ARTICLE

Borders in Globalization Review
Volume 7, Issue 2 (Spring & Summer 2026): 70–80
https://doi.org/10.18357/big_r72202622235

Ghosts, Gatekeepers and Guards: Borders as Hauntings and Hauntings at the Borders

Malvika Sharma

This paper reads borders as much more than lines and gates, as they usually appear to the naked eye. Such an understanding of borders is embedded in the historical crossover and exchange that flourished in regions where those borders later appeared. Before the borders became present-day state barriers, they acted as key bridges that ensured flows and crossovers between people. The shared historical crossover and exchange of the living, but also of the non-living, took a different turn as borders grew hard, impermeable, and aggressive. Through an inquiry into one such South Asian border, the Line of Control, a border that is also an unsettled product of the Partition in South Asia, this work engages with both the living and the non-living, the material and the immaterial, the visible and invisible to see how the birth of the partition's borders changed fluid everyday realms into hostile borderland geographies—geographies that continue to remain haunted by the border ghosts.

***Keywords**: Cross-border cooperation, Greater Geneva, Léman Express, mobility, European integration.*

Introduction

Two recent essays inform this piece about writing on borders: Sarah Green's (2019) work on *borders as traces* and Eleni Myrivili's (2019) work on *borders as ghosts* (see also Pulkkinen 2019; Andersen 2024). The overarching conceptual foundation that both scholars draw heavily from is Derridean hauntology, particularly the concepts of *différance*, trace, and spectre. This work engages with Derrida's notions of spectre and spectrality, as highlighted in one of his later works, *Specters of Marx* (1994), and in line with Myrivili's (2019) reading of borders as ghosts. Along with spectres, Abraham and Torok's phantoms are also taken into consideration as both of these—*spectres* and *phantoms*—constitute the underlying conceptual framework for an alternate reading of borders and boundaries, or shall I say, for reading borders as something more/other than how we have so far been reading them in key sociological, political, and social anthropological discourses (Abraham & Torok 1986; Rashkin 1992).

The transgenerational phantomatic haunting, much like a spectral one, is about the unknown, the unspeakable secret. However, they differ in key ways. Davis (2005), in *Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms,* reminds us that Abraham and Torok's phantoms speak of trauma passed down intergenerationally in complete secrecy—undisclosed, as an unknown secret —only to be suddenly disclosed in the individual or the family as a phantom. The phantom interferes with the individual's capacity to act, to think, and to be. Derrida's spectres, on the other hand, are much more than a phantomatic secret that haunts. Derrida's spectres need to be spoken with, deconstructed for the meanings they carry and the roles they play. His spectres are not active agents of

Malvika Sharma, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Jammu.
Contact: Malvikasharma58@gmail.com or Malvika.sharma@iitjammu.ac.in. ORCID: 0000-0003-0165-974X

Creative Commons
CC-BY-NC 4.0

change like Abraham's and Torok's phantoms. Spectres do not solve mysterious secrets like phantoms do to end intergenerational haunting. Spectres contribute to the processes through which individuals experience and uncover the process of secrecy (the past trauma), further leading to some kind of transition or change in the present. In other words, phantoms need to be revealed, spectres need to be engaged with. Davis, in this regard, writes, "The difference lies in the status of the secret…for Derrida, the ghost's secret is not a puzzle to be solved; it is the structural openness, or the address directed towards the living by the voices of the past or the not yet formulated possibilities of the future. The secret is not unspeakable because it is a taboo, but because it cannot yet be articulated in the languages available to us…Phantoms lie about the past whilst spectres gesture towards a still unformulated future" (Davis 2005, 378–379).

How do we reconfigure such a haunting vis-à-vis borders and people?[1] Terms like ghosts, when used as tools to study borders, writes Andersen in one of his recent essays, "indicate a focus on temporalities… only by connecting temporalities with their spatial and practical manifestations may we even begin to understand how precarious borders can be, particularly because of how cemented the idea of "the line" can be among borderland populations and accordingly how easy it is to stir up memories of 'the line'" (Andersen 2024, 28). Memories, along with other archives, thus play a key role in connecting temporalities, which in essence are ghosts of the past informing us how things were in times past and how they changed, transitioning into and with the borders of today. In the case of borders and lines that are a product of bloody Partitions—territorial and religious, such as those in South Asia and the one this piece of writing is about—one needs to then ask, how do memories connect with temporalities, and what sort of secrets/traumas do Partition's phantoms reveal or conceal? To put it in the words of Myrivili (2019, 108), what sorts of creatures—living, non-living, and in-between living and non-living—are lurking around these borders? How do spectres that are the border's ghosts of today engage with these phantoms of the past in order to better understand the present and the future? More importantly, what roles do these localized ghosts play, good or bad, in ensuring that the lingering intergenerational founding silence (the haunting termed as "anasemia" by Abraham and Torok (1986)) is addressed, engaged, heard, and spoken with, if it is not completely exorcised.[2]

The spectre, the ghost, keeps coming back again. Not that it ever went away, but it comes back as an apparition. When Hamlet (the conceptual underpinning of all founding theoretical orientations on haunting) prepares to chase after the ghost (Act I, Scene 4), Marcellus proclaims, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark". Derrida draws on Hamlet and continues to ask: What if we are chased by the ghosts, too? "What does it mean to follow a ghost? And what if this came down to (us) being followed by it, always persecuted perhaps by the very chase we are leading?" (Kamuf 1994, 10). This involves speaking and engaging with the rotten, the trauma, the ghost, the secret, the temporal. Derrida adds that this also means knowing where the rot is located and to whom the graves belong. Marking the dead, moving beyond doubt in mourning, knowing who is buried there but also knowing that in what remains of him, he remains there. Let him stay there and move no more! (Kamuf 1994, 9).

