Borders and borderlands have perhaps never been as prominently in the public consciousness as they are in the contemporary moment. This is equally true of academic, governance and policy discourse. Globally, refugees are pushing across state borders seeking homes away from sites of conflict, religious persecution, genocide and medical or climate disasters. In response, states are tightening controls over their borders, enforcing stricter surveillance and monitoring of visa regimes for incoming migrants, even as they seek to enforce exclusionary regulatory mechanisms over their own citizens as they determine who can stay and who must leave, amending criteria for citizenship and belonging. Migration across state borders is matched by internal mobility within state boundaries as people move constantly in search of jobs, education and marriage. In crossing borders, whatever their scale, migrants create new borderlands in the process. Through resettlement, they once again become enmeshed in borders of other kinds, as fear, rumour or suspicion serves to configure their relationship with their new neighbours. Within India, the casting of the Muslim citizen as the ‘outsider’ or the ‘internal enemy’ is spatially instantiated with areas within cities being referred to as ‘mini-Pakistans’ (Ghassem-Fachandi 2012: 231) and temporally manifested through a citizenship regime that ‘oscillates ambivalently between encompassment and closure’ (Roy 2010: 7). The passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in late 2019 marks the latest in a series of legislations on India’s ‘citizenship regime’ (Jayal 2013). This is the third amendment to the Citizenship Act, with earlier changes incorporated in 1986 and 2003, each of which was formulated as a response to the crisis of potential Muslim migration into India. By legalising the status of non-Muslim illegal migrants (who qualify to be settled as ‘refugees’) from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan (in effect all the ‘Muslim-dominated’ states in its neighbourhood), the 2019 Act renders Indian citizenship as an attribute that is increasingly being seen as exclusive of Islam. Similarly placed Muslim migrants are deemed ‘infiltrators’ by the Act. The passage of this Act created a nationwide emergency of sorts, with massive popular protests driven especially by students,
women and young people who poured out onto the streets protesting what they felt was an exclusionary and anti-constitutional move. The Act also serves to render precarious entire generations of Muslim citizens within India who suddenly find their belonging under threat of erasure, potentially turned into ‘illegal infiltrators’ overnight. This is particularly the case in the borderlands of Bangladesh and India which have witnessed waves of migration across the two Partitions of the twentieth century. The nation-state’s external political borders are thus transposed onto internal spatial, sociopolitical and cultural borders within the geographic heart of the nation. The shifting contours of national belonging, that is, who is or is not a citizen, demonstrates that borders are not encountered—either in law or practice—as always-already existing territorial demarcations. Instead, they are materialised through social practices of bordering that are not tethered only to a territorial interpretation of the border. In India’s north-east, citizenship is a contested—and ever-shifting—resource. Who is or is not a legitimate citizen of India in the state of Assam is not linked to historical mobility but is increasingly tied to religious or linguistic identity.

In India, ‘illegality’ in terms of border crossing coalesces for the most part into the figure of the Bangladeshi migrant, who is very much the ‘iconic illegal migrant’, much as the Mexican migrant is in the United States (de Genova 2005). While some of this xenophobia around Muslim migrants is the South Asian configuration of the Global War on Terror as it uses the justification of national security to deny Muslim claims to citizenship and residency rights (or even refugee status as seen in the Rohingya refugee exodus from Myanmar in 2017–18), it also has a very particular historical context in the debates around the question of migration and citizenship from the early years following the Partition (Roy 2010; Jayal 2013; Zamindar 2007). The Muslim is very much on the margins of citizenship as it is envisioned in India—she is marginalised with respect to the benefits and entitlements of citizenship and arguably also with respect to a larger sense of national identity and belonging. But this is a temporally shifting margin. A ‘citizen’ one day may become an ‘illegal infiltrator’ another, depending on the way in which the state chooses to read these attributes of belonging. The fuzzy boundaries between the perception of religious and national identity in these cases suggest that the idea of the margin does not only exist as a stable set of relations within the nation (for instance, as a socio-religious category alone) but also enables us to ask the question: Who is deemed worthy of inclusion as a citizen in the first place? This volume proposes that the margin is best viewed not in terms of exclusion alone but as a set of relations between forms of regulation.
and jurisdictions across space and time. Borders are thus not about territory alone; they allow us to raise questions about internal jurisdictions and about marginality, and also affect and desire, and about how these are manifested across spatial and temporal sites.

