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Crossings: *borderizing* and *borderized* mobilities in an era of converging crises

By

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DISSERTATION

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2022

Acknowledgements

To Rosie, and countless others, who live and die in search of refuge

My journey with this dissertation research is not merely an account of the last six years in the Sociology PhD program at the University of California, Davis. It started way before, as I grew up navigating a world of formidable structures and power relations, a world crisscrossed by different types of borders, some more (in)visible than others, pervasive yet elusive, durable yet elastic, constant yet shifting over time. As I near not an end to a journey, but rather a beginning, I look back to acknowledge all who believed in me, inspired me, guided me through challenging times, and helped me learn crucial lessons beyond the realm of classrooms and textbooks—lessons that will stay with me for life.

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International and CIAT has helped me hone my toolkit and vision for becoming a bridge between research and policy. I ultimately dedicate this research to all (including would-be) migrant participants, simultaneously navigating *borderized* realities and *borderizing* the world around them. Their voices have stayed with me beyond interactions in the field, guiding my thoughts, dilemmas, and reflections during the process of dissertation writing.

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Abstract

This dissertation research argues for recalibrating an overused lens for understanding human mobilities engendered by or engendering crises. Going beyond the canonical framework of people crossing borders, which dominates research and policy globally, I contend that it is necessary to engage with common experiences of being crossed, constrained, and conditioned by "borders"—social and legal barriers reinforced by political and economic power relations. I consider borders not only as objects or sites of inquiry, but as conceptual tool for critical inquiries around mobilities in relation to the climate crisis, COVID-19 pandemic, and conflict, with specific focus on local postcolonial contexts in the Global South. Empirically focusing on internal migrants within the nation-state boundaries of Bangladesh and India, I examine how effects of historically operating bordering processes shape their mobilities through creation and reification of intersectional *borderized* realities. I further demonstrate how migrants as *borderized* bodies on the move are simultaneously *borderizing* beings, capable of negotiating possible futures, and reimagining existing social, political, and legal boundaries by which they get defined and categorized. Drawing on data collected from in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations during multi-sited fieldworks conducted over multiple time periods, I orient my analysis around insights emerging from three empirical studies to unpack nuances of the phenomena of *borderized* mobilities and *borderizing* migrants. I conclude with a discussion around refugee-ness as an emerging condition of concern linking the differentially *borderized* and *borderizing* in this era of converging crises. I ultimately contribute to advancing critical understanding of human mobilities shaped by and shaping multiple crises by illuminating experiential knowledge and subaltern standpoints of those already always crossed by borders.

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PART I:

Research Framework and Design

CHAPTER 1

The Argument: Changing the Lens

Introduction: An Overview

This dissertation research argues for recalibrating an overused lens for understanding human mobilities engendered by or engendering crises. Going beyond the canonical framework of people crossing borders, which dominates research and policy globally, I contend that it is necessary to engage with common experiences of being crossed, constrained, and conditioned by "borders"—social and legal barriers created and reinforced by political and economic power relations. With a specific focus on local contexts in the Global South, I consider borders not only as objects or sites of inquiry, but as conceptual tool for critically juxtaposing mobilities in relation to the climate crisis, COVID-19 pandemic, and conflict, with growing importance over time. Situating the effects of historical bordering processes and power relations on everyday lives of migrants moving internally within the nation-state boundaries of Bangladesh and India, I examine how these border-like effects shape their mobilities through the creation and reification of intersectional *borderized* realities, experienced and internalized by migrant bodies. I further demonstrate how such *borderized* bodies on the move are simultaneously *borderizing* beings, capable of negotiating possible futures, and reimagining existing social, political, and legal boundaries by which they get defined and categorized.

Drawing on data collected from in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations during multi-sited fieldworks conducted over multiple time periods (between 2012-2014 and in 2020), I orient the analysis around three empirical cases to focus on: 1) *borderized* mobilities of migrant workers returning to their villages in the Indian part of the Bengal delta region, confronted by cascading crises, namely COVID-19 lockdown and cyclone *Amphan*; 2) *borderized* mobilities and *borderizing* migrants in the context of slow-onset gradual impacts of

the climate crisis on lives and livelihoods of circular migrants who float between rural and urban areas in Bangladesh; 3) *borderizing* as practiced by the internally displaced Kashmiri Pandit community in India, who are negotiating belonging around a social border with the Kashmiri Muslim community by reimagining and reorienting this group boundary into a bridge. Finally, I conduct a comparative analysis across these three empirical cases and conclude with a discussion around refugee-ness as an emerging condition of concern linking the differentially *borderized* and *borderizing* in this era of converging crises. By examining the effects of bordering processes and borders in the postcolonial South, as well as by illuminating experiential knowledge and subaltern standpoints of crisis-affected groups already always crossed by borders, I contribute to the advancement of a multi-disciplinary and critical understanding of human mobilities associated with multiple overlapping crises.

The notion of borders as conceptualized in this research is expanded beyond their geopolitical forms bounding the margins of nation-states to signify the effects of larger structural processes and power relations. As socially constructed and contested effects of power structures, borders can have a pervasive presence in (would-be) migrants' lives that is more than real, even more durable than the shifting physical borders of nation-states. Borders in this conceptualization represent relations of power that can reinforce consequences, shape identities, and assign value and worth to some groups over others. With this emphasis, my attempt is to move away from understanding borders only as sites or things in themselves, that are then crossed by people, to examine the not so visible processes of bordering, as experienced, embodied, internalized, and negotiated by migrants. Nevertheless, in critically juxtaposing past and ongoing bordering processes with mobilities and crises in this contemporary time, I attempt

to study borders as "social things" (Lemert 2012) within this relational framework. It may not always be easy to express this directly, using the somewhat limited conceptual language at our disposal. And while the language used may even seem to be anthropomorphizing borders as intentional actors, the aim of this work in operationalizing borders as a tool is to find a way to come closer to capturing how people in their everyday life may experience overlapping and overwhelming effects of power relations as their immediate reality, especially from the position of a subaltern in a postcolonial context.

Serving as a broad overview of the dissertation, this introduction tries to present an overall summary and logic of the research framework. However, what it may not reveal is how, like pieces of a big jigsaw puzzle, each part of this work was inspired and shaped by specific experiences and moments. I present two such moments below.

Mapping the Social Terrain of Crossings

Inside a half-lit room with one window and a tinned roof, a space designated for a community-based organization in one of the largest slums in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, there hangs a hand-drawn map of the slum created by local community members (Figure 1). The map shows locations of informal settlements and facilities within a dense and sprawling Korail, paradoxically bordering one of the most affluent neighborhoods in the country, while serving as home to hundreds of thousands of migrant workers who arrive in Dhaka to survive on the margins. The title of the map reads "Social map-Korail slum" and the detailed legend on the left explains symbols for facilities and establishments like school, mosque, CBO office, public toilet, shop, well and water point, among others. Created in 2016, the map indicates there were almost

27,000 families and more than 100,000 dwellers in Korail, a number that could be expected to have grown in the past years. On the bottom left of the legend are names of those who were present when this map was being drawn and who potentially contributed to the mapmaking. This map is much more than an assemblage of lines, scribbles and polygons—it represents a puzzle. It is documented proof of grounded presence, of settling and surviving on a piece of land by those without access to basic resources and rights to this land.

Can this process of mapping themselves on a piece of paper represent an attempt to formalize, document, and make visible a largely informalized existence? Such an attempt to locate themselves by delineating boundaries on a map can also symbolize how migrant agency works in the face of formidable structures and bordering processes that condition their lives, well-being, and rights as human beings. Representing the "situated knowledge" (Haraway 1988) of migrants in one of the largest and most densely populated informal settlements in Dhaka, the very existence of this map serves as a tangible example and reminder of how those at the margins, who are confronted by multiple borders in their daily lives, can simultaneously participate in the process of making and ascribing meanings to borders.

Figure 1: Hand drawn map of the Korail slum in Dhaka by local community members

Yet this map is not a unique, isolated example of how the marginalized may actively engage in bordering in the face of considerable challenges. Only a few hundred kilometers from the capital, I had an informal conversation with Mahira, a middle-aged participant from a focus group in a village within Polder 2 of Satkhira district, Bangladesh. We were standing on an embankment which acted as a major road, dividing the rural settlement from a heavily salinized

river opening up to hazy endless waters of the Bay of Bengal at a distance. She pointed to the banks of the river where the water stood uncomfortably still, to show a line of *keora* trees she and others have planted in the hope they will act as effective mangrove barriers against the frequent tidal surges from the open sea. Her face held an expression that could perhaps be described as defiance, as well as the will and courage to continue surviving in a place where water for drinking and other use need to be bought from the nearest market several kilometers away. I further came to learn many men from this village regularly migrate to nearby small towns to earn a living for their families. On hearing I will be visiting a nearby point on the India-Bangladesh border passing through the river *Ichamati*, Mahira started confiding in me about how, in earlier times, people were usually able to cross this river to the *other* side and come back, but now the security has tightened around this part of the border. “They shoot us in the knees now,” she explained.

My conversation with Mahira reveals a puzzling interplay of two perspectives—what Espiritu (2014) would perhaps call a “jarring juxtaposition”. On the one hand, proximity of the geopolitical border with the Indian part of Bengal looms as a larger-than-life reality, conditioning and constraining decisions around mobility and adaptation for labor located at the crossroads of ecological marginality, economic marginality, and political marginality (Samaddar 2017). But on the other, in the face of a climate crisis unfolding as a slow ongoing process, and amplifying effects of other crises, the multiply marginalized are using their knowledge and engaging in tactics, including various types of bordering, as revealed through the instance of planting rows of mangrove trees for protection of fragile lives and lands in the delta region. This can be seen

manifested along a border with water of riverine channels, a border known for long to shift and realign in response to ecological processes of active delta making.

These two examples, grounded in the specific regional context of the Bengal delta region of Bangladesh and India, reveal something crucial about how borders have conventionally been studied with reference to human mobilities. When thinking of borders in relation to migration policies, governance, and migrant experiences and rights, usually two perspectives are adopted by a range of state and non-state actors, including policy makers, academics, activists, practitioners, and even migrants themselves.

The first perspective feeds on an overtly securitized narrative around borders as legal geopolitical structures, that when *crossed* by a large number of migrants in unregulated, unpredictable, unauthorized ways, can be detrimental, chaotic, and even dubbed as a form of crisis, thereby necessitating calls for "safe, orderly, and regular" migration[1]. While some can be allowed to cross internationally recognized borders under certain qualifying conditions, their movements managed through instruments like passports, visas, and asylum policies, not everyone is permitted the right to move across such a border, even if the said border was created to dissect what historically used to be the same ecological and cultural region.

[1] Following the first ever global level meeting of Heads of State and Government within the UN General Assembly in 2016, focusing on issues of migration and refugees, a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration was developed and endorsed in 2018. Though non-binding, the Global Compact represents the first ever inter-governmentally negotiated agreement on international cooperation in recognition of the need to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration (IOM 2018). It is perhaps not surprising that along with legal identity and documentation and countering smuggling and trafficking, one of the objectives of this Global Compact is to "manage borders." (https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration)

The second perspective, emerging as a critique of the former narrative, recognizes the violence and injustice surrounding technologies of border control, thereby calling for the abolition of borders and freedom of movement for all. There has been a burgeoning trend in mobilizing this approach in migration studies to advocate for migrant rights, and in advancing migration theories by centering migrant voices and experiences from the margins. However, while the latter perspective has been gaining traction across disciplines, and through efforts around public scholarship and bridging of research-policy gap, such an approach unfortunately still tends to normalize the existence of borders as a given, immutable entity that needs to be transcended. As a result, the debate still lingers around whether *borders should be crossed or not*.

In this dissertation, while my approach builds more on the second perspective, I also attempt to move away from it. I argue that without understanding how *borders cross us*, we cannot fully comprehend human mobilities in the context of any crisis, be it COVID-19, conflict, or the climate crisis. However, the overarching tendency to hyper-fixate on understanding human mobilities through the lens of *people crossing borders* can serve to overlook, paradoxically, the ongoing bordering processes and associated production of borders—spatial, symbolic, and social, that cross, classify, confine, and condition lives of millions of people, especially in the Global South.

Through this dissertation research, I further destabilize binaries like that of mobility and immobility by moving beyond considering borders as *things* by themselves that are essentially *crossed*, to instead focus on the *condition* of being *borderized* and the related process of

borderizing that co-constitute everyday lives of the communities in this study. In other words, moving away from a *people crossing borders* framework, I focus on how *borders cross people*.

Borders, Borderized, and Borderizing at Work

My aim in using the terms borderizing and borderized (henceforth used without italics or scare quotes) is to present them as conceptual frames for operationalizing the understanding of how borders cross people. Both the terms here can do the useful work of providing us with a potential language for describing and interpreting effects of multiple intersecting borders, especially in the context of any crisis, be it the COVID-19 pandemic, a violent conflict, or a changing climate.

On the surface, borderized and boderizing might only seem to denote how an existing symbolic boundary could materialize as territorial border on the ground through the process of borderization. However, the way I use these two terms extend beyond such specific connotation, to signify legal, social, political, and cultural effects of broader processes historically operating over the last few centuries. These effects may be imagined as resembling some kind of a border, especially when seen through the lens of crisis.

Borders and their effects not only manifest on the ground, through setting up of border patrols, barbed wires, and other instruments of managing of mobile bodies, but they are also embedded in our mental structures and embodied in our lived experiences. For instance, any system of classification, as a way of bordering and ordering of the world, may not only determine people's *legitimate* geographical locations in relation to territorial borders of nation-states, through (re)production of categories like citizens and refugees, but more importantly, shape

social locations, mobility decisions, and life outcomes by selectively ascribing value to some over others, to then justify differential access to rights and resources. Ultimately, the purpose of such bordering is to mark and separate bodies—superior vis-à-vis inferior, skilled vis-a-vis unskilled, documented vis-à-vis undocumented, human vis-à-vis sub-human, amongst other such distinctions.

Bordering processes, through naturalization of such binaries, can remain obscured, despite being an intimate part of everyday realities of those who have been historically othered and marginalized by these processes. To critically examine the processes, and not only their effects, I offer the words borderized and borderizing as a possible albeit partial attempt at enriching an existing conceptual toolkit.

Building on this, and from my own research and educational experiences, I use the terms borderized and borderizing (which resonates with "militarized/ing") to signify the systematization of certain social arrangements that can become durable and normalized to the extent that the underlying borders that are reinforced can hardly be discerned. Where parallels between borderizing and militarizing might become more salient in this study is through the systematization and bureaucratization of certain ways of classification and reification of a hierarchy, so much so that borderizing as a process itself becomes invisible and naturalized to an extent. This then works to shift the spotlight on what could be a visible effect of people trying to navigate their borderized existence, i.e., by becoming variably and unpredictably (im)mobile.

Beyond growing concerns around the "militarization of climate change" (Gilbert 2012), where military operations might be directly involved to address the role of climate as "threat

multiplier" contributing to fragile and failed state scenarios, it could also be necessary to draw parallels with militarization as a common, even banal, process shaping our everyday mundane spaces, transcending scales, and connecting our personal lives with broader histories and political realities (e.g., Dowler 2012). Because of this parallel, I use the term borderizing to emphasize the incisive effects of broader structures that cut through, condition, and transform our everyday lives, simultaneously reinforcing constraints and producing opportunities that then shape mobility decisions and dynamics.

The process of borderizing does not always render itself visible. However, there is scope to view the unfolding of this process in specific contexts, and to ask *what* might become visible, *how* they might be framed and meaningfully interpreted, and by *whom*. I argue that instead of being able to view the entire process playing out like on a stage, what might become prominent at certain historical moments are fault lines or ruptures during time periods that coincide with what gets hailed as "crisis" in contemporary global order. It is through an in-depth examination of such fault lines or ruptures that it becomes possible to explore what I call borderizing at work.

How might we imagine such fault lines or ruptures manifesting over time and space? How do we operationalize the concept of borderizing for the purpose of this research? *Where* one is situated with respect to multiple intersecting borders can signify *what* effects they could be confronted with. From the example above, if Mahira's geographical location in a rural environment beside a tidal river falls along the path of a cyclone, her experience of this disaster could be interpreted as an effect of her marginalized social location interacting with local history, political economy, and ecological condition in this delta region. In comparison, those who are

differently located, geographically and socially, in relation to other borders, may not be affected by a cyclone in quite the same way. Thus, though we are all borderized, we might not be similarly shaped by the effects of borderizing processes.

Further, instead of thinking of the effects of borders as unilateral and deterministic even for those who are disproportionately confronted by them, we can potentially observe that the very impacts of borderizing may create the condition for a subsequent reimagining and realigning of boundaries and identities, signifying the agency of the borderized. Ultimately, untangling this process is to try and get to the fundamental question of how power operates, by examining specific facets of a kaleidoscope, with human mobility as a lens directed towards climate vulnerable and conflict-affected former colonial contexts in South Asia.

Human mobility is integral to understanding the process of borderizing, although the latter has until now not been fully recognized as a relevant contextual condition for examining why (and who) would move and stay under certain conditions. That is, by thinking about and actually crossing borders, the borders themselves are culturally and politically remade in subtle ways. Thus, understanding localized historical conditions in relation to the process of borderizing becomes all the more salient when the theme of climate change or crisis enters the picture, especially to address the illusion of effects of climate change operating on so-called borderless, ahistorical landscapes. The process of borderizing and its localized histories are not only key for examining impact of climate on exacerbating vulnerabilities of people in postcolonial contexts but is also key to understanding the complexities of human mobilities in such contexts.

For many around the world, the effects of a borderized world are realized through experience of loss and damage, lack, scarcity, absence of support. On the flip side, for select others, it could mean accruing of privileges, profits, benefits, capital, and assets, in an attempt to effectively buffer ongoing and emerging crises. It is the mobility of the former group in relation to a crisis that is considered irregular, and hence unsafe, unmanaged, and problematic. This research focuses on the former—borderized bodies on the move, who nonetheless are attached to borderizing minds capable of engaging in complex decision-making and imagining possible futures, including tactics of rethinking the social, political, and legal boundaries by which others define them. Their experiences can be critical for advancing our understanding of just and feasible policies around human mobility in this era of cascading and intersecting crises.

Overall, this dissertation explores the difficult to research idea that borders are not only about *who* may cross them; they are also fundamentally about *who* can *stay, where and for how long*. Borders are as much about managing the immobility of certain groups of people, as they are about managing their mobility. Therefore, this research is not *only* a study of migration and mobility in relation to climate and other crises. Rather, my goal here is to unravel a peculiar condition of existence in the face of compounding crises. This condition is first and foremost tied to the phenomenon of borderizing and associated borderized mobilities, especially for those moving *within* nation-state borders. Though I do not use nor want to assert a false dichotomy of mind and body, it can still be said that borderized mostly refers to an etic perspective, revealed through how colonial and capitalist systems have historically operated to categorize and control bodies, while borderizing, when applied to individuals or groups, refers mostly to an emic

dimension of minds engaging in cognitive processes and negotiating boundary making, including the borderizing of others[2].

While a conventional understanding of borders in relation to a crisis can pivot around people *crossing* them to flee adversities and violence, the question of those who remain *within* national territorial boundaries, yet whose lives are crossed by multiple borders, may often get overlooked in policy and discourse. Focusing on experiences of such people, I further argue why any dialogue and action must go beyond categories they are made to inhabit, to critically examine conditions of concern as a vital entry point for future inquiries.

Mapping a borderscape: Towards a sensitization

To further understand how I theorize the concepts of borderizing and borderized in this research, we can dive into the history of formation and evolution of a specific geopolitical border dissecting a vast and diverse region in postcolonial South Asia. Characterized as an unfinished, uneven colonial project (Cons 2016), this particular border bears the long shadow of the Partition of British India into nation-states of India, West Pakistan, and East Pakistan in 1947, leading up to the birth of Bangladesh from the latter in 1971.

The process of partition of the Indian subcontinent has been described as a surgical operation, with borders drawn through the territories of Punjab and Bengal as incision scars (Chatterji 1999). Bolstered by the governing logic of “divide and rule” by the British, the mechanism of partition was put in place to facilitate the creation of Pakistan as a separate nation,

[2] Derived from the work of linguist Kenneth Pike and applied to the study of human behavior, “etic” denotes a view from outside while “emic” means a view from inside (Pike 1967, Olive 2014).

to serve as homeland for the Muslims who were religious minority in British India. The new geopolitical borders were officially approved on August 17, a few days after the independence of Pakistan and India. Demarcating the two newly formed nations, these borders were drawn by a Boundary Commission led by the British lawyer Cyril Radcliffe, who only had a few weeks' time and partially documented knowledge to work with in deciding where the Radcliffe Line would pass through.

The bordering and partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 was accompanied by horrific acts of violence including communal riots, mass casualties and sexual and gender-based violence, as millions of Hindus and Muslims moved across the newly formed borders in hopes of seeking safety and refuge (Ansari 2017). More than seventy years and multiple generations later, people in this subcontinent that now comprises three separate nation-states, are still haunted by the shadow of the 1947 partition.

The trail of tears left in wake of the bloody legacy of Indian Partition has since then marked tensions around movement of people across the borders while hardening the religious boundary between Hindus and Muslims within these borders. Nevertheless, people on both sides of the partitioned regions have continued sharing language, culture, social connections as well as political and institutional settings informed by colonial history.

Although a narrative of "homecoming" (van Schendel 2005) has characterized and legitimized earlier periods of movement across the India-Bangladesh border as refugee migration, both during the 1947 Partition as well as during the war of liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, it has since been replaced by a narrative of "infiltration," marking this geopolitical

borderland as an epicenter for climate related anxieties and border restrictions. A rhetoric of "climate terror" (Chaturvedi and Doyle 2015), based on the imaginary of an inundated Bangladesh accompanied by a "tidal wave of (Muslim) migrants" crossing the India-Bangladesh border (Cons 2018), has culminated in a multi-phase fencing project along this 4097 Km border (McDuie-Ra 2014).

The shift in narrative around the border has recently become strikingly obvious with the implementation of the National Register for Citizens (NRC). This census like apparatus has been introduced by the Hindu nationalist ruling party in the Indian state of Assam, which lines the northern portion of Bangladesh border. The idea behind the NRC is to identify individuals who migrated from Bangladesh to India after March 24, 1971 and demarcate them as non-citizens. Families residing in India for decades are now mandated to present documentary evidence in support of their citizenship (Frayer and Khan 2019). Characterized as a "mass citizenship check" that "leaves 2 million people in limbo", this anti-immigrant policy by the Indian government differentially targets Bengali Muslim migrants from Bangladesh, people who have been referred to as "termites" by India's home minister (Raj and Gettleman 2019). It is ironic that many of the "potentially stateless" are actually members of families who settled in the region before 1947, that is before a border even existed between India and Bangladesh.

While my empirical focus does not directly involve people who have traveled across this international border, understanding colonial and postcolonial histories of formation, maintenance and evolution of this geopolitical border is crucial for 1) advancing critical knowledge around other types of borders shaping mobility dynamics in this region, especially in

contexts of crisis, and 2) situating the potential contribution of this dissertation beyond sociology of migration and mobility. Moreover, by doing so, I contend that immersing in contextual understanding of a region's borderscape is essential for engaging in a broader theoretical sensitization.

Partition and (re)making of a *notional* border

Research on borderlands have recognized borders as a paradox. As fault lines separating nation-states and people, borders are also points of contacts, encounters (Ferdous 2022), or as Anzaldúa (1987) would say, "hemorrhages" where one world bleeds into another. More than a historical moment of administrative decolonization of British India in 1947, the Partition is remembered and lived as a phenomenon that has been shaping processes of bordering and othering across the subcontinent. The unevenly distributed pain of partition was disproportionately experienced by the historical regions of Punjab, Bengal, and Kashmir (Ludden 2002, van Schendel 2005). While my research focuses on migrant experiences of contemporary crises in the latter two regions, a closer look into the specific historical moment and process of Partition becomes necessary to remember and reintegrate the *borderized* effects of today with the continued (re)making of *the* physical border(s) that lies at the heart of it all.

From a macro-perspective, the key instruments in making of *the* border as a colonial project, supposed to be separating a polarized Hindu nation (India) from a polarized Muslim nation (West and East Pakistan), were the Boundary Commissions chaired by Sir Cyril Radcliffe, responsible for awarding a hastily and haphazardly drawn Radcliffe Line to divide the regions of Punjab and Bengal. While surgical metaphors have been used to describe Partition as an incisive

process cleanly dissecting the historical regions into the proposed nations, such an analogy has been heavily critiqued as misleading and obscuring the messy, unfinished aspects of border-making through Partition (Chatterji 1999). What has been further critiqued is the overwhelming spotlight on the violent legacies of Partition in Punjab at the cost of inadequate focus on other regions, with Bengal only receiving attention in more recent decades (examples include scholarly works by Chatterji, Samaddar and van Schendel).

For drawing the border through Bengal, the Boundary Commission was asked to demarcate "contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims" while also considering "other factors"[3] which remained unclear. The result was the formation of a "notional boundary," a rushed improvisation by the colonial government (van Schendel 2005). That this border remained legally "porous" after its formation was supported by the presence of more than 150 enclaves on its both sides, existing as "sensitive spaces" producing everyday experiences of "territorial anxieties", even perhaps through the exchange of enclaves and realigning of the border in 2015 (Cons 2016). With the establishment of passport and visa system, this border became less and less porous, illegalizing routinized cross-border mobilities through erection of border fences, and militarization of spaces through which historically people have been able to move freely (see Sur 2015). Consolidation of the notional border that was drawn through a dominantly rural and riverine landscape with little knowledge of ground realities especially affected the agrarian communities through uncertainties in ownership and exchange of cultivable lands, and disruptions of sharecropping and credit systems (Chatterji 1994).

[3] 3 Nehru to Mountbatten, 12 June 1947, TP, XI, No. 158. (in Chatterji 1999).

Conventional narrative that this border and its western counterpart has predominantly been a Hindu-Muslim divide has been contested, with the aim to include experiences and perspectives of those who have been largely erased from Partition discourse (see for example, Ferdous 2022). Using a similar logic, I argue in this dissertation that there are other types of borders and border-like effects, related directly or indirectly to the history of Partition, and that they have largely remained overshadowed by the geopolitical border seen to be partitioning territories and communities. Chatterji (1999) asserts that the "border is far from being the trace of an event long over" and that it is "still in the process of being formed" (p. 242). I believe this can also be interpreted as a call to critically examine and advance knowledge around other types of borders and their effects in simultaneously producing borderized mobilities and borderizing beings.

The 1947 Partition and associated borderizing of territories, communities, cultures, ecosystems, and lives in South Asian context is therefore by no means an event of the past, but rather an ongoing process shaping the present postcolonial landscape and instrumental in imagining climate futures. The border that was haphazardly drawn over seven decades ago continued to be formed in later years (Chatterji 1999), both in material and symbolic forms, and juxtaposed on it today are other types of borders that together make up a meshwork of borderized effects shaping (im)mobility dynamics and strategies of internal migrants, further contributing to their emergence and perseverance as borderizing beings.

From borders and crisis towards borders as crisis?

Thinking of the prolonged and ongoing effects of the fissures drawn in 1947 as the "Long Partition" (Zamindar 2007) can be useful to theorize it as a lingering and unfinished condition, reproducing borderized effects differentially experienced by those on the move. I posit that this condition can itself be theorized as a form of crisis. Doing so can offer a critical purchase for studying borders and crisis not necessarily as disparate concepts.

It can further aid the realization that formation of geopolitical borders in the Global South could largely be connected to colonial histories. Such borders could be juxtaposed with (but may not always visibly so) other types of borders—prominently the political economic divide between rural and urban linked with processes of global capitalism and neoliberal state formation, and in the specific context of the Bengal delta, the ecological divide between land and water, including shifting riverine channels and shrinking coastlines in this climate hotspot.