The coming back of the spectre, intergenerationally, needs mourning, or exorcising, of that which is rotten, so that it moves no more. That something (the phantoms, the spectres, the ghosts), which is rotten within the Partition's borders, is the cause of the haunting, the founding intergenerational trauma, the unknown secrets and silences, and needs to be exorcised. But it also needs speaking with, such that the dead, the lost, the ones who knew the origins of the secret, are marked, mourned, not with the intention that the secret will ultimately be revealed—and the ghosts will disappear—but because engagement with this haunting from the past can tell us better how to shape our present and build a better future. The haunting, when engaged with, can help us understand the why, the where, and the whither, questions that repeatedly haunt us about our past and also the present.

Like the spectre, the immanence of borders prevails; it comes and goes like the ghost but is always there. Derrida emphasizes that even though we cannot see the spectre at all times, it is there, seeing us even when we cannot see it, *the absent presence* as he calls it. This gaze of the spectre, termed *the 'visor effect'* by Derrida, has been associated with the panopticon-like tower surveillance on the border and, hence, with *the state* (Myrivili 2019, 111). The subjects of this surveillance, especially for those who live right under its eye, remain suspended in a state of exception and keep moving from being a subject of the surveillance to being an aware subject, an aware and keen critic of the power, knowledge, and authority of the state that runs within its borders (Agamben 2023; Althusser 1984; Badiou 2009; Foucault 1995). The apparatuses that shape a border subject—let us call them *border-apparatuses* or what Demetriou and Dimova (2019) refer to as the socio-political materialities of borders—not only shape a border subject and discipline it through punitive everyday repression and surveillance, but also create a subject that is born out of an event, a rupture. The event leads to new possibilities for subject creation, including the creation of borders in the first place. Partition, as that event, that rupture, created newer borders, and newer border-subjects, people in whose backyard the borders suddenly appeared, like an apparition. These same people then learned to live with the border—the

unseen and the unknown, only to find themselves suspended in that state since Partition, a state where they continue to live not only under the border's gaze but also with its ghosts (everyday border*ly* apparitions) as the haunting continues to inform and shape lives around here.

Conceptualizing borders and borderscapes through categorizations, as discussed above, also speaks to a large body of work by Tumarkin, especially her work on "traumascapes" (Tumarkin 2005; Tumarkin 2019). Relying on autoethnographic approaches, she writes, "traumscapes are haunted and haunting places, where visible and invisible, past and present, physical and metaphysical come to coexist and share a common space. These are places that get to us, that affect us at the very core, that make us feel everything from awe to unease, from fear to epiphany, from a burst of involuntary memories to a sense of deep, all-powerful transformation" (Tumarkin 2019, 5). Tumarkin's emphasis on linking trauma and place together (linking affective materialities of space and place), while at the same time understanding trauma (sites of memory where traumas lie) as non-pathological, is of key relevance for this article (2019, 13). In this light, mourning is not, then, a sickness but a way to engage with the trauma that haunts.

Although Tumarkin, taking from Gordon's (1997) work, reiterates that our engagement with that which haunts needs to go beyond the Derridean view of the spectral as merely a non-living presence in the living present. While agreeing with these arguments, I do not necessarily look at Derridean haunting as a mere non-living presence in our present. In fact, this essay takes from Derrida and interprets his hauntology as essentially asking us to engage with those who haunt, so that through deep engagement with the spectres of our past, we can move towards shaping a better future. To this end, this essay also agrees with Gordon's futuristic view of both looking at and taking from haunting in a way that pushes us to reach a stage where "something needs to be done" (Gordon 2011).

The accounts below draw on haunting and its related conceptual frameworks, as discussed above, to analyze how we can see borders as ghosts, while also looking at how ghosts who were gatekeepers (of the mountainous passes where these borders gradually were drawn) react to the sudden appearance of the borders, much like the living. The ghosts, like the living, are subjects of the state and its borders, such that the haunting embedded in Partition also haunts the dead. Most importantly, the accounts below look at how haunting continues to engage with the living, but also with those who were the non-living, in regions where borders suddenly sprang up, where "the event" unfurled, releasing phantoms and spectres—creatures that go on lurking around these rotten spaces.

Borders, Continuities and Ruptures in the Himalayan Pir-Panjal

The Line of Control (LoC), the contested non-permanent boundary that bisects Jammu and Kashmir, also divides many smaller, lesser-known cultural groups.[3] Most of them, such as the Pahari, Gujjar, Bakerwal, Dard-Shin, Balti, among others, are minority linguistic ethnicities now lying partitioned on each side of the border between India and Pakistan, with the line fracturing the very territories—which are significant markers of spatial regional identity—that once unified each of them as a single group. One sector, the Poonch-Uri, along the north-western belt of the boundary, is home to the Pahari, a multi-religious ethnic group, as well as other prominent tribes such as the Gujjar and the Bakerwal. These groups have, since pre-colonial times, called the "outer hills" in Jammu and Kashmir their home.[4] The geography of these outer hills, such as the lesser Himalayan ranges like Pir-Panjal, in whose lap the Poonch-Uri sector falls, was such that these diverse minority ethnic groups were sprinkled on the surface of these hills, their habitations flowing undemarcated like the mountainous folds. The folds encouraged flows between and within these groups. The community networks, kinship, marriages, and other exchanges surpassed the mountainous passes, bringing neighbouring hills and their foothill populations into a chain of intercommunity relations. These relations gradually grew wider like a well-woven meshwork, further connecting groups across community lines, across mountainous folds (Sharma, 2025).

