Intimate Suspects

Politics of Fieldwork and Intimacy under State Surveillance

Pascale Schild

Introduction

Unexpected and intimidating encounters with state surveillance are certainly not what anthropologists would wish for their fieldwork. In many research contexts, however, anthropologists must devote considerable time to complying with the regulations and demands of intelligence agencies. Moreover, they must endure and emotionally navigate the uncertainties and anxiety that come along with experiences of being shadowed. The usual reason for state surveillance is that (foreign) anthropologists arouse suspicion and are seen as potentially dangerous figures or even spies. In this chapter, I seek to explain how suspicion relates those who monitor with those who are monitored. I want to trace the ambivalent and intimate workings of mistrust and suspicion in the everyday relationships and interactions between the anthropologist and her 'shadows', using my own example as a woman researcher in the 'disputed territory' of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.

Martin Sökefeld – my PhD supervisor – and some of his other PhD students also felt the presence of 'agencies' or 'agency *wale*', as they are called by people in Pakistan and Kashmir, during their fieldwork in Gilgit-Baltistan (Grieser 2016; Sökefeld/Strasser 2016). Interactions with intelligence officers may represent the opposite of what this *Festschrift* for Martin explores as anthropologists' 'hobbies' in the field. However, I

would claim that from an epistemological perspective, Martin did not understand his fieldwork hobbies, such as hiking, photography and truck art, as radically different from his encounters with state surveillance in the field. Rather, in his work, he fundamentally thinks of both the pleasant and the less pleasant moments of fieldwork, as instances in which the 'multi-sided ethnographer' co-creates knowledge with the people he interacts with, whether they are interlocutors he chooses or ones who choose him. For the multi-sided ethnographer, there are hardly any events or feelings that take place 'beyond research'.

The blurred lines between work and leisure (or 'hobbies'), professional and personal life, are crucial to understanding the ideal and practice of ethnographic research as near-complete immersion in a certain social and political context. At the same time, however, it is this immersion that often brews mistrust and suspicion. As Martin Sökefeld and Sabine Strasser note in their introduction to one of the few publications on anthropological fieldwork "under suspicious eyes" (2016: 159), the practices of participant observation often do not correspond to the prevailing image of a 'scientist' and their professional work:

> In many countries, social science is largely identified with conducting surveys, and as such a 'scientist' that does not work with questionnaires and spends most of her or his time simply hanging out with people does not appear to be scientific at all. In an environment deeply infused with mistrust, the conclusion is not far-fetched that the self-proclaimed scientist who apparently does not really do science is, probably, a spy. (Sökefeld/Strasser 2016: 164)

Given such an image of science, ethnographic fieldwork is barely recognisable as 'work' but rather conforms to how people, observing and being observed by an anthropologist, would expect a researcher to spend their 'free time'. What may seem merely a curiosity and perhaps strange and amusing to some of our research partners must almost inevitably appear suspicious to the agents and citizens of a 'security state' like Pakistan, where military-shaped nationalism constructs the nation as being under threat (Ali 2013; 2019). But there is yet another

reason. In many ways, ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation resemble the secretive practices of intelligence agents (Verdery 2012; Sökefeld/Strasser 2016). The similarity between anthropological research and intelligence work is aptly depicted by John Borneman and Joseph Masco:

> Both involve looking, listening, eavesdropping, taking notes, recording conversations, snapping photos, and establishing trusted confidants. We call it participant-observation; they call it spying. We seek informants; they seek informers. Both intend to understand and create a representation of someone else's reality. (Borneman/Masco 2015: 781)

However, while this similarity explains the suspicion that anthropologists may arouse in a certain political context, it does not tell us much about how this suspicion shapes the lives and practices of both anthropologists and the intelligence agents monitoring them. As I argue in this chapter, suspicion creates and maintains a social relationship between anthropologists and 'their' intelligence officers, forging an uncertain bond of intimacy between them. In other words, suspicion and the blurred lines between professional and private life relate anthropologists and their 'shadows' to one another as intimate suspects rather than socially distant opponents. As an anthropologist in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, I was not the only one whose boundaries between professional and personal life were blurred (in the name of my research). In a similar way, one of my 'shadows', an intelligence agent from Pakistan, surrendered the separation of his professional life from his and his family's private life (in the name of his duty, my safety and the safety of his country). This is how we invaded each other's lives and how 'the other' was experienced as both suspicious and familiar, vulnerable and threatening, caring and unpredictable.

Uncertain and intimidating encounters with state surveillance are not merely scary interruptions or, at best, annoying sideshows to anthropological research. Rather, as anthropologists we need to think through such encounters to deepen our understanding of political power rela-

tions and how they shape not only our interlocutors' lives, but also our own practices as researchers. By pointing to my ambivalent and complicated role and positionality as an anthropologist in the field, and its wider political context of 'military nationalism' and (post-)coloniality, my relationships and interactions with intelligence agents show how I was both exposed to and part of local power relations. At times, the uncertain presence of intelligence agencies in anthropological research also points us to the ways our research partners may experience our presence as anthropologists in their lives.

