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ISLAM IN THE TRANS-HIMALAYAN ECUMENE

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This chapter addresses the history and presence of Muslim communities in the Western Himalayan region, stretching across Gilgit-Baltistan in the west towards Ladakh bordering Tibet in the east, with ethnographic examples from the Kargil District of Ladakh. In its focus on the Trans-Himalayas, the scope of this chapter does not include the Kashmir Valley except in relation to the historiography of Islam in Ladakh. Anthropological scholarship focusing on religion in the Trans-Himalayas was for a long time dominated by the study of Buddhism, displaying, as scholars of Ladakh have pointed out, a distinctly Tibetocentric tilt. While hugely valuable for its insights, an orientalist fascination with Tibet and the marketing of Buddhism in the West no doubt played an implicit role in the development of this scholarly direction. For example, Snellgrove and Skorupski (1973: xiii), in their volumes on the *Cultural Heritage of Ladakh*, write,

> Since we are concerned … with Ladakh's cultural heritage, it is with the Buddhists that we are almost exclusively concerned, for it is Buddhist culture which remains typical of Ladakh … Even where it has been largely effaced in the Moslem areas, no higher Islamic culture has come to take its place.

The reiteration of the Middle East as the centre of Islam by Islamic and religious studies scholars too contributed to the elision of the study of Islam in this region from the 'mainstream' Euro-American academy, where it was considered peripheral even to scholarship on Islam in the Indian subcontinent. A notable exception to the silos that the Islamic world and Tibet have been placed in by these bodies of scholarship is a volume on the interactions between the Islamic and Tibetan worlds from the seventh and eighth centuries onward (Akasoy, Burnett, and Yoeli-Tlalim 2011). Since the mid-1980s, this representational lacuna on Islam in the Ladakh region of the Trans-Himalayas gradually began to be filled. This body of scholarship lends insight into the overlapping histories of mobility shaped by trade and religious networks, the material culture of Islam (Gupta 2018), the influence of modernist Islamic reform on ritual life and politics (Pinault 2001; Gupta 2014), and sectarianism and communalisation in relation to the politics of the nation-state (Aggarwal 2004; van Beek 2000, Gupta 2022). Following a summary of the historiography on Islam in the Western Trans-Himalayas, this chapter will focus on the specific locale of Kargil to foreground Islam in the *Trans-Himalayan ecumene*.

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The Trans-Himalayas cover a vast geographic and climatic region that lies in the rain shadow of the high Himalayas – Karakorum, Ladakh, Zangskar, and Kailash mountain ranges – stretching across the borders of Pakistan, India, Nepal, and the Tibet Autonomous Region of China. Large parts of this region were part of a wider Tibetan cultural realm, with Baltistan and Ladakh also known as 'Little Tibet' and 'Middle Tibet', respectively. During the Mughal period, Baltistan was also known as *Tibet e Khurd* (Little Tibet) in Persian, a designation mobilised to attract tourists in contemporary times. After a long era of dispersed sovereignty, Leh, Kargil, and Baltistan were politically and administratively conjoined as a province known as the Ladakh *wazarat* in the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir under Dogra dynastic rule from the mid-19th century until the partition of India. In 1947, Ladakh – comprising Leh and Kargil – was incorporated into Indian-administered Kashmir, while Baltistan became a part of the Northern Areas of Pakistan. Ethnically, people living in the regions of Baltistan and Kargil – the predominantly Muslim parts of the erstwhile Ladakh *wazarat* – are descended from intermarriage between Mongols from Tibet and Dards from Gilgit, who migrated and settled in these parts around the 10th century CE. Dialects of classical Tibetan are spoken across Ladakh and Baltistan, with Balti upheld for its *adab* (refined etiquette) in Kargil. Historically, people across the Trans-Himalayas relied on subsistence agriculture, pastoralism, and trade for their livelihood. From the time of the Dogra rule, their options expanded to include employment in bureaucracy, with jobs in the state administration becoming coveted for the security offered as well as tourism in the post-colonial era.