The Partition of 1947 and the ceasefire line of 1949—renamed the Line of Control in 1971—changed the nature of the cultural geographies by partitioning them between two sovereign nation-states. The ties that were characteristic of these spaces were also reshaped, leading to a much larger cultural partition that, at the time, barely rose above the communal-religious lines. While a multireligious ethnicity such as the Pahari was religiously partitioned, the cultural partitioning of these groups ultimately lingered on as the cindering religious bloodbath eventually cooled down. The people who survived were packed along both sides of the border depending on their religious affiliation, and as Indians and Pakistanis in the newly partitioned Jammu and Kashmir, only to find that the Partition had seeped into their cultural affiliations and shared social ties, with the line packing them up into separate, inaccessible borderlands. People who belonged together through shared language, territory, communication, and traditions were now segregated into different borderland groups. An artificial, man-made construction of lines and borders divided ethnicities by placing them into different pockets across these lines. The pockets today lie facing each other, only a stone's throw away, yet separated by a very volatile border. The story of the Poonch-Uri sector, with its two neighbouring culturally connected

geographies, is the story of the Line of Control absurdly severing an otherwise well-connected, oft-favoured route for exchanges of all kinds. Today, both Uri and parts of Poonch lie on the Indian side, but the line severed the route that historically connected them. Thus, despite these falling on the Indian side, they remain cut off due to an odd bulging of the LoC between them. (See Figure 1).

This paper, tapping into the historically shared connectivity between the two hilly neighbours, Poonch and Uri, connected by a culture, looks at what became of the human-inhuman, living-non-living, material-immaterial connections after Partition. What became of the mountainous folds and routes therein that connected the two smaller outer hill regions in Jammu and Kashmir? Do these folds lie barren and infertile today, with barbed electrified concertina running atop their summits, along with an ever-swelling military and militant footprint killing everything living and scaring away even the dead who lived on the mountain top? Or did at least the ghosts survive, forever waiting for the past for more than seventy-five years to let the humans who belonged pass, to again make contact perhaps with a human who crossed these tops to reach the other side to see his kin? Through the anecdotal and archival details of those who once seamlessly crossed over, only a few decades ago, this paper engages with borders as a haunting, as political and statist entities that bring suffering, pain, and loss to those it encloses, to speak with the hauntings at the border, which are understood here as living-non-living connections. Although lost to the borders today, they once shaped the mountainous realms and the homes that belonged to them in key ways. Let us begin with the connections and networks that these folds signified before Partition ruptured them in 1947.

Godfrey Thomas Vigne (1844), in his nineteenth-century travelogue, *Travels in Kashmir, Ladakh and Iskardo*, recounts walking the outer hills in May 1837 and crossing Poonch to reach Uri when he wrote,

> *On the next day, about one-third of the way to Punch, I crossed the end of a valley on the left…in the afternoon I came in sight of Punch, lying on the north bank of the river. The country is generally open, the mountains forming an amphitheatre around it. The valley up which lay the way to Uri and Kashmir, were visible in a northerly direction behind the town…it is usually necessary to pass the night at Kahuta, having first ridden through the district of Sudarun, at the mouth of the valley. The serai at Shukrabad is old and comfortless, and I took*

Figure 1: The Map of Jammu and Kashmir is from the 1961 census and depicts various districts and principalities as they existed before the ceasefire line (the Line of Control) partitioned them. The regions depicted inside the circle are the Pir-Panjal belts. As we have seen, Uri was then a sub-district region of Muzaffarabad (to the north-west), which is also the next neighbour of Haveli (the site of Pai Shera's village and the present-day district centre of the partitioned half of the Poonch on the Indian side. Poonch before Partition comprised four tehsils: Bagh, Sudhnoti (*Sudhnutti*), Haveli, and Mendhar (*Mendher*) (as shown on the map).

> *shelter in a hut a little below it. In bad weather, it will be found necessary to halt there for the second night from Punch and ascend the remaining distance in the morning. On the summit is a hut capable of affording shelter in case of a storm. Its elevation is about 8500 feet above the sea. The path on the summit winds over a flat covered with firs, for the space of half a mile or more, and then descends through the jungle to the village of Hyderabad. The Punch path is never entirely shut for foot passengers and very rarely for horses, at any time of the year, though snow may render the passing a service of fatigue and difficulty. On the next morning, the traveller descends from Hyderabad to Uri, down the valley of the stream. (Vigne 1844, 248-249.)*

The route that Vigne is describing here in the mid-nineteenth century was the key route that communities in Poonch and Uri depended on to reach one another. In 2023, during the course of my fieldwork, Pai Shera (*bhai*, a prefix added to the names of the elderly and wise as a mark of respect, pronounced as Pai in Poonchi-Pahari), a Gujjar resident of Degwar-Pothi, was in his late eighties while elaborating on the journeys he took from Poonch to Uri. He shared about the nature of social, economic, and religious exchange, which stood out as a marker of diversity for these minority (now also borderland) communities here in Jammu and Kashmir. I visited him at his house on June 20, 2023, and we were in the initial round of introductions and rapport-building, during which the nature of sharing and exchange as it existed before Partition became the main focus of our conversations.

I have written elsewhere about the nuances and trials of doing fieldwork in our own communities, in places and with the people to whom we belong, but it is exchanges like the one shared below with Pai Shera that foregrounds *the self*, a self who is deeply entwined with *the other* that we intend to observe on the field, thereby blurring boundaries while simultaneously making research more challenging and important at the same time (Sharma 2022). In line with the nativist approach followed by Tumarkin (2019), among others, in researching trauma, this essay highlights how the self is far from being kept at a distance in the field but becomes a key source of reflexive inquiry, not only helping us understand past trauma better but also making us aware of our own positionality through the various entanglements and intimacies we share vis-à-vis the field from being an insider. These entanglements then align methodologically with our research by providing a key anchor for how we choose to explore and navigate the field. It shapes and drives our research in a way that implicit inquiries into the self will align seamlessly with the explicit questions raised, thereby blurring the boundaries and making the self a key methodological source. Having highlighted this above, the following accounts methodologically orient the way I approached conversations by unapologetically making *the self* and *its shared intimacies* central to the inquiries I make in this paper on past trauma and the Partition in Poonch. The following vignettes throw more light on this.