Blurred lines: 'Work' and 'free time' research

"Come and visit my home, whenever you are free (*mere ghar a jao jab free ho*)". I frequently received such invitations from my women neighbours, who were also my research partners, when I passed their houses on my way to the city centre, where I had 'some work' (*kuch kam*) to do, for example meeting and interviewing a local state official. My neighbours distinguished my work from my free time in a way that seemed at odds with how I saw this distinction myself, i.e., as largely non-existent. The time spent with families in their homes was as much part of my research as my frequent visits to state authorities in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), one of the two parts of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir (the other being Gilgit-Baltistan). Tracing local and translocal politics of relief and reconstruction in the everyday lives of survivors of the 2005 earthquake, my work in AJK drew on research both within and outside the political domains of disaster government and bureaucracy (cf. Schild 2019; 2022). The processes of reconstruction and the distribution of relief by state authorities were often not transparent to people (including me) and were surrounded by speculation and rumours. My research with women and their families was aimed at understanding how this non-transparency of the state and political authority in AJK manifested in people's practices and struggles to rebuild and reshape their homes and lives after the earthquake. Moreover, I sought to place and understand my interlocutors' lives and struggles in the context of the so-

cial and political uncertainties extending beyond the disaster and related to Kashmir's (post-)colonial past and present and Pakistan's rule in AJK.

I had spoken several times about my work with all my neighbours, and they were aware that learning about their everyday lives was an important part of my research. However, while we were "hanging out" (Geertz 1998: 69) together, my role as researcher often faded into the background, not only for my research partners, I believe, but also for me. While my professional role extended into (other people's) leisure time, the reverse was also true: I sometimes found myself in a leisure mood and in the role of a friend while hanging out with neighbours 'doing research' (or what else was I doing?). Only at some points during the visit or later – for example, when I took my notebook out of my bag to write something down, or when I had returned home in the evening and completed my fieldnotes about the day's events – did I feel myself turning into something like a 'professional' researcher again.

It has been noted many times in anthropology that the boundaries between work and leisure, professional and personal life, are often blurred in and through ethnographic fieldwork. Classical fieldwork, practiced and idealised as immersion in a place and a social context (cf. Malinowski 1922), involves the researcher as a whole person, replete with all their feelings, emotions, privileges and vulnerabilities (Behar 1996; Davies 2010; Thajib et al. 2019). In the field, it is often not clear where an anthropologist's work ends and their free time begins – any more than their analytical mind can be neatly separated from their positionality and embodied research practice (Berry et al. 2015).

And yet, as researchers, we experience boundaries between work and leisure that structure our practices and everyday lives in the field. In this way, the invitation "come and visit my home, when you are free" shaped my work and life as an anthropologist, creating a sense that it was 'free time' I was spending when hanging out and doing research with women interlocutors in their homes. Over time, I therefore came to experience and think of this part of my work as my 'free time' or 'private life' research.

This shows, I believe, that ethnographic fieldwork is not only about the adaptation and immersion of the anthropologist in a social context, but also about the context immersing into the researcher and their body.

The way in which I experienced the boundaries between work and leisure highlights my embodiment of local power relations and gendered norms of *purdah*, i.e., the separation of women from men, the home (*ghar*) from the outside, the city or the bazaar, and private from public. Women in AJK usually do not leave their house or neighbourhood (*mohallah*) alone and unaccompanied by a male relative, or, if they do, it is not without a good reason such as going to work or school (and certainly not for leisure), and they always return home before sunset.

Image 1: A group of women sitting together in the morning sun and chatting at a neighbour's home.

Photo by Pascale Schild

As both a researcher and a foreigner, I was able to transgress many of the gendered norms to which my interlocutors were exposed. The position of the foreign researcher gave me greater freedom as a woman in AJK. This was the privileged position of the white woman (*gori*), one that is closely related to that of the coloniser, namely the British (*angrez*) in South Asia. However, my privilege did not always position me outside local power relations. People's expectations of my role as both a woman and

a researcher/student shaped my everyday practices, and I both adapted to and embodied these expectations. As a result, I ended up regularly visiting my women neighbours and friends, not only to do research, but also to spend my 'free time' with them, to relax and emotionally recover after work when I returned home to the *mohallah* from the city centre, where I had been talking mostly to men in public offices.

My embodied adaptation to local gendered norms and related boundaries between work and leisure, home and the city, points to a specific culture of surveillance that women – and foreigners in particular – are exposed to in AJK. Anna Grieser (2016) experienced such gendered surveillance in Gilgit-Baltistan, albeit in a much more extensive way. By enforcing patriarchal norms, and thus restricting the mobility of foreign women researchers, intelligence officers "aim[ed] at both monitoring the foreigner *and* controlling the female" (Grieser 2016: 190). In AJK as well, forms of transgression and difference arouse suspicion and are closely watched, not only by local communities and the police, but also by various Pakistani intelligence agencies operating in the region. I adapted to the local norms and practices of *purdah* because I did not want to attract any more attention, especially from men and intelligence agents, than I already did as a foreign, unmarried woman in AJK. I dressed in *shalwar qameez* and tried to do my work outside the neighbourhood as straightforwardly as possible. When I walked in the street, I hastened my steps and lowered my head, and when I spoke to strangers, I avoided eye contact and limited the conversation to what was necessary. In this way, I tried not only to meet the moral expectations imposed on women, given their role in society, but also to protect myself from harassment and assault that might result from disregarding the local patriarchal order. The more I immersed myself in the place where I worked and lived, the more I experienced 'my' home and neighbourhood as familiar and safe, in contrast to the uncertain outside and suspicious anonymity of the public, the city and the bazaar.

