kashmir or an imminent Indian attack (Rubin and Siddique, 2006: 6). In a rare public statement, Pakistan's military top commander, General Ashfaq Kayani warned that „an environment hostile to Pakistan could strain its battle against militancy and extremism" and further emphasized its focus on India in terms of foreign and defense policies:

Pakistan wants a 'peaceful, friendly and stable' Afghanistan; strategic depth isn't about 'controlling' Afghanistan but about ensuring Pakistan doesn't have a long-term security problem on its western border; India's role in Afghanistan is 'unhelpful'; and Pakistan wants Afghan state institutions, including the army and the police force, to be fashioned in a manner that they don't pose a threat to our 'strategic interests' (as paraphrased by Dawn, 2010; cf. Hussain, 2010).

Furthermore, the colonial frontier dividing the ethnic community of approximately fourty million Pashtuns – and thus the 'Pashtunistan Question' with its options of secession, autonomy or integration – has been instrumentalised by both Afghanistan and Pakistan (Rasanayagam, 2007: 27-37; Wirsing, 1991: 29-30). Pashtun nationalists regard the border demarcation as arbitrary, dividing the member of its community and their territory between two states. For secessionists, Pashtunistan would not only consist of parts of FATA or NWFP, but also of Balochistan – an unthinkable step for any Pakistani government after having suffered already the secession of Eastern Pakistan, now Bangladesh, and the continuous conflict with India over Kashmir. Pakistani officials fear that a strong Afghan state might support and reinforce the quest for an independent Pashtun state in the provinces

of NWFP and Balochistan. Furthermore, „[t]he Baluch also live on both sides of the Durand Line in the southwest border region, as well as in neighboring Iran" and have mounted at least five insurgencies against the Pakistani state in the same border region (Rubin and Siddique, 2006: 5, 7).

Currently, we find a Pashtun-led government in Kabul under President Hamid Karzai, with Pashtuns being the largest ethnic community of the country (an estimated fourty percent of the population), and regionally as well as nationally successful Pashtun nationalist political parties in Pakistan, governing for instance in NWFP and serving as a coalition partner of the government of President Zardari and Prime Minister Gilani since 2008 (representing fifteen to twenty percent of the population). In fact, since the 1960s successive Pakistani governments have employed an Islamization agenda to counter Pashtun nationalism and its potential secessionist threat, attempting to override Pashtun identity with a predominantly religious-oriented one. Furthermore, Islamist groups were encouraged to seek Afghan counterparts from the 1960s onwards. Pashtun-dominated Islamist parties are understood to having supported the Hezb-e-Islami of notorious Gulbuddin Hekmatyar or the Afghan Taliban, whose figureheads are sought to have their bases in cities such as Quetta or Peshawar (Rubin and Siddique, 2006: 10). It took the events of 9/11 for the world to understand that the Pan-Islamist strategy and the support of jihadism against Soviet occupation and Pashtun secessionism had backfired terribly.

They [the Taliban] showed to what extent the mass violence, migrations, and ideological mobilization of the past three decades had transformed the border region. They are a phenomenon of the borderland, a joint Afghanistan-Pakistan network and organization. Afghan refugees, their children, and their grandchildren have coped with and interpreted their experiences in the refugee camps, tribal territories, and urban slums of Pakistan through the lens of the Islamist education that Pakistan's military regime and its Saudi and U.S. patrons offered them alongside their classmates from Pakistan, including FATA. Pashtuns are no more or less prone to extremism than members of any other ethnic group in the region, but intelligence agencies and radical movements have used their cross-border ties and strategic location to spread extremism. (Rubin and Siddique, 2006: 9-10)

Having said that, it is important to remember that the Pashtun nationalist movement has had a Ghandian-style predecessor: Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his civic movement, the Khudai Khidmatgar ('Servants of God'). The so called "Frontier Gandhi" and his "Servants of God" emerged in the 1930s as a non-violent nationalist movement in the wake of the anti-colonial struggle within British India, later Pakistan (Banerjee, 2000; Easwaran, 1999; Rubin and Siddique, 2006: 6-7). Its descendents are currently governing NWFP with the subsequently established secular Awami National Party (ANP) and which follow a pro-peace deal

and developmental agenda when dealing with violent insurgencies in the region.