While Ladakh and Nepal attracted Western scholars for the possibility of studying authentic Tibetan culture in the 1970s, the trajectory of Ladakh studies changed gradually. As van Beek and Pirie (2008: 4) have pointed out: 'It soon became clear that Ladakhi society and culture could not be subsumed under a generic Tibetan cultural or social model'. This shift took place against the backdrop of influential critiques of the Shangri-la syndrome that dominated popular Western thinking on Tibetan culture in highland Asia (Lopez 1998). Lopez's critique was substantiated by ethnographic research that described how tourists and Western scholars of Buddhism at sites such as the Boudhnath stupa in Kathmandu became mediators of notions of authentic Tibetan Buddhist culture (Moran 2004). A travelogue by Andrew Harvey (1983), *A Journey in Ladakh: Encounters with Buddhism*, is one prominent example of this mediating role in the context of Ladakh. Though the anthropology of Ladakh began to question received categories that sought to subsume the region within a Tibetan model (van Beek and Pirie 2008; 8), the study of Ladakhi society and culture in the 1980s predominantly focused on Buddhist Ladakh with interest in topics such as kinship, spirit possession, and agriculture that painted a picture of the region as a 'traditional society' with some scholars nostalgic for a return to 'ancient futures' (Norberg-Hodge 1991). It was only in the late 1980s that Muslims began to receive attention, and then too, Nicola Grist was the only anthropologist who conducted substantial research on Muslims in the Kargil district (see van Beek and Pirie (2008) for a detailed overview of Ladakh studies scholarship). Even as scholars began to acknowledge and include non-Tibetan historical influences on Ladakh's culture from the 1990s, they focused on modern Ladakh and its imbrication with mainland India, and also studied Muslims; research on Kargil remained scant until the early 2000s.

Conversion to Islam

The historiography on conversion to Islam in this region suggests it arrived from multiple directions, gradually over a long period of time.[1] One of the oldest mosques in Ladakh in Shey village (Leh district) is said to have been founded by Mir Syed Ali Hamadani from the Kubrawi

Sufi lineage. According to local legend, he passed through Kashmir en route to Kashgar in 1394 CE (Bray 2005); many Sufis travelled through Ladakh from Central Asia to Kashmir. But some historians argue that Hamadani's presence in Ladakh cannot be established with certainty. Holzwarth (1997), for instance, attributes the early conversion to Islam to Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi around the early 16th century, when he fled to Baltistan from persecution in the Kashmir Valley (Bray 2013). Shahzad Bashir (2003: 249) suggests that the claim that Hamadani brought Islam to Ladakh is part of the projection of later generations of Muslims as they seek to construct an authentic Islamic past. However, there is a general agreement that within the Trans-Himalayas, Baltistan was the first region to enter Islam's fold in a major way from where it spread further to Kargil. Bashir (2003: 256) conjectures that Baltistan's rulers were possibly more open to conversion as it lay on the western-most periphery of Tibetan culture. He suggests that this can be gleaned from the portrayal of the mythic hero Gesar in the popular legend Gesar Saga, much celebrated throughout Tibet and Ladakh, in his portrayal as an invader of Baltistan rather than a local protagonist. Grist (1998: 61) contends that although Western Ladakh had been Buddhist, it was not fully incorporated into the more institutional form of Tibetan Buddhism, which was consolidated in Eastern Ladakh in the 17th century. Most areas of Baltistan and Kargil first became Nurbakhshiya – a messianic mission traced to a Central Asian Sufi hospice – under the influence of Syed Muhammad Nurbakhsh's followers in the early 15th century.[2]