The opposition between the home and the public is a cultural construction reproducing gendered norms and inequalities. The idealisation of the home as the caring and safe place for women and children ignores the silent suffering and violence, including harassment and

assault, women often experience in this place (Schild 2021). And yet, if there is one space where women can rest, feel safe and have fun with others, it is in each other's homes. This is how I came to experience my interlocutors' homes, too, and where I went to spend my free time, to hang out with neighbours and friends, to chat, joke and laugh together, to watch TV, to take a nap, to care and share in the lives of others, to drink tea and have lunch or to go out visiting other neighbours' or relatives' homes. Research turns into leisure, and leisure into research. In the shared moments of pleasure and excitement, but also of boredom, sadness and worry, emotional bonds of affection are created that also frequently turn research partners into dear friends. This makes it even more impossible to discern where the 'work' of anthropologists ends and their 'free time' begins. The point, however, is perhaps not so much that boundaries between work and leisure do not exist in ethnographic research but that they are fluid and constantly shifting – clearly drawn in certain situations and left blurry in others.

Pakistan's military nationalism and politics of surveillance and suspicion in AJK

While an ethnographer's role is multi-faceted as well as contradictory and difficult to grasp, not only for themself, but also for their research partners, to whom they may both become a friend and remain a stranger, it is often also a suspicious role. This is especially true for a 'disputed territory' like AJK where foreigners (but also local Kashmiris) are seen as potential spies and are therefore closely monitored by various special branches of the police and civil and military intelligence agencies, the most prominent and powerful of which is Pakistan's military Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

Pakistan's surveillance in AJK illustrates the ongoing conditions of coloniality that structure politics and power relations in the region. AJK is part of the Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India, and it is under the control of Pakistan. The region's relationship with Pakistan embodies the historical predicament of the Kashmir dispute, i.e., it is am-

bivalent and reveals both the political marginalisation of AJK within the Pakistani nation-state and the importance of this region in sustaining Pakistan's military-shaped nationalism, with India as the aggressive and dangerous enemy that constantly threatens the existence of the Islamic nation. Pakistan's "saviour nationalism" (Ali 2019: 16) in relation to Kashmir holds that, in contrast to the parts of Kashmir across the 'border' – the military *Line of Control* (LoC) – AJK is 'free' (*azad*) from Indian occupation. However, this 'freedom' has come in the form of great political and military dependency on, and domination by, Pakistan (Snedden 2012).

AJK – like Gilgit-Baltistan, the other part of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir – is neither an autonomous state nor a province of Pakistan but a disputed, and therefore highly militarised, region shaped by processes of "postcolonial colonialism" (Sökefeld 2005: 939). In these borderlands and domains of ambivalence, Pakistan's political and military rule in the name of 'national security' is revealed by, among other things, a distinctive culture of surveillance and suspicion (Ali 2013; 2019).

Historically, the emergence of AJK is linked to politics during colonial times, which resisted autocratic rule in the former state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and related discrimination against Muslim subjects. In the turmoil of the partition of British India in 1947, Kashmiri Muslims in the southwest, the south of today's AJK, started an armed uprising against the Maharaja of J&K, who had ruled under the auspices of the British and was yet to decide about the future of the state. To end autocratic rule, the political leaders of the Kashmiri uprising deposed the Maharaja and formed the rival 'Provisional Azad Government' of J&K. The Maharaja turned to India for military support to suppress this local struggle for *azadi* (freedom) and subsequently declared J&K's accession to India. The resulting war between Pakistan, supporting the Kashmiri freedom fighters, and India ended in 1948 with a UN-negotiated ceasefire line that later became the LoC, dividing J&K into Indian-controlled J&K and Ladakh, and Pakistan-controlled AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan (Snedden 2012; Hayat 2020).

Although the 'provisional' AJK government at times favoured accession to Pakistan, the Pakistani government has always refused to recognise AJK as a province of Pakistan, as the region's integration into

the nation-state would undermine Pakistan's claim to the entire J&K territory (Snedden 2012). At the same time, neither Pakistan nor the UN recognises AJK as a sovereign state and alternative government for J&K. The UN has referred to AJK only as a provisional 'local authority', while Pakistan, with the consent of the local Kashmiri leaders, has taken control over all matters of the state relating to defence, foreign policy, negotiations with the UN and Gilgit-Baltistan. To this day, Pakistan claims to be protecting AJK from the Indian threat and supporting the local state temporarily until the people of Kashmir – through a UN-led referendum – determine the political future of the entire J&K state, including AJK. In practice, however, Pakistan has integrated and dominated AJK through different forms of bureaucratic, constitutional and military domination (Snedden 2012; Hayat 2020).