I visited Pai Shera at the courtesy of Master Makhan, a Pahari-Hindu resident of Degwar, who generously walked me uphill to Pai Shera's house. Pai Shera could hardly move out of his bed, *a charpoi*, *a khatt*-woven four-legged bed, that lay in the house's *berha*, an open porch found in most houses in Poonch, also a place where conversations flow freely, with people coming and going at their will. There were a few people who had already occupied chairs placed around Pai Shera's khatt. After an exchange of pleasantries, the conversation in a mix of Pahari and Gojri went like this:

> ***Me to Pai Shera**: Tus kinne saal ne ho? How old are you?*
>
> ***Pai Shera**: Pausing and contemplating...hosan assi na, probably 80, not sure.*
>
> ***Master Makhan**: Assi tohn kaafi uppar hoso, pachasi tak...could be 85 and above.*
>
> ***Pai Shera to Master Makhan**: Ae Kudi kon he? Who is this girl you have brought here with you today?*
>
> ***Master Makhan:** Mehta Parsram ni dotri hai. She is Mehta Parasram's great-granddaughter.*
>
> *Pai Shera, after a long pause: Mehta Parsram ni biwi Lagame ni si...Mehta Parsram's wife was from Lagame [Lagama, a village in Uri].*[5]

At this point, Pai Shera began randomly reminiscing about his friendships and bonds with his Hindu and Sikh Pahari friends in the village. I did not interrupt him with other questions as he continued, speaking fondly of many others, such as Mehta Parsram, his peers from the village as it existed right before Partition in 1947.

> ***Pai Shera** (continuing): Sundar Kako [as he refers to Mehta Sundar, Parsram's father], Parsram ne walad sahab, and me would take our horses up on these hills... Kodho (godha) torno...walking our horses up on the hills.*
>
> ***Me**: Kiyan...to what end?*
>
> ***Pai Shera**: Iss trah bas, just like that, we would load rice on our horses from here, would barter it for Mothi, Rajma [kidney beans locally cultivated in the hills] from the bazaar of Uri. Sometimes we would go to Rawalakote, but mostly we took that route, paarli shadak podhi [pointing to the road that Vigne wrote about in his accounts above, which was visible to us across the river from Pai Shera's bedha. See Figure 2].*

He continues,

> *Once, I accompanied Sundar Kako on his journey to Uri. We had a horse, loaded with grains and rice...Kodho*

assan ladh leyo. We started really early in the morning, crossed Aaliabad's Sarai by afternoon, then Haji Pir valley and then reached Pidhi (Bhidi) after that at around nightfall.[6] *Katak-Manggar ki raat thi, kole koyi macchhis ni kuch ni kan ni, jis le rasto ni labbo tho, yeh tokkan ka tarra jeda tha na...chatt la ke baddeyo uthe kodo...those were the months of October–November, the months of long dark nights, when we couldn't figure out which way to go downhill, we decided to spend the night in a temporary stone shelter atop the hill and also tied our horse there. We had nothing to cover ourselves with for the night, we had to lie close to the stones that had naturally formed a shelter around us. It was when I heard the sparrow sing, I realized it must be light outside, jis le chidhi chaunki na, te hum kahan ke lau ho gyi. Both of us were glad we survived the night. Within a few hours, we were in Lagame [the village of Lagama in Uri]. Sundar Kako's family did not look happy at our unannounced arrival. They were concerned and immediately inquired how come we were there that early in the morning when people who took that journey started from Poonch in the morning and reached Uri by evening. They asked, Paiyaji, kis trah bacheyo unn aafataan te balaiyaan kolun tus raati? Brothers, how did you manage to spend the night atop these summits and still managed to walk out alive, how did the mountain ghosts, aafataan-balaiyaan, let you live? We looked at each other and responded, hayati thi, we had some life to live before the dead finally takes us. They finally came one day and took Sundar Kako before me.*

Pai Shera was narrating this memory from his life before Partition, most likely the 1940s, and he added that he was just a little boy who loved walking up and down the hills with elders from his village. I did not start the conversation with him by looking for his memories from the pre-Partition period. But my presence as a woman who shares kinship with people (now dead) from the village with whom he walked took him back to one such journey he undertook to Uri with Sundar Kako. As Derrida also adds, haunting is historical but not dated. It does not start to happen suddenly one day; it is what flows between generations (Kamuf 1994, 4). My shared generational kinship with Sundar Kako made Pai Shera share tales of his bonds and connections with his fellow villagers from back in the day. The tales further brought to life pathways and connections that had been lying dormant, closed, and laden with landmines, tightly securing the prohibited crossing of the Line of Control.

De Certeau, in his classic *The Practices of Everyday Life* (1985), writes that memories tie us to a place, and that these memories are deeply personal between two people who shared that space, for example, people in a shared neighbourhood. These memories are stories held in reserve, of pasts that others are not allowed to see, known and shared only between those who share the space. The stories are often also stories of different spirits that remain hidden in such a space, in silence. Between these spirits and the living (ascertaining that the living and the non-living dwell together) in that shared space, de Certeau (1985, 108) adds, "there is a sort of knowledge that remains silent, only hints of what is known but unrevealed are passed on just between you and me". I did not interrupt Pai Shera with questions but rather listened to whatever he continued sharing from his past, a past he shared with my ancestors, revealed as a narration between him and me. He wanted me to know whatever he was telling me. The narrations were also of a past before borders were drawn on the landscape. What sort of phantoms did Partition and its borders release in 1947 that continue to haunt Pai Shera's narration of his memories from the time before the line appeared? And what became of *the aafataan* and *the balaiyaan*, the mountain Ghosts, *the dwarpaal*, the gatekeepers who spared Pai Shera's and Sundar Kako's lives that night? Let us have a look below.