Muhammad Nurbakhsh (d. 1464) sought to override sectarian boundaries within Islam and propagated a 'religious viewpoint rooted in Sufi terminology and practice' that historically came to be represented by Iranian Sufis (Bashir 2003: xiii). The majority of the population converted to Twelver Shi'ism in Kargil under the influence of Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi from the 16th century onwards. Nevertheless, a few Nurbakhshiya pockets continue to exist in Baltistan and Ladakh into the present. Ladakh is also home to Sunni Muslims, some of whom migrated from the Kashmir Valley, and others, known as Argons – born of intermarriage between Ladakhi Buddhist mothers and Central Asian fathers – who came to Ladakh for trade. In addition, Kashmiri Muslims, who traversed the trading networks between Kashmir and Central Asia via Ladakh, also came to settle in Leh. They were granted land by the king of Ladakh to settle in Leh from the early 17th century as they conducted trade on the court's behalf with Tibet and also undertook translation work for communication with the Mughal court in Persian. Kashmiri Muslims were also important intermediaries in the encounter of colonial officials and Christian missionaries with Tibetan Buddhism (Bray 2018). A sizeable community of Tibetan Muslims of Kashmiri origin also settled in Lhasa. By the 20th century, the majority of the Muslim population in Ladakh was Twelver Shi'a concentrated in the Kargil district. Baltistan is home to Shi'as, Sunnis, and Nurbakhshiyas. Buddhists in Ladakh refer to all Sunnis as '*kha-che*' even though the term was originally designated for Tibetan Muslims of Kashmiri origin, while the Shi'as are generically called Baltis, even though Baltis are a particular ethnic group originally from Baltistan (Dollfus 1995).

Place and the Islamic *imaginaire* in Ladakh

Reflecting a history of largely peaceful inter-religious coexistence across the Indian subcontinent, in the past, Buddhists and Muslims in Ladakh 'lived under a single roof' (Sheikh 2009: 137) and 'ate from one plate' (Smith 2013), intermarrying and participating in each other's religious festivals. However, Ladakh did not remain immune to the political communalisation of life in postcolonial India. From the late 1980s, the conflict in the Kashmir Valley escalated with Muslims there demanding independence (*azadi*) from India, and the Hindu right making inroads into national politics. Communal animosity began to appear in Ladakh, too: a decline

in Muslim-Buddhist marriages became an indicator of the weakening of organic social relations between these two communities (Aggarwal 2004). In parallel, within the Muslim community, a consciousness of sectarian identity grew both in Ladakh and Baltistan. In Pakistan, sectarian violence against Shi'as accelerated in the 1980s under Zia-ul-Haq's Sunni Islamisation policies. The hardening of sectarian identities was reflected in the Textbook Controversy (2000–2005) in Gilgit-Baltistan. Constituting nearly 75 per cent of the region's population, Shi'as in these northern areas of Pakistan challenged the public school curriculum's 'sectarianized representations of Islam' that legitimised the ideological basis of Pakistan as a homogenous national community guided by a 'singular belief system, with no sectarian differences' (Ali 2019: 115–123). Such representations, as Nosheen Ali has argued, led to both religious and regional suppression. In Kargil, nascent sectarian consciousness – tied to a long-held perception of being dominated and politically squashed between Sunnis in the Kashmir Valley and Buddhists in Leh – grew stronger with the influence of the Iranian Revolution (1979). The year 1989 marked a turning point for Buddhist-Muslim relations in Ladakh, with the social boycott of Muslims called by Buddhists as part of their demands for regional autonomy from Kashmir. In this context, for the Shi'i community in Leh, in particular, living among a Buddhist majority, ritual occasions such as Muharram and Eid al-Ghadeer became important markers and celebrations of their minorityhood (Singh 2018).