Moreover, in its role as (temporary) protector of AJK, Pakistan often uses this claim as a justification for its political and military presence in the region. Indeed, without its financial support and political protection, the Azad government – established initially as a war council – would not have been able to survive and run its own local state beyond the ceasefire. At the same time, however, local people are suspicious, with their loyalty to Pakistan being constantly called into question, mostly because of the possibility of propagating Kashmir's independence (cf. Snedden 2012). Ultimately, this suspicion of Kashmiris has led to Pakistan's continued control and surveillance of the local state, society and politics in AJK through intelligence agencies, with agents hailing mostly from Punjab or other parts of Pakistan, and locals serving as informers. The culture of suspicion and surveillance that Nosheen Ali (2013; 2019) notes for Gilgit-Baltistan essentially exists in AJK as well:

> The military-intelligence regime accomplishes its rule in the region not only by rendering its citizens suspect and using this suspicion to further its control, but also by promoting suspicion among citizens and hence disrupting local political solidarity and resistance against the military regime. Apart from suspected subjects, it thus also produces suspicious subjects. (Ali 2013: 109)

Apart from creating mistrust among Kashmiris (and towards foreigners), as anyone could be a potential spy and informer, Pakistan also resorts to other mechanisms of domination and control. By 'lending' officers to AJK's administration, for example, the government in Islamabad can appoint loyal Pakistanis to the most influential political positions in AJK, including the chief secretary, who acts as the intermediary between local government and the administration (Snedden 2012). Moreover, AJK's politicians and officials are bound by the constitution to ensure loyalty to the political ideology of Kashmir's accession to Pakistan. The requirement to sign a declaration of loyalty has regularly silenced and prevented candidates from pro-independence groups from contesting elections and seeking state employment in AJK (Snedden 2012; Mahmud 2021).

Foreigners are exposed to a similar regime of suspicion and surveillance, as well as additional regulations and monitoring. Unlike Kashmiris and Pakistanis, for example, they must obtain a non-objection-certificate (NOC) from Pakistan's Ministry of Interior to travel to AJK. When I travelled by public transport, the bus was usually stopped at the border crossing between Pakistan and AJK. Officers checked the vehicle for suspicious passengers, and as a white woman, I often attracted the attention of the vigilant officers, who would ask me to get off the bus and follow them to a nearby barrack. There, they checked my passport and papers, including my visa and NOC. They asked me why I was travelling to AJK and where I was staying in Muzaffarabad. Then they took my picture and wrote down my details in a thick notebook. I was also sometimes checked on the street or at my home in Muzaffarabad. Since various civil and military intelligence agencies operate in AJK, it remained mostly unclear to me whether it was always the same agencies who checked me, why they kept checking me and the same papers again and again, and whether the checks were spontaneous or planned in order to intimidate me and the people with whom I worked and lived. Usually, the officers explained that it was all for my safety and that they were only doing their duty.

In AJK's ambivalent relationship with Pakistan, the lines between protection and control, care and suspicion are often blurred. Moreover,

the country's national security concerns regarding foreigners are multiple and complicated and relate not only to the enmity with India, but also to the imperialist politics of the US. These concerns range from abductions of tourists by Islamist groups, to operations by foreign intelligence agents in the Kashmir dispute, Afghanistan/Pakhtun-US relations and the so-called 'war on terrorism', all of which undermine Pakistan's national sovereignty. While I was doing my fieldwork in AJK, on January 27, 2011, Raymond Davis, who worked for the US Embassy in Pakistan and was later exposed as a CIA agent, murdered two young men on a motorbike in the streets of Lahore. However, amidst large public protests, Davis was released and returned to the US, thus avoiding prosecution by Pakistan's judiciary. Only a short time thereafter, on May 2, 2011, a special US Navy Seals commando tracked down Osama Bin Laden and killed him and four other people at his hideout in Abbottabad in Pakistan. The multiplicity of security concerns makes it impossible to discern whose safety is being maintained when foreigners like me are monitored: mine, that of the people of AJK or that of Pakistan and/or its military-intelligence regime.

Anthropologists, intelligence agents and research ethics

The uncanny and opaque presence of intelligence officers in my fieldwork in AJK sheds a rare, penetrating light not only on my research partners' everyday lives under suspicious eyes, but also on my conflicting and uncertain role as an ethnographer in the context of both territorial conflict with India and the 'war on terrorism' by the Global North. As a security state, Pakistan, through its military, dominates AJK, but at the same time it is dominated by US imperialism and global geopolitics. Therefore, both my presence as an anthropologist and that of agencies (due to my presence) must at times be experienced by interlocutors and other people around me as opaque and potentially threatening. Who is this person? What is she doing? And why?