FATA thus serves – and has historically served – as a kind of a buffer zone, and both countries have offered sanctuary for the other's opponents and their cross border insurgencies – be it the anti-Soviet *mujahideen*, Pakistani or Afghan Taliban, Pashtun or Baloch nationalists or globally operating militants of Al Qaeda and its affiliates (Rubin and Siddique, 2006: 3, 8). With the size of Luxemburg and an estimated population ranging from three and a half to seven million inhabitants, the region is marked by comparatively low socioeconomic development opportunities. Only seventeen percent of males (national average: forty percent) and three percent of females (national average: thirty-two percent) are literate. The regional income is half of the national average (250 US-Dollar compared to 500) and an estimated unemployment rate of sixty to eighty percent (Markey, 2008: 5-7; Rubin and Siddique, 2006: 12ff):

> The economic situation in the borderlands is equally dire. The wars in and over Afghanistan during the past three decades have transformed the economy of these tribal territories from one based on subsistence agriculture and nomadic pastoralism to dependence on the unregulated, cross border trade of goods, including contraband such as drugs and arms. The area depends on smuggling routes that exploit the Afghani Transit Trade Agreement, under which goods may be imported duty-free into Pakistan for reexport to Afghanistan; many are illegally re-exported or simply sold in Pakistan (Rubin and Siddique, 2006: 13).

In addition, FATA remains under a peculiar discriminatory political regime, which is currently under revision. It has been governed by a colonial and tribal code of rules (Frontier Crimes Regulation) despite its semiautonomous status within the political system of Pakistan, due to which national legislation is not enforced in the region which is instead ruled by a succession of unchecked political agents, appointed tribal leaders and where political parties are barred from operating (Markey 2008: 5-7; Rubin and Siddique, 2006: 12ff).

And the ethnic and political complexity of the border does not stop here. As already mentioned, the border region does not only consist of FATA or the South-Eastern Afghan Pashtun-belt, but also includes the Pakistani provinces of Balochistan and North-Western Frontier Province with Baloch citizens (dispersed to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran and a nationalist movement and insurgencies of their own). The region further contains a strong Shia population in the NWFP agencies of Kurran or Chitral which served for instance as safe havens for persecuted Afghan Shia Hazaras or Tajiks. This border region is thus marked by a wide range of ethno linguistic communities with a high level of transregional mobility and hybrid identities (Marsden, 2008: 214, 223; Marsden 2005).

The Current Securitization of the Border Area: Shortcomings and Biases

To Western policy-makers, as we have already suggested, the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan is seen mostly through the lens of security – a fact which can easily be gleaned from the many policy reports emanating from Western governments on the Af-Pak issue.

Among the security threats flagged by such literature, Islamist militancy in the Af-Pak border area is by far the most cited (Acharya, Bukhari and Sulaiman, 2009; Bajoria, 2009; Fair, Malhotra and Shapiro, 2009; Gunaratna and Nielsen, 2008; Zahab and Roy, 2004). As one U.S. government report succinctly puts it, from the American point of view the increase of militancy in the border areas "poses three key national security threats: an increased potential for major attacks against the United States itself; a growing threat to Pakistani stability; and a hindrance of U.S. efforts to stabilize Afghanistan" (Kronstadt and Katzman, 2008). The nightmare scenario, in the minds of several analysts and prominent politicians, is that this process of Talibanization of the border areas would spill-over to engulf the whole of Pakistan, potentially leaving the country's government and its nuclear arsenal in the hands of Islamist militants (Arnoldy, 2009; Hersh, 2009; Kerr and Nikitin, 2010: 10-14)[5].