Since the late 1980s, the Buddhists of Ladakh had waged a struggle for autonomy from Kashmir, arguing that the region's development and needs were being eclipsed by the conflict in the Kashmir Valley. This struggle came to fruition with the (illegal) revocation of Article 370 of the Constitution of India – which had granted a form of limited autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) since the partition – in August 2019. The province of J&K was bifurcated, and Ladakh was declared a union territory to be governed directly by the central government in Delhi. The Muslims of Kargil had never supported the demand for union territory, for they feared further marginalisation vis-à-vis the Buddhists, with a Hindu right government in power at the national level that had strategically courted the Buddhists of Ladakh. This further deepened the tensions between Buddhists and Muslims and Leh and Kargil. Neither the historical conversion to Islam nor growing communal polarisation has, however, diminished the attachment of Muslims in Ladakh to a Trans-Himalayan ecumene. It remains integral to their sense of place and has been translated into their Islamic *imaginaire*. This is illustrated in the realm of material culture and regional practices that in the past had been essentialised to Tibetan Buddhism in external representations of Ladakh and Tibet. I propose the concept of a *Trans-Himalayan ecumene* rather than a religious or linguistic *cosmopolis* to go beyond the linguistic realm and textual modes of transmission to include everyday regional practices that have been historically shaped as much by the landscape and ecology of the Trans-Himalayas as by Bon and Tibetan Buddhist belief systems. The presence of Islam within the Trans-Himalayan ecumene also brings to the fore the encounter between Indo-Persian and Tibetan worlds that have received scant attention in the extant scholarship on the region. The influences of 'Islamicate forms of self-representation' in Ladakh predate the conversion to Islam in this region. Art historian Finbarr Barry Flood (2013) discerned both Indic and Persianate elements in the murals in the shrines of Alchi, one of the oldest monastic complexes in Ladakh, which he suggests, demonstrates the receptivity of 'non-Muslim elites' living outside the Islamic world to its popular forms and modes of representation in the 11th and 12th centuries. Sartorial conventions and iconography seen in the Alchi paintings, Flood argues, are part of a broader 'transcultural horizon' of Islamic, Buddhist, and Christian elites who lived on the margins of major Islamic polities. As a key hub along the Silk Route, Ladakh had for a long time been connected to Central Asia and Tibet. The Central Asian Museum in Leh and the Munshi Aziz Bhat Museum of Central Asian and Kargil

Trade Artefacts in Kargil house collections of trade goods to memorialise this trading past and the 'cosmopolitan' ethos of the region as a 'cultural contact zone' (Fewkes 2012: 262). Shared objects, spaces, and practices that cut across contemporary religious and political divides are not just a relic of the past, but inhere in lived traditions. This is illustrated by examples in the realms of material, literary, and wedding cultures.

Material culture

If you were to travel to Ladakh or Tibet, your hosts would most likely greet you with cream-coloured silken scarves that would be placed around your neck. Called '*khatags*' in Tibetan, these are honorific scarves used throughout the Trans-Himalayas in various ceremonial and social contexts. Though typically printed or embroidered with the eight auspicious Buddhist symbols, these continue to be used in various Muslim contexts ranging from weddings and retirement ceremonies of government officials to places of worship, where they can be found tied to the pillars of mosques or on *minbars* (pulpit) in Shi'a *matam-serais* (spaces for Muharram gatherings). I have even seen images of Ayatollahs Khomeini and Khamenei (supreme leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran) adorned with *khatags* in mosques and restaurants. Along with Ayatollah Sistani in Iraq, images of these supreme leaders of Shi'as globally are ubiquitous in Kargil and Shi'i spaces of Leh district. *Khatags* are thus a common 'inter-religious cultural symbol for both Ladakhi Muslims and Buddhists' (Singh 2018: 79) that one would immediately encounter as one example of the material culture of the Trans-Himalayan ecumene.