Beyond borders separating yet connecting territories and communities, everyday experiences of bordering processes cutting through and shaping landscapes, livelihoods, labor, and time can reveal how mobility and immobility (hence (im) before mobility) are first and foremost borderized. This can then facilitate the problematizing of assumptions around seemingly irregular movements of a large number of migrants as the crisis to refocusing the lens towards formations of borders and their insidious, inescapable, and pervasive effects as crisis. Doing so can pave way for more granular evidence and richer theory building around how local contexts and mobilities can be shaped by border-like effects of global processes.

Crucial to this conversation are questions such as *who* borders and *how* as they can help us *begin with borders*, instead of only asking *who* moves and *why*. Mobilizing experiential knowledge of the multiply borderized and borderizing migrants in the Global South, I not only question borders as predominantly spatially fixed entities, but also depart from the hyperfocus on material and symbolic bordering processes in *borderlands*, geographically located at margins of nation-states, and demarcated by territorial borders. In other words, I try to avoid falling into a "territorial trap" in an attempt to recognize the fluidity of borders as processes, thereby going beyond conventional imagination of borders as "mere containers of people, politics, and things" (Cons 2016: 17).

However, even when literature on borders and borderlands in the context of Partition and its aftermath have aimed the spotlight on frameworks around "border culture" (van Schendel 2005), and the relations between territory, violence, and gender (for example, Butalia 1998, Das 1996, 2007, Banerjee 2010 among others), the overarching site of inquiry still remains at the geopolitical border. A major point of departure of this research is that instead of treating borders and borderlands as merely sites and "sensitive spaces" (Cons 2016), I use crisis as a lens to see borders not as things in themselves, but as relations, as processes continuously unfolding through (re)production of structured borderized effects, accompanied by relational and agentic borderizing. Furthermore, I contend that understanding borders as multilayered and pervasive, beyond territorial limits of areas demarcated as borderlands, would contribute to enriching the "borders crossing people" framework.

Ultimately, to advance critical understanding of borderized mobilities and borderizing beings in this era of intersecting crises, it is perhaps crucial to first ask how a crisis gets defined, who defines the crisis, and whether a part of the crisis is also related to the obscuring of borders that continue to cross and condition us, thereby shaping present political realities and social imaginations of futures. Therefore, beyond examining mobilities in the context of multiple crises, this research represents a step towards unpacking crisis-like (so common as to not always be identified as such) consequences of being already always crossed by borders.

Research questions, study design, and chapter organization

At the very heart of this research project is an attempt towards *changing the lens* through which we have come to understand, mostly within a managerial frame, human mobility and migration, along with a call for interpreting localized context-specific evidence on how we are at the same time borderized as well as engaging in borderizing. What might be the implications of such a way of framing for research and action on human mobilities in the context of climate and other crises? I address these concerns through an examination of three empirical cases of borderized mobilities and borderizing migrants in the context of multiple crises involving effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate vulnerability, and conflict-induced displacement.

Through my empirical chapters that follow, I aim to demonstrate how human mobility, as fundamental part of our existence in the face of compounding crises, is first and foremost a case of borderized mobilities. But instead of beginning with a concentrated focus on mobility, I begin with borders created and consolidated through historical processes of bordering and ordering of the social world. The logic behind this is to understand how borderizing as a longstanding process

has been informing realities in the context of which people then move and stay. Thus, before studying human mobility across or within nation-state borders, we must try and move the familiar lens we have been using to critically examine and advance understanding of the phenomenon of borderized mobilities in this era of intersecting crises.

This study is organized around two research questions: 1. How are migrant bodies and lives differentially borderized, including those of (would-be) migrants, in the postcolonial contexts of India and Bangladesh? 2. And, how might they also, even simultaneously, engage in the process of borderizing?

It is necessary to clarify here that the focus of this study is not the climate crisis, conflict, or COVID-19 pandemic, nor is this primarily a study on mobility per se. The core purpose of this research is to understand the process of borderizing at work and the effects of this process on shaping lived experiences, consciousness, as well as imaginations of future in an era of entwined crises.

I explore these questions through three regional cases of mobilities and borderizing within the geopolitical borders of India and Bangladesh, an iconic region within the climate and mobility literature. Serving as examples of postcolonial contexts in the Global South, shaped by the inertia of colonial histories, and representing a particular type of crisis or intersection thereof, each of the cases can also be read as characterizing our relationship with different types of borders during times of crisis.

The first case focuses on unpacking borderized mobility in the context of migrant workers returning to their villages in the Indian part of the Bengal Delta region, confronted by overlapping

crises, namely COVID-19 lockdown and a disastrous cyclone making landfall in this area in the middle of the pandemic. COVID-19 became a critical lens for this research which has itself been shaped through experiencing and navigating the pandemic as a crisis. Although in terms of the fieldwork chronology, this was the last case I studied, while immersed in a context rendered practically paralyzed by a pandemic, I use this as my first empirical chapter and entry point into examining how mobility and immobility as mutually co-constitutive processes cannot be comprehended without critically engaging with and theorizing about borderized realities, bodies and lives that underline their peculiar juxtaposition in specific moments and spaces. Using the co-occurrence of a global pandemic and a local cyclonic disaster as a particularly revealing moment, I focus my lens on borders and border-like effects that have been made visible by this overlap of crises, along with the return migrants' seemingly transgressional relationship with these borders. This relationship mainly plays out with respect to national policy response in the form of a lockdown, local curfews, checkpoints, and barriers to movements across internal administrative boundaries, accompanied by lack of access to social protection and safety net provisions to cope with shorter-term disastrous effects of the crises as well as longer-term recovery.

The second case is oriented around both borderized mobilities and borderizing in the context of slow-onset gradual impacts of climatic stressors on lives and livelihoods of circular migrants "floating" between rural and urban areas in Bangladesh. The primary border under study here is the rural-urban divide that not only links rural and urban contexts within the country but needs to be understood in light of larger political economic structures, labor-capital relations, and global processes of colonialism and neoliberalization. The relationship of the floating people

with this border is apparently transactional, through exchanges across this border in the form of labor and remittances. The chapter finds how the phenomenon of borderized mobility in this case gets constituted by two key processes of erosion and exclusion operating on both sides of the rural-urban divide (which can also be imagined as a continuum). The chapter further highlights how migrants in Dhaka's slums also engage in the process of borderizing by negotiating and situating themselves beyond pre-determined categories and assumptions to control their own narratives and imagine possible futures.

The third case uses the example of internally displaced Kashmiri Pandit community in the context of Kashmir conflict in India to examine how this displaced group is negotiating belonging and otherness around a social border with the Kashmiri Muslim community by reimagining and reorienting this group boundary into a bridge. Here the focus is more on the phenomenon of borderizing through transforming meanings around a historically constructed border, carrying the burden of a colonial past—a border that has played a salient role in shaping communal relations and even experiences of violence in the postcolonial socio-political landscape of the Indian subcontinent. This study deviates from the other cases in focusing on a historically privileged caste group, the Kashmiri Hindus, who were religious minority in Kashmir Valley but part of the Hindu majority at sites of relocation. It offers insights around the agency of a displaced community in redrawing a group boundary representative of a larger social border with the Muslim community in India, and instrumental in the process of Othering of the latter at national level. Although chronologically this study was conducted before the other cases in this dissertation, it is presented in this order to use crisis as lens in the context of a protracted conflict situation, as well as illuminate the transformational aspect of a displaced group's relationship

with a particularly rigid social border that has played a fundamental role in their sudden and forced migration from the Kashmir Valley since 1989-90.

I rely on lessons from these three empirical cases representing different facets of the complex phenomenon of borderized mobilities to highlight the salience of multiple mobile borders that often work together to confine, categorize, marginalize, and keep people in a limbo, including even limiting their abilities to imagine their own futures. The way migrants then navigate their own borderized worlds is through borderizing, including reimagining and realigning one or more of these borders they confront in their everyday lives. Focusing on mobilities as borderized gives me a critical purchase of examining something fundamental about human condition in this era of entangled crises. It also provides the scope to reveal immobility as an essential part of mobility, break down binaries, engage with paradoxes, and challenge conventional assumptions that have dominated both discourse and policy decisions around borders and mobilities in this era of climate and other crises.

I use crisis as a lens here to reveal borders as more than fault lines dividing geopolitical territories and people. Rather, borders can assume multiple mutable forms, as markers of time, identity, labor, and livelihood, as well as bridges across seemingly disconnected categories, phenomena, and communities, as revealed through the empirical cases. Further, beyond a theoretical construct, borders can be used as a tool to connect the seemingly unconnected, to question what may remain unquestioned, and to trouble the typically untroubled assumptions, attributions and associations that not only drive academic learning, but also shape our worldviews, public perceptions, and policy priorities.

CHAPTER 2

A Climate of Crossings: Framing concepts, Conceptualizing the frame

Introduction

There is water in every direction, and we are floating in the middle

Abir's description of the situation in his village in the Indian Sundarbans after the devastating Cyclone *Amphan* made landfall in May 2020, during an ongoing COVID-19 lockdown across India, sums up the existential condition of millions of migrants in the Global South trying to balance their lives and livelihoods as "floating" people, so-called because of how they live moving back and forth between rural and urban areas. 24-year-old Abir had previously migrated to Puri in the state of Odisha as a construction worker but had returned to his village around five to six years ago. Since then, he was mostly engaged in work as a day laborer in and around his village, until he went back to Puri again for work, just two months before the countrywide lockdown was put in effect from March 2020. At the time of this conversation, Abir was back in his village, located in one of the largest active deltas in the world crisscrossed by numerous riverine channels that distribute water from the Ganges into the Bay of Bengal. A part of the India-Bangladesh border runs through this delta region, dividing the Bangladesh part of the Bengal delta from its counterpart in West Bengal, India. The experience of floating, surrounded by water, especially during extreme events like cyclones and floods, not only represents a part of life for this region's inhabitants. It also captures something more elusive—how the socio-economically disadvantaged and ecologically vulnerable, located in hotspots affected by climate and other crises, constantly navigate, and attempt to make sense of the tremendous challenges and barriers for survival in ways that trouble our conventional understandings of both human mobilities and borders.

This is also reflected, in another variation, in a testimony from the other side of the India-Bangladesh border. Sitting inside a room in one of the largest slums in Dhaka, her voice breaking with effort to keep tears at bay, a 40-year-old Mahfuja shared her experience of migrating from rural coastal Bangladesh, an area that also forms a part of the Bengal delta.

> We used to live on the banks of the Payra river, near its confluence with the sea… My house fell outside the embankment, near the river. When the river started breaking, my home was wiped away…that is when we came to Dhaka… When this slum burnt in 2004, we again became destitute… I went back to our village with my small children. In 2007 during cyclone Sidr, the water came, and in only five minutes… seven members of my family, including my parents, were washed away by the water… everything became a graveyard, where would I go? Nowhere else to go, so came again to Dhaka with my children.

These examples are neither random nor isolated. They are connected by a complex yet common phenomenon. Although linked with climate and other crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, considered to be relatively recent, this is not a "new" phenomenon, but one that is located at the intersections of dynamic biographies, histories, and social structures.

Given the examples above, using our "sociological imagination" (Mills 1959) is thus crucial for understanding this phenomenon of boderizing and how those crossing borders are typically already borderized. This is because, understanding this requires attention to a context that is largely invisible. A context rich in stories of people pushed about for interests that are largely not their own, whose lives remain disproportionately impacted by overlapping crises over decades, shaped by the continuing inertia of processes and histories that have created and legitimized the existence of a multi-layered and normative borderized world.

How can we uncover the core mechanisms and logic of complex bordering processes at play across multiple scales and contexts? The answer perhaps lies in mobilizing our sociological

imagination to reconcile personal biographies and experiences with broader histories and structural forces. Rather than thinking of climate and other crises as “new” phenomena, anomalies deviating from historical “normality”, it can be useful to connect dots between this present moment, specific historical contexts, and futures being imagined for such contexts with respect to emissions and development scenarios. Locating roots of today’s crisis and vulnerability in familiar and durable social structures and understanding the stickiness of possible border-like effects of these structures, could be key in this endeavor. Therefore, rather than trying to uncover something “new”, the approach here focuses on “older but recurrent social processes manifested in contemporary forms” (Kyle 2000: 203).

In the following sections, my attempt to further situate and unpack the theoretical framework of this research is simultaneously a journey of focusing my analytical lens, with the hope of trying to shift it, even if slightly, from the conventional way it has usually been used.

Mobilities and borders in a climate of crises

Prefixing climate in front of mobility can act like a magic trick—climate becomes the focus, and the debate shifts to whether or not climate is responsible. This happens at the risk of obscuring the very human agency that has played a key role in maintaining structures, reproducing inequality, reinforcing power relations, reifying social orders, all without examining the question of accountability. Moreover, the focus is on a large number of bodies on the move (or likely to be on the move) across thresholds and boundaries meant to act like divides and barriers restricting movements. Thus, it is still the mobility of people that is suspect, not the

processes facilitating naturalization of boundaries that when drawn on the ground as borders are meant to keep a spatial and social order.

The nexus between climate change and migration has been the subject of many dialogues and debates in policy, academic, and public discourses over the last few decades (e.g., El-Hinnawi 1985, Myers 2002, Hugo 2011, Black et al 2011, Felli 2013, Bettini 2014, Baldwin et al 2014, The Nansen Initiative 2016, McDonnell 2019). Propelled by predictions such as "200 million by 2050" (Stern 2007, Biermann and Boas 2008), apocalyptic notions of anthropogenic climate change conjure the specter of millions of people on the move. Such a future imaginary can serve to normalize narratives of fear around climate change (Hulme 2008) along with related movement of people across and within nation-state borders. This is particularly the case in the Global South where most of the world's displaced people live and move today (UNHCR 2017, Clement et al 2021).

The term climate refugee has been fast becoming a catch-all phrase used by international agencies and humanitarian organizations around the world. There is scope for further critical inquiry about the identified and idealized subjects, their situatedness in history and particular locations, as well as their migration experiences, to illuminate not only what might be problematic about the name of the category, but also the meanings it may impose without paying attention to historically contingent processes.

The debate around climate refugees as a category of concern and the contested use of migrants or refugees as the appropriate term, have usually been based on whether borders have been crossed, and whether economic or political drivers take the front stage. Recognizing that

categories related to migration are anything but fixed, it is imperative to consider different situational and temporal outcomes based on local contexts. This includes the possibility that people who are “non-migrants” today can become migrants tomorrow, and those who have been categorized as “migrants” could return indefinitely amidst an ongoing crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. What begs closer examination is that at different points on the continuum of mobility at the intersection of climate and other crises, people are experiencing various forms of injustice and violence that could potentially be woven together and brought under an umbrella condition resembling that of refugee-ness.

Often framed as both an environmental and a social problem, “environmental/ climate refugees” are dually represented as both the outcome of a problem (climate crisis) as well as a problem by themselves (migrant crisis). By representing this category of people as objects of a fast-growing discourse, a large part of the literature has left out what they *do* as subjects in relation to other actors contributing to knowledge production around climate refugee-ness. For example, Farbotko and Lazrus (2012), in their study on contested narratives of climate change in Tuvalu, call for the need to include multiple voices and migration experiences of those identified as climate refugees. Drawing from Foucault, they argue that “climate refugee” discourses are being continually produced and negotiated, through representations that are “vehicles for power” for competing claims and interests. Posing critical queries around the construction of climate refugees as subjects, as well as the bearing that may have on their understanding of *who* they are vis-à-vis who they are represented to be, can be useful to illuminate hidden facets and expand the ongoing dialogue.

Framing of the relationship between climate and mobility is critical to revealing insights about a borderized world. This is because of an over-securitized framing of climate-related mobility, justified through concerns around borders being crossed by teeming masses of people, with implications for national security for neighboring countries. However, it has been widely acknowledged that climate-related movements are usually internal migration within national borders (Rigaud et al 2018, Clement et al 2021). This does not mean that borders need not be brought into the framework anymore. It rather sets a peculiar contextual backdrop for studying how borders are present and active beyond margins of the nation-state, despite their presumed absence and passivity in the context of climate change. Similar to those moving across international borders, migrants traveling within nation-state borders can experience material and symbolic effects of borders. These effects are often misrecognized, deeply embedded inside the logic of capital and formal classification systems adopted by states, international agencies, and human rights regime.

Although states and international human rights regime are often interpreted as taking opposing stances in their ways of representation and recognition of rights[4], their underlying logic can be parallel in how both stratify persons and groups into more deserving and less deserving candidates and beneficiaries. The deservingness frame for climate refugees further involves a double bind of representation. On the one hand they are represented as spokespersons for a global catastrophe, and on the other they are not recognized as rights bearing subjects. Their

[4] Referred to as the *double-R axiom* (Papadopoulos et al 2008), the balance between rights and representation is pivotal in binding people to a certain territory, as it simultaneously denotes the *absence* of rights and representation beyond the nation-state's borders.

voices are not directly heard or included but filtered through several intermediaries to get co-opted in de-historicized "global" narratives.

In this context, contested narratives around climate refugees as a category upheld by nation-states, NGOs, and other actors serve a vital function—they sustain a powerful myth. A myth that paradoxically recognizes their vulnerability as victims and questions their validity as refugees, while erasing their value as human beings and political subjects. A myth that can only be debunked by attempting to recognize the "ghostly"—apparitions symptomatic of a haunting presence, and by telling "ghost stories" even though we may not be fully able to reveal the "ghosts" (Gordon 2008).

Furthermore, building on understandings of the nexus between climate change, power, inequality, and injustice (Beck 2010, Paprocki and Huq 2017, Faist 2018), climate change itself has been conceptualized as a form of "slow violence" (Nixon 2011). The slow violence of climate change refers to "unseen suffering" (Skotnicki 2019) unfolding slowly over space and time; "an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2011: 2). This invisible form of violence disproportionately affects people at the margins. Borders and bordering processes are critical to unpack the processes through which this violence operates and affects those who may not be crossing international borders.

Normative language in refugee lexicon serves to delegitimize experiences that do not fit that of the standard figure of a refugee. The 1951 Refugee Convention of the United Nations legally defined a refugee as someone who flee "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political

opinion" (Article 1(2) of the 1951 Refugee Convention). The concept of a *sociological refugee*, however, encompasses a wider group of displaced people experiencing violence and embodying the condition of refugee-ness, even though they may not be legally recognized as refugees by state authorities (Zolberg et al 1989). Originating in the Global South, migration journeys of many of these sociological refugees trace a South-South trajectory rather than the assumed South-North arc (Fitzgerald and Arar 2018).

Further, critical refugee studies scholars critique the formal legal codification of "refugee" in the 1951 Convention as a historically and geographically situated category, meant to originally signify European people displaced during World War II. Though the geographical and temporal limits were expanded in the 1967 Protocol, the arrival of "new asylum seekers" from the "Third World" in the North, especially during the 1980s, saw to the creation of a "myth of difference." This myth placed the new asylum seekers as radically different from a "normal" refugee who was white, male and anti-communist. This further led to the adoption of a "new approach" framed in the language of human rights, with the aim to contain potential refugees in their region of origin through humanitarian assistance and protection (see Chimni 1998).

Humanitarian organizations can play a critical role in this context. Applying Bourdieu's theory to the field of humanitarian relief, Krause (2014), for example, presents analytical insights into how population in need of aid and assistance are socialized into the role of beneficiaries by humanitarian non-governmental organizations competing for symbolic capital. The beneficiaries are co-opted to become part of a commodity by contributing to the production and pursuit of the primary organizational output—*the good project*. Thus, be it the state or the international

human rights regime, the production of subjecthood of existing and potential refugees revolve around official categories that either denote them as illegitimate border crossers or legitimate victims of injustice and violence. Yet both these connotations ultimately serve to normalize the apolitical and ahistorical framework of people crossing borders, despite theoretical and empirical evidence of classificatory mechanisms producing border-like effects for people on the move.

Further dots can be connected to highlight the staggering presence of internally displaced persons (IDP) in the Global South since the 1990s, a category of concern representing displaced people who have not crossed an internationally recognized border. As people without access to legal status and rights as official refugees, they can experience being contained, filtered, categorized, and marginalized by multiple geopolitical, social, and symbolic borders. The experience of being crossed by borders need not paint an overtly structural picture that takes away migrant agency. Rather, unfolding of consciousness around their structural embeddedness can give us critical information about migrant agency. To use the language of the present framework, it can inform us about how the displaced as multiply borderized can simultaneously engage in processes of borderizing.

Diverse narratives depicting climate refugee-ness around the globe may contain similar threads that can weave together to appear as a "global" discourse. Despite the global reach of these narratives today, it is crucial to recognize them as anchored in local histories. As underscored by Morrissey (2012), recognition of "historical embeddedness of other non-environmental factors which also shape mobility decisions" (45-46) can be crucial for a nuanced orientation of the debate on climate refugees as more about "*how a relationship is represented"*

and less about the *"nature of the relationship itself"* (40). Moreover, understanding refugee-ness as a condition of concern in today's world of entangled borders requires asking questions around political integration and citizenship. This becomes critical in a context like the broader Indian subcontinent, with a religious boundary dividing regions otherwise characterized by shared language, culture, habits, and histories.

The discussion perhaps remains incomplete without critically interrogating the notion of crisis itself. As a turning point towards uncertainty with multiple alternative possible pathways, a moment where "alternative futures collide" at present (Antentas 2020), crisis as multi-dimensional phenomenon can span multiple temporal and spatial scales, encompassing momentary and shorter-term emergencies and shocks, as well as longer term protracted conditions.

Crisis as a concept can therefore serve as a useful lens to reveal what may otherwise remain hidden under conditions characterized as normal. For instance, examining how and why people move during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic may help us better understand socio-cognitive dimensions of migration decision-making, as well as the mindsets of borderized bodies on the move (Koikkalainen and Kyle 2016, Kyle, Koikkalainen and Dutta Gupta 2018). The potential of a pandemic as crisis to make the familiar strange through halts, disruptions, and changes in daily routines, offers a much-needed critical distance and a window through which the same phenomenon (in this case mobilities and borders) could be viewed in a different way. This is evident in growing calls to leverage social scientific knowledge and inter-disciplinary

approaches to understand the contingent, conjunctural, and the social nature of crisis (Hulme et al 2020, Bergman-Rosamond et al 2020).

Further, while crisis has, on the one hand, been conceptualized as a pathological deviation from normality, on the other, the idea of status quo in modernity, shaped by capitalism and reinforcing inequalities, has been theorized as the catastrophe (Benjamin 1999). This understanding of crisis, not only as a transformational moment, but also as a pervasive condition involving contingencies and paradoxes, adds a crucial point to the argument I am trying to unfold here. Instead of thinking of migrants as bodies out of place, crossing borders in response to a shock as *the crisis* (as witnessed through naming of moments and events as migration crisis or refugee crisis), understanding processes of formation of borders, and what ensures their durability, elasticity, and almost larger-than life presence in the lives of certain migrant groups warrant critical inquiry. Moreover, in a world where certain forms of mobilities can destabilize the assumed naturalness of borders, logic dictates we focus on borders first to question instead why and how some types of mobilities have come to be considered as "un"-natural in the first place.

This then brings me to lay out the groundwork of my research. Instead of beginning with the assumption and the concern that people are and will become increasingly mobile confronted by impacts of climate and other crises, the idea is to begin with borders—including processes that have historically shaped bordering processes and led to the reifying of categories defined in relation to border-like effects of these processes. And while the spotlight still remains on how millions will be crossing borders in response to some crisis, what can get easily overlooked is the

instrumental role played by any crisis in reinforcing existing hierarchies and amplifying effects of borderizing processes and structures.

Though building on and in conversation with sociologies of mobility and migration, critical refugee studies, border studies, and influenced by my participation in a broader multi-disciplinary conversation on crisis and human mobilities shaped by climate and other forces (Boas et al 2019), I nonetheless challenge the conventional view of borders as something we cross. Rather, borders can be seen as powerful structural effects that differentially condition and constrain us, impacting lives and livelihoods of millions on the frontline of any crisis. I contend that instead of imagining people as bodies crossing borders, we need to understand how multiple *borders cross them* (Anzaldúa 1987).

People Crossing Borders

The "people crossing borders" framework has dominantly informed studies in migration. Theories of international migration have primarily focused on drivers that initiate and sustain patterns and processes of migrants crossing borders (Massey et al 1993). Theories of labor migration have been prominently applied to the North American case to study economic migrants moving within and across nation-state borders (Massey et al 1994). More recently, some of the theories have also been utilized to study migrants whose movement cannot be attributed to purely economic factors. For example, parallels have been drawn between the New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) and livelihood frameworks in political ecology (De Haas 2010) to present migration as an adaptation strategy to "buffer households from environmental shocks" (Hunter et al 2015: 7).

Further, scholars have acknowledged the intersection of capitalism and colonialism in sowing conditions that shape contemporary environment-migration relations in the South. For instance, migration patterns in Niger today can be connected back to a colonial system of cash cropping responsible for environmental degradation and food insecurity (Afifi 2011). Regardless of these efforts, as key assumptions of the migration theories have been built around the Mexico-US dynamics, it is not unreasonable to critically question their generalizability and application to understand other historical contexts. More specifically, application of migration theories to the case of climate refugees in the South may need to consider the complexities of a postcolonial landscape and the intersection of climate change with capitalist interventions and inertia of colonial legacies in the region.

A similar observation can be made for the literature on migrant assimilation and integration. Revision of migrant assimilation theory from a unidirectional model to a two-way process signifying narrowing of ethnic/racial distinction between groups (Alba and Nee 1997, 2003) still implies that immigrants eventually transcend social and symbolic boundaries to merge with the mainstream in US which also gets transformed in the process. The "segmented assimilation" perspective (Portes and Rumbaut 2001, Portes and Zhou 1993) further suggests that depending on the context of reception, immigrants and their children in US may not only "melt" into a white middle-class or selectively integrate by holding on to ethnic ties and culture, but may also follow a downward trajectory to assimilate into marginalized minorities, forming a "rainbow underclass."

However, as Fitzgerald (2014) states, "*similarity* among groups and individuals and *social mobility* are two distinct questions" (130), which may converge or diverge based on the context.

The question of migrant *social* mobility poses the question of whether groups are able to access opportunity structures or encounter blocked mobility due to racialization. Assimilation frameworks have been critiqued due to lack of attention to the process of racialization, with some exceptions illuminating how non-white immigrants and their children encounter race in US (for example, Waters 1999, Telles and Ortiz 2008). Addressing the "racial unconscious" in assimilation theory (Jung 2009) can potentially expand our understanding of how social stratification orders reified by racial thinking may act as borders crossing people.

Efforts can be traced around how migrants' consciousness of such borders crossing them can shape behavior, outcomes, and identities. Levitt and Glick Schiller's (2004) transnational social field perspective makes analytical distinctions between *ways of being* and *ways of belonging* of migrants, where *ways of being* denote "actual social relations and practices that individuals engage in" (11) and *ways of belonging* signify consciousness of identity and membership in groups. Expressing ambivalence in ways of being and belonging can be a migrant's way of troubling group boundaries as static and durable. This can be connected with integration perspectives involving the notion of citizenship along the four dimensions of status, rights, participation and belonging (Bloemraad et al 2008). The border between a citizen and a non-citizen tends to align with nation-state borders, established through the language of legal status and rights. Yet membership in a community can be more flexible, as questions of participation and belonging can subvert or challenge hardened politico-legal borders demarcating those with rights from those without.

The paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion embedded in the concept of citizenship has been studied through "jarring juxtapositions" such as "inclusive exclusion"

(Agamben 1998), “militarized refuge(e)” (Espiritu 2014) or “humanitarian violence” (Nyers 2006). The idea of people crossing international borders in their flight from violence both challenges and reinforces the integral logic of nation-states and borders, as “their stories, actions and inactions—simultaneously trouble *and* affirm regimes of power” (Espiritu 2014; 2). That sociological refugees, including those who have not crossed international borders, embody ambiguities and engage in negotiation of identities and sense of belonging, can in turn speak of their consciousness surrounding multiple cross-cutting borders that locate, exclude and categorize them. In relation to this, the experiential knowledge of the borderized and borderizing migrants in this study serve as key for examining the condition of refugee-ness.