Figure 2: The hills on the right are towards Uri, in the Northern direction. The Line of Control falls between them. The photograph is taken from near Pai Shera's home in Poonch.

Partition's Phantoms

The trauma associated with Partition continues to haunt several communities in South Asia, particularly those in India and Pakistan. The founding silences that come with revisiting the narratives, primary or otherwise, have become a new site of inquiry that continues to inform the directions in which Partition studies proceed. (Butalia 1998; Menon & Bhasin 1998; Das 1995; Pandey 2001; Zamindar 2007; Zutshi 2010; Zutshi 2015). How

to uncover that which cannot be spoken? The unspoken in most cases is much more than a simple answer to the inquiry, what happened? The unspoken lies beneath that which is narrated, even in cases where people have been brave enough to revisit, recall, and narrate. It is like the secret of Abraham and Torok (1986), a secret that many survivors do not even know exists. It haunts them much like the visibly felt trauma, but even more than that. It is a spectre that sees them through the generations and might appear like an apparition in an individual or a family down the line. But for most of the time, it stays hidden, unknown, unheard of.

Many writers on Partition have attempted to capture this unknown secret in their writings, and one is immediately taken to Sadat Hasan Manto and his genius for capturing that which cannot be seen in the survivors and their stories of Partition. Manto's (1955) lunatic in his short story, *Toba Tek Singh,* Bhishan, is haunted by the spectre. He is frustratingly puzzled by the spectrality, the gaze with which the freshly placed barbed wires partitioning the two sides look at him. Standing between them, feeling quite out of place, yearning for his home, he lets out a scream, a helpless cry that is a submission to the power and authority these new borders suddenly held. Bhishan's scream affirmed that his world, his home, his village as he knew it, had forever changed. There were no possible answers to the questions he kept asking, where is my village now? On which side? Why? How? Etc.

The vested authority over the borders (by the states) has been haunting many who were displaced on either side of the borders, the lines both settled and unsettled that had been drawn during and since Partition. The unsettled Line of Control severed old routes between Poonch and Uri in Jammu and Kashmir, displacing many. Many have since then felt out of place or found themselves standing between the barbed-wire fences, not knowing what happened to their homes. As such, life itself is permanently unsettled. On the side of Poonch, Pai Shera's accounts of Partition are among many such accounts of "being out of place". His house sits right below the fence, on the Indian side. He narrated how he was on one of these hills around his village when the ruckus of the October 1947 Partition struck Jammu and Kashmir.

> *I had taken the sheep grazing and had been walking these hills for about a week when other shepherds along the way informed me that something uncanny is transpiring down at the foothills. It took me a long time to understand what shape these borders have taken place in our lives, only Allah (almighty) knows what truly transpired…Allah jaane kiss trah ni sarhadan peyi gaiyaan zindagiyan ich…I was only a little boy, stayed atop the hills for around three years, taking shelter and food wherever I could…Kazinag, Malaangan, uss paar bakri chaarta rehya…When the noise settled down, I gradually understood that I had been stuck on the side that is now with Pakistan and had to register for rehabilitation to the other side, by then in India, the side where my land and family lay. I came back only to find out that my parents' house, and nearly all other houses in the village, had been consumed in the fighting going on between the Indian and the Pakistani militaries. We were slowly rehabilitated in our torched houses post-war, which we had to build all over again. Sundar Kako, among many other Hindu-Sikh minorities from the village, had been displaced too. I remember how Kako made infrequent visits back to the village, whenever it was safe, trying his best to help his cattle, very few of which were left, as most of them died or were killed in the war. Not even animals could survive.*

Pai Shera's narrations largely speak of his life before the Partition's borders changed his village and its surroundings, and he reminisces very little about his life in the village as it exists after Partition today. On the side of Uri, I visited Shyamlal's (name changed) family atop a hill, nestled in a neighbourhood in the village of Lagama, where a handful of Pahari Hindu minorities can still be found. The fate of these ethnically and culturally similar neighbours, Uri and Poonch, was sealed by the turn of events that occurred when Partition struck Jammu and Kashmir in October 1947. Among the other events that shaped the catastrophic Partition was the arrival of tribesmen and the raiders from Pakistan, infamously known as *qabayalis*, which was followed by the first war between India and Pakistan from 1947 to 1949. Much changed for the communities here (Whitehead 2007; Sharma 2025). Uri falls right on the Jhelum Valley Road, the route that the tribal raiders took towards Srinagar, looting and plundering along the way. The Muzaffarabad–Uri–Baramulla belt had a substantial Sikh–Hindu minority. All of them, in one way or another, were affected by the marauding raiders followed by the first war between the militaries of both nation-states, which, for the time being, transformed the outer hill peripheries into war fronts. All the communities that called these peripheries home bore the brunt. Shyamlal told me that most people, and especially the religious minorities in Uri, evacuated and ran for their lives and honour (the *izzat*, the gendered sexual violence that ripped apart the lives of women on both sides in India and Pakistan during Partition) (Butalia 1998; Das 1995; Menon & Bhasin 1998), mostly towards Srinagar and following the same Jhelum Valley Road. Many others, like his family, did not; instead, they chose to take shelter atop the hills that connected Poonch and Uri. The village habitations that these families belonged to were already situated at quite a distance from Jhelum Road, which ran through the foothills. Instead of choosing to climb down the hills to reach the road that the raiders had planned to use, many thought that the summits of the hills further up, away from the roads, would be the safer option. They spent months sheltered in these hills, often moving in groups with men and younger boys being on the lookout, taking turns to guard the group.