Historically, mosque architecture in Ladakh used the same materials – mud bricks and stones – that were typically used for the construction of all buildings across the Trans-Himalayas. Mosques in Ladakh were typically flat-roofed square or rectangular buildings with wooden pillars and timber lacings with decorative motifs that are said to have resembled the palaces and mosques of Baltistan. In contemporary Ladakh, many of these old mosques have been razed to the ground to make way for concrete structures of cement, adorned with domes and minarets, which were rarely seen in the past. In some cases, old religious structures constructed from mud bricks and stone are not entirely rebuilt, but the old is instead enclosed by the new. This can be seen in the case of the shrine of Mir Hashim, an Islamic preacher in the village of Karpo Khar, which is an important site of local pilgrimage in the Suru Valley in the Kargil district. Renovated in 2007, the inner shrine, which houses the tomb of Mir Hashim, was originally a simple mud structure with a small wooden door. The renovation enclosed it with an outer mausoleum painted white on a raised platform with two minarets and a green dome. The outer façade of the mausoleum with curved archways was decorated with floral motifs and calligraphy. The older structure bears the ethos of an inner sanctum sanctorum, where people, especially women, read the Qur'an, pray, and make supplications. Even if new mosques and renovated sacred sites are the pride of a village, not all old mosques have been destroyed; though less-used, several survive and are included in the processional routes of Muharram and *Asad Ashura* within villages.[3] Local sacred geographies link material inheritances with new sites that, in their design, are inspired by architectural styles from the Middle East. The mosque in Chigtan (Kargil district), located below the ruins of Chigtan Castle, is considered to be emblematic within Ladakh of traditional mosque architecture in the past. Conservationists and historians cite it as evidence of the composite culture of the region, for it brings together Tibetan Buddhist architecture, Central Asian styles, and temple carvings in Himachal Pradesh. The wooden pillars inside the Chigtan Mosque are carved with the motif of a dragon, the frame of the doorway with a 'lotus' design and other creatures, and floral motifs. Scholars have conjectured that the presence of various creatures may 'reflect local beliefs in a supernatural world inhabited by a wide range of deities and spirits' (Khan et al.

2014: 267–268). This Ladakhi cosmology has not disappeared from the lifeworlds of its Muslim inhabitants but adapted to Islam and offers another example of Islam in the Trans-Himalayan ecumene.

Literary culture

Another sphere where the encounter between Indo-Persian and Tibetan worlds that I argue must be included within the Trans-Himalayan ecumene is that of musical and literary genres. Many Muslims in Ladakh bemoan the gradual decline in the culture of writing, singing, and sending of folk songs (*glu*) in Tibetan dialect as a form of encoded communication across distances with the advent of Islam. Though Buddhists have claimed folk songs as an authentic marker of their cultural identity in contemporary cultural politics, 'the performance practices, musical structures, form, and textual content of songs clearly indicates a fusion of characteristics of Middle Eastern, Balti, Central Asian, and Tibetan origin' (Dinnerstein 2013: iv). Furthermore, traditional musical instruments in Ladakh – the *surna* (double reed) and the *daman* (kettledrum) – are of Persian and Middle Eastern provenance, respectively. These instruments were historically played by a caste of musicians known as the *Mon*; their name derives from *Kharmon* (*Khar mon*, musicians of the *khar*, or palace). These musicians are said to have accompanied the Balti Princess Gyal Khatun – the legendary Muslim wife of Jamyang Namgyal, who was the king of Suru Kartse from 1660 to 1700 – as part of her dowry (Sheikh 2010). Such royal intermarital alliances between Buddhists and Muslim kings of Ladakh and Baltistan that were 'a prevalent feature of ancient diplomacy' in Tibet and the Northwestern Himalayas are depicted in folk songs on the birth and accomplishments of kings, lords, queens, and noble ladies (Halkias 2011: 231). Muslims had therefore been integral to the development of the music and literary culture of Ladakh.