As we can see, the securitization[6] of the border region is achieved by employing a discourse that indelibly links that geographic area to violent Islamist militancy, and in turn sets the two against the key goals of contemporary American foreign policy in the region – the war on terror, democracy promotion, nuclear non-proliferation and post-conflict state-building. This, in turn, has resulted in a host of calls for "securing Pakistan's tribal belt" (Markey, 2008), including extending counterin-

5 Assuming, that is, that a set of relatively small local movements, hailing from essentially rural areas and driven by a multi-issue agenda could somehow mobilise enough resources to project its power over hundreds of thousands of square kilometres, defeat the world's sixth largest armed forces, take over two mega-cities and one of the most secure capitals in Asia, and convince Pakistan's military to hand over the nuclear codes – and then legitimise itself successfully before a population of 170 million and a growing middle-class (Ahmed, 2009)

6 For the purposes of this chapter, securitization – a term coined by the Copehangen school of critical security studies -refers to the process whereby a socio-political actor discursively defines a particular issue as a security issue, implying that this issue poses a grave, existential threat to any given referent (in the present case, the stability of the region, the governments of Afghanistan or Pakistan, etc.). Securitization processes work by moving an issue away from the realm of open, inclusive, deliberative politics, and by investing security issues with a degree of urgency, exceptionalism, violence, thereby making them the realm of executive power. For an overview of the securitization concept and associated scholarship (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, 1998: 23-26; Emmers, 2007; Taureck, 2006)

surgency principles (already being applied in the Afghan theater of operations) to the border area (White, 2009), tempered by a dose of (state-initiated) development aid for those populations deemed most at risk, or most essential to the success of the counterinsurgency campaign.

While research on the securitization of the Af-Pak border area may take us into several directions, we are especially interested here in examining the discursive construction of the region as a danger to international security, thereby opening it up to a series of (heavily militarized) interventions. The focus of this section is therefore on the descriptions of the region employed by academics, policy-makers, journalists and politicians to literally conjure something called "Af-Pak" into existence, to endow that area (and its population) with a series of dangerous or threatening characteristics, and to thus justify a new regional strategy on the part of Western governments, especially the U.S.. In other words, what elements are emphasized in the description of the border region in order to effectively convince audiences that it represents an existential threat that must be dealt with via security policy? Below we examine the key discursive clusters that are regularly employed and emphasized in (mis)representing the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Tribe and Prejudice[7]

The first discursive cluster we examine here as part and parcel of the securitizing narrative surrounding the border area could be provisionally termed the "tribalization" of the border region. By "tribalization" we mean the narrowing of prevalent accounts concerning the social, political, economic and cultural make-up of the border areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan, so as to focus almost exclusively on the (supposed) tribal organization of life, and even then focusing almost always on Pashtun tribal elements. And there is no shortage of proponents of some variation of "the key to victory in this area of the world is understanding (and successfully instrumentalizing) it's essentially tribal nature-discourse" (Blatt et al., 2009; Gant, 2009; Johnson and Mason, 2007).

In many ways, this discursive move follows the general blueprint already critiqued by Edward Said in his Orientalism thesis (Said, 1978). In this particular case, such accounts are problematic in at least three ways.

The first of these is that such accounts often ignore the heavy imprint of (British) colonialism in our conceptualization of tribal arrangements in the border area.

7 The wonderfully apt phrase has been coined by Joshua Foust (2010), himself a critical voice when it comes to the "tribalization" of security policy in the Af-Pak context, especially in the excellent Registan blog (www.registan.net)

Rather than simply having "encountered" tribal structures already in place, the zeal of British colonial administrators to subdue the local populations under the rule of the Raj lead them to actually reify local structures of power, often tweaking them to fit colonial objectives. This translated into the elaboration of tribal tables, aided by colonial ethnographers-cum-administrators (Haroon, 2007: 8-11, 25-30), and the very creation of a geographic entity called the "Tribal Areas". In other words, the architecture of local power in the tribal areas, and sometimes the very notion of a tribal identity, had to be (re)created by the British so that it could be co-opted in the service of delivering alien modes of governance to a difficult and fiercely independent area (Beattie, 2002, Haroon, 2007: 5-31; Lindholm, 2009)[8]. The repercussions of these schemes of imperial rule are still being felt to this day – one of the most important being the blinding shift from a transnational perspective of the frontier region, its populations and their cross-border flows, to one directly in the service of modern states with ideally static borders, centralized authority, the ability to extract revenue and centralize taxation, and a desired monopoly over the legitimate means of coercion.