Recent collections on borderlands in South Asia have proceeded in dialogue with ethnographic perspectives on the state (Gellner 2013) or through the conceptual lens of marginality (Cons and Sanyal 2013). This volume seeks to build on the critical insights generated by these preceding works by deepening the historical engagement with both borders and the borderlands they generate. All the contributors directly tackle the question of how political, geographical or territorial marginality from administrative centres does not preclude these spaces becoming central to an understanding of authority, sovereignty or legitimacy. Nor does the imposition of state authority seek to constitute its outlying areas in any unilateral fashion. The role of borderland populations is crucial in mediating—even directing—the relationship of the so-called centre and its periphery, thus enabling a re-conceptualisation of the relationship of the state and borders in terms of a centre–periphery framework and of marginality as the only conceptual lens through which to view borders and frontiers.

This volume also steps away from the national and transnational contexts within which histories have been imagined and written, thus fragmenting borderlands that existed prior to the nation-state. Regions and nations have been defined by history-writing that anachronistically shape territories to suit imaginaries of the past. Thus, regional and national territories appear compact and secluded, rather than connected by shared histories of contact, social spaces ‘for which ceaseless circulation of humans was a sine qua non’ (Subrahmanyam 2005: 212–13). Vasudha Pande (in this volume) traces how the writing of histories of distinct spaces within the trans-Himalayan region led to the reorientation of the regions themselves. Kothiyal (2016) has argued that the consolidation of Rajputana, a region oriented towards the Indo-Gangetic plains, distinct from its associations with the western Thar, was a result of historiographic impulses that overlooked the migratory histories of the Rajputs. Chapters in this volume attempt to unravel the connected histories of borderlands, untangling them from the given regional and national historiographic contexts.

Methodologically, this volume traverses a liminal space between history and anthropology, thus occupying a kind of borderland itself. This liminality, however, is not merely engendered by the coming together of two disciplines, but by ways in which these disciplinary practices explore multiple space–time dimensions.
While boundaries as products of modern nation-making processes emphasise the present, this engagement with the idea of borderlands shifts the emphasis to space and time as imagined and experienced in the past, both methodologically and experientially. While history allows us glimpses into how spaces were imagined and defined, and how these imaginaries shifted, anthropology allows us to see how these shifts continue to be experienced in the borderlands.

**BORDERS, FRONTIERS AND STATES: RETHINKING SOVEREIGNTY, MARGINALITY AND TERRITORIALITY**

It is now well accepted in academic discourse that even though borderlands may constitute the physical margins of the Westphalian state, they are at the very core of nationalist discourses about territorial survival and security and are also integral to the ways in which the nation is both imagined and produced (Aggarwal 2004; Bhan 2008). They may constitute the physical 'edge' but they are fairly central to the business of statecraft. This proposition is important to initiate a discussion on the nature of the state and its authority. Modern states have increasingly come to view themselves as territorially circumscribed, absolute sovereign units with monopolistic claims over violence. This view occludes the fact that the territorial sovereignty of states was not given a priori but often wrested from competing claims to sovereignty that were often considered to be equally legitimate. The emergence of kingdoms and empires from competing claims inevitably led to the creation of frontiers or borderlands: zones where the authority of the state was gradually in dispute. States forged multiple relationships with these frontier zones. In classical Indian political discourse, the margins of the states as well as that of settlements were identified as *aranya* or wilderness, which was at once the 'site for and an object for the exploitation and violence of the state' (Singh 2017: 457). While inflicting violence and attempting to draw the margins into a civilisational centre or *ksetra*, the state also remained fascinated with the wilderness, often drawing imperial symbols of power like the lion and elephant from the forests. The wilderness was the site of *brahmacharya* as well as *sanyasa*, the first and the last stages of human life. For kings, while the city and the palace were sites for the experience of kingship, the space from where moral authority could be drawn was the wilderness. It was both the space of exile, as well a space where kingship could be reclaimed through acts of self-realisation as well as self-actualisation. The Arab philosopher Ibn Khaldun also views the wilderness—in his case the desert—as the space for the renewal of moral authority (Dawood 2005 [1969]:
95–107). Thus, the wilderness rather than being an external space is a space of rejuvenation and reassertion, a ‘different kind of borderland’ (Singh 2017: 457), an idea explored further through Uberoi’s (1978) concept of ‘frontier logic’.