While efforts have been made to preserve this repertoire of folk songs, other genres of literary production in Tibetan dialects continued to remain a vibrant sphere of creativity, source of pleasure, and spiritual solace in Muslim Ladakh and Baltistan. A rich corpus of religious poetry – *marsiyas* (elegies composed to recall the events of Karbala), *nohas* (dirges recited during Muharram), *qasidas* (odes to the Prophet and Shi'i imams) written in Balti dialect can be found across these regions.[4] Such *majlis* (religious gathering) music is part of the larger repertoire of forms of Persianate poetry. According to Sohnen-Thieme (2007: 3), who conducted research on traditions of Balti literature in Baltistan, the composition of *marsiyas* cannot be traced further back than the first half of the 19th century. These new literary genres exhibit the influence of Persianate and Arabic poetry in both form and content. Traces of trading contact between Tibet and the Islamic world predating the conversion to Islam in Ladakh and Baltistan can be found in Arabic and Persian loan words in Tibetan (Tlalim 2011: 8). Such inclusion of loan words became more obvious in these Muslim poetic genres, especially when referring to nouns and religious figures and events. These words are grammatically treated like other Balti words, for they take 'case and plural endings, and determinative and derivative suffixes' (Sohnen-Thieme 2007). Such writing in hybrid forms of language was, of course, not unique to this area but confirmed patterns of literary transformation instigated by conversion in other parts of the world. Aggarwal (2004: 200) cites a well-known Balti poet in Kargil, who told her that *ghazals* in Balti were in the past called *khuda'iglu* (songs of god), thus including them within the folk song tradition of the region. Poets in Kargil narrate poetry in which Balti lines are interspersed alternately with Persian. As in the case of the 'Arabic cosmopolis' in the Southeast Asian Archipelago (Ricci 2011: 154), where Arabic did not influence Tamil, Malay, and Javanese directly, Persian was an important intermediary language in Baltistan and Ladakh, too. It had for a long time been a language through which information about Tibet was transmitted via Kashmiris (Bray 2012).

The recitation and singing of qasidas, naths, and ghazals are not restricted to religious gatherings in the Shi'i ritual calendar or to circles of intellectuals who share poetry at *mushaira* sessions that were patronised by the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages. Old Balti songs have been set to pop music as part of efforts undertaken to preserve the Balti language (Magnusson 2011); these can be heard in restaurants, buses, and shared taxis. Religious music is also played and sung during weddings. Though these have replaced folk songs, various other wedding rituals among Muslims in Kargil continue to be embedded in the region's cultural traditions in combination with influences from Kashmir and mainland India.[5]

Weddings

The key sequential events that constitute the celebration of a wedding (*bag-ston*) remain similar across Muslim and Buddhist Ladakh, albeit with modifications to accommodate Muslim proscriptions. Wedding celebrations begin with the practice of the groom and bride's friends throwing individual night-time prenuptial parties for them. At the girl's party, called the *bomo-khangsa* (*bomo* – girl; *khang* – room), the bride is decorated with henna and bangles; it is a merry affair with much singing, dancing, and teasing. Both the groom and bride parties include dancing in the slow, swirling traditional way in small circular groups, a style found across the Himalayas. On the day of the wedding, a procession (*nyopa*) accompanies the groom to fetch the bride. En route to the bride's home, relatives of the bride set up small tables to offer them refreshments, a practice that in Kargil is called *chai nikalna* in Urdu (literally to 'take out tea'). At each point along the route, the maternal uncle (*azhang*) of the bride pays the relatives who serve these refreshments some money before the groom's procession is allowed to proceed. This ritual recalls that of *stap-chang*, before the advent of Islam, where alcohol was served by the maternal uncle to relatives. At the bride's house, the groom bows before the bride's parents, and when he reaches the door of their house, her kin ritually block the way until the groom offers some money. A song is sung to mark his entry into the bride's home. According to Dinnerstein (2013: 67), pre-Buddhist traits can be discerned in such 'door songs' (*sgoglu*) sung when the friends of the groom arrive to 'purchase' the bride and continue to be iconic in contemporary Ladakh.