Secondly, the narrative of tribalization simultaneously de-legitimates older, non or trans-state modalities of local governance, and injects the state (Afghan, Pakistani, Western) – as paragon of modernity, guarantor of justice, provider of security and development – as the single referent for Af-Pak policy. In so doing, such a narrative ignores not only decades of research on state-tribe relations in all their complexity (Christensen, 1986; Gross, 1998; Khoury and Kostiner, 1990; Noelle, 1997; Shahrani, 2002; Tapper, 1983), but also realities on the ground and the daily practices and wishes of hundreds of thousands.

More importantly for the purposes of the present critique, perhaps, is the way in which the "tribal" narrative ignores and/or obscures alternative forms of political identity and activism in the border areas (a point we elaborate upon below). Lost in these mainstream narratives, then, is the richness of the frontier and its daily life, the nuance and diversity of its cultures. What of other communities that inhabit the frontier – like the Kohistanis (Knudsen, 2009), the Kalasha, the Pashai, the Nuristani or the Kirghiz of the Wakhan? What of the tens of thousands of in-

8 Yet, despite protestations against the charge of neo-colonialism or neo-imperialism, American policy makers – especially those hailing form defense circles – have (re)discovered tribal engagement as a strategy for the Af-Pak region. This unfortunate trend has many contemporary manifestations under the evolving Af-Pak strategy endoresed by the Obama administration – from calls to "winning the war, one tribe at the time" (Gant, 2009), to the deployment of "human terrain teams" of social scientists embedded in military teams to study the local tribes, to the (re)activation and use of tribal militias in the fight against the Taliban (a strategy employed by both the US and Pakistan).

dividuals, from pasthun and other ethnic backgrounds, that have migrated to the lowlands and cities on both sides of the border in search for work, an education for themselves or their children, a better life – to what extent does the mainstream tribal narrative apply to them? What of class, gender, status, how do they intersect with the tribal narrative to give us a better purchase on the (in)securities engendered in the region? The tribal narrative, then – as employed en passant by politicians, time-pressured analysts, or uninformed journalists looking for rousing metaphors – is often (blissfully?) unaware of the wealth of historical and/or ethnographic material that has been compiled about the area and its peoples.

As a result, "tribal" as a concept is further reduced, taken to mean a kind of stereotypical Pashtun: rural, male, mysoginist, religiously conservative in the Sunni tradition, hopelessly shackled to traditional modes of behavior such as the Pashtunwali, rebellious and prone to violence. But how well does this view fit with the daily realities of local traders that buy goods across the Persian Gulf and sell them throughout the Af-Pak border region? Or the local smugglers, plowing the thousands of difficult kilometers between the Central Asian Republics and the Af-Pak border passes? Or the Afghan refugees that have made a place for themselves in Peshawar, mastering four or five local languages, running a successful business, and trying to learn computer skills in community centers to improve their business? Or the local woman turned activist that has completed her medical degree and braves the rugged terrain and the threats of islamists in order to set up a trans-border medical service for widows and children?

Mullahs and Militants

Another key discursive cluster that often makes its way into securitizing accounts of the Af-Pak border addresses the issue of violent Islamist militancy, or radical Islam more generally. As already mentioned at the outset of this section, policy-makers – as well as academics and journalists – often justify more or less militarized interventions into the border area by invoking the threat posed by the (potentially violent) political mobilization of Islamic militants. In such accounts, the mixture of religion and politics in the area, coupled with the "tribal", "ungovernable" and "warlike" character of the local populations mentioned above, make the region an explosive one. As a result, phenomena as diverse – and as different in its causes, modus operandi and potential consequences – as the Pakistani Taliban, the Afghani Taliban, several islamist organizations, tribal militias, radical clerics and their ideological followers and conservative Pashtuns are often conflated in a misleading amalgamation (Markey, 2008: 16-18).