As anthropologists, we have more in common with intelligence agents than we would like to admit. Martin Sökefeld often hinted at this

affinity when he jokingly claimed that anthropologists would also make good intelligence agents. One might counter that the former are bound by research ethics and obliged to be open and honest with their research partners and do them no harm (AAA 2012), yet history shows how colonial and imperial regimes have repeatedly used anthropologists and their knowledge to dominate local communities. It is no coincidence that the debate on research ethics in anthropology took shape in the late 1960s, when it came to public attention that the US military had planned to enlist anthropologists for research supporting counterinsurgency operations in Latin America (Sökefeld 2022; Sökefeld/Strasser 2016). The knowledge created by anthropologists is both potentially valuable and potentially dangerous for a "delusional" (Ali 2019: 6) state with high military spending for its national security, depending on who they work (and spy) for. It is therefore hardly surprising that foreign researchers in Pakistan are monitored by intelligence agencies. For instance, what I uncover in my research could be destabilising for Pakistan's rule in AJK. But my knowledge could also be of value to the ISI and be used to track down and arrest local Kashmiri critics of Pakistan. At the same time, the everyday practices and personal intentions of intelligence agents working on the ground and at the lower levels of bureaucratic hierarchies may influence surveillance in unexpected ways. In other words, as anthropologists, we often do not know how our knowledge is – or will – be used, nor whether our publications are read at all.

From the perspective of research ethics, however, my obligation to be transparent with the people I interact with for my research turned out to be very complicated when I was confronted with intelligence agents who questioned me about my research and interlocutors. I especially recall the visit of two officers who pretended to be journalists and visited me at my home in Muzaffarabad for an interview about my work. At first, I wanted to be as open with them as possible and to share my knowledge with the local Kashmiri community they claimed to represent. Moreover, I did not want to hide anything, so as not to be suspected of being a spy or to reinforce such a suspicion. When the visitors took out their pens and notebooks and started asking questions in English, I soon realised that I was not interacting with journalists. They did not make much ef-

fort to hide the fact that they were agents but asked very detailed questions about whom I had visited and when, and what people had said about the earthquake and reconstruction. I explained to the visitors that I could not reveal my sources, which I was sure they as journalists would understand. I then spoke mainly about technical issues of disaster reconstruction, and I avoided mentioning politics and local conflicts over Pakistan's dominant role in reconstructing AJK (Schild 2015; 2019). It was certainly an advantage that I had only recently arrived in Muzaffarabad, and I was able to tell them that I had just started my research and to ask them counter-questions about their experiences of the earthquake and its aftermath. The 'interview' turned out to be very short. What remained with me, though, was the unsettling feeling that I had made myself unavailable – and therefore suspicious – to intelligence agents, because I had chosen not to be transparent with them but to protect the identity of my (other) interlocutors and research partners.

While the debates about ethical standards for anthropological research are important, the standardised procedure for the ethical clearance of research projects increasingly imposed on anthropologists by their universities is often not helpful. My example of interaction with covert intelligence agents underpins Martin Sökefeld's recent call to "Keep research ethics dirty!" (2022). Indeed, we need reflexive research practices that are ethical in a more holistic, relational and politically engaged sense, given the unpredictability of fieldwork encounters and the uncertain and blurred boundaries of ethics and politics in most research contexts.

Intimate suspects

At the beginning of my research, I was visited at my home in Muzaffarabad every two or three weeks by intelligence officers. However, such encounters became less frequent five or so months later. While it might be that I was simply unaware of the surveillance, I believed that the more time I spent at the homes of neighbours and other research partners rather than in public, male-dominated domains, the more the intelli-

gence agencies lost interest in my research. As a woman and an anthropologist working on and with women and their families, my knowledge would perhaps be considered less valuable and, potentially, less threatening, so I was no longer worth being closely monitored. However, it turned out that I was wrong. The agencies did not lose interest in my research at all; rather, my 'private life' as a researcher increasingly presented them with unexpected difficulties and finally compelled them to take a rather drastic step.

Towards the end of my research in Muzaffarabad, my neighbour Ambar told me one day that they would finally be renting out their prefabricated house her husband, Asif, had received as earthquake relief. The building was unoccupied and located on a small plot next to the house where Ambar and Asif and their four children lived. When the new tenants arrived, Ambar invited me, along with their relatives living nearby, to a small inauguration ceremony. I learned that the tenants were a family from the Punjab in Pakistan. The husband was on duty in Muzaffarabad and had brought his wife and children with him. I first met Zahur and her two little daughters, and a few days later I met her husband, who introduced himself as 'Tanvir'. I was shocked when I immediately recognised him as an ISI agent I had previously interacted with several times. 'Tanvir Sahib', as I now called him, was one of the officers responsible for my surveillance and security in AJK.

Tanvir Sahib's moving with his family to Muzaffarabad and into my nearest neighbourhood was certainly not a coincidence but a deliberate move by the ISI to improve their surveillance of me by invading my 'private life' as a researcher. The boundaries between home and the outside, private and public, 'work' and 'free time' research as I had come to experience and draw them, in the way my research partners did, turned upside down.