In the next section, I attempt to focus on select interdisciplinary literature that share a language of affinity with the framework of borders crossing people. I hope to potentially contribute to a cross-disciplinary dialogue by bringing relevant literature in this framework in conversation with literature on migration and refugee studies.

Borders Crossing People

The notion of refugee-ness is intricately related to state-ness as “states make refugees” (Fitzgerald and Arar 2018: 8.8). The very definition of refugees is predicated on the existence and enforcement of borders by state authorities. This involves both borders on the ground as well as those embedded in mental structures and embodied in lived experiences. Conceptualizing the “state effect”, Mitchell (1999) theorizes the state as a structural effect, not as an actual structure, but as effects of practices and mundane arrangements that make such structure appear to exist as an abstraction set apart from material reality.

Mundane arrangements may include, for example, establishing and policing a frontier involving the management of human migration through barbed-wire fencing, passports and documents, immigration laws and other forms of control. Such arrangements simultaneously reinforce, regulate, and regularize the legitimacy of borders as well as the illegitimacy of people who attempt to move across them without state sanctioned documents. More recently, the term borderization has been used in the context of the Georgian-South Ossetian boundary dispute, to describe a violent geopolitical process by which a previously theoretical boundary could materialize as a territorial border on the ground, through the setting-up of border patrols, barbed wires, and other markers and instruments of border management, with serious implications for those who lives are impacted by the hardening of such a divide (for example, see Boyle 2016, Otruba 2019).

As argued by De Genova (2016), borders as structural effect and "spectacle" not only denote a site of exclusion but also "subordinate inclusion" that is "selectively revealed." It is through borders that "states legally and politically *produce* and *mediate* the social and spatial differences that capital may then capitalise upon and exploit" (De Genova 2016: 50). Torpey's (2000) work further highlights the state effect by investigating the development of contemporary passport regime as central to the process of monopolization of "legitimate means of movement" of people across and within nation-state borders. Arguing that the regulation of movement helps constitute the very "state-ness" of states, Torpey demonstrates how national identities that can no longer only be "imagined" (Anderson 1991) but must also be codified in documents. This bears far reaching implications for lives lived without the security of documents, as exemplified by

undocumented migrants experiencing legal status as an axis of stratification and confronting mechanisms of "legal violence" (Menjívar and Abrego 2012) perpetuated by the state.

To study the gap between "rhetoric and reality" of immigration policies, Golash-Boza (2009) conceptualizes the "immigration industrial complex," denoting the confluence of public and private interests in criminalizing the undocumented, along with the development of "anti-illegal rhetoric" and border enforcement strategies. Whether it is a border wall reifying the North-South divide or a border fence dividing two neighboring countries in the South, stringent border control measures bolstered by anti-immigrant narratives around the world have led to the emergence of migration industries that paradoxically help migration become self-sustaining. Mobility in this context can be seen as a form of subversion and "escape" (Papadopoulos et al 2008).

Nevertheless, migrants in their everyday lives encounter coercive power of the state to shape "mental structures" by imposing principles of vision and division through classification systems and production of difference (Bourdieu 1999, 2018). The power of *universalizing effect* (Bourdieu 1999) and normalization achieved by classificatory mechanisms of the state is demonstrated by Loveman (2014) who engages with the puzzle of re-introduction of ethno-racial classification in Latin American state censuses and problematizes how the official categorization contributes to the making of race and nation by drawing borders to reinstitute social hierarchies. However, development of rights-based consciousness and resistance among subjects cannot be separated from the logic of the state. For example, tracing the transformation from color blindness to ethno-racial legislation adopted by Colombia and Brazil, Paschel (2016) examines

the dual logic of cultural difference and cultural equality adopted in each country to unpack the making and unmaking of black political subjects.

Integrating racialization and the postcolonial perspective can become relevant in this context. Nowhere is this perhaps more evident than in the idea of a color line that "belts the world", representing a global racial logic of empire (Du Bois 1903). Borders—geopolitical, social, and symbolic—can then be viewed as products of such processes and as apparatus to control, govern, and mark certain mobile bodies as out of place. Discussing the "*globalization of the racial*", Goldberg (2009) reminds us that the cross-border circulation of racial thinking and racist institutional arrangements formed "key instruments of colonial governmentality and control" (1275). Colonial governmentality was not only about producing and demarcating the colonized as uncivilized outsiders, but also about imposing a classification system on a pre-existing social hierarchy. This is manifest in stratified social structures of former colonies characterized by multiple entangled boundaries, as well as embodied in the "complex personhood" (Gordon 2008) of postcolonial subjects.

Classification systems essentially pivot around a bordering process, by marking bodies as superior and inferior. Following Fanon (1967), those who are categorized as superior are situated in the "zone of being," while those on the inferior side of the line fall in the "zone of non-being," to be then treated as sub-humans or non-humans. As argued by Grosfoguel et al (2015), the inertia of the global racial logic in the contemporary time also serves to classify migrants into the *zone of being* and the *zone of non-being,* as reinforced through naturalization of binaries such as

skilled versus unskilled migrants, which can then be mapped onto other dichotomies such as documented versus undocumented (and therefore dubbed as "illegal") migrants.

Oppressions in the zone of being are different from the way oppressions are "lived and articulated in the zone of non-being" (Grosfoguel et al 2015: 637). Merging this understanding with de Sousa Santos's (2007) "abyssal line" below which people are dehumanized into a quasi-animal status, Grosfoguel et al (2015) further reflect on the heterogeneous and stratified nature of the "zone of non-being," recognizing that "colonial/racial" subjects today experience multiple layers of oppression, both as the racialized non-Western "Other" as well as classed and gendered "non-beings" within the territorial boundaries of former colonies. Understanding this distinction is crucial, as it informs the context and design of this research.

Despite the common-sensical assumption that the world is "decolonized", the inertia of colonial legacies and vectors that form the modern world system can be captured in Quijano's (2000) theorization of "coloniality of power," as evidenced in the entanglements between the international division of labor and global racial/ethnic hierarchy of migrants. Du Bois's (1903) theorization of "double consciousness"— "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others"—also contains an invitation to shift position and see the world from the other side of the "veil."

This call can be connected with Go's (2016) discussion of the efforts of postcolonial thought to challenge imperial episteme by privileging a "subaltern standpoint." Inspired from Gramscian notion, the term "subaltern" has been utilized by the Subaltern Studies Group[5] to

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[5] The Subaltern Studies school, which includes scholars like Spivak and Guha, critiqued how production of knowledge through existing historiography of India followed and extended the imperial episteme instead of questioning it. The

denote not a single identity, but “a general attribute of subordination in South Asian society” (Guha et al 1994). Subaltern does not refer to an essentialized social category, but rather a relational position of subjugation with respect to multiple axes—class, caste, gender, religion and so on. In contrast with Gramsci, Guha’s subaltern is a “colonial subaltern” bearing “colonial difference” and embodying “racialized colonial wound” (Mignolo 2005: 386). Imagining climate refugees in the South as a “colonial subaltern” can raise similar questions around crossing a colonial difference when compared with people displaced by environmental changes in the North.

“Can the “subaltern speak”?” Spivak’s (1988) paradoxical question hints at the impossibility of representation and the incompleteness of the attempt to recover voices and agency of the subaltern. “One writes the subaltern only to show the impossibility of such a task” (Go 2016: 61). The “subaltern standpoint” is therefore a complex locus of intersection and interaction, the point of view of an experiential knowledge that remains hidden and partial in its struggle against erasure. The task thus laid out is not about making the invisible completely visible, but to recognize partial and incomplete nature of this knowledge in relationally examining the “subaltern standpoint” of potential climate refugees in Bangladesh and India with other polarized and overlapping viewpoints of state and non-state actors. I further aim to connect and align this standpoint with the framework of borders crossing people by asking how the subaltern actors in the study experience and negotiate the borders crossing them.

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aim of the school was to write “history from below,” to recover repressed voices and agency of the colonized peasantry.

The Marxist theory of "metabolic rift" denoting a rupture in metabolic interaction between society and nature, based on the exploitation of the earth, can become useful in the present discussion. The idea of this rift entailing antagonism between the rural and the urban, when projected on a global scale, can be extended to signify relations of domination and exploitation between former colonies and metropoles (see Foster 1999). Such divide, alternatively conceived as linkage between the rural and the urban, may not necessarily be contained within territorial boundaries of nation-states, but shaped by global forces of colonialism and capitalism, can inform divergent international mobility trajectories of predominantly rural communities, like the "transnational peasants" from Ecuador (Kyle 2000). To fully grasp context-specific dynamics around this rift, it becomes crucial to understand the relationship between local economies and global markets, between capital and informal labor and livelihoods, especially in the context of climate and other crises. However, labor and livelihood are often omitted from the conversation on climate and migration (Samaddar 2020), making it seem like the entire process is driven by a global force that is neutral, ahistorical, and somehow independent of the global capitalist regime that shapes movement of labor across and within nation-state borders. The question then becomes, as a border between the rural and the urban, the local and the global, the colonizer and the colonized, how can this rift be applied to understand the condition of borderized mobilities in the context of Bangladesh and India? Do the migrants embody a consciousness of this rift along with other borders that are imposed on them?

Building on cognitive sociology's *sociomental* domain (Zerubavel 1997), Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov (2004) argue for the need to shift attention from groups or categories as "things *in* the world" to processes of "group-making" through categorization as "perspectives *on*

the world" (45). They suggest the analytical usefulness of boundaries/borders in thinking about processes of group-making involving inclusion, exclusion and belonging. Critically reflecting how "the categorized are themselves chronic categorizers", the authors observe that "categories used by ordinary people in everyday interaction often differ substantially from official categories" (35). They further critique the tendency of cognitive perspectives to "focus on conspicuously visible constructions… to the neglect of the less visible…activities of common people in their everyday lives" (52).

Reflecting on the power of everyday strategies of ordinary actors to make new categories or infuse official categories with alternate unofficial meanings (Brubaker et al 2004), I consider this dimension that tends to remain hidden as the "invisible"[6]. The relative visibility of official categories in terms of the power to define the migrants as subjects cannot be analytically separated from the relative invisibility of everyday migrant experiences that it constitutes, constrains, and conceals.

Present in ordinary everyday experiences are "hidden transcripts" (Scott 1990), subverting and transforming meanings of categories institutionalized and reproduced by both state and non-state actors. How may we understand the paradox of the invisible simultaneously coexisting with, yet contradicting, what is dominant and visible? How can we study the links between the visible and the invisible in the present context when crises are based *sui generis* on the visibility of "the problem"? Focusing on historically specific local contexts in Bangladesh and India, the condition of refugee-ness may not easily be rendered obvious yet remain as "invisible

[6] It is necessary to note here that my reference to "the visible" and "the invisible" is not to establish them as fixed and absolute notions, but to invite critical thinking on how they are relationally connected dimensions.

visible" symptom of a broader mechanism that can extend beyond the realm of human mobilities in the context of a crisis. Understanding how borderizing effects of larger processes, structures, and relationships can shape and constitute borderized mobilities remain a critical part of making this mechanism more visible. This research represents an effort, even if partial, towards this direction.

CHAPTER 3:

Navigating Borders: Methodology and Research Design

Navigating an unsettling terrain of borders

Guided by my situated knowledge and experience of growing up in the city of Kolkata in West Bengal, India, and having imbibed stories from my grandparents who moved there as Partition refugees of 1947 from what is now a separate country called Bangladesh, my motivation for this research was actually consolidated by a satellite image of the Bengal delta region of Bangladesh and India. Hanging on a wall behind my office desk on a mounted canvas, this particular image has captured my fascination for a long time. At first glance, this frame is nothing but a false color composite of a delta region depicting vegetated land fragments (in red) crisscrossed by numerous tidal channels (in blue). However, a closer scrutiny of this false color image may reveal something not immediately visible to the eye: A part of the international border between Bangladesh and India runs through the heart of this region, right through the center of one of the major river channels captured in this image. Not only is this border not apparent to observers, this image being a snapshot in time also conceals how the particular river channel in this active delta has shifted its course over time, thereby also shifting a part of the India-Bangladesh border along this "unsettling terrain" (Roy 2020).

The red color of this remotely sensed image that indicates vegetation further conceals that this region is inhabited by millions of people on both sides of the India-Bangladesh border. Formed in 1947 as the border between India and East Pakistan, renamed in 1971 as the border between India and Bangladesh, this international border had to be recently redrawn to redistribute the enclaves on both sides. Although people like my grandparents, have been known to be "crossing" this border since it was created in 1947 to rip through the sociopolitical fabric of a complex ecological and cultural region, many others have been moving within the nation-states

demarcated by this geopolitical boundary, floating back and forth between the rural and the urban landscapes.

The aim of this chapter is to describe how I came to pursue an unsettling of people and an unsettling of how we understand those unsettled by borderizing, even though many appear for most of their lives as immobile, unable to leave or control their destinies, or even the very ground underneath them. Much like the terrain represented in the image, borders in the Bengal delta region are far from being fixed and immutable, including the India-Bangladesh border itself that demarcates geopolitical territories of the two nation-states of India and Bangladesh. A nuanced understanding of local contexts under study here is thereby key for operationalizing the conceptual tools of this research. Drawing from my experiences of conducting multi-sited fieldworks in the two countries and building on the history of formation and evolution of the geopolitical border created during 1947 Partition, this chapter describes the contexts under study, the study design, and methods of data collection, preparing the ground for empirical analyses in the following chapters.

Foregrounding Contexts

Bengal delta region of Bangladesh and India

The Bengal delta region of Bangladesh and India is framed as a "climate borderland" (Cons 2018), not only because of the region's increasing vulnerability to cyclones, flooding, sea-level rise, and saltwater intrusion, but also because of its history as a sensitive borderland zone paradoxically dividing yet connecting a Hindu majority India with a Muslim majority Bangladesh (former East Pakistan). As one of the largest active delta regions in the world, the Bengal delta is

crisscrossed by multiple riverine and tidal channels, part of which also acts as the international border between Bangladesh and India. This region famously includes the Sundarbans ecosystem. Designated as UNESCO World Heritage site, the Sundarbans is the largest contiguous mangrove ecosystem in the world, and the only mangrove forest inhabited by tigers. Spanning south-western Bangladesh and southern West Bengal, India, the Bengal delta region is unified by shared language (Bengali), cultural practices, social ties, colonial histories, as well as impacts of climate change.

As a low-lying, densely populated region and a well-documented climate hotspot facing the threat of disappearing lands due to flooding and sea level rise, the Bengal delta is vulnerable to intensifying cyclones, storm surges and saltwater intrusion, with the effect of salinity rendering agricultural lands unsuitable for cultivation at times. Loss of livelihoods connected with environmental changes in this region, combined with opportunities in urban informal labor markets, are continuing to drive hundreds of thousands of migrants from rural areas to densely populated urban destinations.

In Bangladesh for instance, hundreds of thousands of migrants are reported to arrive in the densely populated capital of Dhaka, and this number is growing every year. These migrants typically find work in brick kilns, garment factories, and become rickshaw pullers or domestic workers to earn from the informal sector. As a next step, they may move across the border to India through long established pathways of migration, or to Gulf countries to work in construction jobs. Migrants from the Indian part of the delta region usually migrate to urban areas within the state of West Bengal, as well as other Indian states to get absorbed in the informal economy working as construction laborers, tailors in garment factories among other jobs. While it is more

common for male members of households to migrate and send back remittances to the rest of their families in villages, there are cases of entire families moving together as well.

Internal circular migration, across rural and urban regions in India, has been generally considered a common survival strategy for millions of migrant workers across the country. Estimates indicate that there are more than one hundred million internal migrants in India, making up more than a third of India's urban population (Faetanini and Tankha 2013, Balakrishnan 2020). Many of them operate through circular trajectories, floating back and forth between their rural areas of origin and the urban destinations. In the Bengal delta region of the Indian Sundarbans, cyclones, accompanied by storm surges and saline water inundation of agricultural lands, often result in material loss and damage, along with gradual changes in livelihoods for those inhabiting this vulnerable climate emergency hotspot (Parry et al 2007). It is typically the male members of families who then move in response to climate-induced economic risks, in search of informal sector jobs in urban labor markets. Regardless of whether it is a shorter or longer-term move, their migration is not a one-time unidirectional phenomenon. Rather, the migrants prefer to "keep one foot in the village" through family and community ties, and remittances, for access to social safety nets and a pathway to return (Deshingkar et al 2008), especially during a crisis.

Yet this delta region was largely uninhabited by people before the 18th century. This understanding can be further grounded in the colonial history of human settlement in the region since 1765, through land reclamation and transformation of the low lying tropical "jungle" into inhabited islands by the British colonial government for the purpose of generating revenue from

agriculture. The peopling of the Sundarbans was more prominently documented since the middle of the 19th century, when the British colonial state brought in landless laborers and indigenous tribal groups from various parts of the subcontinent (Jalais 2014).

Typically considered a low lying “jungle” and waterlogged “wasteland” by the British, this “unsettling terrain” (Roy 2020) was transformed by the colonial rulers into inhabited islands through efforts involving land reclamation and resettlement of landless marginal people (Jalais 2014). Today, this region is populated by more than 7.5 million people, with over 4.5 million living on the Indian side (Census of India 2011). However, similar to the imperial gaze of the colonial travelers who were fascinated by the unique ecology of the Sundarbans and not its people, “an unsettling silence on the social and human facets of the region” (Jalais 2007: 337) continues to prevail in research and policy conversations. This research is also an attempt to address this silence by focusing on experiences of migrants from the Sundarbans region, whose lives have been crossed and conditioned by multiple borders—physical, social, and symbolic.

Contrary to conventional assumption of mobility followed by indefinite periods of extended immobility in destination areas, migrants in this region can be found to be typically moving back and forth between the rural and the urban. I aim the spotlight here on internal circular migration as key to understanding precarious (that is, borderized) living conditions of these variably (im)mobile “floating” people, as their experiences can remain largely absent from migration theories, public discourses as well as policy dialogues (see Newland 2009). At the same time, these floating people are engaging in borderizing, through situating and rooting themselves, even as they remain unmoored and insecure.

Kashmir Valley, India

Zooming out from the regional context of the Bengal Delta, I refocus the lens to zoom into another region of the subcontinent, to examine a boundary that has played a crucial role, both in the dislocation of an internally displaced group as well as their disconnect from a community they consider to be their Other. Cradled between the Himalayan ranges of Pir Panjal and Zanskar, the elongated bowl-shaped Valley known as Kashmir today has remained a bone of contention between India and Pakistan since the 1947 Partition, and an epicenter of conflict between Indian armed forces and militant organizations since 1989-90. What acted as a tipping point for the protracted and ongoing conflict situation in Indian-administered Kashmir was the rigging of 1987 elections, followed by widespread discontent and protests in the Valley. Grievances against the Indian state by local Kashmiris were mobilized by secessionist groups to support their cause for *azadi* or freedom (Tremblay 2001). The situation rapidly escalated towards a full-blown insurgency within the next two years.

In 1989-90, the Kashmir Valley region became the stage of a secessionist movement and armed conflict between militant groups and the Indian government, as the latter responded to the situation by enforcing stringent counter-insurgency measures. The ensuing political turmoil resulted in the displacement of thousands from the region. Almost the entire community of Kashmiri Pandits left the Valley amidst fear of violence, owing to their status as a religious minority in a Muslim majority Kashmir as well as their historical affiliation with the Indian nation-state.

As Hindu *Brahmins* of Kashmir, the Kashmiri Pandits[7] have historically occupied a peculiar social location, both as a religious minority of Hindus in a Muslim majority region, and as a relatively privileged caste group of *Brahmins* with higher literacy rates and social status. Even as their religious affiliation make Kashmiri Pandits a "minority"[8] community in the Muslim majority region of Kashmir Valley, at the scale of the Indian nation-state, their religious affiliation as Hindus allows them to be considered part of the majority.

Such forced exile of almost of an entire community is considered unprecedented in India's history after the 1947 Partition, especially since circumstances during and after the displacement served to create a prominent rupture in the relationship between the Kashmiri Hindus and Kashmiri Muslims, a bond which had historically contributed to maintaining the cohesive fabric of Kashmiri society. Over the years, even though the Indian government has tried to engage in dialogue about the resolution of the Kashmir conflict and generated both material incentives and hopes for the return of the displaced, the Kashmiri Pandits still remain one of the largest groups of internally displaced people in India (IDMC 2015).

Rather than being passive backdrops, these contexts under study have played an active role in developing my theoretical sensitization, methodological framing, and design of this research framework.

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[7] The literal and cultural meaning of the word "Pandit" is "the learned one." It is no surprise that the Kashmiri Pandit community has a very high literacy rate, which can be connected to their historically privileged social position.

[8] It is important to elaborate here that this "minority" status was solely based on their religious affiliation, and not based on their ethnic identification. The Kashmiri Pandits identify themselves as part of the same ethnic group as the Kashmiri Muslims, but they belong to a different religious group and have historically been part of the privileged status group of *Brahmin* caste.

Research Design and Methods

The major fieldwork for this dissertation research took me to Bangladesh over the first few months of 2020, before COVID-19 hit the region and international borders were closed for travel. I conducted this first stage of the fieldwork in multiple settings, including the sprawling densely populated urban slum of Korail, the low-lying coastal rural areas crisscrossed by embankments or *polders*, and one of the southern-most inhabited parts of Bangladesh at the edge of the mangrove forests of Sundarbans—a dwindling ecological buffer for rural areas increasingly becoming vulnerable to the effects of a warming globe and rising sea level.

Due to the advent of COVID-19 pandemic and associated India-Bangladesh border closure, I had to abruptly truncate my fieldwork in Bangladesh mid-March and shelter-in-place in my hometown Kolkata, India. The key method used in this phase of the fieldwork involves in-depth interviews conducted remotely over phone with return migrants and actors from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the Indian Sundarbans region. I conducted these interviews both during and after the months following the end of the country-wide COVID-19 lockdown in India.

The interviews were based on a semi-structured interview guide and checklist, comprising multiple phone conversations ranging from around 15 minutes to over 80 minutes. I also carried out follow-up interviews with participants who were initially contacted and interviewed before cyclone *Amphan* made landfall in May 2020. Migrant participants[9] were purposively recruited

[9] Migrant participants were mostly male and in their 20s and 30s, except a few who were in their 40s and 50s.

with the help of key informants from local community-based organizations in the Sundarbans region.

Overall, I conducted around 67 in-depth interviews (in-person and over telephone) with migrants, organizations, and local actors in Bangladesh and India (Table 1), along with focus group discussions with non-migrants and community leaders in rural areas of southwestern coastal Bangladesh. Together, they comprise over 100 hours of conversations (both formal and informal) and field observations, conducted over 8 months during the year 2020.

Table 1: Research participants and locations in the Bengal delta region of Bangladesh and India

Method	Participants	N	Location
In-depth interviews	Internal rural-urban migrants	21	Korail and Bhola slums, Dhaka, Bangladesh
	Non-migrants in rural areas	7	Khulna and Satkhira districts, Southwestern coastal region, Bangladesh
	Return migrants	20	Patharpratima and Sandeshkhali II blocks, Indian Sundarbans, West Bengal, India
	Actors from NGOs and local bodies	19	Bangladesh and India
Focus groups	Non-migrants and community leaders in rural areas	2	Two villages in the southwestern coastal region, Bangladesh

For the case of internal displacement from the conflict-affected context of Kashmir Valley, I relied on 80 in-depth interviews conducted between the years 2012 and 2014. I carried out a multi-sited fieldwork with 55 participants from Jammu and 25 participants from Delhi (Table 2). These two cities were the main sites of relocation for the internally displaced community of Kashmiri Pandits. The method of sampling was purposive and included identifying key informants followed by snowballing.

My research on internally displaced Kashmiri Pandits in India serves as another example to illuminate a fundamental human condition: *we are always already borderized and borderizing at the same time*. How this internally displaced community may reimagine a social boundary as

a bridge illustrates the value of borderized and borderizing as conceptual tools in our existing and expanding repertoire of knowledge around human condition in this age of converging crises.

Table 2: Research participants and locations of the internally displaced Kashmiri Pandits in India

Site of Relocation		Gender	Age (years)		Location in Kashmir Valley	
City	Men	Women	60 and above	35- 60	Urban	Rural
Jammu	35	20	18	37	20	35
Delhi	14	11	12	13	16	9
Total	49	31	30	50	36	44

How might circular mobility of people in the Bengal delta moving within Bangladesh and India as well as internal displacement of the community of Kashmiri Pandits from Indian administered Kashmir Valley be studied as cases of borderized mobilities and borderizing beings? This query is not only relevant to these particular local contexts. It can be situated within a broader question of how migrants in the Global South, many of whom have never crossed an international border, continuously navigate border-like effects in their daily lives. In the next part of the chapter, I elaborate on my experiences of conducting fieldwork across three specific contexts and discuss the methodological framing, to further prepare the ground for a comparative analysis among the empirical cases.

Returning migrants in the Indian Sundarbans (Chapter Four)

Conducting fieldwork during COVID-19, I found the pandemic as crisis acted as a rupture and lens, making the interaction and co-occurrence of mobility and immobility more visible. While COVID-19 in some ways reinforces the notion of a “borderless” world, we have also witnessed the hardening of geopolitical borders across the globe. This further lends legitimacy to other kinds of borders confronting those who move as well as those who stay. The series of

countrywide COVID-19 lockdowns in India beginning from March 24, 2020 and implemented by the Central Government with less than four hours' notice, brought this reality into stark focus. The entire country of 1.3 billion people was subject to these immediate restrictions; "every state, every district, every lane, every village will be under lockdown," Prime Minister Modi had announced in his televised address (Gettleman and Schultz 2020). For millions of internal migrant workers, representing over 20% of the country's workforce (Ministry of Finance 2017), and living in cramped spaces of urban slums and tenements, the announcement did not make it clear how they would survive without work or be able to maintain social distancing protocols. As the world witnessed the plight of millions of migrant workers across India, stranded in urban areas without adequate food, shelter, and income support, many of them began walking hundreds of miles back to their villages. This chapter focuses on a group of return migrants, who, affected by the pandemic-induced lockdown, journeyed back to their villages in the delta region of the Indian Sundarbans. They were further confronted by the disastrous effects of the very severe cyclonic storm *Amphan.*

One of the strongest cyclones to develop in the Bay of Bengal region, *Amphan* made landfall over this coastal region on May 20, 2020, in the middle of the COVID-19 lockdown. Orienting my inquiry around cascading impacts of the pandemic and cyclone *Amphan* over lives and livelihoods of the return migrants in the Indian Sundarbans, I examine the complex relationship between mobility and immobility by focusing the analytical lens on migrant experiences of borders during this time of crisis. Situating my findings from this specific context in research-policy dialogues on the nexus between climate crisis and mobilities, I draw from experiential knowledge of the migrants to demonstrate how they make sense of their return in

this time of overlapping crises, how their understanding may relate or not relate to policy-oriented efforts and "expert" knowledge of the state and NGOs actors, and more importantly, how the peculiar juxtaposition of mobility and immobility in this crisis-induced situation provides fertile ground for theorizing about the phenomenon of *borderized* mobilities.

Apart from two migrants who were still in their destination areas at the time of the interviews, other migrant participants had returned to their villages in the Community Development (CD) blocks of Patharpratima, South 24 Parganas and Sandeshkhali II, North 24 Parganas in the state of West Bengal, India[10]. Both these CD blocks are entirely rural. Though rain-fed paddy cultivation is still the major source of livelihood of this region, the northern block of Sandeshkhali II is almost entirely dependent on agriculture in comparison to the more remote southern block of Patharpratima, where people also rely on fishing (Government of West Bengal 2011). During follow-up interviews after *Amphan*, participants from Patharpratima reported that they still did not have electricity in those parts, with the power grid heavily damaged by the cyclone. Both these blocks were severely affected due to breaching of embankments during *Amphan* (Basu 2020). The organizational actors I interviewed represent a range of NGOs—from aid and development to research and policy organizations operating at multiple levels. I specifically engaged with actors in local NGOs working on rural development in the Sundarbans delta region.