It is, of course, indisputable that Islamist militants have engaged in violent campaigns in the region – targeting not only security forces (Western, Pakistani

and Afghan) but also local power brokers and the general population as well, often as reprisal for their resistance, assertion of autonomy, or behavior deemed immoral and unacceptable. As such, those violent actors have also contributed through both discourse and (murderous) practice to the streamlined narrative of the border as a security threat that states must deal with through the use of force. While the mainstream discourse on the border could in fact benefit from a much more accurate depiction of the contours of violent Islamic militancy in the area, as well as a better distinction between historically situated local resistance against perceived encroachment by the central state versus transnational jihadism, the limited scope of this chapter precludes us from entering that line of inquiry. Instead, this section focuses essentially on a series of mischaracterizations of "lived Islam" in the region that contribute to the securitization of Islamic activism even when it is not violent.

One of the most obvious ways in which this appears in accounts of the Af-Pak area is the constant emphasis on the violent character of political Islam. If most of the violence and insecurity in the region is attributable to Islamist militants and the governmental reactions they spark, it is understandable that policy-makers would vocally worry about the marrying of Islam and political mobilization, or to put it in other words, the joining of (transnational) social movements and mobilizing for contentious politics (Tarrow and Tilly, 2007). But this must be countered by two other ideas: the first is that the vast majority of Islamist contentious political mobilization and activism is non-violent (including in the region), the second that political Islam can be – and indeed historically has been – a force for peaceful settlement of disputes, modernization, and an avenue to protest/dissent against state-policy (Esposito and Burgat, 2003; Chernov-Hwang, 2009).

Both ideas find expression historically in the Af-Pak border (Haroon, 2007). Firstly, as we have already mentioned, there is the legacy of Badshah Khan and his Servants of God movement. As the name readily indicates, this was a religiously inspired movement aimed at the political mobilization of Pasthuns to resist British colonialism (Banerjee, 2000; Johansen, 1997). However, rather than deploying a repertoire of violent actions – and contrary to stereotypical notions of Pasthun religious fanaticism and commitment to violence so prevalent in British Victorian accounts, – the case of Badsha Khan shows that "religion may motivate people for action against political repression while confining them to nonviolent means in pursuit of humanitarian ends" (Johansen, 1997: 53). Moreover, Robert Johansen's study of religious empowerment and constraints on use of violence among Pasthuns wisely alerts us that "a preoccupation with the violent elements of these [religious and tribal/nationalist] traditions may impede the expression of their less violent themes" (ibid.).

The same could be said with regard to the sensitive issue of Islamic education in a madrasah setting and the often touted links to violent extremist activity. In

peripheral regions afflicted by a dearth of development schemes, welfare and free, reliable, state-run education facilities such as the NWFP, FATA, Balochistan or their neighbouring southern Afghan provinces, attending a madrasah is often the only way for entire generations of children to have any education at all - especially since almost all are free of cost, and many include boarding. However, the last decade has seen the rise of an important anti-madari sentiment among Western policy-makers and academics.

In such accounts, madaris are denounced as "terrorist factories" – or, in the best case, highly problematic institutions bent on ideological indoctrination of children, and as such in need of urgent substitution by state-run schools (Fair, 2008; Stern, 2000; Singer, 2001). While such characterizations may resonate with our (scant) knowledge of the madrasah-educated youth that filled the ranks of the Taliban in the 1990's, it does not stand up to what we know today about madaris. In fact, several authors have presented a much more balanced, historically informed and accurate picture of the nature and role of madrasah education, which could profitably be used to guide Western policy towards the Af-Pak border (and South Asia in general) (Zaman, 2002: 74-78; Riaz, 2008; Hefner and Zaman, 2007; Malik, 2007; Noor, Sikand and Bruinesen, 2009). Among these alternative accounts, one must in particular pay attention to studies that carefully de-construct the reasons for over-focusing on madrasah education in general as a (security) threat (Bano, 2007; Bergen and Pandey, 2006). In a region as complex and as ignored by state welfare schemes as the Af-Pak border – and even despite the efforts of Greg Mortensen and his Central Asian Institute to extend community schooling dramatically - madrasah education may be the best change that hundreds of thousands of children have to gain access to education and personal advancement. Rather than securitizing madaris in general because of the links between a small share of them and violent islamist militants, we should realize that they can turn out profoundly religious, conservative, politically active, transnationally mobile individuals who are also community leaders, strong moral examples, and non-violent activists against a host of perceived social, political and economic injustices in the region.