When news that the Indian military had reached Baramulla and subsequently Uri, the groups of religious minorities moved out of their hideouts, mostly to assist the military on the Indian side to push out the raiders, who were by then being assisted by the Pakistani military, but also to go back to whatever was left of their homes since the raiders had pillaged their habitations (Mehta 2005; Whitehead 2007). In the post-Partition times, when Uri lost its important connections with its neighbours like Poonch and Muzaffarabad, many minority groups chose to stay back in cities like Jammu, where they had found shelter during the war. A few did, however, come back, and that is why one can find fewer Hindu-Sikh-Pahari neighbourhoods in Uri today. They belonged to those who stayed by taking shelter in the mountains and to those who were displaced but chose to come back, only to find the newly carved-out line gazing at them right in the eyes, partitioning many of the fluid connections their everyday lives had been shaped around.

Uri is similar to Poonch, but much smaller in area and spread, and can easily continue to qualify as the front. It is heavily militarized, but also home to those who chose to stay in their ancestral homes even if it meant living at the extremely hostile fronts where the line stands today, demarcating the Indian and the Pakistani territories. The history of India's and Pakistan's dispute over the territories of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh, coupled with the ongoing conflict in the valley of Kashmir, has not been kind to these communities. They are now classified as the borderland groups, with the line piercing through the middle of their homelands. Borderlanders in both Poonch and Uri continue to live in the shadow of the Partition's borders, finding connections and routes between them, forbidden, closed, and lost since 1947.[7]

These stories of displacement, violence, borders, belonging, and home are stories of human losses but also of the loss of the material and immaterial, living and non-living realms, to which these humans, who were suddenly made to inherit these new borders, were previously unknown and unheard of. The perennial mountain ghosts by then were accompanied by the invisible ghosts of the Partition. What changed is not only human lives but also everything that constituted "the everyday" around these human lives here. When people came out of their shelters and moved back to their homes, or whatever was left of them, they readjusted to the material and immaterial realities and the new realities that reshaped their lives and worlds completely. Since the line divided the mountains, their connections, and the pathways people had walked since the time of Vigne and before, but also the summits where wayfarers took shelter, one is then pushed to contemplate and ask, what did the new borders do to the mountain ghosts? Did the mountain-ghosts embrace the battered, torn, and the displaced seeking shelter, similar to how they sheltered Pai Shera and Sundar Kako during their tempestuous nights on the summits? Or did they move down into the valleys and the foothills where the barbarity of the raids, followed by the war, was unfolding? Or did the mountain ghosts choose to guard the unguarded homes of those who ran out of these for the sake of their lives, ultimately failing to guard them in the wake of the larger, scarier ghosts that had possessed humans, the perpetrators of violence and bloodshed at the time?

Eventually, the ghosts must have moved back to the mountains, only to find them partitioned by an unfamiliar cacophony. The conversations of the curious wayfarers, the climbers, the horse walkers like Pai Shera were suddenly gone, replaced with machine guns and mortar shells, along with a strange chatter inside the camouflaged military bunkers on both sides, a strange tongue not familiar to the ghosts. Did the ghosts abide by this new arrangement of sorts, ultimately turning into border guards or mountain gatekeepers? But then, who did they let pass when no one was allowed to enter? Did the absence of those who sought passage as wayfarers today haunt the ghosts? Most importantly, how were the mountain ghosts between Poonch and Uri partitioned? Among them, which ones were chosen to guard the border on the side of India, and which ones guard Pakistan's side?

Borders and Hauntings

As Pai Shera continued with his stories of the Poonch-Uri stretch, I once intervened to ask him how many times he had undertaken that journey through the hills to Uri in his lifetime. He kept thinking, then answered, "*gyi oo duniya*...that world has been lost". I have since thought about what sort of world that one simple question I posed made him revisit. Through my inquiries, he was perhaps revisiting a world that he had never really left behind. Some remnants and recollections of that world came alive when I visited Uri in July of 2023, a few weeks after I met Pai Shera in Poonch. I would like to close this essay with a description of that world, existing in fragments—lost and buried in some places, yet alive and gasping for air in others, as one moves about in Uri (as seen in Sardar Dhyan Singh Reen's accounts). Something is indeed completely rotten in these borders; whether the dead or the living, they haunt everyone and everything. The spectacle of life in the borderlands, the striking performativity, and the display of borders are in themselves a spectre. It comes and goes, never leaving one alone as we walk through these hills all the way through Jhelum Valley Road, entering from Uri to Chakothi and further to Muzaffarabad in Pakistan.

Derrida asked us to engage with such haunting and its lingering absent presence, which sees us even as it remains invisible to us. As I tried to engage with those who encounter such a haunting on an everyday basis in Uri, the following accounts show it grew denser, more complex, layered, and uncanny, like a cold chill I felt in

my spine as I crossed borders within borders. Just when I started to feel it, it was gone, suddenly reappearing a few minutes later as a pulsating quiver. I knew there was a chill running down my spine, but I could not feel it strongly enough and hence could not put into words what it felt like at the moment. That is what uncanny borders have done to these realms, both living and non-living, since Partition. The borders are very much there, and just when people try to live with them ordering and reshaping lives and realms in order to fit around these structures, the phantoms and ghosts from the past suddenly come alive, ever more scary, ever more threatening, ever more bloodthirsty, reminding everyone to not settle down just yet, and always be ready to appeal to the mountain ghosts, thereby seeking shelter whenever the need arises.