In retrospect, I believe that ethnographic fieldwork, and with it the blurred lines between 'professional researcher' and 'private person', made me a suspicious figure and presented intelligence agencies with the problem of how to monitor me when I was moving – outside the public domains of society – in and between homes and along the narrow and rather hidden paths and within the intimate networks of women in

the neighbourhood. However, the step taken by the ISI also reveals that I was not the only one for whom the boundaries between professional and personal life were blurred. After Tanvir Sahib and his family had become my neighbours, I frequently interacted with Zahur, whose home I had to pass when I was visiting other neighbours and research partners. Most of the time, we only made small talk, but against the backdrop of her husband being an ISI agent and claiming to be responsible for my safety, her otherwise trivial questions became suspicious to me. How are you? Where are you going? I am not sure if she reported my answers to her husband, but she probably did. Tanvir Sahib and his family became part of 'my' neighbourhood and 'private' research network, which enabled him to track my movements and social relationships outside of public domains. At the same time, he made his presence, as an agent closely monitoring me, *felt* in the domains that I previously had experienced as relatively safe and protected from the male gaze of the public and state surveillance. In other words, with Tanvir Sahib and his family as my next-door neighbours, I was exposed to suspicious eyes that no longer excluded my 'private life'.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault (1977 [1975]) traces the intimate and embodied workings of surveillance in the lives of those being monitored, pointing out that it is the mere knowledge of the possibility of pervasive surveillance that brings people under disciplinary and increasingly self-disciplinary power. Explaining this panoptic experience, Sökefeld and Strasser note:

> Surveillance often operates in a way that it makes itself known, at least to some extent. Also, in many cases, secret services are not *that* secretive, and so we often know or at least sense that we are being watched, and this necessarily changes our way of acting in the field and the manner in which we view social relations. (Sökefeld/Strasser 2016: 165)

The knowledge of being watched by my intelligence agent-turned-neighbour brought new feelings of uncertainty and suspicion into my life as a researcher and related experiences of home, friendship and leisure:

who was a neighbour and friend, who was an informer and agent? But even more so, I worried about the safety of my research partners and was confronted with ethical questions. Had my research partners been threatened and put under pressure by the ISI? Was my presence in their lives dangerous to them? Should I continue to visit and interact with my neighbours and friends?

While suspicion and state surveillance have the power to penetrate the bodies and intimate lives and relationships of those being monitored, intimacy and in-depth knowledge of the 'other' can also produce and reinforce suspicion and mistrust. In "Specters of Treason" (2010), Tobias Kelly and Sharika Thiranagama point out that "forms of surveillance increase not only the sense of what can be known but also the sense of what is not known, amplifying the feeling of suspicion and the impression that betrayal is always possible" (Kelly/Thiranagama 2010: 15). The drastic move by the ISI to send an agent to live with his family in my neighbourhood is perhaps a result of such self-reinforcing tendencies of surveillance and knowledge about those being monitored.

However, I would like to reveal another dimension of intimacy that is linked with surveillance as a social relationship that constitutes new forms of knowing and interacting between those who monitor and those who are monitored (as well as those around them). In anthropology, the concept of 'intimacy' connects 'the personal' and 'the political' and seeks to explore "the uncanny fold in which inner and outer life are disjunctively blended" (Mazzarella 2017: 199); that is, both the "intimately impersonal" and "impersonally intimate" (ibid.). The concept explains kinship, neighbourly relationships, friendship and community beyond the personal/political and public/private divide and refrains from attributing only pleasant emotions and feelings to intimate relationships (Berlant 2008; Sehlikoglu/Zengin 2015). While intimacies create and involve suspicion, enmity and hatred no less than affection, trust and mutual care (Kelly/Thiranagama 2010), I would like to reverse this perspective and claim that surveillance not only penetrates, but also creates intimate relationships.

My surveillance brought with it new intimacies and social relationships for me and 'my' intelligence agent, as well as for his family mem-

bers and my research partners, neighbours and friends. Tanvir Sahib and his family became part of 'my' home and *mohallah*, with Zahur participating in everyday relationships and the social exchanges among women neighbours and friends. She visited Ambar and her relatives regularly and asked them for small favours, whilst their children played together every day. In response to my mistrust of Tanvir Sahib, which I obviously could not always hide, Ambar explained that Tanvir *bhai* (brother), as she called him, was only doing his duty (*is ki duty hai*). In an important way, he and his family were just 'normal' neighbours. Therefore, not only does surveillance penetrate intimacy, but intimacy also invades surveillance, thereby making the strange familiar, the distant close and countering suspicion not always with even more (intimate) suspicion but sometimes also with trust, care and friendship.

Epilogue

When I returned to AJK in 2012 on a tourist NOC, much had changed, and I was no longer allowed to stay with a local family but had to stay at a hotel. Tanvir Sahib was still on duty in Muzaffarabad. His family, however, had moved back to the Punjab soon after I had completed my fieldwork and left. He came to meet me at the door of my hotel room almost every evening, asking me about where I had spent the day and at whose house. Since he had gained an in-depth knowledge of my research relationships, I could mention just the names, sometimes even only those of women friends, and he knew where I had stayed and whom I had met. After all, he had closely watched and researched me during my fieldwork.