This brings us to one last issue regarding the securitization of the border area through discourses about the danger of religious political mobilization and "Talibanization" – the purported lack of agency of local population vis-à-vis radical islamists. As Magnus Marsden insightfully observes:

Indeed, the predominantly rural societies in which much of South Asia's and other Muslim populations live continue to be stereotyped as intellectually barren, rendering Muslim villages as places of non-thought.

> (…) More specifically, they also reveal the widely held assumption that villagers are deficient intellectually, and, once educated, will inevitably 'Islamise' because Islam is a faith of codes, rules and book standards, (…). Nowhere has this been more apparent than in both popular and academic accounts of Pakistan's Frontier province, where the use of the term 'Talibanisation' has conveyed a view that Muslims in the region do not think but, instead, just somehow become 'fundamentalist' and Taliban-like (…). (Marsden 2005: 10).

Instead of partaking in such a blatantly racist view of the populations that inhabit the Af-Pak area, we should pay attention to the various ways in which they actively negotiate – rather than simply passively receiving – the issue of religious orthodoxy in their everyday lives. The people living in this area have survived countless military actions, state and militant repression in their daily lives, poverty and low agricultural yields, natural catastrophes and much more. They have managed to thrive under conditions that would appeal most Western policy-makers, provide for themselves and their extended families, gain a measure of education, and negotiate the enormous challenges of globalization and modernization. They have evolved a sophisticated culture that prizes moral rectitude, individual identity, courtesy and hospitality and the ability to articulate ideas and take pleasure in discussing complex issues. We should therefore afford them more than simply being the passive, voiceless recipients of an Af-Pak strategy of military intervention tempered by problematic development schemes. We should listen, and learn, and actively ensure that the people of the area determine their welfare and their future on their own terms.

Politics of Transnationality

While the tendency remains to focus and listen to those wielding guns, the diverse humanitarian emergencies for borderland citizens have not caused much of a public stir in the last decades and years – it's not Bali or Haiti after all, but most likely the wrong people on the run. The transborder and transnational space under review is one of hybrid identities precisely due to countless refugees caused by subsequent local, regional and global political conflicts, not only by cross national trading and militant mobilization. Thus refugees, their strategies and agency included, are another category that should inform on and contribute to our depictions, perceptions and understandings of the border region.

There is no shortage of examples of the role of refugees in the transnational politics of the border area. In the 1970s, for instance, one of the Balochistan insurgencies resulted in a wave of thirty thousand refugees to Afghanistan while as a

consequence of the fighting in Soviet occupied Afghanistan, more than five million Afghans fled across the border into Pakistan where most remained in FATA, NWFP, Balochistan alongside other destinations in Pakistan (Rubin and Siddique, 2006: 4). Since 2002, over three million of them have returned to Afghanistan, but around two million remain and are not very likely to return after becoming part of Pakistani society as „semi-permanent refugees" (Marsden, 2008: 213). By now, an estimated fifty percent of Afghans have either lived or visited Pakistan while around sixty thousand Pakistanis work in Afghanistan, ten thousands crossing the border daily. (Rubin and Siddique, 2006: 19)