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[10] Although migrant participants recruited from these blocks may not be representative of entire population of return migrants, they represent a specific convergence of phenomena, their lives and livelihoods impacted by the crises.

Key points of conversation with migrant participants in the Indian Sundarbans, who were mostly male and Hindu, involved how they were impacted during the lockdown in their destination areas, what happened during the return journey, as well as their experiences after returning to their villages. A major part of the conversation focused on the migrants' living conditions since their return, including any disaster relief and support they might have received after *Amphan.* All interviews with the return migrants have been conducted in Bengali and then translated to English. Pseudonyms have been used for the participants to maintain confidentiality. Conversations with the NGO actors mainly revolved around the overall scope of the organization's work in the region, and their efforts in providing relief and recovery support to the people of the Sundarbans in response to cascading effects of the pandemic and the cyclone. These interviews were conducted in both Bengali and English. During the interviews, while my identity as a graduate student found more leverage with the organizational actors, my social location as a Bengali speaking woman from Kolkata facilitated my access to the migrant participants, aiding the process of seeking consent and building trust through informal phone conversations before and after the formal interviews.

Data from the interviews were coded to identify the interactive impacts of the pandemic induced lockdown and cyclone *Amphan,* followed by writing of analytical memos. The codes were mainly developed with the view to understand the life stories narrated by the return migrants in relation to any border-like structural effects they have encountered, both before and during this specific period of overlapping crises under focus. These effects range from directly navigating internal state boundaries in the country during a pandemic-induced lockdown, to surviving in the face of loss of employment, as well as lack of access to basic services, social protection and in

some cases, remaining outside the scope of being considered as bona fide beneficiaries eligible for humanitarian aid. I further triangulated the interview data with information from policy documents and news reports to support my findings. My research framework is thus based on an abductive approach (Timmermans and Tavory 2012), allowing me to engage in theoretical sensitization while also being flexible to integrate any unexpected insights emerging from the data.

Conducting interviews remotely in the middle of a pandemic has been a strange and challenging experience. Before embarking on the fieldwork, I had planned to focus on migrants working in and around the city of Kolkata, as well as travel to the Sundarbans to understand experiences of those who mainly stay back. The advent of COVID-19 and the lockdown not only disrupted my plans, but also provided me with a window to realize how messy and blurred the distinctions are between the assumed categories of mobile versus immobile. Although the interviews involved difficult topics of conversation, and I was unable to gather visual observations regarding the settings and body language of participants, the experience and the conversations have been instrumental in shaping and sensitizing my research framework.

Internal "floating" rural-urban migrants in Bangladesh (Chapter Five)

During this part of the fieldwork, I conducted in-depth interviews with migrants living in Dhaka's slums, and organizations working on climate adaptation and development in the region, as well as additional interviews and focus group discussions with local actors and stakeholders in the southwestern coastal region of Bangladesh, specifically in the districts of Satkhira and Khulna. Along with the formal interviews, countless conversations in Bengali with local actors in each of

these settings have been instrumental in molding my theoretical understanding, further allowing me to situate myself in this research.

Early on in the fieldwork, I learned to be flexible in leveraging my identity as a student and a middle-class Bengali woman from West Bengal, on the other side of the India-Bangladesh border. When asked where I am from, I would usually say “Kolkata” instead of “India”. I felt this to be received more favorably, given shared histories and cultural ties between the two Bengals. I believe this way of introducing myself has helped me overcome challenges around recruiting key informants and participants, establishing rapport, and gaining trust. For recruiting key informants, I sought help from organizations who regularly work with the population I was trying to reach. Working closely with these organizations also helped me develop a clearer understanding of their perspectives.

I was grateful to be connected with a student from the Dhaka University through one of these organizations, who assisted me with a part of the field research. Once connected to key informants through the organizations, I would then ask for their help in recruiting potential participants. This technique of purposive sampling followed by snowballing was quite effective, with the key informants connecting me with community members they know of migrating due to economic reasons in connection with a changing rural environment. The participants I ended up recruiting were mainly Muslim women, though I also spoke with men in Dhaka’s slums. Interviews, mostly conducted in Bengali, were recorded on phone with the participants’ consent, and later translated to English. Sometimes conversations would continue after turning off the recorder, and it is in these moments that I could learn something unexpected. A part of the challenge during this fieldwork has been to move beyond expectations of what the participants

would think I would like to hear, to actually get them to open up about different aspects of their lives, albeit with varying emphasis, to develop a more nuanced understanding of the borders and bordering processes confronted by the migrants. To do this therefore, parts of the interviews conducted may not have followed a structured "script" and this flexibility is what I believe has allowed for some of the key insights to emerge from the interview data.

This further influenced the process of coding and analysis. Parent and child codes were developed thematically from the interview data, followed by a second round of coding where I selectively coded excerpts to demonstrate structural effects of what could be considered as borders on lives and livelihoods of the migrants in Bangladesh, as well as migrant agency in responding to and possibly reshaping these effects. It is perhaps worth noting here that while the parent codes for both the empirical cases in Chapters Four and Five mainly follow the same logical order, partly informed by my theoretical sensitization before officially beginning the fieldwork, and partly by the commonalities in queries I had developed for the entire Bengal delta region across Bangladesh and India, the child codes needed to be diversified to capture heterogeneities of the local contexts in two nation-states, as well as the separate moments in time. For the purpose of analysis, the latter has been distinguished as pre-COVID and COVID time periods.

While cognition of the border between the rural and the urban has been a common theme, nuances of mobility dynamics around this border differed between the cases, especially due to the pandemic. Further, while simultaneous presence and absence of water emerged as a paradox in conversations, the slower, more gradual erosion of livelihoods through soil salinity in Bangladesh can be characterized as distinct from the more sudden effects of flooding from cyclone *Amphan.* For urban settings, while experiences of disaster in Dhaka's slums mainly

revolved around flood and fire, for the return migrants in the Indian Sundarbans, narrating experience of a disaster mainly involved the pandemic-induced lockdown. Moreover, though uneven circular mobility of labor has been captured for both sides of the India-Bangladesh border, *who* moves and works differed with the study participants, with the return migrants in the Indian Sundarbans being mostly male, while migrants in Dhaka's slums included women who moved with their families. Gendered differences in vulnerabilities thereby emerged as another theme which informed the scale as well, with women talking about precarious situations faced by their entire families, while the men mostly talked about their individual experiences.

Internal displacement from Kashmir Valley, India (Chapter Six)

Within the city of Jammu, the temporary structures built by the Indian government during and after 1990 to house displaced Kashmiris were referred to as "camps." The makeshift tenements which were later rebuilt as quarters housing hundreds of displaced Kashmiri Pandit families are colloquially referred to as "camp" areas. I visited some main camp areas in Jammu along with other neighborhoods or non-camp areas inhabited by Kashmiri Pandit families. In Delhi, some of the key sites for my fieldwork were neighborhoods with a relatively higher concentration of displaced Kashmiri Pandit families. Unlike Jammu, the sites in Delhi are not divided into camp and non-camp areas. Though initially, after 1990, the Government of India had set up camps for the displaced Kashmiri Pandits in Delhi, these structures were shut down around 2008.

I had developed a semi-structured interview guide but soon found that informal and unstructured conversations were key in coaxing the participants to share their stories. I mainly

presented myself as a student as well as a Bengali woman from the city of Kolkata in eastern India. I would explain the purpose of the research and request their consent to be interviewed. Before beginning the pilot study in Delhi, I visited a Kashmiri Pandit organization and interviewed a major spokesperson, who became one of my key informants. I relied on key informants to learn about localities in both the cities where displaced Kashmiri Pandits are residing. It was relatively easier for me to navigate the field in Delhi than in Jammu, where I was treated as more of an "outsider." To gain access to participants, I navigated both camp and non-camp areas in Jammu. During most of my field work in Jammu, I stayed near one of the camp areas in the periphery of the city. While people were initially hesitant to speak and kept asking if I was a reporter, I found that my identity as a student got me more purchase in approaching potential participants and gaining their trust. Looking back, I think that perhaps my status as a partial outsider allowed me an analytical distance which helped me interpret nuances in their experiences and expressions.

To develop rapport with the "gatekeepers," I sometimes had to share aspects of my background and seek common grounds with people in the community before I would be invited "inside" for interviews. To break the ice and convey that I would be able to understand their stories, I shared about my grandparents crossing the present border between India and Bangladesh (former East Pakistan) during the Partition of India in 1947. I would often encounter questions like, "what are you doing here alone?", or "are you married?" I quickly learnt to include a *bindi* (cultural marker usually worn by Hindu women) on my forehead along with my usual ensemble of *kurta* (long garment) and *dupatta* (scarf) over a pair of jeans. Even after gaining access into households through the "gatekeepers", I had to face unexpected roadblocks, such as interviewing women in the presence of male relatives in the families. Usually, the men would

often answer for the women, and the women would acquiesce by either repeating the same answer or by staying silent. As a woman trying to navigate a field in a patriarchal social setting, I had to think of strategies for circumventing such barriers. A strategy I found useful in this context was to alter the time of my visit. Late morning and early afternoon usually worked best, as the men would be at work, and I could converse with the women while sitting inside the kitchen area while they prepared food.

Most of the interviews were conducted sitting down on floor covered with a carpet or rug (*kaleen*) inside the places of residence. I can hardly remember an instance when I was not treated to Kashmiri sweet tea (*kehva*) and bread (*telwur*). While some of the interviews could be recorded digitally with the participant's consent, I also wrote extensive notes documenting conversations. Conversation usually flowed in Hindi and were later translated in English. Only one participant who identified as an elderly Kashmiri Pandit woman spoke in Kashmiri, with her daughter-in-law acting as the translator. During interviews, I learnt that certain gestures, pauses or silences may speak louder than words. I mainly used selective coding method for interpretive analysis of the interviews, involving multiple iterations for recoding some of the excerpts—a process which reflects my struggle to make sense of the unexpected in the data.

Along with the interviews, I also engaged in several hours of participant observation at the places of residence of the internally displaced. I would present myself in a similar way during participant observation as I did during the interviews. Typically, at least one key informant would be present, who would introduce me to other members of the community. Data from participant observation mainly included photographs and field notes about artifacts at places of residence, as well as everyday practices performed by members of the displaced community. These

observations are not independent of the interviews, and the data gathered from participant observation complement the data from the interviews in supporting findings.

The selection of the core sample of participants was determined by their availability as well as the access granted to me by certain “gatekeepers” based on my navigation of the field. The sample, though perhaps not representative of the population, is still representative of the phenomenon (Luker 2008). The interviews were retrospective, and it was challenging to capture experiences through memories that span almost three decades. Further, we spoke in Hindi during the interviews, although it is not our native language.

Informal conversations with Kashmiri Muslims during my brief stay in Kashmir Valley in 2012 made me realize there are contrasting perspectives and complex narratives surrounding the Kashmir conflict. Since bodies and knowledge are “situated” (Haraway 1988), they are not neutral but inscribed with historically and socially constructed meanings. In this study, the historical context of Kashmir conflict has definite influence on how the Kashmiri Pandits have been living with multiple boundaries in displacement. Understandably the interviews consist of partialities, prejudices and silences arising from their historical situatedness.

PART II:

Three Bs, Three Cs: Borders, borderized and borderizing in the age of COVID, climate, and conflict

CHAPTER 4

Borderized mobilities in the age of COVID: Return migrants in the Bengal delta region of India

Introduction

Pivoting the conversation around the COVID-19 induced lockdown and cyclone *Amphan* as converging crises, this chapter has attempted to examine the complex relationship between mobility and immobility by focusing on return migrants in the Indian Sundarbans to demonstrate how their experiences can serve as an illuminating example of borderized mobilities. Cascading impacts of the converging crises have magnified existing precariousness of these internal rural-urban migrant workers. Unable to survive in urban areas during the lockdown, and unable to move to other destinations in search of work after returning to their rural habitat in the Sundarbans, these migrants along with countless others across the country, have become one of the most prominent casualties of India's war against COVID.

In this chapter, I focus my analysis and discussion around two key findings: 1) the paradoxical interplay between mobility and immobility as a result of cascading impacts of the pandemic and cyclone *Amphan*, and 2) a known history of mobility acting as a constraint for the return migrants in the Indian Sundarbans in the context of the converging crises, further reinforcing experiences of uncertainty, stasis, and immobility. These findings highlight that mobility and immobility are relational, and to understand their co-constitutive and dialectical interactions, we need to first inquire how they are essentially *borderized*.

"We are floating in the middle": (Im)mobility in time of cascading crises

"There is water in every direction, and we are floating in the middle." Abir's symbolic description captures the post *Amphan* situation in his village in Sandeskhali II block of the Indian

Sundarbans. As elaborated earlier in the dissertation, Abir returned from the state of Odisha before the lockdown came into effect. For Abir, returning to his village was not a one-time event but part of a cyclical process of migration that is neither linear, nor does it occur at a regular interval. At the time of the interview, Abir was without work, and facing food insecurity. As agricultural fields were inundated with saltwater after cyclone *Amphan,* there was limited to no scope of finding work in the village. Abir was thinking of finding work in West Bengal, near the city of Kolkata, but was reluctant to travel to another state.

Abir's experience resonates with the situation encountered by other participants. But unlike Abir, most of them could not return before the countrywide lockdown[11]. As Suresh, a male participant in his 20s, who was in the city of Mumbai, Maharashtra at the time of the interview, recalls:

> When the lockdown happened, actually, it was an immediate decision. We did not know it would happen like this. We could not have returned then. My home is in a remote area. It is not possible to suddenly return home from Mumbai, even if I wanted to. We also do not have that much money with us, that we could buy tickets with to return home. So, because the decision was immediate, we could not return home.

As part of a group of eight migrant workers, Suresh was staying in a room arranged by his employer inside a *chawl* (tenement) in Mumbai. He shares they have been managing to survive by cooking rice and lentils his employer has been providing. Since work has stopped, they were not getting paid. "If we had to pay rent ourselves, we could not have stayed. Without getting paid, how will we pay rent, how will we eat?" Living in overcrowded condition amidst a public health crisis can further take a toll on health. "My brother recently became unwell. If you are

[11] Though the countrywide lockdown came into effect from the midnight of March 24, the state of West Bengal went under lockdown from 5 pm on Monday, March 23, 2020 as reported by The Hindu. See https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/west-bengal-under-lock-down-from-march-23/article31135554.ece

unwell, we cannot get doctor here, also the hospital is far from here. Doctors who used to be available nearby are not here now." Since there was restriction on movement during the lockdown, they could not go anywhere, and had to stay huddled inside one room, at risk from the virus as well as food insecurity. Suresh was aware that conditions in his village was far from ideal, but as an only son and earning member of the family, he was worried about his parents who were alone during the crisis.

> I have heard the situation is not good in my village—markets are closed, it is not possible to go out, there is fear of police beating. Then, there is no income *there*, just like there is no income *here*, though I have heard they are providing food grains in the village.

Considerations such as these played a role in decisions to return. They were accompanied by the realization that it was not possible to survive for long in urban areas, as the COVID-19 lockdown as a "one size fits all" national policy response disproportionately affected migrant workers, exacerbating their precariousness. As 23-year-old Kailash, who returned to his village in Sandeshkhali from the state of Tamil Nadu, explains:

> We were in such a place where we did not have access to any kind of support. We did not have enough food or anything else, we had to communicate with our homes for money to be able to eat. They sent money and we survived that way.

The actual journey back to villages in the Indian Sundarbans involved costs and challenges. It was not before weeks into the lockdown when special buses could run, carrying stranded migrants to their villages across state boundaries. Between May and August 2020, the Indian Railways operated over 4,000 Shramik Special trains[12] to transport hundreds of thousands of migrant workers returning to their home states (The Economic Times 2020). Although some participants could avail these special trains free of charge when they made their journey from

[12] The word *shramik* means laborer in Hindi.

states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala, others had to pay from their meagre savings to reserve seats in special buses. Even then, there were barriers on the journey as experienced by Girish, 23, who was returning from Tamil Nadu during the lockdown, just after cyclone *Amphan* made landfall.

> There were checkpoints at two places, and the bus broke down at one place. We were stranded there, then after around four hours we moved. The entire journey took us a total of four days. When we were on the road, the cyclone was happening then. We had to stop often, there were fallen trees on the road.

Anil, 54, who boarded a bus from Tamil Nadu to return to his village in Sandeshkhali, expresses his regret. "We had to spend our own money to rent a bus. It was a lot of money, almost Rs 8,000-10,000 per person."[13] These journeys usually take less than 24 hours and tickets cost almost ten times less. Anil's voice held a deep note of resignation while remembering his return after cyclone *Amphan*, and how he witnessed the condition of his village, damaged by the storm.

> Everything had become like a desert. Ravaged by the storm, the whole place was entirely barren. It was not our village anymore. Fallen trees on the road. There was devastation everywhere.

This comparison with a desert reveals a paradox—how people may live in delta environment surrounded by water, and yet experience acute scarcity of water for drinking and daily use, especially following a disaster like the *Amphan.* Participants reported freshwater reservoirs like ponds in their villages being inundated with saltwater due to the storm. Saltwater intrusion during cyclones can also encroach freshwater coastal aquifers, with any efforts of effective desalinization taking up to weeks, if not months.

[13] While this monetary amount translates to around $110-140, this is almost equivalent to a month's salary for the migrant workers.

Paritosh, 22, was working in a garment factory in Tamil Nadu when the lockdown was declared. He journeyed back to Khulna, Sandeshkhali, with his wife aboard a Shramik Special train to find his house damaged by cyclone *Amphan*. Huddled together inside a makeshift room at the time of the interview, Paritosh and his family were facing food and water related scarcity. They had to regularly fetch water from a well located at a distance, as the public tube-well near their house had been without repair for over a year.

Paritosh further recalls what had happened after cyclone *Aila* in 2009. “When *Aila* happened, I was very young. The water washed away everything, there was nothing.” He elaborates how his parents had to find work in and around Kolkata for their survival after *Aila*, due to massive loss of agriculture dependent rural livelihoods in the region.

> Agriculture? no, no, no... till almost five years after *Aila*... there are sites beside the river that could not be cultivated… we did not have any land...mother used to work in Kolkata, took care of an elderly lady, and father used to work various jobs including building with cement...I stayed in my maternal uncle's place. They would come home for a month or so, and then leave again. My entire childhood… they faced a lot of hardship to raise me.

While in the past people have moved out of the delta region in search of alternative livelihood options in the wake of disasters like cyclone *Aila,* making any such decisions in the present context has been significantly more challenging and complicated. The interactive effects of COVID-19 and *Amphan* (see Figure 1) have resulted in a paradoxical interplay between mobility and immobility for the return migrants in the Indian Sundarbans.

Mobility (shorter or longer-term, intra-state or inter-state) has usually been considered an integral part of their strategic response to disasters like cyclone *Amphan*, as well as more gradual impacts of anthropogenic climate change on delta livelihoods. However, due to coincidence of the cyclone with COVID-19, the return migrants have now been presented with a

conundrum at a peculiar intersection of their mobility and immobility, which ultimately makes them more vulnerable to climate related environmental and economic risks.

Implementation of COVID-19 lockdown in India involved enforcing immobility as the norm. This was contradicted by return migrants across the country, becoming variably mobile to reach their villages for shelter and survival. The situation that followed and persisted even after the official lifting of the lockdown, during various phases of "Unlock," was that return migrants were now indefinitely immobile in rural areas without a source of income. This inverted outcome has culminated in a protracted livelihood crisis for people in the Indian Sundarbans. More specifically, the return migrants in this delta region find themselves stuck in a medium-term limbo without the ability to plan for an immediate future that appears fleeting and uncertain.

The inertia of the lockdown could be observed in conversations with participants while conducting follow-up interviews and new interviews in June and July 2020. Even though the countrywide lockdown that began on March 24, 2020, officially ended on May 31, 2020, participants kept referring to their present situation as being "under a lockdown." Anil explains his hesitation of leaving his village and traveling to an urban area. "I do not know about work in Kolkata. I am searching for work nearby, but I am not finding any. I hear that more cases of the virus are happening in Kolkata. That is why it is not possible to go now." When asked whether he plans to go to Tamil Nadu for work, Anil elaborates:

> I will not go back now, at least not in 2020. Next year I will think whether I will go or not. If I get good work here, I will stay. If I stay in an area adjacent to home, it will not take me too much time to come back. But if I stay *there* [Tamil Nadu], it will take three to four days.

This reluctance to leave their villages despite experiencing a livelihood crisis was echoed by most of the other participants. Memories of an arduous return journey during the lockdown, followed by experiences of quarantine in isolated school buildings without basic facilities, act as deterrent for any immediate plans of migrating to another state.

"They can go back any time": How mobility shapes immobility during crisis

Internal mobility within and across state boundaries in India is not restricted by any administrative policies of the center or state governments. However, even though migrant workers are understood to have freedom of movement anywhere within the country, i.e., their mobility is considered to be legal, there still remains the question of portability of documents, specifically the ones connected with social welfare benefits. For example, "ration cards" issued by home state governments provide access to subsidized food through the Public Distribution System (PDS). These ration cards could be used to buy food from local ration shops or "fair price shops" at subsidized rates. Ration cards have historically been linked with cardholders' locations in home states and until recently, were not portable within or across state borders.

The widespread food insecurity experienced by migrant workers during the COVID-19 lockdown brought the issue of ration card portability under critical spotlight. Following the urgent suggestion of the Supreme Court of India in April 2020, Government of India tried to enhance inter-state portability of ration cards through the "One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)" scheme, introduced in June 2019. Concerns have been raised about the effectiveness of this policy for migrant workers as it relies heavily on technical processes of identifying and serving beneficiaries by linking their biometric information through Aadhaar cards (Unique Identification

Cards for Indian nationals) to electronic point-of-sales (EPoS) machines installed at ration shops (Panda and Kumar 2020). According to the Indian Food Ministry, merely 0.002% of subsidized rations could be purchased by inter-state migrants at their destinations in host states. In comparison, intra-state migrants could procure over 6% of subsidized rations (Jebaraj 2020). In connection to this, research has found that the Indian government's attempt to make ration cards portable between states has largely been ineffective in checking inter-state mobility during COVID-19 crisis (Choudhury et al 2020).

In a way, Indian government's response to COVID-19 in the form of a countrywide lockdown acted as a lens, making visible the precarities experienced by migrant workers in urban areas, along with the value placed on migrant lives by policy makers. Had the migrants from the Indian Sundarbans been able to achieve economic self-reliance in their destination regions, they might not have felt the desperate need to return to their villages, with the hope to survive for a while by eating what they could grow. Despite acknowledging that they receive relatively higher income than what they would have earned in the delta region, participants returning from other states shared about facing barriers and bearing costs in the destination regions, including language barriers, concerns about healthcare, as well as restricted access to social benefits during this crisis.

Mobility can therefore be constraining, especially when it comes with limited to no protection through social benefits. And it still remains to be seen whether effects of portability of documents such as ration cards can translate to actual benefits for migrant workers. In the absence of robust policies and social protection mechanisms, the responsibility to move and survive disproportionately falls on migrant workers as they are mainly seen as economic actors

who migrate to minimize livelihood related risks in sending regions. Under this framework, crisis-induced return tends to be viewed as a completely voluntary aspect of migration, driven by economic concerns. Such a view not only obscures the complex motivations and nonlinear pathways of circular migration, it also overlooks structural effects of policies like the COVID-induced lockdown, with major consequences in terms of food insecurity and livelihood crisis experienced by the migrants.

Although labor welfare laws such as the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act (ISMWA) existed since 1979, it has not been effectively implemented in most states. As an effort to formalize accountability for work-related welfare of inter-state migrant workers in India, the main provision of this Act includes registering establishments hiring migrants from other states, as well as documenting information about the workers. Additionally, under ISMWA, migrant workers could receive allowances and access to basic amenities, with the promise of social protection and safe working conditions. During the 2020 Monsoon session of Parliament, the Ministry of Labour and Employment (2020) responded to a query about return migrants by estimating more than 10 million migrant workers to have returned to their home states following the COVID-19 lockdown. Though ISMWA was cited as key piece of legislation, further details were missing about the migrant workers.

A notable exception is the state of Kerala, which is among the few states across India where this Act has been implemented in some way. Through Kerala Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme 2010, the state offers social welfare benefits including health coverage for migrant workers. This was reflected in experiences of participants who had either returned or was in Kerala at the time of the interview. Malay, a participant in his 40s who stayed back in Kerala

during the lockdown remembers that the state government provided them with rations such as rice, lentils, potatoes, onions for one month after the lockdown. As 30-year-old Bikash, who returned from Kerala on a Shramik Special train, reflects, "those who had come from outside, the local government [of Kerala] there treated them well, and were updated and informed about them."

As translating policies such as the ISMWA and ONORC to praxis remain a challenge, this lack of an effective unified mechanism of social protection across India has served to mobilize a range of NGOs and civil society actors. They are often on the front lines of providing relief and support to crisis affected communities. While a considerable number of NGOs working at multiple scales have been invested in providing aid and relief support to people in the Sundarbans delta region who were worst hit by cyclone *Amphan,* (im)mobility dynamics during the pandemic induced lockdown presented obstacles for transporting food grains, tarpaulins, and other relief materials. Both the return migrants as well as the spokespersons of NGOs I interviewed reflected that conditions of unpaved roads and embankments, together with the fact that most people are located on deltaic islands, to be accessed through boats which are essential mode of transport in the Sundarbans, have complicated the process of relief distribution. Moreover, participants also shared that bigger NGOs that come from outside cannot work independently in the region without necessary permission from the local government. Hence, they usually work with and *through* local bodies in the villages—the *gram panchayat* (village governing body) as well as local partners such as community organizations and volunteers.

A spokesperson of a prominent NGO working on rural development in the region explained their process of selection of potential beneficiaries in this time of crisis:

> Our greatest advantage perhaps is that along the coastal belt of the Sundarbans, we have almost 150-200 volunteers who are from the local community. They are spread over different villages. Most of them are women… We asked our volunteers to make a priority list of those in need… after *Amphan* we faced a new challenge…before it was food, now it was related to shelter and health… through donations we gathered we bought tarpaulin and the process of providing food… organizations like the Oxfam extended helping hand, so that we could support around 500 families… we followed our basic core principle of providing for those who are suffering, those who are really in need. Our volunteers would examine the situation in villages, and we would make priority list on the basis of that information.

As the conversation veered towards the issue of livelihood security of return migrants in the Indian Sundarbans, he acknowledged it as "an important issue" and a pressing need at this time, further elaborating on the organization's perspective on including migrants in their list of beneficiaries.

> We have tried to provide opportunity for those with skills through a skill development center here. But once they have this inclination to migrate, they *will* go. We have seen village after village with no men…Here people say, my son is in *bidesh* [foreign land] … when they return, it is a source of pride for them… The reason we are not thinking about them [return migrants] now in any special way, is that I think they can go back any time… and this has already happened in front of my eyes. I know two brothers who returned. We have an organic farm, and I told them to work there… after around 10 days, when the lockdown was lifted, I heard they have left.

Though the brothers in this example moved to work in a factory within the state of West Bengal, what it reveals is that migrants tend to get left out of beneficiary lists of NGOs, even during situations such as the present intersection of the crises. This further points to a mismatch between "expert" understanding of NGOs and the way the return migrants are making sense of their situation, with consequences for decisions around who gets to be considered as potential beneficiaries in need of material and livelihood support during a crisis. Therefore, a known history of mobility can act as a disadvantage in this context, as migrants are seen as individuals with the inherent ability to move and survive, rather than being embedded in a crisis-affected

community—their lives and livelihoods shaped by social structures, environmental changes, and colonial histories.

Emphasis on assumed mobility of the return migrants can further shape their experiences of immobility in the delta region. For instance, Bikash reflected how, “those who had come from outside, they were not treated like before.” In contrast to their usually elevated status of persons sending remittances back to their villages, migrants who returned to the Sundarbans in West Bengal were now being regarded as potential carriers of the virus. Bikash continues,

> We saw a lot of change from before in the village. Since we stayed separately after reaching here [quarantine], we did not entirely understand the situation… After returning, we were staying in a school near our house, now am back at home… I feel we are being avoided somewhat, more than before, and even though there will be change because of now, still feel we are being treated differently than others.