However, the wilderness was not always an uninhabited territory outside of civilisation. These were the territories where, according to Kautilya, ‘those likely to be won over’ lived. Kautilya divides ‘those likely to be won over’ into four categories, that is, the ‘angry’, the ‘greedy’, the ‘frightened’ and the ‘haughty’ (Rangarajan 1992: 484–5). These could be instigated against their own kings by stoking anger, greed, fear or pride through the use of conciliation (sama), gift (dana), won over through sedition (bheda) and force (danda), the last to be used only if all other means failed (Rangarajan 1992: 572). Revisiting the Mauryan Empire, Thapar (2000: 463) views frontiers as buffer zones that were deliberately kept underdeveloped, with the intention to keep them pliant rather than maintaining firm control. These buffer zones often allowed citizens from either side of the borderland to benefit from the presence of multiple jurisdictions. Citing the fifth-century Roman historian Priscus, Lattimore (1962: 481) refers to the eastern frontiers of the Roman Empire where Roman traders continued to serve the Huns rather than return home because of the pitiless taxation in Roman cities.

The frontiers of pre-modern states were thus zones of competing sovereignties and negotiated loyalties that sustained immense possibilities for the emergence of new social and political formations. These were not merely neutral territories but ‘political wombs’ where ‘cohesive, participatory, segmentary communities, endowed with great military potential’ existed with tremendous potentialities for supplying new rulers (Gellner 1995: 164). However, did the political turmoil of these frontiers and the frequent shifts of loyalties represent the unstable nature of sovereignty in the frontiers? Wink suggests that pre-modern states were essentially organised around conflicts and that sovereignty was a ‘matter of allegiances’ (1986: 27). Tracing the lineages of the word fitna through the work of the fourteenth-century Arab philosopher Ibn Khaldun, Wink points out that the term could be interpreted as a disruptive force only in the context of the universalist claims of Islam. In the formation of various Muslim states, fitna implied nothing more than the use of conflict and conciliation in local disputes to forge alliances. Ernest Gellner’s study of the Berbers of the High Atlas Mountains in Morocco views the history of Morocco as that of conflicting and conciliatory relationships between the states of makhzen and siba, that is, the pale and beyond the pale (Gellner 1969: 2). This idea has been further developed by Scott who views sovereignties of the core
as ‘explicit’ as opposed to the ‘ambiguous, plural and shifting’ sovereignties of the frontiers (2009: 59–60). These distinctions became explicit as modern states began to centralise and monopolise territorial control, disputing the claims of inhabitants of the frontiers who could in the past have claimed access to multiple sovereignties. In the Thar Desert, as Kothiyal (in this volume) argues, banditry and highway robbery by local chieftains that came to be viewed as a threat to governance was in fact an overt claim to shared sovereignty that was being overridden by the marking of clear jurisdictions, both ideationally as well as cartographically. It is this access to multiple sovereignties that converts frontiers and borderlands into zones of creative possibilities of many kinds. Rather than anarchy and lawlessness of the margin, the frontier signifies liberty and autonomy, for ‘by frontier logic the wall is also a corridor and to divide is also to interconnect’ (Uberoi 1978: 73).

Given this creative potential at the frontier, and the ability to potentially subvert the centre, it is not surprising then that even modern borders are not immune to a ‘territorial anxiety’ on the part of their respective nation–states in South Asia. This anxiety transmutes into a ‘sensitivity’ with regard to its borders where, as Cons (2016: 7) has recently argued in an ethnography of the enclaves (chhitmahal) along the Bangladesh–India border, ‘the fragility and instability at the heart of national territory’ joins forces with bureaucratic regulation and management to produce Sensitive Space that is prone to high degrees of surveillance and control precisely because it is also the site where the ideological belief in the coincidence of nationality and territory begins to unravel. Through the last two millennia, South Asian frontiers have shifted several times with the creation as well as disintegration of kingdoms, empires and nation–states. With the emergence of several nation–states in the last century, it has become difficult to imagine frontiers that do not match the current nation–state boundaries. However, most pre–modern states had very little accurate sense of their territories before cartography came to be extensively used to actually draw maps and mark boundaries from the late eighteenth century onwards. In the Mughal Empire, while attempts were made to mark external boundaries through forts and so forth, the strongest fortifications were erected around towns and cities, giving us a sense of where priorities lay in terms of exercising strict surveillance and control. The control of vaguely defined external frontiers was more often than not left to local rulers and chieftains, thus ensuring little change in the conditions of local sovereignty with the expansion or contraction of frontiers (Embree 1977: 273). In the frontier zones, it is these tribesmen that formed the necessary link in governance (Singh 2006 [1998]: 444–9).
Introduction