I was asked to meet Sardar Dhyan Singh's (name changed) family while visiting Gurudwara Parampilla Sahib, a key religious site in Uri for Sikhs from Jammu and Kashmir.[8] Many of those who looked after the social and religious life at Parampilla Sahib belonged to a few of the remaining Sikh families that stayed in Uri and never left. Sardar Dhyan Singh generously offered a ride to his home and was also excited to note the cultural connection we shared as Paharis, with me from Poonch and him from Uri. He picked us up in Lagama, and we proceeded to visit the rest of his family and home in the village of Salamabad (Islamabad also goes by the name Salamabad). As soon as we had entered into a discussion of the connections and the various marriages that have occurred between the Pahari of Poonch and the Pahari of Uri, the commotion in the car was abruptly broken by the first check-post that screens vehicles to be allowed to enter Salamabad.

The mighty Jhelum takes a U-turn in Uri, flowing north-westwards into Muzaffarabad on the Pakistani side, with a part of Uri falling on its right bank and the other on its left. The main bazar is situated around the base of the "U". Salamabad was the area of Uri that fell beyond the main bazar on its left bank. It is also an area where a large military garrison has been stationed, with quite a few significant hydro power projects alongside the road. The road further leads to the terminal end of the border, *the Kaman post*. The entry on the left bank, thus, is regulated and thoroughly surveilled. As Sardar Dhyan Singh's home falls on the left bank in the village of Salamabad, he was a regular commuter and quite confident that the military wouldn't trouble him much, since we were riding in his car. We still had to stop and report our identification, putting down an anticipated exit time that couldn't be too late in the evening. This meant we had to leave his village and all those areas on the left bank of the Jhelum by four or five in the evening. We crossed the Salamabad market, rode uphill to the Sikh neighbourhood, and chose to sit in Dhyan Singh's house garden for the views that it offered us of Uri and its surrounding hills.

Figure 3: The picture is from the check post that screens people and vehicles entering the village of Salamabad or those visiting the border, towards Kaman Post, in Uri.

Dhyan Singh retold stories of his mother and father evacuating the house along with other villagers, going towards Srinagar and further to Jammu when raiders arrived in 1947. He narrated many anecdotes of others who had similarly been displaced and spoke of his family's life in the village during the subsequent wars that India and Pakistan waged in 1965, 1971, 1999, as well as the impacts the wars had on frontier border areas such as Salamabad and Uri. I shared my family's stories of displacement from the same time, the routes they followed, often prying with the intention of locating a common shelter where our ancestors could have crossed paths as refugees seeking safety and help in the chaos of 1947. He spoke about his marriage to a Sikh Kashmiri woman from Baramulla and the interesting ethnic-cultural mix that it led to in his family, with his wife and his son participating enthusiastically in the talks.

Amidst all this, there was a lingering sense of desolation throughout our conversations. We had been mourning but silently through our stories. While speaking with and to each other, we often sipped tea and looked out towards the hills and the habitations of Uri that were around us, as if, while narrating and sharing our stories, we were relocated to a different world, a world gone by, or as Pai Shera puts it, *gayi oo duniya*. We were somehow also happy that we reached out and found each other, rekindling connections that our ancestors had

shared, walked, and established across these hills as neighbours. But what we were most happy about was constantly finding in the making and remaking of the borders that our families, regions, and histories were not alone. The borders uprooted and unsettled all of us, and we need to find each other, speak, and engage with our sense of loss, yearning, trauma, absence, and so on. While working for many years now on the Partition's borders in Jammu and Kashmir, it was in Uri - I realized that Derrida was right. None of us has the answer to why, where, how, or wither? But what we can have, is engagement with the why and the how, the why us?

Dhyan Singh showed me the hills from his house and the route walked between Poonch and Uri. He promised to take me up there, the next time as far as the military allowed, to see for myself the connections frozen in time. While looking at the route from a distance that day, I thought of Pai Shera's *aafataan* and *balaiyaan* and wondered if the ghosts, still standing guard to these borders, would let us pass, finally bringing these borders down and letting those who belong to these lands move freely. Ghosts, I suppose, can put right what humans have not been able to since Partition—to bring down the same gates they were made to forcibly stand border guards to!

Figure 4: Gurudwara Parampilla Sahib on the banks of the Jhelum, in Uri.

Works Cited

Abraham, Nicolas, and Maria Torok. 1986. *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy.* Translated by Nicholas Rand. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Andersen, Dorte Jagetic. 2024. "Living in the Time of the State: Border Temporalities in the

Northern Irish Borderlands" *Borders in Globalization Review* 6(1): 27–36. https://doi.org/10.18357/bigr61202421664

Agamben, Giorgio. 2003. *State of Exception.* Translated by Kevin Attell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Althusser, Louis. 1984. *Essays on Ideology*. London: Verso.

Badiou, Alain. 2009. *Theory of the Subject*. Translated by Bruno Bosteels. London: Bloomsbury.

Behera, Navnita Chadha. 2007. *Demystifying Kashmir*. New Delhi: Pearson Longman.

Behera, Navnita Chadha. 2000. *State, Identity and Violence: Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh*. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers.

Bose, Sumantra. 2003. *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict, Paths to Peace*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bouzas, Antia Mato. 2024. "The Line of Control in Kashmir" *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History.* https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.746

Butalia, Urvashi. 1998. *The Other Side of Silence*. London: Routledge.

Das, Veena. 1995. *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Davis, Colin. 2005. "Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms" *French Studies* 59(3): 373–379. https://doi.org/10.1093/fs/kni143

De Certeau, Michel. 1985. *The Practices of Everyday Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 1994. *Specters of Marx*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge.

Demetriou, Olga, and Rozita Dimova (eds.). 2019. *The Political Materialities of Borders: New Theoretical Directions*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv18b5m0p

Foucault, Michel. 1995. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books.