Practices of social distancing and shelter-in-place during a pandemic can go beyond physical isolation, to magnify perceptions of discrimination and social exclusion, as experienced by return migrants like Bikash. This can exacerbate economic precarity connected with lack of steady income that has become their present reality. Additionally, disconnect from the social networks through which they had earlier found work in the destination regions can further compound interactive effects of the crises, pushing desperate migrants to change occupations and endure hazardous work conditions. For example, 27-year-old Pallab, who used to work in a garment factory in Tamil Nadu, was living inside a cement truck in Kolkata at the time of the interview. He came to Kolkata within a week after the countrywide lockdown was lifted. “In the village we had almost nothing to eat, so I came.” Not used to this backbreaking work, he had managed to send only Rs 1,000 back to his village.

Pallab's experience is echoed in anxieties expressed by Malay, who had stayed back in Kerala. Malay was afraid that had he gone back, he would have no other option but to catch fish, which he had not done for a long time. The return of migrant workers in the Indian Sundarbans also coincided with an alarming rise in incidences of tiger attacks on fishermen (Mukherjee 2020). Livelihood insecurity, heightened by the pandemic induced immobility, have been driving helpless, jobless people into the Sundarbans Forest, creating over-dependence on natural resources of this region. This has resulted in more frequent instances of human-wildlife conflict. Therefore, the uncertainty produced by immobility in this specific context, when placed in relation with assumed mobility of the return migrants, not only poses a challenge for their livelihoods, but also a threat for migrant lives in this delta region.

Discussion and Conclusion: A Link Forward

The interactive effects of mobility and immobility may become more visible during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, along with state-centric responses to such crisis. This moment of crisis has also created an opening to view how certain borders operate, reinforced through effects of historical processes on contemporary policies, that may usually remain obscured during periods of "normalcy". Using mobilities as a sensitizing concept, I illuminate complex experiences of people from a climate hotspot, highlighting how assumptions around mobility and the label of being mobile can shape migrants' experiences of immobility, specifically in times of crises. When researchers, activists and policymakers view people from climate vulnerable regions as either moving or staying put, nuances around how moving can also become a way of staying (including periods of return and rest) tend to get lost. This can then feed conventional assumptions and

reinforce binary thinking around forced versus voluntary mobilities, or migration versus in situ adaptation as mutually exclusive and opposite processes.

The findings further question the idea of return as an end point in the process of migration. Rather than an end point in the process of migration, there is scope to understand the phenomenon of return in this context as part of a cyclical continuity, where mobility is interspersed with periods of temporary discontinuity or rest when the migrants may remain immobile for a while before moving again. Moreover, instead of a single cyclical trajectory, movement for these migrants can be conceptualized as partially overlapping circles since they could be journeying to different destinations after each instance of return to their region of origin. This can then pose problems for the typical state-centered binary understanding of mobility and immobility as neatly separate and symmetric concepts. Even as the "mobility turn" in social sciences aimed the spotlight on mobility and flows (Sheller and Urry 2006), challenging sedentary narratives that assume rootedness and immobility as "natural" (Malkki 1992), it can still serve to reinforce a "mobility bias" in migration research (Schewel 2019).

Addressing the "mobility bias" in migration literature may also entail how this bias may further obscure borderizing processes that in turn can shape mobility dynamics of people such as the migrants in this study. Instead of making mobility and immobility the central problematic of this study, I refocus the lens on how migrant bodies and experiences are borderized in the context of multiple crises. I argue here that return is part of a nonlinear, cyclical trajectory for the migrants, and that it is imperative for research and policy conversations to take into consideration periodic immobility along with periodic mobility of these "floating" people. Doing so would be critical to not only address how their increasingly precarious lives are multiply

borderized during times of crisis, but also how their pervasive borderized condition as an accepted status quo in this so-called "post" colonial era is itself a form of crisis.

When mobility becomes the central axis around which migrant lives get oriented, interpreted, and represented in scholarship, "the moments in which further movement is renegotiated, resisted, or restrained—when migrants are *not* migrating—are lost" (Schewel 2019: 330). This concern has been echoed in empirical studies that critically investigate how mobility and immobility are relational and mutually constitutive (hence the logic of placing (im) before mobilities), albeit in the context of transnational migration (e.g., Carling 2002, Mata-Codesal 2015).

Understanding mobilities as *relational* further entails recognition of how they are also *relative* to certain spatial and temporal frames. For example, on a larger scale, when the emphasis is on a spatial frame that considers nation-states as natural units of analysis and a temporal frame that is linear and long-term, internal migrants moving between rural and urban areas can be seen as relatively immobile compared to those moving across international borders (Schewel 2019). To critically examine how circular migrants moving within nation-state borders can be simultaneously mobile and immobile, experiencing movement as well as stasis along cyclical pathways, together with how their experiences are borderized, I empirically focus on migrants returning to the rural delta region of the Indian Sundarbans. Moreover, focusing on the compounding effects of converging crises such as COVID-19 and cyclone *Amphan* on migrant lives and livelihoods in this region, I demonstrate how human mobility and immobility in this context can be understood as a case of borderized mobilities.

Furthermore, how the people of the Sundarbans engage in and experience mobilities in the backdrop of a changing climate cannot be separated from materiality of their lives in this "tide country," characterized by the ebb and flow of tides, breaking and building of banks by river channels, as well as periodic disappearance and reappearance of land when the water recedes. Amitav Ghosh (2004) articulates how in the Sundarbans, the "boundaries between land and water are always mutating, always unpredictable."

> There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea…The currents are so powerful as to reshape the islands almost daily—some days the water tears away entire promontories and peninsulas; at other times it throws up new shelves and sandbanks where there were none before…And to the inhabitants of the islands this land is known as *bhatir* desh—the tide country—except that *bhati* is not just the "tide" but one tide in particular, the ebb tide, the *bhata*. This is a land half submerged at high tide: it is only in falling that the water gives birth to the forest. To look upon this strange parturition, midwifed by the moon, is to know why the name "tide country" is not just right but necessary. [original emphasis]

This cyclical understanding of life among the inhabitants of the Bengal delta region also extends to how they, as borderized subalterns carrying the inertia of a colonial history, perceive and practice being (im)mobile as a way of survival, and ultimately as a way of being in the world. Engaging with colonial histories, cultural understandings, and ways of living in a context such as this "tide country" thus become vital, especially as global discourses and policy dialogues in this age of "climate coloniality" (Sultana 2022) continue to outline the possibility of a future when the water may not recede.

The findings presented in this chapter are neither exhaustive nor do they represent a homogeneity of experience among migrant workers returning to their villages across India. Despite limitations in the interview data gathered during a pandemic, it has yielded critical insights that might have remained obscured in a non-COVID world.

My effort here has been to locate knowledge and experiences of migrants disproportionately affected by the twin crises at the center of critical research and policy dialogues that can hopefully transcend this specific context and historical moment. Such conversations are not only urgent. They are also fundamental to imagining possible climate futures for coastal and island communities that ideally, would not devalue rural lives and livelihoods (see Paprocki 2020), and would integrate lessons, concerns, and puzzles around complex, interrelated, and borderized mobilities in the context of overlapping crises by learning from experiences of groups such as the return migrants in the Indian Sundarbans.

CHAPTER 5

Shifting Borders, Floating People, Changing Climate: A tale of the borderized and borderizing in Bangladesh

Borderized and borderizing in an era of climate crisis

During a field visit to the southwestern coastal areas of Bangladesh in early 2020, an area popularly referred to as the "polder" region, Alam, an elderly teacher in a local primary school explained why they have constructed a makeshift hut to function as a school near the banks of a river after a recent flooding. Pointing to the other bank of the river, Alam informed me how part of the river acts as an administrative boundary between two sub-districts (*upazilas*). When the river eroded its banks on the other side, families had to relocate to this side of the river to seek shelter and survive. The move included setting up a temporary structure to function as a school. However, despite this relocation, the people were not considered as displaced by the *upazila* administration where they resettled, albeit temporarily. Hence resources available in this administrative unit, including potential benefits from programs implemented in this particular area, were not accessible to the families displaced by river erosion, despite their physical relocation across an administrative boundary. For all intents and purposes, these families were still under the jurisdiction of the administrative unit they migrated from, part of which were now submerged under the river.

Such ascribed *immobility*, bestowed on people who may have moved across a natural border-like feature such as this river, which in this specific case also serves as an internal administrative boundary, can only be explained by first considering borders as *mobile*, and the effects of such mobile borders on lives and livelihoods of people inhabiting this deltaic region, a well-known climate hotspot in global climate discourse and policy circles.

However, neither are environmental factors like river erosion, flooding, and extreme cyclonic events new to this region, nor is human mobility across and within territorial boundaries unprecedented for this historical context. Whether it is the movement and settlement of marginal populations in the low-lying deltaic lands during the colonial era, or as part of one of the largest waves of mass migration in postcolonial history due to the partition of Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan, people in this part of the world have always been mobile, albeit at different spatial and temporal scales. Indeed, relatively new for this landscape, especially in the context of its much-deliberated vulnerability to climate change, are an assemblage of political borders that have been formed and transformed over time, with their associated structural and symbolic effects, and (un)intended consequences for mobilities in this region.

What role might climate play in making people from this region variably mobile and immobile? And how might circular mobility of people moving within Bangladesh be related to structural and symbolic effects of borders they confront in their daily lives? These queries are not only relevant to this particular context. They can be situated within a broader question of how climate impacts may interact with non-climatic drivers to exacerbate border-like effects for migrants in the South, many of whom have never crossed an international border. Beyond what might be interpreted as an overtly structural understanding, my aim here is to also focus on migrant agency by asking how migrants may not only survive but also shape the effects of multiple borders that cross, confine, and classify them.

Below I describe and analyze the dual process of *erosion* at "source" areas (read rural areas) followed by *exclusion* at "destination"[14] areas (read urban areas). By doing so, I aim to contribute to existing knowledge on climate mobilities as well as a broader repertoire of social scientific understanding by examining borderizing as a process in relation to mobilities in a climate vulnerable region like the Bengal delta.

Erosion

In the deltaic landscape of Bengal crisscrossed by multiple river channels, there is a peculiar relationship between land and water that governs lives and livelihoods in the region. People here have internalized the understanding that "rivers break one side of the bank and build on the other," effectively shifting their courses over time. This then places those residing on the eroding side on shifting grounds, with their land and home submerged under water, while the river creates new lands (*char*) on the other side. Today these rivers are increasingly getting choked with sediments, with impact of climate variability affecting freshwater supply downstream, effectively resulting in riverbeds becoming higher than surrounding lands and more susceptible to saltwater flooding. As a village community leader from Satkhira remembers:

> We have seen, before 1970, around '65, in this region, this river was a big river. There were even *steamers* (big boats) plying on this river. When *steamers* stopped, and the river tried to slowly fill up with sediments. Then we had *lonches* (ferries) plying. From *lonches* to trawlers, trawlers to smaller boats. And from smaller boats, now the situation is that these rivers have become so filled up with sediments, the riverbed is higher than our homes.

[14] Although I treat rural areas as source and urban areas as destination for this analysis, I also argue for the need to go beyond fixed labels, as they can alternate in cases of urban-rural return migration, as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This further means that not only ecological borders between land and water in the Bengal delta are in a constant state of motion, but also that the inhabitants of this region are aware of these mobile borders. For example, Najma, a middle-aged woman in Korail, Dhaka, still remembers:

> The river was very near, the distance between here and this market, it was this close… If the water rose, it came straight to our house… Now everything we had, including the ground, is in the river… My father, grandfather's ancestral property and home, everything went into the river… We have absolutely nothing… we cannot go back to our home in the village (*desh*)… Only the *desh* is there, no home or anything, everything the river has taken.
>
> [Najma, Korail slum, Dhaka, Bangladesh]

What Najma is recalling here denotes much more than a river eroding its bank. It also alludes to the erosion of homes and a way of life. While the process of river erosion has long been prevalent, and people have learned to live and move accordingly, what is different now is how far and for how long people move away with their families as lands and homes are claimed by water. For instance, Hasan, who is now in his 40s recalled leaving his village in the Barisal district when he was only 12 or 13. As the river took away homes, schools, playgrounds, his family had to relocate to Dhaka. The river is still eroding in his village, he reported:

> "I went back a few days ago. But where was our home? In the middle of the river."

Meaning making around rivers as borders in motion, displacing people through erosion, can extend beyond the physical erosion of natural riverbanks and embankments. It also involves erosion of traditional livelihoods and means of survival, often leaving people in the rural areas without an alternative livelihood strategy. Experience of surviving disasters like floods in rural areas often co-occur with the risk of gradually eroding livelihoods. Such intersection of ecological

and economic impacts gets revealed through Salma's narrative, who came to Dhaka with her parents around eight to ten years ago:

> Our house was near the river, almost half was broken and taken away, when *Sidr* [cyclone] happened, we were in dire condition… we had big trees that became damaged… the business *Abba* did faced challenge, we had a shop… the shop was not doing well, *Abba* had to incur debt, could not repay… we were almost grown up… what will he do? So he brought us to Dhaka… *Abba* came to Dhaka before us, after settling a bit, brought us to Dhaka. [Salma, Korail slum, Dhaka, Bangladesh]

The southwestern coastal region of Bangladesh is also known as the *polder* region due to the network of Dutch-style embankments, erected as permanent barriers to protect lands from flooding and saltwater intrusion through controlled management of water. Endorsed by a UN Mission, these polders were built as engineering solutions in the 1960s, through the Coastal Embankment Project, implemented by the East Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA). Even after Bangladesh became independent from East Pakistan in 1971, the acronym WAPDA has stayed on in public memory, serving as a stand-in term for embankments in colloquial language.

For Rahim, an elderly man from the same village, storms are becoming more intense, with greater risk of loss and damage than what he had experienced earlier. Embankments or *Wapda* have collapsed in places and are unable to act as effective barriers against the water.

> Storms used to happen, when my father and grandfather were alive, but not like this… [So, what would happen earlier?] Then storms would happen, but we would not have losses like now, *Wapda* was there
>
> [Rahim, community elder in a village in Khulna district]

Today, the WAPDA embankments in vulnerable coastal rural parts of the country also stand as remnants of a development effort that exacerbated the problem of flooding instead of solving it,

by compartmentalizing land from water in this deltaic region, and contributing to raising of the height of the riverbeds through sedimentation. Damaged by cyclones like *Sidr* and *Aila,* parts of the WAPDAs are used as roads and thorough ways for rural traffic, which prominently includes motorbikes, locally referred to as "helicopters" that "fly" over broken parts of the embankments.

Riding one of these "helicopters" I visited one of the southern-most inhabited settlements in Bangladesh, which not only faces high level of exposure to sudden-onset events like cyclonic storms but is also facing protracted risks owing to increasing salinization, together with related changes in livelihoods and local political economy. Nasir, NGO representative and community member from this area explains what has changed based on his own experience:

> We have seen floods before, when I was young… but now, like *Aila* (cyclone in 2009)… we have not experienced anything like this… neither in my own life, nor those who are more senior, don't think they have witnessed something like this… what used to happen before was overflow, and because of river erosion, some areas would get flooded with salt water… in that case, there would be damage to paddy if paddy was grown… now paddy is not grown, now its shrimp farming, when *gher* becomes flooded, the fish would leave*,* which would be another source of loss.
>
> [Nasir, NGO actor and community member, Khulna, SW Bangladesh]

A fledgling economy with an ecologically fragile delta region, Bangladesh is heavily reliant on farming for producing food and sustaining rural livelihoods. However, impact of climate variability in the region, in the form of temperature and rainfall anomalies, and more frequent and intense cyclones, are not only adversely affecting agricultural production, but also undermining livelihoods dependent on agriculture. As reflected by a focus group participant in a village in the Satkhira district, "saltwater is a persistent problem here." This has been echoed by other participants during my fieldwork in the villages as well as in Dhaka's slums.

The effect of salinity on people's lives in the rural areas extends well beyond the duration of cyclonic events, accompanied by widespread flooding of the low-lying lands. Salinity works in insidious ways, affecting both surface water and groundwater recharge, with consequences for crop production. In the southern coastal parts of Bangladesh, lands are converted to shrimp farms, that are kept almost permanently inundated with saltwater, making these lands unsuitable for any other forms of cultivation. In the words of the focus group participant:

> Because people want to make profits… Thus, those who have money, who have the means, what did they do? They obtained land from people like me, from him [pointing to another person], from others, and started a *gher* system (shrimp farming) to profit… But this only benefitted the privileged, and disadvantaged people from *middle* class… [What grew in the *gher*?] In *gher,* only shrimp, *bagda* (saltwater shrimp), Now sometimes other fishes too… like *rohu, mrigel*, some fishes… But mainly the *gher* is for producing *bagda* shrimp… [*Bagda* needs saltwater, right?]… Yes, saltwater, *bagda* would need saltwater… This is why… this problem persists… Now the poor people have vanished.
>
> [Focus group participant in Polder 2, Satkhira]

The natural cycle of ebb and flow of tides, connected with the disappearance and reappearance of land has been an integral part of environmental and cultural consciousness of people. Now when land is kept permanently inundated with saltwater due to profit-making motives of shrimp farmers and larger corporations, that land is not reappearing again. This means, that the coastline, a significant border for climate discourse and policy, is effectively moving northwards, and human mobility dynamics from this area are shaped by both ecological and socio-economic impacts of this border constraining and conditioning what can be practiced as a viable livelihood strategy and what cannot.

This shift, however, has not been uncontested. As described by Kalyan, a community leader from a different polder:

> We are an organization of landless, hardworking people, we protest against injustice and violence by the powerful… we protest against the use of saline water, because beside us in 19, 21 [polder numbers], there are saltwater *ghers…* now poor people like us cannot create these *ghers…* big owners come from outside and make monetary deeds, then no work is there for the poor people.

Kalyan further shared that resistance to converting land into shrimp farms by farmers in their area has been met with violence from local power elites. Such instances of localized conflict, along with broader changes in the political economic landscape of the region can be seen as a form of erosion, eventually resulting in borderized effects for the marginalized through forceful shifts in their livelihood and labor.

It is perhaps helpful to understand the process of erosion here not merely through a language of loss, but also through an accompanying dynamic of creation. That erosion has another side becomes clearly visible along riverbanks through the geomorphological process of creation of *char* lands. However, as lamented by participants who have experienced a *nadi bhangan* (breaking of river) in their rural habitat, eroding away their homes and means of survival, they could not have hoped to be compensated for their loss with any newly created *chars,* as these lands are usually controlled by the *prabhabshali* [original emphasis], translated to mean those with power and influence.

Such multi-faceted nuances of erosion, culminating through the shifting of land-water boundaries, and the mutating relationship between land and water in this era of climate crisis, can essentially be read as a borderizing process, which can then shape mobility decisions for some of the most vulnerable sections of the society. The fluctuating border between land and water representing political ecological and economic relationships can now be imagined to be intersecting with other types of borders, especially those articulated through linkages between

the rural and the urban, as well as the relational process of adapting in place versus moving elsewhere. As observed by the focus group participant, “now the poor people have vanished.” While this may sound like a paradoxical statement, especially given claims in migration literature about the *inability* of the poorest of the poor to move, it may also illustrate a logical fallacy in our assumption of what it entails for the subaltern to be mobile. In this case the profile of the subaltern largely consists of landless laborers who used to work in agricultural fields. Now with the conversion of the land use to shrimp farming, they may not be left with any alternative but to *move* from one livelihood to another. And for some people, this may involve physical movements to a nearby village or town, and then eventually the destination could be Dhaka.

While there are spatial and temporal variations in the movements of people, what could be common are the experiences of border-like effects operating through erosion of embankments, infrastructure, and livelihoods in the rural areas. Adverse impact of saline water inundation and intrusion on agricultural income and livelihoods has been identified as a key driver for internal mobility to specific locations within Bangladesh (Chen and Mueller 2018). The densely populated capital of Dhaka is one such location, where hundreds of thousands of migrants are reported to be arriving, and their numbers keep growing. They typically find work in brick kilns, garment factories, become rickshaw pullers or work as domestic help. As a next step, some may move across the border to India through long established pathways of migration, or to Gulf countries to work in construction jobs. I specifically focus here on internal migrants hunkering down in Dhaka, making up a majority of my research participants, and living in densely populated informal settlements or slums such as Bhola and Korail.

Exclusion

The periphery of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, offers a view that can perhaps be best described as a jarring juxtaposition. With the skylight of the city as backdrop, one may not only witness the lush green of paddy fields, but also the black smoke emanating from numerous brick kilns dotting the landscape. Depicting a land use and livelihood transition zone and symbolizing both a rural-urban divide and linkage, this image also symbolizes a limbo and state of in-betweenness experienced by countless internal migrants floating between rural and urban areas, but not belonging to either.

This so-called rural-urban divide may also obscure another linkage: how the process of “erosion” in rural areas can shape and be further shaped by a process of “exclusion” in urban areas confronting the migrants. I posit here that both these processes can operate together to *borderize* through structural and symbolic effects that may not often be visible or recognized but experienced daily and disproportionately by the floating people of this study.

Whether people are suddenly displaced as their homes get swept away by cyclones and floods, or whether they decide to migrate to urban areas in response to economic scarcity and search for alternative livelihoods, the idea of refuge on the other side of the move may not match with existing reality. These effects may manifest through experiences of labor exploitation and hazardous working conditions (e.g., in brick kilns, garment factories), or indebtedness to predatory contractors or agents connecting them with informal work in urban areas. For those who have mainly worked in the fields and depended on natural resources, the abrupt change in the type of work they would find in urban areas can affect their health and well-being. These

effects may also have a gendered dimension. Arifa Banu, a 51-year-old woman in Korail, shares the disproportionate burden that she had to carry to provide for her entire family, after migrating to Dhaka:

> We faced a lot of hardships during the flood… had to stay in a makeshift tent on a railway line… could not return home for 1 month, there was water… then from there, where to go, what would we eat? Very helpless, so came to Dhaka… we had relatives here… rented a room. I worked in [Matla] garments. The pay in garment factories those days used to be 300 *taka*. I had to show I knew tailoring work from before to enter the job as training operator. Then my pay was 600 *taka*… I would walk a long distance to work, from Mahakhali to Bagda… did not even have few pennies for the bus ticket… Then after coming here [in Korail], I could not pay the rent, even 400 *taka* I could not pay for rent. How else would I feed the children? My husband was ill… When we came here, there was mud everywhere, the ground was low… there was no proper source of drinking water then.
>
> [Arifa, Korail slum, Dhaka, Bangladesh]

Even though absolute income for the migrants may increase by working in the urban economy, so does their costs of living in a city like Dhaka. This may not necessarily correspond to any improvements in their quality of living. Indeed, in slums like Korail housing hundreds of thousands of migrants, sometimes multiple families would live under the same roof. Such overcrowded housing conditions are often matched by a lack of basic facilities like electricity, gas, water, and sanitation.

Instead of understanding migrant experiences in this context as outright exclusion, it is perhaps more useful to grasp this process as one oriented towards "subordinate inclusion" through participation and embracing of the precarities of informal labor markets, often present as the only option for survival to these migrants. Thus, building on De Genova's (2016) work on borders as sites of selectively revealed "subordinate inclusion," I argue here that the metabolic rift or divide between the rural and the urban can be theorized as sites of "informalized inclusion"

through rural livelihood shifts followed by incomplete and uncertain inclusion in urban labor markets, regulated through forces of global capitalism and neoliberal state apparatus in this postcolonial context.

Informalized inclusion can reproduce precarious conditions experienced by the migrants and naturalize them to the extent where return becomes inevitable during times of crisis, as exemplified by the case of return migrants of the Indian Sundarbans in the previous chapter.

In this context as well, sudden shocks in the forms of urban floods and fires were reported by the participants, exacerbating border-like effects of the rural-urban divide. Repeated occurrences of both flood and fire have been reported by the participants from Korail, who had at times suffered serious loss and damage to what little they could own. As Arifa continues:

> Here also we faced floods… our houses here again went under water… we put one bed over another… such dirty water entered, we could not even put our feet in that water… we had to buy water and drink at the rate of 10 *taka*… due to flooding, entire Korail went under water… our place was flooded with water… stayed like this for more than one month... those who could stay, stayed… others had to relocate to a school building.
>
> [Arifa, Korail slum, Dhaka, Bangladesh]

While some instances of receiving aid and relief during disasters like floods and fire were shared in the interviews, these were not followed by longer-term solutions aiming at recovery.

Fire as a disaster in Korail slum is not a new phenomenon. Paradoxically however, while it is the slum dwellers who face irrecoverable losses from a fire burning down houses and belongings, they are also the ones who may get blamed for the fire. This is evident from the news coverage following the 2017 fire in Korail. According to the reports, the fire began at 2:00 am, spreading widely inside a slum that houses thousands of families on 150 acres of state-owned

land. An authority figure in a government department was quoted saying, “The slum has a lot of illegal power lines… The slum also has illegal gas lines underneath” (The Asian Age 2017). Illegal and faulty gas connections have also been cited as a leading cause of fires in other slums of Dhaka. Using analogies like that of a “ticking time bomb” (Dhaka Tribune 2019), news reports likely present the perspective of the state, a perspective that denies accountability by blaming inhabitants of the slums for their negligence.

Furthermore, highlighting this half of the picture can serve to hide the other half where slum dwellers, like the migrant participants in this study, cannot legally access basic services including gas lines at these sites. Nevertheless, the demand for services along with the desperation to survive create an opening, a gap, that is then exploited by profit-oriented influential locals to provide black market alternatives. The double bind of informality ascribed to these settlements, vulnerable to hazards like this fire, further extend to the dwellers and their labor, not only making their futures here uncertain and precarious, but also effectively illegalizing their existence, while at the same time apportioning responsibility and blame.

It is therefore not surprising that as more and more migrants keep flocking to cities like Dhaka, the government and city authorities, concerned about issues of security and carrying capacity of the capital, treat them as unwanted and undesirable. The migrants in this study constantly live under the threat of eviction from their informal makeshift homes in the slums, together with the promise of rehabilitation to another part of the city.

Because lands on which informal settlements are built are public lands owned by the government, there is consistent anxiety and fear of demolition of slums like Korail expressed by

the participants. Despite resistance against eviction of slum dwellers, a major part of the Bhola slum was demolished recently, forcing migrant families to relocate to the periphery, or move to another slum. Rahim, who has rebuilt his life while residing in the Bhola slum, how the experience of physical eviction, with hardly any advance notice, has compounded their material scarcity, identified as the reason they moved to Dhaka in the first place.

> Three times the river broke and took… First time it broke here, rebuilt there [indicating shorter distance with hand]… then broke again, fixed there… then when broke there, then came to Dhaka… *obhaber karone Dhaka chole eshechi* [we came to Dhaka driven by material scarcity]… after coming to Dhaka, more material scarcity… the government had said those who have suffered from river erosion, they will be given rehabilitation before demolishing the slum… they did not give us two minutes, *apa* [sister]… I had two-month-old baby… should I take the baby or run with my possessions?
>
> [Rahim, Bhola slum, Dhaka, Bangladesh]

Even when not evicted physically, there is constant anxiety and fear around eviction. As articulated by Alina, another participant from Korail:

> Yes, that fear is there, if they evict us there will not be any place to go… Because if they come and break everything here, we will not have the power to do anything, since we do not have a *dalil* (legal document granting right to stay), any property of our own, we will not have any ground to say that we will stay. But we want the government to give us rehabilitation, and that only after giving us rehabilitation they can move us elsewhere.
>
> [Alina, Korail slum, Dhaka, Bangladesh]

With the fear of being evicted comes the knowledge of being excluded—from policy concerns, from social protection mechanisms, from plannings of urban climate futures. And while their informal labor might be critical to build such urban futures, their informalized existence and presence in informal settlements may not be welcome. Along with fear, there is also hope of being rehabilitated by the government to another part of the city where they can have access to basic services and live with dignity.