These conditions of conflicting as well as coexisting sovereignties continued well into the colonial period in India, with contiguous zones of direct and indirect rule creating borderlands of competing jurisdictions. While normatively the frontiers between different authorities sought to represent a clear demarcation, in practice, the proximity of multiple competing political, social and juridical authorities made borderlands a space differentiated from nearby areas in terms of the rules that were applied or suspended there (Beverley, in this volume). Beverley views the frontier as a critical social and political resource, which allowed states as well as people living on the frontiers to creatively engage with the new legalities as they emerged with the marking of colonial boundaries in the late nineteenth century. In the Hyderabad–Bombay frontier, legal pluralism of the frontiers allowed the manipulation of instruments of governmentality. The frontier was a space of anomaly where sovereignty was fragmented, allowing for simultaneous expression of British territorialised sovereignty against the decentralised patrimonial features of Hyderabad’s governance. Fragmentation produced flexibility, permitting the possibility of participation in alternative regimes of criminality, labour and sexuality. Kothiyal (in this volume) argues that in the harsh and inhospitable Thar Desert, which was a borderland between several princely states and British-controlled areas, the rules of hostility were often suspended in order to ensure safe passage for people and commodities, as their flow was controlled and facilitated by local chieftains and rulers. This was predicated upon the capacity of frontier communities to build widespread networks of fidelities based on kinship and affinity, thus providing channels of co-operation that neither the princely states nor the British were capable of accessing. The liminal spaces that these allegiances created could seamlessly become passages as well as fortifications, as the necessity arose.

To counter this fragmentation, in the nineteenth century the colonial state attempted to make frontiers sites where the state sought to unleash its knowledge-making apparatus to map, to know and to tame—the cartographic impulse (Cons 2016) to render the remote outpost at least as legible to the centre as the core (if not more so). The production of annual reports and revenue, cadastral and topographical surveys led to information that could produce a totalising picture that could transform fragments into a meaningful totality, the ‘cartographic truths’ (Bhattacharya 2018: 82–5). With advances in cartography by the mid-nineteenth century, it became possible to map clearly defined and ordered territories amenable to governance. In doing so, the search for ‘natural frontiers’ like mountains, rivers, marshes, deserts, and so on, those ‘great obstacles of nature’ that could serve as
frontiers of separation and defence became a primary objective (Embree 1977: 278). However, what were viewed as ‘great obstacles of nature’ were in a true sense frontiers that were controlled by a range of state and non-state actors facilitating the flow of people and commodities. The marking of boundaries as well as the creation of new circuits of commodity flows led to shifts in the orientation of the regions themselves, as Pande (in this volume) demonstrates in the case of the Kumaun frontier. Pande explores the shifts in borderlands that Kumaun shared with Nepal, Tibet and Tarai, and argues that in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Kumauni borderlands were redefined owing to multiple factors like shifts in administrative and legal regimes, opening of roads and motorised transport, and shifting of travel and trade. Kumauni borderlands transformed from being a space seamlessly connected with Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions like western Nepal, Tibet, Terai and Kashmir, through flows of people and commodities like iron implements, salt, wool and borax, to distinct regions marked cartographically, administratively as well as historiographically. The marking of India, Nepal and Tibet as distinct national communities based on the core identities of these nations also led to a homogenisation of community identities within groups like Kumauni, Gorkha and Bhotiya among others, which in the past had shared linkages and could have been at some point indistinguishable. However, while mapping of national boundaries might have created national identities, the shared pasts of borderlands are being constantly evoked in multiple ways across the boundaries of nation-states.

Middleton (in this volume) ethnographically examines the shifting contours of ‘Gorkha’ identity in Darjeeling as it oscillates between the demands of a pan-ethnic identity as ‘Gorkhas’ and the ‘ethnological straightjacket of tribal recognition’, as Scheduled Tribes within the constitutional framework of affirmative action policies within the Indian nation-state. In either case, certain forms of identity are lost even as others may be gained, situationally. Not all forms of difference are equally legible by the state and these forms of recognition are also contextually and historically contingent with respect to national histories. Middleton argues that the politics of Gorkha identity in the border region of Darjeeling is premised on a highly ambivalent relationship with the actual border. As they seek to project themselves as autochthonous citizens of India, their family histories of migration between Nepal and Darjeeling are rendered ‘unspeakable’ even as kinship (or in this case, its negation) becomes ‘the topos on which “nationness” is mapped’ (Borneman 1992: 19). Legal and social forms of recognition, however, are not always congruent. Middleton writes, ‘[B]order populations like the Gorkhas
may maintain heightened desires for rights, inclusion, and belonging in India, and increased dependency on the state to achieve those aims. Yet the conditions of life at the border often render these groups unable to meet India’s norms of recognition.’