My accounts of the day, I believe, were then compared and/or supplemented with those of other officers who shadowed me during the day on their motorbikes but sometimes lost track of my friends and me when we were walking along the more informal paths through the hills on the outskirts of the city. On one occasion they called me on the phone, and since I could not tell them where exactly I was, I handed the phone to my friend Shazia. I could hear the officer asking her rather desperately, "*Oh beta, tum kidher ho* (Oh child, where are you)?" Shazia tried to explain our

location to him and mentioned the name of her late grandfather whose house we had visited, but the official did not seem to understand. We laughed about the incident many times later on, imagining the agent getting lost in the *mohallah* with its many narrow and hidden footpaths while trying to find us and get his motorbike back to the main road.

Image 2: The steep and narrow paths of a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Muzaffarabad.

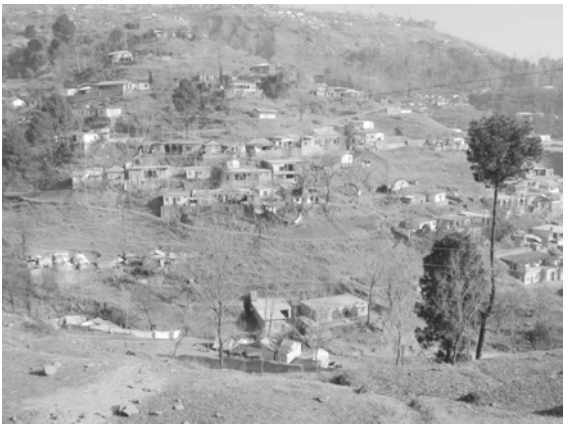

Photo by Pascale Schild

Perhaps we were naively lucky, but the incident did not have any serious consequences, for me or for my friends. However, after that phone call we had a call from Shazia's mother, whose brother had met several officers looking for me on his way home from work. Shazia's mother told us to come home immediately. My friends were ambivalent about the 'agency *wale*', and most people – including Shazia and her family – did not seem overly scared of intelligence agents. They sometimes called them harsh and unyielding people (*sakht log*), but often they also excused and normalised their intrusive practices by claiming they were only

doing their duty (for my safety) and that I should not worry (cf. Grieser 2016).

The intimate and uncertain experiences of state surveillance in AJK are deeply intertwined with local politics and power relations, as well as the region's ambivalent relationship with Pakistan.

One very late evening, Tanvir Sahib visited my hotel room and knocked loudly on the door. I was already asleep and woke up startled; I was the only woman guest and all alone. This night-time intrusion and intimidation by the ISI agent was certainly part of monitoring practices shaping surveillance as a panoptic experience for those who are monitored, namely 'anytime, anywhere'.

One day later, I again became aware that Tanvir Sahib was closely monitoring me when I was stopped on the street in the afternoon by a Special Branch officer from the local AJK police. The officer was about to question me and check my papers when suddenly Tanvir Sahib came out of a small teahouse not far away. He asked me to leave and began to harass the other officer, who eventually left on his motorbike.

While the ISI made its powerful presence felt, the incident also showed that there was rivalry between intelligence agencies over responsibility for my surveillance and safety. Later, I even learned that Pakistan's ISI was certainly not all-powerful but had to confront local resistance and related moves to hold its officers accountable in AJK.

When I met Zahid Amin, a well-known local politician in the city, I somehow ended up telling him about Tanvir Sahib's previous late-night 'visit'. I did not expect Amin to do anything about it, but when Tanvir Sahib visited my hotel later that day, he was deeply offended that I had complained about him. He explained that Zahid Amin was an influential person (*bare admi*) in Muzaffarabad and that I was completely wrong to protest against him, since he was only protecting me. He pointed to the incident with the Special Branch officer, claiming that he had argued (*larai*) with the officer on my behalf and that I should complain about that officer instead. He then insisted that I write down the officer's name. At that very moment, I no longer saw Tanvir Sahib solely as 'my' intelligence agent but as a 'normal' man and a former neighbour who probably feared for his job and who had to provide for a family – one that I knew well! I

honestly hoped that my (unintended) complaint had no consequences for him personally.

Pakistan's political and military presence in AJK intimately shaped my relationship and interactions with an intelligence agent who was responsible for my surveillance and safety and to whom and to whose wife and children I and the people around me inevitably became close as neighbours. In this way, not only did suspicion come to penetrate my 'private life' and intimate relationships with my research partners, but intimacies were also planted into relationships of suspicion, turning them into familiar and sometimes even comical encounters, albeit not necessarily any less uncertain or less threatening ones. The anthropologist and 'her' intelligence agent became intimate suspects, bound together through political intimacies of everyday life and neighbourly practices, as well as through intimate (post-)colonial politics of mistrust and enmity entrenched in military nationalism and global geopolitical power relations.