Green, Sarah. 2019. "Lines, Traces and Tidemarks" in Olga Demetriou and Rozita Dimova (eds.) *The Political Materialities of Borders: New Theoretical Directions*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 67–83. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv18b5m0p.12

Gordon, Avery F. 2011. "Some Thoughts on Haunting and Futurity. *Borderlands*" 10(2): 1–21. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48782437

Gordon, Avery F. 1997. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Khan, Yasmin. 2007. *The Great Partition: Making of India and Pakistan*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Lamb, Alastair. 1991. *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy, 1846–1990*. Hertingfordbury, England: Roxford Books.

Mehta, Krishna. 2005. *Kashmir 1947: A Survivor's Story*. New Delhi: Penguin.

Menon, Ritu, and Kamala Bhasin. 1998. *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Myrivili, Eleni. 2019. "Borders and Ghosts" in Olga Demetriou and Rozita Dimova (eds.) *The Political Materialities of Borders: New Theoretical Directions*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 103–115. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv18b5m0p.14

Pandey, Gyanendra. 2001. *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pulkkinen, Tuija. 2019. "Ontologies of Borders: The Difference of Deleuze and Derrida" in Olga Demetriou and Rozita Dimova (eds.) *The Political Materialities of Borders: New Theoretical Directions*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 56–66. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv18b5m0p.11

Rashkin, Esther. 1992. *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narratives*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Schofield, Victoria. 2003. *Kashmir in Conflict: India, Pakistan and the Unending War*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Schofield, Victoria. 1996. *Kashmir in the Crossfire*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Sharma, Malvika. 2025. *The Partition of the Indian Subcontinent: Border Identities in Jammu and Kashmir.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press and Routledge.

Sharma, Malvika. 2022. "Insecurities of Nativism: A Woman Ethnographer Studying Her Own Community" *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 12(1): 126–40. https://doi.org/10.1086/719413

Snedden, Christopher. 2013. *Kashmir: The Unwritten History*. New Delhi: Harper Collins India.

Tumarkin, Maria. 2019. "Twenty Years of Thinking about Traumascapes" *Fabrications* 29(1): 4–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/10331867.2018.154007

Tumarkin, Maria. 2005. *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Vigne, Godfrey Thomas. 1844. *Travels in Kashmir, Ladakh, and Iskardo.* 2 vols. London: Henry Colburn.

Whitehead, Andrew. 2007. *A Mission in Kashmir.* New Delhi: Penguin Viking.

Zamindar, Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali. 2007. *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Zutshi, Chitralekha. 2015. "An Ongoing Partition: Histories, Borders and the Politics of Vivisection in Jammu and Kashmir" *Contemporary South Asia,* 23(3): 266–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2015.1040734

Zutshi, Chitralekha. 2010. "Rethinking Kashmir's History from a Borderlands Perspective" *History Compass* 8(7): 594–608. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2010.00692.x

Endnotes

1 Ghosts, phantoms, and spectres are used interchangeably here.

2 See also Derrida's foreword to Abraham and Torok's The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy (1986).

3 The ceasefire line is embedded in the key socio-political changes after the Partition 1947 in Jammu and Kashmir. The line was laid down following the UN-mediated ceasefire agreement of 1949 at the end of the first war between India and Pakistan over the territory of Jammu and Kashmir and was renamed the Line of Control in 1971. For a brief account the events that shaped and continues to shape it, see Bouzas, The Line of Control in Kashmir (2024). For historical accounts on the events leading to Partition and the ongoing conflict and dispute in and over the territories of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, see Behera (2007, 2000), Bose (2003), Lamb (1991), Schofield (1996, 2003), Snedden (2013), and Whitehead (2007).

4 Outer hills in Jammu and Kashmir, such as the lower Himalayan Pir Panjal ranges, are home to diverse ethnic groups. In the Uri–Poonchz–Rajouri belts, the Pahari, Gujjar, and Bakerwal are key ethnic groups. The Line of Control runs through these regions, dividing many of these groups territorially. Many of the hills were autonomous/semi-autonomous principalities in the pre-partitioned princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Poonch existed as an autonomous fiefdom, and Uri was a part of Muzaffarabad district. The ceasefire line partitioned Jammu and Kashmir into Indian and Pakistan held territories. Parts of Poonch and Uri remain on the Indian side, with Muzaffarabad is on the other (see Figures 1 and 2). See also Sharma (2025).

5 This was new information for me. I double-checked with Master Makhan, who reiterated that my maternal great-grandmother belonged to Uri and married in village Degwar, Poonch.

6 It is most likely the sarai of Shukrabad as mentioned by Vigne. It is known today in the villages by the name Aaliabad, not to be confused with the other Aaliabad Sarai enroute Mughal Road, which is another prominent route that connects Poonch to the valley of Kashmir across the Himalayan Panjals.

7 In the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war, the central peak of Haji-Pir between Uri and Poonch was captured by the Indian forces only to be later returned to Pakistan under the Tashkent-Agreement, which restored the status quo ante of the positions held by militaries on both the sides before the war. For that brief period of time, around six to eight months when Haji-Pir was brought under the control of India, the route from Poonch to Uri was reopened. People today have fond memories of when they once again visited each other freely for the first time after 1947, only to find themselves separated again when Tashkent was signed and borders restored. These borders stand today, keeping Uri and Poonch separated.

8 The Gurudwara marks Chatti-Patsahi, signifying that the sixth guru in line of the ten gurus known in the Sikh-gurudom as the ten founding fathers of the faith, visited these lands and personally marked these places in Jammu and Kashmir. Today, Parampila sahib is also known for its syncretic values, sharing space, and boundary with a courtyard that belongs to key Muslim saints who walked in the region.