Neither the cartographic practices that informed the marking of these borders in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries nor the bureaucratic practices that went into the implementation of borders were in any way uniform, as in the case of the India–Pakistan border in Kutch (Ibrahim, in this volume). While the nineteenth-century delineation of borders was about jurisdiction and governance, the recognition of national boundaries led to a far more explicit and pronounced reiteration of national identities, particularly in the case of Muslims along the Kutch–Sindh border. This reiteration was however not a pre-given but was the product of administrative debate and arrived at over a period of time.

Cartographic anxiety and state control over its margins should not, however, occlude the fact that the relationship between the centre and the frontier is not always a predictable one. Ethnographic perspectives have contributed to rethinking the state as a site of absolute power. Just as the centre is not always all-powerful or all-knowing, so too we cannot assume the intransigence or opposition of those sites that are geographically remote from the centre (Gupta 2013). Geographical remoteness, in fact, does not merely refer to actual physical distance. Harsh and unforgiving geographies of the mountains, deserts and marshes have been treated to be politically, administratively as well as affectively remote from the centre that is often located in the agrarian plains (Kothiyal 2016). In this collection of borderland studies, we also propose a critical reappraisal of the relationship between the geographic periphery and the concept of marginality. From her study of the location of Kashmir in the Mughal Empire, Maurya (in this volume) argues that ‘remoteness’ was not a permanent or universal category for the empire. Geographically remote regions on the fringes of the empire were ideationally created as ‘core’ through practices of the empire.

The idea of the ‘remote’ has already been unmoored from its geographical and spatial connotations, articulated instead as ‘a sociological concept of relative association or familiarity’ (Harms et al. 2014: 362). The ‘remote’ thus speaks to a certain ‘edginess’ that is about a way of being in the world, a strategically deployed positionality that is less about geographical orientations and more about relative interactions. The ‘remote’ can exist as urban fringe as much as in rugged and physically inaccessible terrain, for instance. The production of ‘remoteness’ is then a ‘process situated in dynamic fields of power’ (Harms et al. 2014: 364) rather than
any objectively existing spatial reality. Similarly, the ‘margin’ is not just exclusion, or opposition to the state, it is ‘those sites that do not so much lie outside the state but rather, like rivers, run through its body’ (Das and Poole 2004: 13). The margin invites us to examine how the state is constantly reinventing its forms of regulation in tandem with other forms of life, rather than to pose the question in terms of state presence or absence, supporting or subverting the state. What constitutes the various forms of state power is itself a question that needs to be answered. Roitman (2004) proposes delinking ‘state power’ from ‘state regulatory authority’, arguing that even when the latter is compromised, it may not always lead to the erosion of the former. She demonstrates that even as new forms of authority emerge—whether merchants or renegade militias—that may challenge the state’s regulatory authority, they do not always usurp power from the state; in fact, through the defragmentation and capillarisation of authority, they may end up consolidating the power of the state. This allows us to locate competing frames of sovereignty even within the analytical contours of the modern state with its rhetorical claims to absolute power.

**MOBILITY AND AFFECT: TOWARDS A DIACHRONIC VIEW OF BORDERLANDS**

Just as the concept of the margin—or border—is delinked from space, this volume also proposes a shift in borderland studies away from a perspective that privileges spatial practices of the state and territorial manifestations of borders. When one moves away from spatial determinism, it allows one to de-singularise the border as more than just a line or a fence or a guard that divides (or connects) people and spaces (Reeves 2014). Uberoi reminds us that the frontier is essentially diachronic: ‘[I]t is the essential nature and diachronic rhythm of the frontier to change in time alternately from a firm dividing line into its opposite, a meeting point, and back again’ (Uberoi 1978: 75).

Similarly, a border also manifests differently across different sites and at different points in time. Middleton (in this volume) argues this for the Gorkhas’ relationship with India and Nepal, and Ghosh (in this volume) demonstrates the same in the context of the India–Bangladesh border. In these terms, the border is not a coherent whole; Reeves suggests that each iteration of the border should be taken on its own terms—these are all different borders, not versions of the same (Reeves 2014: 245). As Reeves argues, rather than ask only whether a (territorial) border is maintained or subverted, the question should instead focus on how it