Participants have shared their plans for repaying housing loans, even relying on their next generation to do so. However, they have also expressed concern around not been seen as reliable and valid beneficiaries of government programs, despite being citizens of the country. This is connected to the assumption that as people who have been known to be variably mobile, they can sell the property they receive as beneficiaries and move elsewhere. Here again, as in the case of India, a known history of mobility keeps them at a disadvantage of not being trusted to qualify for social protection benefits. Thus, the rigidity around non-portability of social protection mechanisms can act as a border here, as these programs and policies are more often than not tied to places rather than people moving between these places.

Moreover, both experience and threat of eviction can act as a formidable border, with serious consequences for human well-being and the right to live with dignity and plan for a future. As Nafisa remembers:

> [After eviction]… we faced a lot, we suffered… we were living on the road, for 2-3 weeks we were living on the road… then this side of the road was empty… now 20-30 families we are staying here… when they will come to work on cleaning the drains here, then we will again have to move… they can come any time.
>
> [Nafisa, Bhola slum, Dhaka, Bangladesh]

As seen from this example, future mobility decisions of those residing in Dhaka's slums then become dependent on this particular border, and how it might intersect with other border-like effects of disastrous situations like floods and fires, compounded by lack of access to social protection and safety nets. Together these contribute to a form of exclusion that operates despite apparent political inclusion of the migrants as citizens of the country.

This has further ramifications for migrant lives lived under a condition of permanent temporariness, a state of being stuck in a limbo that has prominently been connected with

experiences of people who are legally recognized as refugees. Jamila, a migrant woman in her 30s from the Bhola slum voices her frustration and distress:

> We invested our sweat, money, and hope to come to Dhaka and build homes. The government had promised they will not break them, that they will only do so after providing us with rehabilitation. But they did not do that in the end.

When asked about how they see other groups such as Rohingyas, who are refugees in Bangladesh, Jamila continues:

> … For example, the Rohingyas, who are called refugees… The government treats them better than us… Because they are coming from another country… The respect they get, the support they get… but we don't have the worth and value. We give them our votes… but they don't give us the respect… as citizens of this country.
>
> [Jamila, Bhola slum, Dhaka, Bangladesh]

Status of citizenship is thus not a protection against impacts of climate variability and structural conditions that undermine migrant lives, livelihoods, and safety. The government's broken promise of rehabilitation for the migrants in Bhola has not deterred their dreams of return to their villages. Several participants from both Bhola and Korail have expressed their desire to ultimately return to their villages, explaining that "even if we don't work *there*, we will still get to eat."

The illusion of permanent rehabilitation in an urban area like Dhaka further reinforces the elusiveness of any permanent return to rural areas, though participants have shared about visiting their *desh* periodically. As Shabnam explains:

> We are not able to earn or save much… barely going by… it's hard to live, but nothing to do, have to survive and eat like this… we don't have the capacity to go back to our *desh* (village), build a home and live there… now here it has burnt twice, once in 2004, and then recently three years ago, all gone… whatever we did we did here, still it has gone… we have nothing.

[Shabnam, Korail slum, Dhaka, Bangladesh]

This further reveals an important characteristic of the process of exclusion in relation to *borderized* mobilities. Exclusion operates through the circulation of migrants on both sides of the rural-urban divide/linkage, instead of keeping them entirely on one or the other side of this border. A part of this logic can be discerned from 40-year old Ashina's experience:

> We came here 20 years ago from our *desh*… we used to work in the fields, 500-600 *mon* [unit of measurement] paddy we have husked to produce rice… used to carry sacks of rice on our shoulders, like this [body gesture]… after flood broke our homes, we came to [*Ashaganj,* literally translated as the place with hope] to do this work… then we were not used to this toiling work… work was more, salary less… then came to Dhaka… after coming here we stayed in slum, did domestic work, to go by and pay rent…

Ashina also says that in Ashaganj, sometimes they had to work 24 hours a day. Hence regardless of whether people are moving to a setting that is rural or urban, the informalization and devaluation of migrant labor (and by extension laboring bodies) are an inescapable reality of this era defined by climate and other crises. To understand how and why migrants are variably mobile and immobile in this context is to also grasp how the processes of erosion and exclusion work in tandem to perpetuate border-like effects for these floating people, culminating into the phenomenon of borderized mobilities.

Borderizing at work? A Beginning

In this chapter, I examine how borderized mobilities in the context of climate crisis may operate through dual structural processes of *erosion* in rural areas and *exclusion* in urban areas. Together they contribute to a form of erasure that is inherently violent. Therefore, the hand-drawn map introduced in Chapter One can also be considered as a way migrants in Korail may participate in "borderwork" (Rumford 2006, Johnson et al 2011) or what I call *borderizing at*

work—by reimagining the borders in their lives to magnify themselves and their location on paper. It can also imply how a desire for permanence and for being immobile among the migrants may intertwine with their condition of precarious temporariness and the need to be mobile in order to survive.

In the context of Bangladesh, it is becoming increasingly clear that climate is not directly driving migration in the Bengal delta. This is because migration has historically been a part of people's way of life before climate became so central to policy making in the region. Rather it is the *temporality* of migration that is being affected by climate. What it means is that migration, while still cyclical, may no longer strictly follow a seasonal timetable. The cyclical periods of mobility and immobility are instead becoming visibly erratic and uncertain, as migrants navigate interacting ecological, socio-economic, and political effects of the not so visible borders that cross them.

I thereby argue that to understand a form of erasure experienced by such floating people who are at once mobile and immobile, there is need to go beyond geographies to critically examine *temporalities* of borderized mobilities. My aim here is to problematize borders as divides reinforcing binary notions of source versus destination areas, rural versus urban areas, and instead highlight linkages that are crucial for unpacking climate-related mobility dynamics in the region.

Moreover, while state-centered borderizing in relation to the climate crisis largely focuses on adaptation and development-oriented infrastructural solutions such as building and repairing of *Wapdas* to act as barriers between land and water, for those at the margins of society and

history, and whose lives and lives of earlier generations have been shaped by the dialectical relationship between land and water, borderizing can take multiple forms. It becomes more than a conscious intentional process, or a fleeting emergent response. It becomes a perspective and a way of life.

As shared by Salma, a middle-aged community leader and chairperson of the CBO in Korail that helped me recruit participants from this area, this particular community-based organization was formed in response to various needs of the slum's inhabitants, related to basic services like toilet, sewerage, access to water, as well as issues of child marriage, alcoholism, and gender-based violence at both household and community level. In response to the question of possible rehabilitation and how the government has treated migrants living in Korail, she articulates:

> This Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh… to keep it well, to keep it clean and functioning, who has to work to do so? People like us. Today, see, whether it is Banani or Baridhara [names of affluent residential neighborhoods in the city], if the domestic help does not go to work, there will not be cooked food that day… if the driver does not go to work, then they cannot go out, if the security guard is not there at the gate, they cannot sleep… who do these work? These kind of people. They keep Dhaka's heart beating and alive.

The existence of the CBO not only points to efforts of the migrant community in Korail to organize themselves and find solutions to challenges and insecurities confronting them, but Salma's reflection also further highlights a strong sense of awareness, pride, and self-worth, in recognition of the value their labor provides for the city that treats them as dispensable. Even while living in a constant state of uncertainty, with the possibility of being evicted without adequate compensation and rehabilitation, this shared knowledge of their own value is crucial for understanding agency of the migrants in building their own reality and borderizing their own world.

For instance, speaking of surviving urban floods in Korail, an elderly Fatima reminisced:

> That time, our homes, and this area, all went under water, in Korail. Then I was a community chairperson for BRAC. Me, with other members, would get help from them… They made me chairperson of this zone. So, I would go… there used to be boats here, right here. I would go on a boat… used to make *roti* (bread). I would distribute *roti* within my area, along with the members. Would also distribute *gur* (jaggery), *fitkari* (alum), would bring water, and distribute in bottles. And everyone here… they suffered a lot *apa* (sister), without end.

Be it community building, aid giving or map making, these examples only partially reveal a tapestry of responses and survival strategies through which we may begin to see how these multiply *borderized* migrants are also at the same time *borderizing* beings, continuously battling adversities and uncertainties in attempts to control their own narratives, recognize their own value, shape their own futures, and situate themselves vis-à-vis others. More than anything, they uphold how those without rights and resources can also dream.

However, not all instances demonstrating aspects of *borderizing* at work could have positive connotations. Some, like Jamila's expression of frustration in the comparison with Rohingya refugees might be read as a negative implication, with the potential to affect social cohesion and possibility of building solidarity across communities crossed (often in similar ways) by different borders. Moreover, along with regret, women participants have used humor during interviews to joke about incidents of violence or fear of violence they experienced after moving to Dhaka. How they processed, coped, and survived any acts of violence can also be seen through the lens of *borderizing* at work. Therefore, emerging from the interview data is a further realization that the process of *borderizing*, at least in this particular context, would need to be comprehended as an everyday gendered phenomenon, as effects of shifting borders

differentially cut across gender and age, even within this community representing subaltern standpoint of floating people in this era of changing climate.

Discussion and Conclusion

When it comes to climate mobilities in Bangladesh, there is a spectrum between those who are displaced by environmental disasters and those who move for economic reasons, with climate playing an indirect role in their mobility decisions. Boundaries between these categories are often fuzzy, as it is getting increasingly difficult to separate ecological effects from economic ones, both in terms of sudden-onset events like storms and floods, as well as slower processes of salinization. While the role of climate in this mobility dynamics may not always be obvious, the aim here is not to parse climatic from non-climatic factors but understand how their interactions may compound already existing structural inequalities and violence, resulting in cascading border-like effects for a large number of people floating between multiple places, categories, and possible futures. Hyper-securitized framings of mobilities in relation to climate crisis can reinforce the need for technologies of control to regulate, classify and even delegitimize certain kinds of population movements, both *at* the territorial margins of nation-states as well as *within*, by making borders function in ways that effectively place certain moving bodies on the "wrong" side of territory, history, and even justice.

Moving beyond only understanding borders as dividing and separating *this side from that side, here from there, then from now* can become critical in this context. Moreover, only by thinking of borders as mobile, and socially constructed and contested, can we challenge the assumption and justification tied to a so-called fixed natural-ness of their effects, especially in

cases where ecological effects of climate change might get de-politicized and over-naturalized to obscure structural (and oft violent) effects of multiple intersecting borders at play. Examining where and how such borders intersect can tell us about mobilities that are shaped by and in turn may shape how such borders operate, shift, and realign over time.

At this juncture, I further ask, compared to standpoints of relatively privileged actors engaging in “borderwork” (Rumford 2006, Johnson et al 2011), what might the subaltern standpoint contribute to our understanding of “borderizing at work”? More importantly, can these processes (at least partially) only become visible when viewed from a subaltern standpoint? By considering how the subaltern standpoint of internal circular migrants in Bangladesh might enable “seeing like a border,” this chapter focuses on how lives and livelihoods of floating people in the deltaic region of Bangladesh are crossed and conditioned by various borders and their structural effects.

Furthermore, understanding migrant bodies as already always borderized as well as borderizing, simultaneously shaped by and negotiating the very structures that constrain, confine, and define their movements can allow for crucial analytical insights to emerge. These insights can help advance knowledge around how human agency may work *through* structural effects of bordering processes, as migrants may not always cross over to the other side of borders, rather negotiate and shape meanings of mobile borders that cross them. Therefore, to analyze circular mobilities in relation to slow-onset climate impacts, it becomes useful to not only conceptualize borders as a theoretical construct, but also focus on the emergent and oft elusive process of borderizing.

Additionally, recognizing there can be diverse trajectories and temporalities for people moving in climate hotspots, literature has recently called for a shift in attention towards climate mobilities (Boas et al 2019). I aim to go a step further to ask how climate mobilities in Bangladesh may also be a case of borderized mobilities, and why it might be useful to operationalize borderizing as a lens. I argue that this lens could be a key missing piece of the puzzle that climate scientists, development practitioners and policymakers are trying to "solve" for this well-known hotspot: With rural development and adaptation programs (some funded by international humanitarian aid organizations) trying to keep people in place, why are so many migrants moving irregularly between rural areas and urban centers like Dhaka?

To understand the logic behind what is attributed as "irregular" movements, we need to examine how borderized mobilities operate in Bangladesh through processes of *erosion* and *exclusion*. Building on evidence gathered from interview data, I theorize *erosion* (usually of embankments, livelihoods, way of life) and *exclusion* (usually from policies and social protection mechanisms) as mutually reinforcing processes in rural and urban areas, aiding the process of circulation as discussed above with regard to a specific border: the rural-urban divide. *Erosion* and *exclusion* seemingly operate on opposite sides of this divide, the border that is becoming increasingly salient in characterizing political economies in the Global South. Reframing this divide as a linkage and threshold can further illuminate how the process of circulation works between the rural and the urban, with mobility as an essential component and outcome.

Finally, I conclude that not only is climate mobility in Bangladesh a case of borderized mobilities, rather, the concept of borderized mobilities could be key to understanding why we see people becoming variably mobile and immobile in response to climate, conflict, and other

crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, these effects can perpetuate harmful consequences for the migrants through structural and symbolic violence, with grave implications for their human security, well-being, and dignity. Nevertheless, migrant agency in surviving and reshaping these border-like effects, by being simultaneously mobile and immobile, and through creative, subversive albeit temporary ways of survival, merit critical examination and appreciation. As a step towards this direction, this chapter represents a beginning.

CHAPTER 6

Border as Bridge? Borderizing at work among the internally displaced community of Kashmiri Pandits in India

Introduction

Tanaya: "What did you bring with you when you left Kashmir?"
Sajal Lal[15]: "covers of quilts, clothes, *khos, thal* [utensils]… and brought the keys with me [pointing to the keys] … now this is what is left of home…"
Tanaya: "and, what did you leave behind?"
Sajal Lal: "… [after a pause] everything…"

Sajal Lal is a seventy-year-old Kashmiri Pandit who was displaced from his home in the Kashmir Valley region of India in May 1990. He left Kashmir amidst an ongoing conflict between insurgent forces demanding an *Azaad* (independent) Kashmir and military forces of the Indian Government. Sajal Lal kept the rust coated keys of the house he had left behind in Kashmir—a house which was burnt down later in the same year. While others had mostly left keys inside their houses or with their neighbors, Sajal Lal had not only brought the keys with him, but had treasured them for all these years. The keys symbolize both the enormity of loss and the impossibility of return for an entire community living as internally displaced within the Indian nation-state for almost three decades[16]. The conversation with Sajal Lal about the keys serves as a key to opening a discussion about how different facets of loss experienced by a displaced community can be connected to how migrants negotiate belonging around boundaries.

The key question under study here is, when migrants engage in negotiation of belonging and otherness around a historically formed yet contemporarily relevant social border or boundary, can they potentially reorient the same border to appear more like a bridge than a divide? My query here is not about migrants building bridges *across* borders. I am not treating

[15] To maintain confidentiality of the participants, all names used in this chapter are pseudonyms.
[16] Keys are not unique as a symbol for the internally displaced community of Kashmiri Pandits. Many Palestinian refugees have kept the keys of their former homes after they were forced to flee during the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1948. For the Palestinians, the keys symbolize "Nakba" or disaster (Fisk 2018).

border and bridge as entirely separate constructs. I utilize the term bridge both metaphorically and practically to refer to an aspect of borders that may often get overlooked by focusing only on distance or difference between social groups demarcated by boundaries. The bridge in this case would involve facets of connection, interaction and sharing between the displaced community of Kashmiri Pandits and the community of Kashmiri Muslims who have remained in Kashmir.

Multiple modalities of differences can be articulated around a boundary or can converge along a boundary that acts like a border. The combined effect can produce a site for construction and negotiation of otherness. However, can boundaries not only act as a reference site for otherness, but also as a reference site for we-ness? How would the unfolding of such a social phenomenon appear on the ground?

Situating this within the broader dissertation framework, I further posit this boundary to be representative of a larger social border that has not only defined relations between the two ethnoreligious communities in Kashmir Valley, but rather a border that has cut through the heart of the subcontinent, shaping both the 1947 Partition and post-Partition era. A border that has not remained as lines *at* territorial margins of the nation-states of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, but has been instrumental in tailoring social, economic, and political fabric of postcolonial South Asia. I argue in this study that it is by reimagining and transforming meanings around this very border, through the reorientation of a group boundary into a bridge, that the displaced community is engaging in the process of borderizing in the context of conflict-induced displacement as crisis.

Using data from the in-depth interviews, I first demonstrate how the displacement was experienced by the Kashmiri Pandits as living with multiple boundaries. I then draw from Eastmond's (2007) discussion of narrative methods in forced migration to frame the lived experiences of the displaced at the sites of relocation and understand how they might potentially be reorienting the boundary under study into a bridge.

"Today, we too have become ghosts": Living with borders

Is it possible to feel displaced while still in place? This is what happened with the people in Kashmir during 1989-90. Most of the participants shared that the ongoing conflict disrupted daily routines, restricting movements and confining people within the walls of their residences[17]. 1989-1990 is not the first time in Kashmir's history that the community of Kashmiri Pandits had left the Valley. There have been earlier phases of out-migration, owing to both fear of persecution as well as promise of a prosperous life. Knowledge of such historical trajectories has been transmitted as stories through generations to become a part of the collective memory of the community. This played a role in shaping their decision to leave Kashmir in 1989-90.

During the interviews, almost everyone shared that while leaving they had thought they would be back in their homes within a few months. Those few months have now turned into almost three decades and some people are still living in a limbo of "permanent temporariness" (Bailey et al. 2002). Sajal Lal shares whether he is asleep or awake, he is haunted by memories all the time.

[17] It must be mentioned here that the peak period of displacement (December 1989-March 1990) coincided with the period of severe winter (*chilla kalan*) in Kashmir Valley. It was norm for people to stay inside their homes, storing food grains, oil and other means of sustenance in advance. Even so, the atmosphere of fear during the winter of 1989-1990 made them feel like exiles in their own homes.

> I cannot sleep without medication…I had never left Kashmir before [the displacement]. I used to think then, Jammu has this, Jammu has that. When I came here, I realized… what is here? Nothing!

This sense of experiencing "nothingness" is echoed by Akash, a schoolteacher in his forties living in one of the camp areas in Jammu.

> Our first night in Jammu, we had nowhere to stay. We spent the night inside a vegetable market. Then we finally found a place to stay near Bahu Fort. They told us that the house was haunted. I remember my father smiling sadly, and saying, "That is fine! Today, we too have become ghosts."

The metaphor of a ghost can be translated to understand a pervasive sense of loss which accompanies the displaced community at their sites of relocation. The displacement created many such ghosts. The interviews further reveal that this articulation of a sense of loss or absence of something essential that cannot be replaced is present in most of the participants' narratives. The protracted feeling of living with *nothingness* and loss characterizes a condition of being displaced which has also been observed by scholars in other empirical contexts (for example, see Dunn 2014).

This can be related with the experience of crossing boundaries by the displaced. Participants have shared memories of what they remember doing and feeling just before leaving Kashmir. For instance, Mahika, a fifty-year-old professional living in Delhi expressed the feeling of disbelief that still accompanies her memory of the moments of departure from Kashmir Valley.

> We did not even realize in our dreams that something like this would happen. Even now it feels like a dream. I don't have words… That night before leaving I washed the utensils after dinner…If I knew then that we will never use them again (she breaks down at this point in the conversation).

In a similar way, Sarla, a forty-six-year-old housewife in one of the non-camp neighborhoods in Jammu shared that "when the situation worsened, we stopped leaving our house… when we left, we left in a way as if we were going to come back in a few days… we cleaned the utensils

and lids of jars, and spread covers and quilts thinking we would come back and use them." Sarla continues that:

> Nothing happened on the way [out of Kashmir Valley] ... I saw other trucks carrying people, and recognized my aunt in the back of one of the trucks... The trucks stopped at Banihal Tunnel... I had never before been on the other side of the Tunnel.

Though other routes have been historically present, the Banihal Tunnel serves as the most prominent road link between Kashmir Valley and the rest of India. Although the tunnel physically acts as a bridge between two regions in the northern Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir—Kashmir Valley region in the north and Jammu region in the south, symbolically the tunnel has been perceived as more of a boundary than a link by the Kashmiri people. In the dead of night and in the middle of severe winter in 1989-90, trucks, buses and cars carried thousands of families to the southern side of the Banihal Tunnel. For the displaced Kashmiri Pandits, the tunnel is a metaphor of transition between Kashmir and the mainland India. During interviews, participants would often use phrases like "this side of the tunnel" and "that side of the tunnel" as reference frames for expressing perceived differences between Kashmir Valley and the rest of India.

As a forty-four-year-old housewife in Delhi, Surila lives in a neighborhood with other Kashmiri Pandit families. She had heard that "before this [referring to the displacement] … we would not have matrimonial alliances with [people on] the other side of the Tunnel." Like Sarla, crossing the Tunnel denoted a significant moment for many other participants as well. For some, the memories of crossing the Tunnel as a territorial boundary are associated with how the participant remembered feeling physically ill. For example, Sarita, who is now in her fifties and living in a camp area in Jammu remembers "feeling nauseous inside the truck… I had never traveled so far before then." A similar experience was recounted by Vinita from Delhi:

> I vomited on the side of the road. You see, I was not accustomed to such long journeys[18]. I have seldom been outside my village before and have never been outside Kashmir. It was the first time I saw the other side of the Tunnel.

Hence more than a territorial boundary, the tunnel can be imagined as a symbolic threshold the displaced community had to cross on their way out of the Kashmir Valley. While the Kashmiri Pandit community did not physically traverse the borders of a nation-state, their common experiences of displacement are oriented and articulated around the crossing of this territorial and symbolic boundary.

The displaced not only crossed boundaries but have been living with multiple boundaries. The boundary I am focusing on in this study became salient around 1989-90 due to the unfolding of events that ultimately led the Kashmiri Pandit community to flee from Kashmir. This can be captured through the experiences recalled by the participants. Sajal Lal's keys are not only the remnants of a house and a place left behind, but also of a time that cannot be brought back. Locking one's front door had been an alien notion in Kashmir— "we didn't have locks on our doors in Kashmir." This phrase speaks of a shared belief articulated by many of the participants. So much did the people trust their neighbors (*humsaya*), that they would leave their houses unlocked—something that was more common in the villages than in urban areas like Srinagar.

This common understanding morphed into panic during 1989-90 when people witnessed locks hanging on doors of houses in their neighborhoods. Several participants shared memories of feeling shocked when they would wake up one morning and witness locks on doors of Pandit houses in the neighborhood. The common perception was, "Pandit families were leaving. No one

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[18] The length of the journey varied among the participants, as they made stops along the way. Most of the participants who started their journey at night recall reaching Jammu the next day.

told anyone anything. They [Kashmiri Pandits] started moving during the night." Damini[19], an elderly woman in her seventies, now living in Delhi, emoted grief and anger while tearfully narrating the following:

> Everyone was leaving slowly… everyone was running away. We could not know who is leaving when. In our village, the communities lived mixed together. Muslims lived behind us…We had to leave at night silently, loading things in the back of a truck. We had to come away and leave everything…our house was burnt that same year.

A retired teacher in his eighties, Vansi Lal now lives in a house near a camp area in Jammu. He too recounts his experience of leaving in March 1990.

> During the months of December and January many Hindu families left…we could not know who were leaving when…In the nearby *mohalla* (neighborhood), people had already fled. We [along with uncle's family] were the only two remaining families left in our *mohalla*…we came to Srinagar in two taxis...our driver was Muslim. When we arrived in Srinagar, we were stopped there for around one hour. There we saw a lot of trucks. We saw many women, children and elderly in buses and trucks...they were not carrying anything...they came away in only the clothes they were wearing...some were sleeping, some awake....

Experiences such as these are life altering and impossible to forget. They also carry implications such as blame and resentment towards Kashmiri Muslims as the ever-present yet now absent Other.

As a community of *Brahmins*, the Kashmiri Pandits have historically occupied positions of power and privilege. They are known to have served as court poets and historians for Mughal emperors and have traditionally been engaged in occupations such as teachers, doctors and priests. After Kashmir Valley's conditional accession to India in 1947, members of this community held coveted administrative positions in the Indian government. Amidst the chaotic atmosphere

[19] Damini spoke in Kashmiri and her words were translated by her daughter-in-law. She suffers from deep sorrow and did not want to elaborate about the past as it was disturbing for her. She was wearing *dejhor* and head dress, traditional symbols worn by a Kashmiri Pandit woman.

of discontent in 1989-90, the Kashmiri Pandits feared they would become targets for an ethnic cleansing because of their affiliation with the Indian government in addition to their identity as Hindu minority in a Muslim majority region. The killings of several prominent Kashmiri Pandits in 1989, including a politician, a judge and a poet, were followed by blaring of slogans from loudspeakers throughout the Valley on the night of 19 January 1990. Sharaf Lal, a seventy-seven-year-old retired professor in Delhi remembers feeling scared for the safety of his family when,

> On the night of 19th January 1990, there was suddenly a loud noise from the direction of the nearest mosque. At first, we thought it must be fire, but there was no fire. We saw the neighbors peeping out of their windows as well. Then two or three of us from our neighborhood decided to go and see what was happening. I asked my wife, daughter and son to stay inside. When we came near the mosque, we saw some people standing there; they had lit a small fire. From the mosque, there came the sound of a booming voice. We came to know later that recorded messages were propagated from the mosques through amplifiers and loudspeakers. The slogans included *yaha kya chalega, Nizaam-e-Mustafa* (what will prevail here, governance under Islamic law), as well as chants of *asyi gasyi Pakistan, batav rostoy, batneo saan* (we want Pakistan, without Kashmiri Pandit men but with Kashmiri Pandit women). They called us *kafirs,* or informers of the Indian government.[20]

These slogans triggered panic and anxiety among the community. The lack of knowledge of what was happening[21] coupled with the anticipation of what might happen compelled people to flee from the Valley. As Vaidehi, a forty-three-year-old government official living in a non-camp neighborhood of Jammu recalls:

> The environment changed suddenly… my father was regarded respectfully as *Panditji* in the shops, there was a change in even their attitude…I used to go to college. We were having winter holidays then. There were pamphlets demanding that women should cover their heads and Hindu girls should wear *bindis*[22] for identification.

[20] Portions of interviews such as this, while not directly a part of the analysis, speaks of the context of exit, and clarifies the point about conflation of religious identity of Kashmiri Pandits as Hindus with their national identity as Indians.

[21] The entire region was under a state of emergency, declared by the Government of India. No press was allowed inside the Valley. The situation escalated to an extent that the 1991 Census could not be conducted for the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

[22] A religious marker worn by Hindu women on their forehead.

A majority of female participants mentioned intentionally abandoning religious markers such as the *bindi* or the *dejhor* (the symbol of being married, uniquely worn on one ear by Kashmiri Pandit women) that could help identify them as Hindus, on the journey out of the Valley. Sampa, a middle-aged housewife living in a camp area in Jammu narrated her family's experience:

> My mother used to visit our [Muslim] neighbor to borrow milk… there were some people who came from outside and asked why does a Pandit woman come here…then my mother stopped going to their house… We came away in a truck and crossed the Banihal Tunnel… Our Muslim neighbor advised us to remove our *bindi* [indicating her forehead].

It was not only the women of the community, but the men too had to remove or hide markers such as the sacred thread worn on their bodies which distinguished them as Hindu *Brahmins*. While the hiding of markers was a common response, comparison with the experience of another participant reveals that they had been advised *not* to remove their markers, based on the logic that if the Indian army stopped them on the way, they would be able to identify them as "Indians." This is an example of how their religious affiliation as Hindus was perceived to be indicative of their national identity as Indians. It also points to the role of the Indian nation-state in propagating a dominant narrative around the Kashmir issue using a communal lens.