References

AAA – American Anthropological Association (2012): AAA Statement on Ethics. American Anthropological Association, https://www.americananthro.org/LearnAndTeach/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=22869&navItemNumber=652 (accessed 5 June 2023).

Ali, Nosheen (2013): "Grounding Militarism: Structures of Feeling and Force in Gilgit-Baltistan". In: Kamala Visweswaran (ed.), Everyday Occupations: Experiencing Militarism in South Asia and the Middle East, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 85–114. https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812207835.85

Ali, Nosheen (2019): Delusional States: Feeling Rule and Development in Pakistan's Northern Frontier, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Behar, Ruth (1996): The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart, Boston: Beacon Press.

Berlant, Lauren Gail (2008): The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture, Durham: Duke University Press.

Berry, Maya/Claudia Chávez Argülles/Shanya Cordis/Sarah Ihmoud/Elizabeth Velásquez Estrada (2017): "Toward a Fugitive Anthropology: Gender, Race, and Violence in the Field." In: Cultural Anthropology 32/4, pp. 537–565. https://doi.org/10.14506/ca32.4.05

Davies, James (2010): "Introduction: Emotions in the Field". In: James Davies/Dimitrina Spencer (eds.), Emotions in the Field: The Psychology and Anthropology of Fieldwork Experience, Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 1–31.

Foucault, Michel (1977 [1975]): Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, New York: Random House.

Geertz, Clifford (1998): "Deep Hanging Out." In: The New York Review of Books 45/16, pp. 69.

Grieser, Anna (2016): "When the Power Relation is not in Favour of the Anthropologist: Reflection on Fieldwork in Gilgit-Baltistan." In: Zeitschrift für Ethnologie 141/2, pp. 177–195. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26384581

Hayat, Javaid (2020): Azad Jammu & Kashmir: Polity, Politics, and Power-Sharing, Karachi: Oxford University Press Pakistan.

Kelly, Tobias/Sharika Thiranagama (2010): "Introduction: Specters of Treason". In: Sharika Thiranagama/Tobias Kelly (eds.), Traitors: Suspicion, Intimacy, and the Ethics of State-Building, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp.1-23.

Mahmud, Ershad (2021): "Azad Jammu and Kashmir's Quest for Empowerment". In: Serena Hussain (ed.), Society and Politics of Jammu and Kashmir, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 79–97.

Malinowski, Bronislaw (1922): Argonauts of the Western Pacific.

Mazzarella, William (2017): "Sense out of Sense: Notes on the Affect/Ethics Impasse." In: Cultural Anthropology 32/2, pp. 199–208. https://doi.org/10.14506/ca32.2.04.

Schild, Pascale (2015): "Local Politics of Reconstruction Along and Across Azad Kashmir's Border with Pakistan." In: Contemporary South Asia 23/3, pp. 292–313. https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2015.1040736

Schild, Pascale (2019): Alltag nach dem Erdbeben. Eine politische Ethnografie des Wiederaufbaus in Azad Kaschmir, Pakistan, Bielefeld: transcript.

Schild, Pascale (2021): "Reciprocal Vulnerability in the Face of Patriarchal Violence." In: Allegra Laboratory, July 7. https://allegralaboratory.net/reciprocal-vulnerability-in-the-face-of-patriarchal-violence/.

Schild, Pascale (2022): "From earthquake victims to citizens: Dependencies and precarious claims on the state in Azad Kashmir, Pakistan." In: Citizenship Studies 26/3, pp. 305–321. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2022.2062703

Sehlikoglu, Sertaç/Aslı Zengin (2015): "Introduction: Why Revisit Intimacy?" In: The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology 33/2, pp. 20-25. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26370571

Snedden, Christopher (2012): The Untold Story of the People of Azad Kashmir, New York: Colombia University Press.

Sökefeld, Martin (2005): "From Colonialism to Postcolonial Colonialism: Changing Modes of Domination in the Northern Areas of Pakistan." In: Journal of Asian Studies 64, pp. 939–974. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911805002287

Sökefeld, Martin (2022): "Keep Research Ethics Dirty! Current Debates." In: International Quarterly for Asian Studies 53/4, pp. 519–532. https://doi.org/10.11588/iqas.2022.4.20799

Sökefeld, Martin/Sabine Strasser (2016): "Introduction: Under Suspicious Eyes – Surveillance States, Security Zones and Ethnographic Fieldwork." In: Zeitschrift für Ethnologie 141/2, pp. 159–176. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26384580

Thajib, Ferdiansyah/Samia Dinkelaker/Thomas Stodulka (2019): "Introduction: Affective Dimensions of Fieldwork and Ethnography." In: Thomas Stodulka/Ferdiansyah Thajib/Samia Dinkelaker (eds.), Affective Dimensions of Fieldwork and Ethnography, Cham: Springer, pp. 7–20.

Verdery, Katherine (2012): "Observers Observed: An Anthropologist Under Surveillance." In: Anthropology Now 4/2, pp. 14–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/19492901.2012.11728357