Since 2008, the current operations of the Pakistani military in its fight against jihadists and local insurgents have caused several waves of internally displaced persons (IDPs) within Pakistan, alongside the IDPs generated in large numbers in the Southern Afghan provinces due to fighting between insurgents and (inter-) national forces. Despite differing numbers, it is estimated that more than three million Pakistani IDPs moved in the years 2008-2010, most og which to or within NWFP, and that some 20.000 others have fled to Afghanistan (assisted by the UN and NATO) – "the worst refugee crisis since partition from India in 1947" (Tavernise, 2009; Aljazeera, 2009; BBC News, 2009; International Crisis Group, 2009a; Irin News, 2009; Platt, 2009; Perlez and Zubair Shah, 2008). The International Crisis Group denounced this sad state of affairs in its 2009 report "Pakistan's IDP Crisis", intimating that the Pakistani civilian government, as well its military forces, were responsible for the waves of refugees, and that they largely failed to support IDPs in their most basic needs for shelter, health care, education and income substitution. An exception might become the redirected federal government's Benazir Bhutto Income Support Program (BISP), under which socioeconomically vulnerable receive direct payments, in addition to free access to health care, life insurance and vocational training and which will pledges to support 45.00 IDP families of the total of 250.000 families (International Crisis Group, 2009a: 10).

Since most of the refugees remain with extended family or in private homes, only a small portion was registered in camps and thus entitled and able to receive direct support. At the same time, Islamist welfare organizations and welfare activities of militant organizations provide support for IDPs on their own terms and in their own camps, thus repeating the pattern manifest in the wake of the 2005 earthquake relief effort in and close to Kashmir, sparking reports that "jihadi indoctrination in Al-Khidmat and FIF camps and schools are widespread" (International Crisis Group, 2009a: 8).

These strategies continue to impact in particular on women IDPs. According to Farzana Bari, head of the Qaid-e-Azam University Excellence Center for Gender Studies in Islamabad, women were and are central to the Taliban version of Islam which focuses on women's dependency from males as well as on the control

of women's mobility and sexuality. At the same time, she stresses that the gender discourse is used by both sides, the Taliban as well as the government, for their own cause. Research conducted in 2009 with IDPs, indicates that the fighting between both sides led to a destruction of traditional spaces for women's interactions and the merging of public / collective and private patriarchies. As IDPs, women are particularly vulnerable in terms of protection, compensation or access to relief packages. At the same time, women local councilors or women peace activists have neither been included in peace negotiation processes, as obligatory for signature states of the Resolution 1325 (2000), nor invited into reconstruction and relief efforts.[9]

The number of IDPs from the Pakistani side of the border region is expected to increase further in 2010, as UN and other aid agencies prepare for an influx of a further 150.000 IDPs from FATA's tribal areas and the much fought over Malakand division of NWFP. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), out of the 2.3 million IDPs in 2009, over a million remain displaced at the time of the writing in early 2010 – 113.500 in camps and the remaining with host families or relatives, mostly in NWFP (Irin News, 2010a). Many expect their displacement to be mid- to long-term given the ongoing military operations and criticize the paucity of educational facilities for children as well as being "often denied jobs on suspicion of being militants" (Irin News, 2010b).

But the politics of transnational resource mobilization and political activism are not exhausted by looking at displaced populations and their plight. An additional good example to illustrate the complexity of the local context, as well as the way in way transnational/trans-border mobilization occurs, according to Marsden (2008: 227-228) is the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), a private, international and non-denominational development organization with various agencies and operating for instance in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Its activities focus on health, education, culture, rural and economic development as well as institution-building, predominantly in Africa and Asia. With sixty thousand employees in twenty-five countries its annual budget for non-profit development amounts to 450 million US-Dollar, funded by the Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of the Shia Ismaeli community whose followers primarily reside in South and Central Asia. The AKDN has various projects in the areas of health, education and welfare services as well as participatory rural development in Afghanistan and Pakistan with employees from Chitral for example working in Afghanistan. The Aga Khan is merely one player in a large constellation of NGO's and other civil society initiatives that must be taken into

9 Personal notes from presentation of Dr. Farzana Bari at the international conference on „Conflict Management in the AfPak Region", held in Berlin on 03.12.2009. Dr. Bari shared still unpublished research and primary findings, part of an ongoing study.

consideration when studying the border region[10]. In paying attention to their workings – something the mainstream accounts of region seldom do – one finds tools to support the transnational reading of politics advocated here, as well as combating the orientalist securitization of the Af-Pak border and its peoples.