Sajal Lal too shared that he never put *tika* on his forehead as a marker of Hindu religion when he lived in Kashmir. He explains, "but everyone *knew* me there." Though participants mostly articulate experiencing a rupture in their relationship with the Muslim community because of the conflict, some of them also acknowledged that they knew Kashmiri Muslims who offered help, gave advice and even expressed helplessness and regret when they were not able to support and protect them. For instance, Sudeshna, a middle-aged school teacher in Jammu, who was pregnant at the time of displacement shares: "we came away in a truck… we started at 4:30 am

in the morning… there was a curfew… it was snowing… I still remember… Muslim neighbors helped us load our things in the truck.” Similarly, Shanti, a forty-year-old housewife in Delhi recalls:

> Our car was stopped in Anantnag. Mummy removed her *bindi*. There was a Muslim friend there who had been our neighbor… We did not have any luggage with us. He took us to his home for a while. We then continued our journey from there.

Memories such as these are painful to relive. They speak not only of loss, but also of longing for a place, a time and a community left behind. Despite the pain and regret inscribed in them, the displaced community hold on to these stories through acts of telling and retelling, weaving a complex narrative. The contradictions and tensions embedded in and lived through these narratives are key for understanding how the Kashmiri Pandits negotiate belonging and possibly reimagine the boundary they share with the Kashmiri Muslims.

“My heart melts”: Negotiating Belonging around a Boundary

The stories also express how the experience of being displaced extend beyond the actual physical journey that brought the community to their present sites of relocation. Explaining why they came to Jammu, Sajal Lal says, “because we could not afford to go anywhere else… this was the closest [safe place], and everybody was coming here.” Sajal Lal had to leave his family’s thriving carpet business and resettle in a camp area in Jammu. He describes what he remembers about the shelter: “it had a dome shaped roof… three of us used to just sit in three corners… the roof would leak during the rains.” He speaks of the devastating effect of the relocation on his health, and how they were unable to adapt to the harsh climatic conditions in the plains of Jammu. The same is true for many other families, regardless of whether they relocated in Jammu or Delhi. They found the environment of these cities in northern India strange, unwelcoming,

unfamiliar and lacking. The displaced encountered multiple others in these cities who did not share with them a sense of common culture or history. This is contrary to the conventional assumption that it would be easy for them to integrate in mainland India based on their religious and national affiliations.

Among the participants, those who were living or had lived in the camp areas of Jammu expressed facing severe financial precarity and material hardships. As fifty-year-old Sharad Nath reports:

> We first lived in a makeshift tent in Nagrota. After 2 years we got a One Room Tenement in 1993… the kitchen and everything else had to fit in one room… we lived there till 2010. We were shifted here [indicating the current living quarter] in May 2011.

Vaidehi also speaks of her experience of crowdedness and lack of privacy in the camp site she stayed in earlier, which would house entire families in one room, or multiple families in the same tent or quarter.

> It was as if a mountain was dropped on us… before this [the displacement], we did not know what it meant to not have financial security… we had to live in a camp… our entire family in one room… I had to complete my studies from there… using a curtain to partition off a corner of the room.

Participants in Jammu, especially women, shared similar experiences about lack of privacy and lack of hygiene in the camp areas, expressing frustration over how difficult it was for them to find appropriate quarters for rent.

Even those who could find a place to rent expressed a sense of being Othered by the Dogras, the Hindu community in Jammu. However, what the retelling of these experiences above reveal is that perhaps it was not only the Dogras of Jammu or other Hindu communities in Delhi who felt like Other(s). In some way, having to share accommodations and facilities with other Kashmiri

Pandit families who were strangers to the participants, made them another Other, despite being members of the same community.

The act of remembering carries a heightened sense of awareness of elements that are not there in the present environment they live in. When asked what they miss the most about Kashmir, Mahika articulated missing the sound of fallen *chinar*[23] leaves in autumn that would crush under her feet when she walked on them. For Mahendra Nath, a seventy-three-year-old retired Pandit living in an affluent neighborhood in Delhi, it is the Kashmiri language that he misses the most. "Grandchildren understand Kashmiri but speak in broken Kashmiri. Here ten-fifteen of us in the same age group, we meet in the park every day. We speak in Kashmiri and discuss Kashmir…" How the elderly people in the community view the younger generation also speaks of an otherness, as they feel the younger generation *do not know* what they know, understand and appreciate. There is also a sense of anxiety and lament that this understanding might die with them.

The act of remembering further includes memories of their neighbors in Kashmir, many of whom were Muslims. Reliving such memories during the interviews was more common among the elderly participants who were above sixty years old. For example, Jayanti, an eighty-six-year-old woman from Delhi says that she regrets leaving Kashmir: "…there we had Muslim neighbors, they loved us very much. They said they would take care of us." Such tone of grief and regret in voices of participants like Jayanti can reveal contradictions that have become a part of the lived experiences of the displaced.

[23] A maple like tree that grows in Kashmir Valley and is part of the milieu of the region.

Memories of people, places and practices do not merely symbolize affiliation with a religion or region, but more importantly they speak of who they are as a community and what they have lost. For the displaced, *who* they are, have become synonymous to *what* they have lost and are trying to rebuild. An aspect of this that came up repeatedly in conversations oriented around relationships with their Muslim Other in Kashmir. As Shanti from Delhi expresses:

> We follow the same rituals here, but the food tastes different. People's way of talking, living and thinking are different here. The neighborhood here is okay but feels as if something is missing. It was better there [Kashmir]… there was more love.

Sajal Lal also remembers: "we had only Muslim neighbors. There were only two Kashmiri Pandit houses… we did not have a temple in our village… Muslim neighbors lived all around us." He is still traumatized by the memory of his cousin being abducted and killed in May 1990. But he acknowledges in the same breath that "local Muslims were killed too."

Ambiguities in perceptions and attitude of many participants towards the Kashmiri Muslims as their Other are key to understanding how they reconcile conflicting worldviews and feelings. These visibly demonstrate anger, resentment and blame but can be interpreted to also contain empathy, nostalgia and love. In the face of the sense of irrevocability associated with the displacement, these contradictions can be helpful in challenging dominant narratives that construct Kashmiri Muslims as their permanent Other. For instance, Gayatri, a fifty-year-old housewife in Delhi carries a lot of blame and anger towards the Muslims but feels there is a difference in the neighborhoods in Kashmir and Delhi. She feels that the "trust between people is missing" and there is a difference in the love between neighbors. "It is difficult to align our hearts with neighbors here." Participants referred to their Muslim neighbors in Kashmir as

humsaya. Though the word *humsaya* is used to signify a neighbor, when broken down in parts, *hum-saya* translates to "someone who has the same shadow."

The significance of the weight this word carries can be seen in lingering emotional ties captured through reflections such as, "there is a big contrast in our relationship with the neighbors… In Kashmir, neighbors would look after your guests if you are not at home." Comparing the situation before conflict in Kashmir with the environment of the site of relocation, Mahika expresses disdain— "there we could think of coming home late at night, we could keep doors open. We knew nothing would happen. *Here* [change in tone of voice] … even if a person is lying on the road dying, no one will come for help." Surila also continues in a similar vein, "there we would blend in with everyone in the neighborhood… here we will not leave [allow] our children to talk to others [strangers]."

What emerges from these comparisons with multiple others in relocation is the role played by personal and collective memory in shaping the lived experiences and expressions of the displaced in the present. Their personal memories may not always align with the script endorsed by the collective memory of the community and a larger political narrative that assigns blame to their Muslim Other in Kashmir. Here the participants are not just passively recalling the past but are mobilizing their memories to interpret and possibly reconstruct the past in the context of the present (Eastmond 2007). Many participants shared that they are still in contact with Kashmiri Muslims whom they knew in Kashmir Valley. This act of being in communication with their primary Other happens mainly through phone calls. Some participants have further shared visiting their Kashmiri Muslim friends and neighbors when they revisited Kashmir for a few days. Accounts of such revisits were quite common among the participants. Even those who did not go

back themselves would speak of a family member or acquaintance who went back and stayed with a Kashmiri Muslim family.

This, however, does not signify the absence of negative feelings like anger, resentment or distrust towards the Kashmiri Muslims. Even as participants shared how well they were received by the Kashmiri Muslims during their visits in Kashmir Valley, they still could not get rid of the feeling that they were being treated as tourists and visitors who would leave after a few days. Along with such interactions, there is a silence about the event of displacement between the Kashmiri Pandits who left Kashmir and the Kashmiri Muslims who remained behind. This silence has festered like wounds that are difficult to heal. The displacement has not only resulted in a geographical distance between the communities, but also a social and emotional distance that conveniently enable the boundary to be seen as an irreconcilable gulf separating the communities.

Several participants consciously articulate feeling conflicting emotions that speak of the tension between the communities. Living in a camp area in Jammu, Farah is a thirty-nine-year-old housewife who left Kashmir when she was very young. Farah understands that:

> There is resentment…There used to be love…they would come to visit us… we would go to their place… now it has all gone bad. Kashmir is not the same anymore. The new generation does not know what the elderly knew.

Pramila makes a similar observation as the conversation continues:

> Younger generations in the Valley do not know who the Pandits are. They have heard that we used to be… But no matter how much we blame them, if I meet someone [referring to Kashmiri Muslims] …the feeling that we are from the same place is very strong. I once went to a Kashmiri shop in Calcutta, run by Muslims. There is still anger in my heart, but when I see them in person, my heart melts. I start speaking in Kashmiri with them.

The acts of remembering and communicating do not occur in isolation, but in combination with everyday practices of the displaced. Apart from continuing interaction with the Other, the displaced Kashmiri Pandits showed how they enact bodily practices in relocation which formed a part of their way of life in Kashmir. Some of these practices are also common for Kashmiri Muslims, based on cultural traditions passed on through a shared history, knowledge, and value system.

As indicated by the excerpts above, Kashmiri language becomes a vehicle for performing these acts and practices. For the displaced, language plays a crucial role in negotiating belonging through both its presence as well as its absence. Some middle-aged participants shared how their parents had refused to learn and use any other language, which is exemplified by Damini who preferred to speak only in Kashmiri during the interview. Fifty-year-old Rajesh in Jammu works as a key person in a radio station where shows are broadcasted in Kashmiri for the displaced community. He further elaborates on: "we are so used to thinking in Kashmiri [the language], it is not possible to translate exactly in Hindi."

Rina and Rinki, who are schoolteachers in their forties and living in non-camp areas in Jammu, speak about a syncretic pluralistic bond named *Kashmiriyat* that had historically characterized the ethos of Kashmir. For Rina, "the *bhaichara* (bond of brotherly love) there was so strong, we could never imagine this [displacement] would happen. This is not the same in Jammu. *Kashmiriyat* is in the process of becoming extinct." Rinki also opines, "it [the bond] is not there now…this generation knows nothing of it."

Similar sentiments are echoed by elderly members of the community as well, but perhaps with more nuances. As Vansi Lal elaborates:

> The relations we had with our Muslim neighbors... the love we had for each other... we would participate in their festivals and they would participate in ours... we don't have that *Kashmiriyat* here...the younger generation do not feel the same… [after a pause] I can write Kashmiri in both the scripts[24].

The term *Kashmiriyat* does not only designate a bond, but also a syncretic way of life common to both the Pandits and the Muslims in Kashmir Valley. Gopal Nath articulates compassion and a sense of solidarity when he states:

> They [Muslims] were good people… we had strong *bhaichara.* They used to be there for good and bad days. That relationship, that humanity cannot be found anywhere else. They have suffered as well.

Despite the assumed rupture between the communities due to the displacement, traces of the bond can still be discerned. As Sharaf Lal reminisces:

> Back in the ancestral house, we would have a steel wire stretched between two neighboring houses [speaking of a Muslim neighbor]; a *kangri* [an indigenous heating device] with coal and wickerwork removed from within, and stuffed with utensils like *khos* carrying food items, would be sent to and fro. This was a traditional method of exchanging food as well as love.

This account of exchanging food reveals one of the many aspects the Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims have in common in their social lives. Both the communities prefer non-vegetarian food, and they would freely participate in social events organized by the other community such as weddings and cultural festivals. Therefore, apart from the language, lived experiences shared around food, dress and routinized activities of everyday life also connect the two communities. Engaging in such practices in relocation provides a potential opening for

[24] The scripts being referred to here are the Devnagri script used for Hindi and the Perso-Arabic script used for Urdu. The Kashmiri language, which currently has the status of an oral language without a script of its own, is usually written in both these scripts. But it was common for Kashmiri Muslims to use the Perso-Arabic script, and for Kashmiri Hindus to mainly use the Devnagri script.

troubling and even partially transforming the existing dominant narrative that pivots around distrust and blame.

Found in the residences of almost every Kashmiri Pandit participants are artifacts such as *kangri* (a wickerwork basket used as an indigenous heating device), *samovar* (silver container traditionally used for making Kashmiri tea), *thal* (brass plate), *khos* (brass cup), Kashmiri *kaleen* (carpet), Kashmiri shawls and *pheran* (a long voluminous gown like attire). These artifacts carry significant meanings for the participants as they have either been carried from the Valley as belongings during the displacement or brought by others who had later visited Kashmir. Most of these artifacts like the *samovar* have lost their original utility but are still preserved by the displaced. Nandini, a sixty-year-old Kashmiri Pandit woman from Delhi shares: "there is a big *samovar* we bought from Jammu after our marriage. It can make tea for ten to twelve people at a time. It is now kept inside the store [storage]." She took out a smaller *samovar* and demonstrated how it can be used to make *kehva*, the Kashmiri sweet tea. Some middle-aged participants also shared that their parents used to eat in *thal* and drink in *khos* even after leaving the Valley, but now these are kept inside the storage unit.

A practice continued by the displaced in relocation is the ritual of sitting on the ground on a *kaleen.* As expressed by many participants: "In Kashmir, our tradition was to sit on the floor." Despite the heavy space crunch, the interior of every living quarters I visited had a *kaleen* strewn over the floor. Even the meagre living spaces of the camp areas in Jammu have been modified to spread a *kaleen.* Other such practices include wearing a *pheran* and using a *kangri* in winter. During the fieldwork I witnessed several participants wearing a *pheran,* the traditional Kashmiri dress usually made of tweed or wool for Kashmiri winters. The significance of a *pheran* in the

Kashmiri way of life is not its outward appearance but the space left inside by designing the dress to be voluminous and oversized. This space is to accommodate a *kangri* next to the body, which is an indigenous portable heater uniquely associated with Kashmir Valley. The relationship between a *kangri* and a *pheran* is symbiotic. One completes the other. *Kangri* or the wicker and earthen basket is literally a fire pot. Fire is lighted inside with coal embers and stoked occasionally with a coal stoker known as *salan*.

Participants remember that in Kashmir the tradition was to use crushed leaves of *chinar* as a fuel for this fire pot. The reason behind the excess volume of the *pheran* is not just to accommodate the *kangri* inside it during winters. It is mainly to enable the Kashmiri habit of sitting on the ground with legs drawn up and hands clasped in front, accommodating the *kangri* inside. Though winters in Jammu and Delhi are not as severe as in Kashmir Valley, elderly participants who are sixty years and above continue wearing *pheran* and using *kangri* during the winters. Gopal Nath from Jammu expresses his regret over the price of coal and *kangri:* "earlier we could get a *kangri* for Rs 5-10, now we have to pay Rs 100 for one. The price of coal here is so high—we would get 10 *bohri* [local units] coal there for the price of one here."

These artifacts and practices are common for both Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims. They constitute the Kashmiri way of life and contribute to the ethos of *Kashmiriyat*. Based on these observations, I further argue that these practices can be considered as "boundary objects" that occupy and reproduce a space of sharedness and connection between the two communities. Practices such as wearing a *pheran,* using a *kangri*, sitting on the ground or speaking in Kashmiri language are not isolated acts but they occur together and in combination with acts of remembering and retelling stories in social gatherings. These acts and practices are vital means

for the displaced participants to reconstruct the social milieu of Kashmir Valley. This reconstruction of what they long for cannot be complete without including their Other who historically has been a part of this social milieu. Therefore, the very same memories of feeling like the Other and being a target of Othering during the conflict and displacement may also be interpreted differently in a more positive vein. Together with the practices and interactions, they create the scope for understanding the boundary in question as a bridge joining these two communities.

The ambivalence in attitude of the displaced community towards their Other in Kashmir merits inquiry in exploring the complex relationships between communities torn apart by conflicts. The interstices that emerge are critical for exploring the possible bridge-like quality of a boundary which has been hardened by collective memory and narratives that establish and reify the boundary as a divide. Thus, a boundary can be viewed as more than a site around which differences get articulated. It can also be a meeting point for communities who have experienced disconnect and distance from each other in the aftermath of a turbulent event such as this conflict-induced displacement. I find that the data contains instances when the displaced Kashmiri Pandits are engaging in rewriting or recoding narratives to denote ambiguities in emotions towards their Other in Kashmir Valley. These ambiguities produce cracks or gaps that present the possibility of reframing this Other in a more favorable light. This is crucial for understanding the puzzle around how a displaced community can potentially reorient a boundary to appear more like a bridge that connects rather than a wall which separates.

Discussion and Conclusion

A bulk of migration literature focus on how boundaries experienced at sites of relocation can either facilitate or act as barriers to integration for migrants (Alba and Nee 1997, Zolberg and Woon 1999, Bail 2008, Subedi 2018). I refocus the lens to examine a boundary that has played a crucial role, both in the dislocation of an internally displaced group as well as their dis-connect from a community they consider to be their Other. Using in-depth interviews of Kashmiri Pandits relocated in Jammu and Delhi, I challenge the dominant notion that such a boundary is unilaterally seen by the displaced as a widening rupture or divide between themselves and their Muslim Other from Kashmir Valley. I find that contradictions and lived tensions embedded in their personal narratives reveal something surprising. The experience of being displaced did not only serve to destabilize notions of the Self but also created an opening for reimagining the Other.

Following Eastmond's (2007) discussion of narrative methods in forced migration research, I draw on the complex relationship between experience and expression to challenge fixed notions of the boundary as a fault line along which differences get articulated and reified. Instead the boundary can sometimes act as a bridge to the Other. I demonstrate how the displaced Kashmiri Pandits mobilize memories to engage in acts of remembering, communicating as well as bodily practices, arguing that their memories are not passive, but part of their lived experiences in displacement.

The displaced are conscious of the boundary with Kashmiri Muslims as their Other, but they also articulate a deep sense of loss around what they miss and long for at the sites of relocation. Their yearnings not only speak of the place and time they left behind, but also of the

people with whom they have shared historical ties. As Ahmed (1999) argues, it is the "uncommon estrangement of migration" and the lack of the familiar that enable migrants to engage in acts of *remaking*. In this case, the process of remaking for the displaced include not only re-situating themselves, but also their Other from Kashmir Valley. Understanding this complex process involves interpreting nuances in the denials, silences and ambiguities that have accompanied lived experiences of the displaced. Though anger, blame, resentment, and distrust towards the Kashmiri Muslims have been constant companions for the Kashmiri Pandits, these emotions can be found layered with more positive expressions including nostalgic longing, compassion, affection, and a sense of solidarity with their Other in Kashmir.

My overall aim here has been to present how a displaced group can negotiate belonging around a boundary that has predominantly served as a cleavage and source of communal tension, and how they can potentially reorient and reimagine the same boundary as a bridge, thereby participating in the process of borderizing.

Relying on in-depth interviews conducted between the years 2012 and 2014, I demonstrated possible bridge-like quality of a boundary between two religious communities who have experienced disconnect and distance from each other in the aftermath of a turbulent event such as conflict-induced internal displacement. I found how displaced Kashmiri Pandits are engaging in rewriting or recoding narratives to denote ambiguities in emotions towards their Muslim counterparts in Kashmir Valley. This became crucial for understanding the puzzle around how a displaced community can potentially reorient borderized effects of a boundary to appear more like a bridge that connects rather than a wall which separates.

Why might listening to the voices of this displaced community be important, empirically as well as theoretically? Rather than empowering the "voiceless" to speak, the aim here is to listen more deeply to voices that can already speak. Whether it is displacement, disability, or disadvantage, more often than not people's experiences are framed around what they do not have instead of what they still have. My attempt here is to understand the complex relationship of a displaced community with their Other beyond a framework or narrative of victimhood. Using the example of this relationship, I problematize the ambiguous nature of boundary as a construct by studying how the displaced Kashmiri Pandits negotiate belonging and otherness with another community historically attributed and stereotyped as their Other. Though the displaced community has encountered multiple overlapping boundaries in relocation, I focus on one boundary which simultaneously divides and connects them with their Muslim Other in Kashmir Valley. I find that the displaced negotiate belonging around this specific boundary[25] through acts of remembering and communicating with this Other, as well as engaging in everyday bodily practices that they have in common with their Other.

The attempt to further connect the micro-dynamics of the lives of displaced people with a macro political picture can be useful for teasing apart incongruencies between the personal and the political. The Kashmir conflict of 1989-90 and the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits set discourses in motion that conflated the displaced group's religious affiliation as Hindus with their national identity as Indians. In a time of emergence of right-wing governments with ethno-nationalist bents in democracies around the world, it is incumbent to recognize the grave

[25] This boundary is formed at the intersection of religious and ethnic (regional) identities of the Kashmiri Pandits as both Hindus and Kashmiris, in relation to the Kashmiri Muslims as both Muslims and Kashmiris.

implications this assumed conflation may carry for people at the margins, as well as migrants on the wrong side of boundaries—both territorial and symbolic. In this context, understanding how this historically privileged yet displaced group negotiates belonging can be vital for challenging and subverting dominant nationalist political rhetoric that feed on narratives based on communal hatred, anger, and blame. Through this effort, I hope to advance a critical perspective of inquiring about how experiences of groups that have historically inhabited more privileged social categories may be mobilized to challenge dominant political rhetoric and practices that often serve to justify oppression of less powerful groups situated at the margins of nation-states[26].

A point of concern remains that the younger generation who were born into displacement outside Kashmir do not have any personal memories of a relationship with the Kashmiri Muslims. They may or may not have inherited the shared understanding and knowledge regarding Kashmir that their parents have. This complicates the picture and raises two critical questions: 1) Since negotiations around the boundary are mainly performed through the body, can we think of those who experienced displacement as embodying the boundary as bridge themselves? 2) Once these bodies, memories, and voices of the "first" generation pass away, will the younger generations have the tools to continue potentially reimagining this boundary with the Kashmiri Muslims as a

[26] It is worthwhile to mention here that after this study was conducted and this chapter written and submitted as qualifying paper for the Sociology graduate program at UC Davis, the right-wing Hindu-nationalist led government of India decided to officially abrogate Article 370 of the Indian constitution, revoking semi-autonomous status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and splitting this former state into union territories, further alienating the Kashmiri Muslims. This was followed by a prolonged internet shutdown and security lockdown in the Valley, with grave implications for human rights violations (Shah 2020).

bridge and continue this way of borderizing?[27] These questions are not confined to this empirical case but may be applied to broader theoretical frameworks for studying similar contexts.

By focusing on one community, in no way do I intend to hide or underestimate the traumatic experiences and injustice suffered by thousands of Kashmiri Muslims who have been surviving in one of the world's most heavily militarized zones. A focus on the perspectives of Kashmiri Muslims through an ethnographic lens could illuminate another facet of a broader story surrounding the Kashmir conflict. Additionally, directions for future research can expand the limits of this one case to include Kashmiri Pandit "non-migrants" who have remained in Kashmir Valley (Evans 2002, Trisal 2007). Their boundaries of belonging can be compared with those of the displaced community. Future research can further engage with this theoretical puzzle across different empirical contexts to ask when and how do migrants reorient boundaries representing larger social borders (even partially) to look like a bridge, along with the consequences of the process of borderizing through such possible realignments.

Such reimagining of a social boundary as a bridge in a postcolonial context can be critical for realizing what value can be added by the concept of borderized mobilities to our existing and expanding repertoire of knowledge on migration in relation to climate and other crises. My research on internally displaced Kashmiri Pandits in India serves as an example to illuminate a fundamental human condition: we are always already borderized and borderizing at the same time. This may appear as a truism regardless of when and where people are located, and whether

[27] Changes in status and rights in the Kashmir Valley in 2019 were accompanied by efforts by the Indian government to rehabilitate Kashmiri Pandit families in the region. While some had moved back to the Kashmir Valley, incentivized by an employment scheme, more recently, Pandit families have again started to leave the Valley and relocate to Jammu due to continuing violence (Ashiq 2022).

they move or stay. But geographical and social locations, historical moments and movements over time and space matter, as these factors can shape and filter the reality of consequences confronting the dispossessed sections of our society today. Whether it is climate, conflict, COVID, or a combination thereof, effects of borders and borderizing are integral part of all kinds of human mobilities, along with the conditions that shape and are shaped by diverse mobility dynamics.

PART III:

Convergences: Reflections and Conclusion

CHAPTER 7

Borderized mobilities and borderizing beings-Critical juxtapositions

Introduction

To summarize key insights from the diverse empirical cases is to simultaneously understand what this dissertation research is about, and what it is *not* about. I ask in this chapter: 1) How do the empirical cases in Part II focusing on mobilities in the context of different crises and borders speak to each other? 2) What do these cases reveal *as borders*, along with relationships with these borders, especially when the type of mobility examined has been internal movements along a continuum between voluntary and forced decisions?

Chapters Four to Six capture different snapshots in time, which also reveal the logic through which my research has been unfolding. The empirical cases are arranged in this order to flow from unpacking the phenomenon of borderized mobilities using COVID-19 crisis as a lens to how those who are borderized in the context of other crises, related to climate and conflict, must also be recognized as borderizing beings.

Although chronologically, my research had first focused on the case of the internally displaced in Chapter Six, followed by the rural-urban migrants in Chapter Five, and the return migrants in Chapter Four in successive order, the chapters have been organized in this manner and sequence to facilitate analysis and interpretation of empirical evidence based on a core premise of my argument in this dissertation: to understand why migrants seem to transgress and cross borders, we need to first examine how borders cross them. Organizing the chapters this way further speaks to my goal of theorizing how the process of borderizing by migrants is intricately tied to and is a result of living with borderized realities.

It is worthwhile to emphasize at this point that the process of borderizing by multiply marginalized people in climate vulnerable regions like the Bengal delta, and forcibly displaced from conflict-affected areas like the Kashmir Valley, would not be the same as the process of borderizing by the state, elites, and policy makers. For the former, it is not about creating, maintaining, and containing neatly demarcated geographical units, and categories for classification and management. Rather, for the variably (im)mobile beings in this study, borderizing can be seen as tactical navigation and even subversive negotiation of their borderized realities.

However, when there is a hyperfocus on geopolitical borders and politics of mobility around such borders, what can then remain obscured are existence and operation of other borders that are formed through and embedded in entanglements of ecological, social, economic, and cultural factors. The aim, therefore, has been to illuminate such meshwork of multiple crisscrossing borders by focusing on cases of borderized mobilities and borderizing beings.

How visible and immediate borders are in our lives could also be a matter of privilege. If we are not able to always see borders in our everyday lives, it is perhaps because some of us do not *have to see* borders. But those who *live* with borders and confront their effects, their entire existence and means of survival could be based on the question of how to navigate a messy patchwork of some visible and not so visible borders. Thus, a combined and comparative understanding of empirical cases in Part II would be necessary to highlight how those who are differentially borderized are also differentially borderizing—in material and symbolic ways.

Connecting dots

I had to begin with a case in Chapter Four where, experiences of moving and staying put, confronted by effects of a global COVID-19 pandemic operating at local scale in conjunction with the impact of a cyclonic disaster, would be helpful in going beyond territorial characterization to illuminate how multiple borders may operate and align to shape (im)mobility dynamics during crisis. Using crisis as a lens here allowed me insights into border-like effects of how the state acts (or not act), through policies such as the countrywide COVID-19 lockdown, which was put in place as an emergency measure to restrict movement and contagion, but which paradoxically led to mass exodus of millions of precarious migrant workers from urban areas across the country. Had I not first focused on the case of migrants returning to villages in the Sundarbans, in the Indian part of the Bengal delta, I might not have been able to as clearly exemplify, utilizing this window of cascading crises, how human (im)mobility is essentially a borderized phenomenon.