In wealthier Muslim families, it is also customary for the *nyopa* to give one goat (known as *makbar*) on being welcomed. A custom specific to Purig (Kargil's ancient name) is that of sending a representative (*snyan-gor)* from the bride's side to the groom's family prior to the wedding to lay down stipulations on the *nyopa*, such as the number of people and the route to be taken. While the *nyopa* and invited guests feast, the bride is seated demurely in a separate room and constantly accompanied by a companion (*skyalkhan-mo*) who also escorts her to her marital home. At the time of departure, the groom's representative (*kra-shispa*)[6] ceremonially goes to get the bride. He carries a symbolic set of arrows wrapped in white cloth with him all through the day and stays by the side of the groom.[7] At the time of departure, the bride engages in loud ritual wailing, sometimes even fainting with grief, a ritual lamentation (*skyin-'jug*) at the departure ceremony, a practice found among Buddhists, too. On the way back, the tea is 'taken out' for the bride by the relatives of the groom, who receive ritual money from his maternal uncle. Upon returning to the groom's home, the *nyopa* perform a ritual dance, a custom found among Muslims and Buddhists. All these wedding rituals were in the past accompanied by specific folk songs, which have been replaced by *qasidas* and *naths* among Muslim families. The labour for the wedding, such as cooking and serving guests, is undertaken by the *pha-spun*, which literally means 'father's brothers', a kin group that is flexible depending on 'residence and cordial relations between families' (Aggarwal 2004: 163) or a group of volunteers from the neighbourhood (*sherba*) in Kargil.

There is no doubt great variation in this broad customary sequence of wedding rituals, events, and practices that I have described across Muslim and Buddhist Ladakh as well as between different ethnic groups among the Muslims of Kargil, not to mention differences along class lines. The similarities, however, underscore the resilience of regional traditions. Some of these hold traces of Ladakh's pre-Buddhist past and are practised in modified forms to adapt to religious proscriptions and beliefs across Muslim-Buddhist religious lines.

Concluding remarks

These ethnographic examples of the Trans-Himalayan ecumene testify to the importance of *place* in the highlands of Asia. Sense(s) of place are defined as much by people's emotional attachments to them as 'analyzed histories' (Massey 1993: 145). Though hemmed in by high passes and mountain ranges, even remote places in the Trans-Himalayas have for long been enmeshed in a network of connections across the highlands and to the plains. Interactions between a wider Tibetan cultural area that includes Ladakh and Baltistan and Islamic/Persian worlds have been integral to the Trans-Himalayan ecumene. Vernacular traditions of construction, literary and artistic production and propitiation practices to ensure wellbeing in the region historically have been incorporated into the Islamic *imaginaire* among Muslim communities in Ladakh. Islam in the Western Himalayas has both adapted to the land and regional cultures but also enriched it through its influences. It echoes the largely peaceful conversion to and dynamism of 'Islam as a lived tradition' (Tayob 2017) in other frontier regions of the Indian subcontinent (Eaton 1993). Despite the drawing up of borders and rigidifying religious and ethnic boundaries, Muslim life worlds in the Trans-Himalayan ecumene remain a place of ongoing negotiations between the past and present that are discernible in traces, fragments, ruins, but also everyday practices.

Notes

1 See Bray (2013) for a valuable and succinct overview of the historiography of Islam in Ladakh.
2 The Nurbakhshiya sect occupies a liminal space between the two major sects of Islam (Shi'a and Sunni) and in contemporary Ladakh is claimed by both Shi'as and Sunnis (see Bashir (2003) for a detailed history).
3 Asad Ashura is an event held to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the founding figure of Shi'ism, in the rural areas of Kargil and Baltistan. It is organised during the hottest time of the summer as a tribute to the heat and thirst experienced by Imam Husayn and his followers at the Battle of Karbala as they defended themselves from the army of the Ummayd caliphs in 680 CE. It is held in addition to Muharram, the month in the Islamic calendar in which the battle of Karbala took place, a foundation of Shi'i devotional rituals.
4 These have been compiled and published by Akhon Ashgar Ali Basharat of Karkichu village (Kargil).
5 See Aggarwal (2004: 196) on a *maulvi* (cleric) who refused to perform wedding rituals where music and dance were indulged in. The 'erosion of traditional song and instrumental repertoires is also linked to rebellion against the caste system' (Dinnerstein 2013: 100; see Aggarwal (2004), chapter 4 on the musician castes).
6 This term that I heard in Kargil links to *tashis pa glu* (auspicious songs) (Dinnerstein 2013: 186).
7 See Day (1989: 135) on ritual arrows and the significance of the 'wedding arrow' among Buddhists.

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