Studying Transnational Political and Social Mobilisation in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Border – Suggestions Rather than Conclusions

This globalized borderland has transnationality at the centre of its daily realities. Therefore, opting for a transnational lens when examining the patterns of political mobilization of the local population is not only trendy scholarship – it is inherently in tune with the historical context and the contemporary realities of life "across the border". This crucial aspect needs to be included in the agenda-setting and mechanisms of conflict-resolution, which would allow for a much more nuanced, fine-grain picture of social and political mobilization in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, thereby going beyond the currently domineering securitizing discourse.

Therefore, we contend that any useful study of or policy for the border region should focus on the strategies and repertories (i.e. practices) of actors, as examples of transnational (and specifically transborder) mobilization that transcends both formal state institutions, and the legal strictures of the Durand Line. Moreover, the list of actors to study – especially for those trying to develop policy-relevant recommendations – should go beyond the stereotypes commonly found. Instead, such a list should include diverse social and political movements and networks and examine their relationship to one another, often building coalitions, or at least interacting in looser transnational coalitions (e.g. transnational economic entrepreneurs such as smugglers or narco-traffickers with militants). In addition to a study of the complex patterns of interaction between actors, the competent study of the border region must also pay attention to the strategies of actors in relation to the transborder, transnational space they inhabit (social as well as geographic) in which mobilization and practices occur, as in the case of refugees, IDP's, or diasporas (including ethnic communities spread throughout regional urban settings).

As we hope to have demonstrated, the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan are a complex setting that defies static, and statist generalizations – gen-

10 Significantly, these NGO's include a host of local organisations, thus underscoring the need to include local agency while studying the politics of transnational activism in the complex border area. These local NGO's include the All Pakistan Women's Association (http://www.apwapakistan.com/), and the Aurat Foundation (http://af.org.pk/mainpage.htm), among others.

eralizations that often betray the prejudices left behind as traces of a bygone colonial era, or the ongoing power of Orientalist discourse. If the essentialist models of Pasthun tribalism and Islamic radicalization are flawed, in what ways do local actors negotiate their identity, their political loyalties? In the distorted mirror of essentialist generalizations – the "essentially tribal nature of the region", the "fundamentally conservative nature of Pasthuns", the "inevitable radicalization of madrassah students", – very little can be discerned which is of use to either better understand or improve the conditions of life in the border.

As we tried to convincingly argue, the way around this relies on strategies of avoiding the subalternization of local perspectives, local knowledge, and local practices. What are the people that inhabit this complex social space saying about themselves and the events unfolding in the region – what is being told and discussed in tea-houses, schools, waiting rooms, bustling bazaars, in newspapers and over the airwaves?[11] Where can we discern the webs of civil society – the myriads of local organizations? On must pay attention to the strategies for asserting agency of local, "tribal" populations, i.e. framing, mobilization and repertoires, thus moving beyond the pro-extremism bias we assume for them. As a case in point, in the February 2008 parliamentary elections, the electorate of FATA voted in its majority for secular nationalist parties and not Islamist parties in their call for socioeconomic and political mainstreaming (or even mere inclusion) in order to move beyond the colonial status of the Frontier Crimes Regulation or the ban of civil society organizations and aid agencies. As a result, the Awami National Party – the direct heirs of Abdul Ghaffar Kahn and his social movement – entered local government, having also won seats in Balochistan and Sindh.

The bulk of mainstream reports, studies and policy briefings about the Af-Pak border area have been majoritarily concerned with what the national policies of Afghanistan and Pakistan should be like towards the region and its population. Or, they have overwhelmingly focused on what strategy Western governments – most prominently the U.S. – should adopt towards achieving our goals in the area, goals that start from the state-centric assumption of a coherent set of national policies that neatly encompass the messy social reality of a transnational space. What would our engagement look like if it started from the inherently transborder practices of the local populations? What would an "Af-Pak strategy" look like from the point of view of the Awami National party and its voters, for instance? What can we learn from them? Probably, that we need to start crossing borders – physical and metaphorical – more often, and better.

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