Furthermore, had I not experienced sheltering-in-place in the city of Kolkata, West Bengal, during the COVID-19 lockdown, I might not have been able to question crisis as a condition that produces differentially borderized lives across specific contexts through sudden breakdown of routines and departure from our so-called normality. Instead, a crisis situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic that reinforced the notion of a “borderless” world, as it was apparently experienced by everyone around the globe albeit not in the same way, can be fundamental in unpacking the normalization of certain practices and policies (or lack thereof) to produce a “new” normal. However, despite its assumed newness, this condition induced by abrupt changes in the form of a crisis, could be a move towards the status quo of another way of (b)ordering of the social world. Hence, my attempt with Chapter Four has not been to essentialize

or take for granted what is meant by a crisis, but to see through the context of COVID-19 pandemic, an event recognized as a crisis worldwide, to demonstrate and develop an understanding of the phenomenon of borderized mobilities against the backdrop of a region in the postcolonial Global South, known to be affected by climate and other crises.

Moreover, what also emerges from Chapter Four is that there is a seemingly *transgressional* relationship between migrants and borders during crisis. Since borders in this case are mainly represented in the form of barriers, be it internal state boundaries, policy restrictions or lack of social protection and support from governments, it is perhaps not surprising if the return migrants appear to have a *transgressional* relationship with the borders they experience. The rhetoric of moving across internal state boundaries, despite curfews and lockdown amidst a pandemic could be explained by how those, truncated from social safety nets and support systems, were left with no option but to transgress rules during an emergency situation. Such a relationship is not overwhelmingly apparent in Chapters Five and Six.

Chapter Five is more about how borderized realities are normalized over time to the extent that borders that shape (im)mobility dynamics become less visible and camouflaged as something else. The not-so-visible border mostly under focus in this chapter is the rural-urban divide, that could be projected like a net or prism juxtaposed over multiple other borders across contexts that spill over international geopolitical borders. A border that is not securitized as nation-state borders, but mainly exist through metabolic rift and a *transactional* relationship between labor and capital. Across this divide, migrants usually maintain linkages through circular mobility trajectories, sending of remittances, and ties to their *desh* or homeland (even those who

may not directly own land). This border, although not as obvious in being recognized as one in times of crisis, played a crucial role even during the COVID-19 lockdown, as it was the linkages maintained with rural areas of origin that enabled the migrants from the Indian Sundarbans region to survive and return amidst the critical juxtaposition of converging crises.

Chapter Six demonstrates how the process of borderizing may also entail reimagining existing fault lines and boundaries into a bridge. Had I not grappled with ambiguities emerging from mental maps of the internally displaced community in relation to borders on the ground and in their minds, I could not have understood how the borderized, in this case a community forced to leave and remain outside their homeland in the context of the protracted Kashmir conflict, could have a *transformational* relationship with a social border that has played a key role in their own displacement as well as in framing the postcolonial political landscape across the larger subcontinent. It is in this chapter that the borders created and lived through as effects of 1947 Partition become more visible.

Nevertheless, while such borders may seem different and not as prominently present in the everyday lives of the internal migrants in the Bengal delta as they do not frequently interact with the Bengal border materially, there is still a haunting presence of this border that is more like an ongoing process than a fixity on this dynamic and evolving landscape. Juxtaposed on this is the border between rural and urban that cut across nation-state boundaries, tied to a system of international division and arrangement of labor that feeds the engine of global capitalism.

Exploring such critical juxtapositions thereby becomes necessary to understand how those experiencing borderized mobilities are also participating in borderizing. And any

comprehension of multiple layered ways of borderizing along with how it may differ across the cases under study cannot be complete without understanding experiences of borderized mobilities as gendered and intersectional.

It is not an accident that there is a heavier focus on interviews of women migrants in Chapter Five and male return migrants in Chapter Four. This is not to say that women do not out-migrate from the Indian Sundarbans or that men were not interviewed in Bangladesh. However, research has shown that those who could be categorized as "climate-induced migrants" such as the participants in the slums of Dhaka, Bangladesh, would tend to migrate with entire families due to deteriorating or destroyed asset base in their rural settings (see for example, Adri and Simon 2018). This can then differentially situate their experiences and vulnerabilities compared to other groups, whose migration may primarily be characterized as owing to economic reasons, involving relatively planned initial out-migration of male earning members of families.

While these two situations can possibly be observed in a region like the Bengal delta becoming increasingly vulnerable to climate crisis, embedded within them are gendered experiences of migrants who are borderized as well as borderizing. For instance, in Chapter Four, men returning to rural Indian Sundarbans lamented about "sitting at home" with "nothing to do" and left without any work they could do to earn income. For women however, the definition of what counts as work itself was different. They were never without work, involved in care labor even during the pandemic-induced crisis that for some time halted routinized rhythms of daily life. A few male participants who were joined by their wives in the destination areas recalled sending them back just before the lockdown, as COVID-19 officially became hailed a pandemic.

The reason for the women returning before the men was invariably shared during the conversations as having to "take care" of people and home back in the village. Gender therefore is a critical factor to be considered for studying borderizing at work. And though the borderized aspect became clearer with the effects of COVID-19 pandemic overlapping with another disaster, the borderizing part, although less visible, merits understanding as well.

Women are not only caregivers during times of crisis but could also very well be the primary providers in families where men have found themselves unemployed and unable to find employment. This could be attributed to the understanding that humanitarian and development-oriented responses to any disaster are likely to target women as beneficiaries rather than able-bodied men, especially if they are known to have been able to move out and find jobs before. But rather than passive victims of crisis or beneficiaries of crisis-induced response, it is critical to understand women's agency in contributing to processes of borderizing by *situating* themselves, *subverting* dominant norms and narratives, *sensitizing and supporting* others in their household and broader community, and in general *surviving* the effects of borderized mobilities.

Further, variably located at intersections of class, caste, and religious markers, the potential of migrant groups under study to transform relationships with borders encountered in their daily lives can also be realized as gendered. Across the empirical chapters, especially Chapters Five and Six, women participants through their various voices have emerged as map makers, aid givers, organizers, and bridge builders. In other words, their experiences tell of the possibility of troubling and destabilizing borderized realities as fixed, immutable consequences of historical and social processes beyond our control and capacity to cope with and change. To

this effect, gendered experiences of migrants across the three cases can also be read as ways of surviving and socializing with (un)changing environments affected by crises across multiple scales. This phenomenon is nothing but borderizing at work, which cannot truly be disconnected from migrants' embeddedness and interactions with their borderized social worlds.

Borderizing has not only been an integral part of my research framework but has also guided my experiences and interactions during fieldwork. Across multiple field sites in Bangladesh and India, including Bengal and Kashmir, I have never been a complete "outsider," nor could I claim to have been treated as a complete "insider" based on how my gender, class and religion intersected with my Bengali identity. To reflect on how I engaged in the process of borderizing during the fieldworks is to reflect upon my attempts to make up for the obvious ways in which I am different from the participants with inherited ties of shared history, culture, language, and experience of borders. Whether it is through reiterating I am from Kolkata, and not India when asked where I am from, or through acknowledging the relation between my family history and the 1947 Partition, with my grandparents being among the millions who had to relocate to the other side of what is now the India-Bangladesh border, borderizing for me personally has been more about recognizing convergences in the face of multiply borderized and partitioned realities.

What was further revealed through my fieldwork observations is time itself as a possible border, especially in this age of Anthropocene, with effects of the climate crisis colliding with other crises. While Chapter Six highlighted the key role played by memories and nostalgia of a place and people in the process of borderizing and reimagining of a group boundary as bridge,

and Chapter Five and Four in various degrees illuminated the uneven temporality of circular mobilities practiced by the floating people, time also became a critical factor in conversing with those who remember living through a different era, and those who are not old enough to align their personal memories with larger histories of the region.

A specific moment from the field can perhaps capture this realization. One morning in early 2020 I was waiting for my research assistant near a line of shops in one of the peripheral lanes denoting the edge of Korail slum in Dhaka, when a curious 7-10-year-old child came up to me and asked if I am a *bideshi* (Bengali for foreigner). I replied saying "look, I speak *Bangla*, so how am I a *bideshi*?" but the child, after evaluating this answer for a few moments, concluded with a big smile "no, you are *bideshi*". This insightful comment has not only stayed with me beyond the fieldwork, it has also helped shape my reflections around research methods and framework, with border as a core conceptual and analytical tool.

More than anything, what could be revealed through this research, which has also been an intense and reflexive journey for me, is a growing and urgent need for interrogating an underlying condition rather than categories of concern in this hyper-connected, dynamic, and crisis-affected world. While localized expressions of this condition may not be the same for everyone, and vary across contexts, histories, and intersections of identities and power relations, there can still be seemingly disconnected and not always visible threads that when brought together may enable us to view, even if partially, a bigger puzzle, an entire tapestry linking diverse experiences of borderized and borderizing beings. I call this condition as that of refugee-ness, while also acknowledging and encouraging other ways of conceptualizing and relating to this notion beyond the discussion I engage with in the following section.

However, before I end this chapter, I want to address a practical question of how I now think about climate refugees, both as a name and as a concept. The reason behind this is not because I want to argue that the migrants from the Bengal Delta are climate refugees per say, but rather because I believe this research framework provides a way of engaging in research and policy dialogues around this much debated and puzzling category.

Climate Refugees or a Climate of Refugee-ness?

How have my critical inquiry evolved from only thinking of climate refugees as a category of concern to engaging with complexities around refugee-ness as a condition of concern? My initial step into this research did not directly begin with the question of refugee-ness. Rather my goal was to critically unpack the complexities surrounding the making and unmaking of the contested category of “climate refugee”—a figure that on one hand lacks legitimacy of a “valid” refugee but can surprisingly haunt the imagination of policymakers and stoke anxieties of nation-states to make their international borders more impermeable and hence, secure. However, with this as my research theme and foundation for my conceptual framework, I found myself constantly struggling to realize something more, something that perhaps cannot be revealed when only engaging with climate refugees as a category of concern. My experiences in the field during COVID-19 pandemic served as a critical turning point, one that allowed me to focus on conditions (that remain, at best, partially invisible) instead of categories that may render themselves more easily visible.

Nevertheless, asking questions about refugee-ness as a pervasive yet paradoxical condition in a world confronted by cascading crises has never only been a part of this research journey alone. Rather it has been an integral part of my personal experiences and family history.

It has also been a thread connecting different projects I have been involved with over the last decade. One of them is Climate Refugee Stories, a multimedia archiving project documenting stories of migrant communities from around the world, including their resilience in the face of climate and other crises. Funded by the National Geographic Society and other partners, this platform has provided critical support for my fieldwork in the Bengal delta region of Bangladesh and India. More than anything, being a part of this project has enabled me to critically reflect on climate refugees as a contested category of concern in policy, advocacy, and discourse around climate justice and migrant rights.

Who are the climate refugees? Does this label potentially include (im)mobility of everyone who are affected by environmental changes across the world, or is it only applicable to certain groups based on their geographical and social locations, as well as attempts to travel *across* nation-state borders? Are we participants in a global political climate that simultaneously ignores, calculates, manages, and in many ways produces refugee-ness by overemphasizing the framework of people crossing borders without considering how borders have crossed people? In this light how can we engage in an exercise of even partially mapping the condition of refugee-ness by focusing on a historically specific context in the Global South?

Engaging with these questions involve grappling with a conundrum. On the one hand, the term climate refugee (without scare quotes) may serve a useful purpose of challenging and potentially expanding the existing definition of who can or cannot be legally considered a refugee. On the other hand, though, if deployed in a manner that is not sensitive to the myriad ways some people, more than others, interact with and survive violent effects of borders in their

daily lives, the label of climate refugee may become yet another way of reproducing existing inequalities. My concern here is not related to the essence of what climate refugee as a name may convey. Rather it is tied to the understanding of *how* it might be used as a tool and *what* it can be used to represent. To put it broadly, beyond recognizing and validating the experiences of those whose lives, mobilities, and even relations to geopolitical borders have been dictated by the effects of a changing climate among other crises, can formalizing this category as another type of refugee facilitate the maintenance of a status quo? This status quo is problematic because it can continue using a deservingness frame to justify privileging the plight of some over others and advocating for differential validation and protection of groups from hyper-visible climate vulnerable hotspots, typically hailed as poster children for discourse and policy around climate justice and migrant justice.

For a possible reimagining of "who is (not) a refugee" (Haddad 2004) in today's world of multiple overlapping crises, most significantly COVID-19, conflict, and climate change, it is critical to engage with relevant international policy frameworks. Establishment of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage (UNFCCC 2013) associated with climate change impacts in developing countries has raised questions about measuring and comparing consequences including migration, displacement, and mobility (action area 6) as well as non-economic loss and damage (action area 4) from a changing climate. Policy mechanisms, including compensation, have heavily relied on evidence from the science of attribution (James et al 2014). However, as recognized in literature, economic model of compensation becomes ineffective and problematic when climate change policy frameworks fail to integrate questions of "systematic

arrangement of poverty and vulnerability over historical timescales" (Wrathall et al 2015: 286). Engaging with this lacuna would involve reorienting the focus to the question of accountability.

Building on legal arguments (e.g., Docherty and Giannini 2009, Mayer 2011), bringing together the words, "climate" and "refugee" in one category adds a much-needed political weightage. It calls for the accountability of an international system of institutions, and the moral responsibility of an international community towards people inhabiting climate hotspots such as small islands and low-lying coastal regions in the Global South. The same may not get emphasized when those affected are labelled differently. While cognizant of the need for expanding who gets to be defined as a refugee, I however caution against the creation of another universal "global" category that may flatten differential outcomes and experiences uniquely specific to certain local contexts. Moreover, overcoming skepticism around climate refugee as a term embodying a phenomenon becoming more real and relevant each day in this era of converging crises would perhaps not be possible if we keep seeing through the same existing lens. I simultaneously struggle with implications of essentializing this label and consolidating it into a category around which critical policy decisions would then be made. It is further possible that the (un)intended consequence of any formalized policy can be to act as a type of border, effectively "othering" those who do not exactly fit within what would be yet another box. With this in mind, I thus call for an unmaking of climate refugee as a category that is still in the making. As emphasized through this research, any unmaking of climate refugee as a category of concern needs to be accompanied by mapping refugee-ness as a condition of concern. To clarify further, this is by no means a rejection of the category but an invitation to critically inquire what it may reveal as well as what it may obscure.

According to the Sixth Assessment Report by the IPCC Working Group II (2022), human displacement is being increasingly driven by climate extremes, reinforcing cycles of vulnerability. The report's Summary for Policymakers predicts with high confidence that the vulnerabilities are likely to concentrate in informal settlements of urban areas, as well as in rural areas owing to dependence on climate-sensitive livelihoods (Pörtner et al 2022: B.2.5). Further, it is also not surprising that the latest Groundswell report by the World Bank has projected more than 200 million people across six regions of the world to move within their countries by 2050, owing to slow-onset climate impacts (Clement et al 2021). With the Bengal delta already being proclaimed as one of the hotspots for climate migration, along with debates over security implications of hundreds of thousands of "floating" people unmoored from their rural habitat, it becomes critical to emphasize that climate is not a direct driver of human mobility but may, under certain conditions, shape mobility decisions by amplifying risks. It further calls for research on this historically specific regional context to try and step out of academia's ivory tower and speak to multiple audiences.

Although moving beyond academic jargons may become necessary in this attempt, the "right" way of thinking and framing the conundrum of climate refugees and refugee-ness perhaps involves participation in a complicated and continuing dialogue. This dialogue might not have a conclusion anytime soon. Nevertheless, what perhaps is of utmost importance here is for multiple actors, including the so-called climate refugees, to actively engage in this conversation, debunk myths, and challenge conventional institutionalized narratives. How might migrants, especially those that despite all controversies are still considered to be spokespersons for the category of climate refugees, see themselves in relation to borders and bordering processes, and

tell their stories? Would their stories contain clues and codes to reveal historical understanding as well as present day experience of how borders cross them?

In light of this discussion, it is perhaps useful to revisit the hand-drawn map of Korail slum from Chapter One, and critically inquire: Is this map entirely unique, or would a map of a refugee camp also look similar, and why? More importantly, would inhabitants of a refugee camp—people who are legally recognized as refugees, experience borders and bordering processes in a similar way as the migrants in this Dhaka slum? How might conditions of survival and lived experiences in the camp be related to and distinguished from the condition of survival and everyday life in the slum, considering both these spaces as potential sites for “inclusive exclusion”?

To continue engaging in this thought exercise is to further understand the condition of refugee-ness as relational, across heterogenous contexts and at the intersections of multiple borders. Whether as sites of convergence or separation, the idea of borders beyond its mere spatial connotation, fundamentally denotes an assemblage of power relations. Where one is located with respect to intersecting borders may not only determine their identities, but also intersectional experiences and positions along a power spectrum. Valuing standpoint and knowledge of those not situated towards the more privileged end of this spectrum can become crucial for unpacking entanglements and inter-dependencies across contexts and scales that might not always render themselves easily discernible. Nonetheless, the task of understanding these relations remain a critical one as it can not only reveal the intertwined nature of crises in today’s world, but also illuminate how power has operated historically through diverse bordering processes along race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, legal status, and other axes of

stratification, reproducing and justifying the resultant unequal distribution of privilege and oppression.

While the tendency of power operating through such processes is to remain misrecognized, an entry point for even partially illuminating these relations can be forged through a possible reimagining of how we conventionally see borders, and by listening to voices from the margins, and *how* they tell their (ghost) stories. Only by doing this can we link our personal biographies to histories of borderizing and realize ourselves as both borderized and borderizing at the same time. Serving as both a theoretical and methodological contribution, I believe such reflexive understanding can help extend the scope of this research and the condition of refugee-ness under discussion well beyond the frame of human mobilities in times of crisis.

Based on the insights emerging from this research, I further posit that rather than debating which category can best contain a crisis-affected group, it is by mapping their conditions of existence in relation to the experiences and positions of other groups, that we can even begin to unpack mechanisms through which effects of different crises at different times in different contexts can reify the same hierarchies and reproduce similar forms of marginalities. Furthermore, it is by problematizing conventional assumptions around terms like refugees and interrogating the condition of refugee-ness beyond its bounded applications, can there be scope for expanding our understanding of borderizing at work in this borderized world.

This can further be crucial for destabilizing the binary between theory and practice, as well as unpacking linkages, inter-dependencies, entanglements in the Anthropocene that could remain as "invisible visible" phenomena. The stickiness of the conventional paradigm around borders as *things* to be (or not to be) crossed can only serve to obscure these complex

relationships, thereby compounding the effects of overlapping crises. Hence, beyond understanding mobile communities as disembodied subjects and victims of crisis, what must be critically examined are the networked, relational, and intersectional [read borderized] realities made more visible by any crisis, contributing to an assemblage of border-like effects that can itself be considered *as* a form of crisis. Using borderizing as a tool to empirically examine the phenomenon of borderized mobilities in the context of three Cs—COVID, climate and conflict, this research therefore aspires to serve as an entry point for future inquiries and critical examinations of refugee-ness as a condition of concern, characterizing the mobile as well as the immobile, in this differentially borderizing and borderized world.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion: Crossings

Crossings

If I have to summarize this research in one word, then that word would be *crossings*. However, when placed in relation to borders, the term may tend to signify border crossings, meaning the crossing of borders by people, rather than *crossings of borders*. This research is an exercise in emphasizing and analyzing the latter instead of the former. Furthermore, the term crossings can be used to signal that we, as a community of practice comprising diverse actors including academics, activists, advocates, practitioners, and policymakers, are collectively standing at crossroads. When it comes to any crisis, there is no one research-policy framework, toolkit, or apparatus that can act as a panacea providing solutions.

The present research framework certainly cannot pretend to do so. Rather, my aim here has been to recalibrate and perhaps even change an overused lens in understanding critical juxtapositions around mobilities, borders and crises. Grounded in the evidence and reflections discussed so far, key insights and reflections emerging from the chapters in this dissertation can be summarized as follows: Firstly, not only do the borders under study in this dissertation simultaneously separate and link communities, categories, livelihood types, and territories, but are also present within households, shaping differential vulnerabilities to crisis and gendered experiences of borderized mobilities. Consequently, associated borderizing processes can go beyond community and territory to include aspects of labor and time.

Secondly, this research supports that crisis need not only be conceptualized as an anomaly, a deviation from what is considered to be *normal*, disrupting routinized rhythms of everyday life. Rather, crisis must be understood as a pervasive condition that could become

normalized as way of life, peculiar in its mundaneness than its abruptness, reproducing borders that are not always visible or even perceived as borders. Further, crisis must not only be understood in terms of how to respond *in future*, but also with respect to what happened in the past. That is, how an assemblage of context-specific and historically contingent processes and relations might have reinforced certain conditions of existence over generations, and what we today confront as effects of a crisis are an echo, a consequence embedded in and exacerbated by these very conditions.

Thirdly, mobilities in the context of crisis may not always be induced by what is considered to be the crisis, but actually by responses to the said crisis. These responses can take the form of particular policies or their lack thereof, to be then experienced as border-like effects. Any process of borderizing in response to a crisis, reproducing disproportionate borderized effects and exacerbating existing inequalities, can thus be interpreted as a form of crisis itself. This research is therefore an invitation to not only think of borders, but rather to think of crisis, as well as the dialectical relationship between borders and crisis through a somewhat refocused lens.

Finally, although the empirical cases do not directly focus on the territorial borders drawn through the heart of the Indian subcontinent during 1947 Partition, that then over time evolved and consolidated into geopolitical borders separating multiple nation-states including India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan in South Asia, their sheer presence in everyday lives, even when participants across the three cases are not directly crossing them or living within borderland areas, merits a critical dive into the historical process of their formation. Theorizing borderized mobilities and borderizing beings in the context of multiple crises in this part of the world cannot

be complete without understanding the history of Partition of the Indian subcontinent, not as an event of the past, but as an ongoing process shaping conditions in the present and imaginations of possible futures across this postcolonial landscape.

Connecting personal experiences with larger structures and histories can thus be key for understanding why and how some are disproportionately affected by situations hailed as crisis, while others seem to remain buffered from their effects. Beginning with borders can serve as a useful first step in this critical examination. Doing so by expanding on and mobilizing the framework of *borders crossing people*, this dissertation research not only hopes to make a potential theoretical contribution but also a methodological one. By treating borders not only as an object of inquiry but as a tool for understanding mobilities in the context of crisis, I have tried to move past problematic dichotomies embedded in literature around over-agentic or over-structural notions of migration, highlighted through voluntary *or* forced decision-making.

Such dichotomous understanding may further contribute to production and reification of categories such as economic labor migrants, internally displaced persons, refugees, and more. For instance, people whose movement across and within nation-state borders can be traced back to environmental conditions influenced by a changing climate are variously labelled as environmental migrants, climate migrants, persons displaced in the context of disasters and climate change, and less popularly as environmental or climate refugees by a range of actors including humanitarian organizations, researchers, and policy makers. But regardless of assumed voluntariness or forcedness of the actual physical movement, whether in relation to climate or

other crises, what still remains mostly unproblematized is the premise that it is the people who *cross* borders to pursue opportunities, survive, or escape from a challenging situation.

What this then entails is the naturalization of a way of imagining and reinforcing inequalities, whereby those who are disproportionately affected by a crisis are also held responsible for their actions and decisions, since they must have decided to transgress some kind of a border in the process. When such assumptions remain unchallenged, and migrants inhabiting different categories of concern are attributed with specific characteristics, it can translate into serious consequences in the form of critical policy decision and implementation. Recognizing this loophole, the framework of *borders crossing people* has the potential to move away from categories of concern, and debates around labels like climate refugees, to further illuminate refugee-ness an embodied condition of concern that need not fit within existing categorical boxes. This can then be critical for untangling the puzzle around how and why people moving within nation-states may experience a peculiar condition, resembling that of legally recognized refugees, without having physically crossed an international border.

Although this research engaged with participants who could be argued to embody such a condition of refugee-ness despite not having crossed an international border, the scope of this dissertation has been limited by specific fieldwork conditions and interruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While I tried to navigate this limit by expanding my dissertation framework to include COVID as a crisis, there are methodological challenges informing limitations of this research, which simultaneously defines the scope for future avenues of research. Across the empirical cases, this research has tried to go beyond the idea of crisis as a sudden abrupt

departure from existing daily routine of life to focus on crisis as a pervasive condition, shaping and amplifying borderized effects. However, I have only been able to explore different crisis contexts by focusing on certain snapshots in time. This was partly driven by the methodological framework, and partly by the feasibility of investigating a context across a longer time interval. While this can be seen as a limitation, it can also open the door for future research focusing on the same context across multiple time periods.

Furthermore, despite being mindful of the "territorial trap", and trying to move beyond container-like understanding of nation-states and regions delimited by geographical borders, I have found myself limited in my capacity as a researcher to express in a language that can move beyond this essentialized understanding. This also informed my methodological framework, as I had to consider the particularities of Bengal delta region on either side of the India-Bangladesh border and conduct separate fieldworks in these contexts across distinct time intervals that I came to distinguish as pre-COVID and COVID periods. Nevertheless, the methodological challenge of addressing both territory and time as containers provided the scope for critically reflecting on how different types of borders may interact and operate to shape borderized mobilities in the Global South. This further indicates the existence of a gap and a fertile ground in studying the genealogy of multiple intersecting borders across specific local contexts. Moreover, experiences of circular migrants, living with and navigating distinct borders, that may or may not align with internationally recognized nation-state borders, may be comparatively analyzed with experiences of groups who are legally recognized as refugees. Comparative analysis can also be conducted across contexts in both Global South and North to better understand entanglements of borderized mobilities and borderizing processes. This can become

especially useful in debunking a powerful myth— a myth around relative borderless-ness of the North, unaffected by colonial histories.

Impacts of rising sea levels, intense cyclones, floods, and droughts beyond a critical threshold can spell devastating consequences for lives and livelihoods of people in regions vulnerable to the effects of a changing climate. Simultaneously, such regions and communities can experience compounded fragility through impact of past and ongoing conflicts, or public health crisis, like the COVID-19 pandemic. Spillover effects of such crisis-like situations would likely not be contained within nation-state boundaries, but possibly affect broader regions with shared histories, cultures, and social structures. This not only carries implications for research, but also calls for policy on climate and other crises to have a broader regional focus. However, instead of focusing on the roots of why and how certain communities are disproportionately vulnerable to overlapping crises, together with identifying common patterns across contexts, international and national policies are usually found to focus on "containing" the crisis within delimited boundaries, along with bodies that are seen as affected (read contaminated). Those who *could* be allowed to move in such situations would need to have a justified reason and right to do so.

But what about those without the "right to have rights"[28]? Policy interventions to deal with a global crisis can simultaneously legitimize and obscure structural violence experienced by people at the margins. For example, the nationwide lockdown in India since March 24, 2020, as

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[28] This oft quoted phrase by Hannah Arendt in her essay 'The Rights of Man: What Are They?' that later became a chapter in the book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), is a critical take on the contradictions embedded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

emergency policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the plight of hundreds of thousands of migrant workers who were left stranded in various urban centers without food, shelter and means of survival, and ultimately forced to begin walking hundreds of miles to their villages. When combined with other, more localized crises, such as the disastrous effects of super cyclone *Amphan* in the Bengal delta region across Bangladesh and India, the pandemic acted as a rare "portal" (Roy 2020) to reveal and connect what would perhaps otherwise remain invisible.

More than anything, this portal revealed the Janus-faced nature of borders as ascribing value and worth to some, keeping them buffered against any crisis, while at the same time devaluing others, making them dispensable even as they became disproportionately affected. Hence, without considering durable effects of borders, no policy or action can succeed in responding to crisis, especially in cases of crisis-induced mobility and immobility. However, a sole, myopic focus on the crisis in isolation, whether it is climate change as the crisis, or unregulated migration as the crisis, without understanding how structural effects of borders can interact, shape, and reproduce less-than ideal conditions of existence, effective policy and action cannot be framed. While contextualizing and examining such peculiar emergent conditions become critical for advancing knowledge and fostering a diverse community of practice, there can be further sensitization of policy frameworks across scales and sectors, by integrating experiential knowledge and subaltern standpoints of those who are already always crossed by borders.

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