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New perspectives on state peripheries in southern Central Asia and northern Afghanistan

Steven Parham

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Summary

Traditional policy studies of how states deal with one another and seek to enforce border control on the line separating them obscure crucial realities of how different nationalities interact with their states and across state borders – interaction that takes place both along stately avenues of exchange and also in greyer, more subversive domains. Such interaction is observable only through on-the-ground documentation, and analysing what actually happens in border regions is more important than relying on the rhetoric of control pursued and projected by the states involved. Generally, traditional studies take a view of borders informed by parameters chosen by powerful state actors, not by the more local political actors who actually deal with the border on a day-to-day basis. In other words, theirs is a view of the periphery as seen by the centre, and policy based on this will be geared towards the centre's needs rather than the border region's realities. This does not suffice, and an on-the-ground, bottom-up view of the border *from* the border is necessary in order to tackle important questions pertaining to a state's territoriality and how it is enforced and negotiated. This is especially important in a region that evinces an extraordinarily complex mixture of ethnic, clan, regional, and state affiliations, as is the case in southern Central Asia and Afghanistan.

This report sheds light on what an exclusive focus on regional security issues chooses to ignore: national policies of border control and issues of state stability are not only devised or debated in state capitals. They are, in fact, crucially informed by discourses taking place between state and periphery, between central elites and regional elites in the border region, between representatives of the state ethnic majority and members of local borderland groups (who are usually members of an ethnic minority). All too often, the parameters of these discourses are obscure to outsiders, and it is official state policy in the Central Asian states and Afghanistan that is taken at face value. This report goes beyond more orthodox discussions of border issues in Central Asia by presenting the multiplicity of actors involved in actually implementing border control rather than focusing solely on what the centres of the states involved decide to present the outside world with. Specifically, we ask: Who holds power at the edges of these states, and how is this expressed? How successful are these

states in controlling local political loyalties at their peripheries? What kind of effects have recent political developments (post-Soviet independence, domestic political upheavals and realignment, the appearance of non-traditional actors such as Western military forces) had on the ability of these states to "control their borderlands"?

Beyond providing concrete answers to these questions revolving around the current dynamics taking place in southern Central Asia and northern Afghanistan to policy-makers and observers outside the immediate region, this report offers a new way of looking at socio-political life at the margins of states. How do political elites in borderlands influence the political centre? To what extent does border control depend on local support to succeed? To what depth can border control extend? How do ethnic minorities figure in such internal discourses of control between centre and periphery? Such a perspective is intended to contribute to the wider debate on how states interact with one another all over the world by adopting a view from below rather than one based on the political centre.

As its premise, this report supports the notion that life in a state's border region is closely entwined with life within the two neighbouring states simultaneously rather than just one state: networks snake back and forth across borders, economic exchange makes use of a borderline, neighbouring political systems influence domestic policy, and local political negotiation employs the presence of an international boundary in sometimes surprising ways. Thus, for example, we are able to appreciate the ways in which political upheaval in Kyrgyzstan fundamentally affects the socio-economic opportunities of ethnic Kyrgyz in neighbouring Tajikistan; or how the 'pacification' of Afghanistan influences the new connectivity of the Pamir region. In other words, a state's border policy never takes place in a socio-political vacuum. Borderlanders, that is, those groups living in the vicinity of a border, do not simply accept rhetorics of control by a state and reorientate their lives along permissible avenues of exchange. They can adapt to or struggle against this rhetoric, but their social networks transcend official categories demarcating states and administrative units. Locally held cognitive maps of borderlanders and their inhabitants as well as actually practised boundary crossings will take the officially demarcated boundary into consideration, but will also ignore it where this is deemed beneficial locally.

Borders are, thus, hotly contested localities that structure the interaction between political periphery and centre and therefore figure prominently in discourses of state integrity and territorial violation, as well as symbolising any given state's ability to cognitively bound its citizens' loyalties and identities. In this context, this report focuses on how discourses of control (military, economic, and socio-political) all interact with each other to form the parameters of state power (or the perceived lack thereof) and local power in border regions in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and northern Afghanistan. Furthermore, it will discuss how these complex parameters both feed back into and are increasingly conditioned by supra-national involvement in these states' handling of their border regions: with the advent of non-traditional actors such as NATO forces in the region, both states and their border populations are confronted with new pressures and opportunities in regard to state territorial integrity.

Introduction

Rich in mineral and energy resources; bordering China's Xinjiang province to the east, Russia to the north, Afghanistan and Iran to the south, and the slowly expanding European neighbourhood to the west; a dangerously unequal distribution of water resources; a confusingly incomprehensible array of political borders rarely seen as functional; the world's major transit hub for opium and heroin, as well as a potential hotbed of Islamic extremism; a complex and convoluted ethnic distribution, poorly understood outside the region; a kaleidoscope of authoritarian (Kazakhstan), secretive (Turkmenistan), and repressive (Uzbekistan) but also weak and politically fragile (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) post-Soviet states.

Such are the images of contemporary Central Asia commonly encountered outside the region. Central Asia has but recently re-emerged to play a role in the minds of an international community pondering a geo-political space that has suddenly, at the latest since the beginning of the 21st century and the events of September 11th 2001, once again found itself in the midst of competing outside interests. Slightly farther south, Afghanistan's imagery is even more fraught: often seen as a 'graveyard of empires' by outsiders from Alexander the Great through the British Empire and down to contemporary critics of NATO's involvement there; a foil for the geo-political tensions of the last decades of the Cold War, as characterised by the Soviet invasion of 1979, which, as then observed with relief in the West, ended in an inglorious and traumatic retreat by the Red Army, beaten back by groups of mujaheddin financially and logistically supported by forces beyond Afghanistan's borders. The international community's subjective feelings of threat emanating from this region of the world have been strengthened by the rise of the Taliban regime of the 1990s and the observation that the NATO-led War on Terror that brought it down at the beginning of the 21st century has not to date succeeded in eradicating its operations.

After a century of being to all intents and purposes a blank space on the world map – known only as the Muslim region of Soviet Central Asia on the Chinese frontier – southern Central Asia and northern Afghanistan in particular have now become a battleground of outside interests once again. The newly independent states of the region have become politically relevant to global political actors once again, albeit

for a wide range of reasons. Crucially, however, little is understood about the dynamics on the ground in this region, and outside interest is dominated by geostrategic thinking, natural resources, issues of international security, and regional political stability. This report introduces new perspectives on a region that has been undergoing unique political and social realignments, and it offers a view that is, first and foremost, centred not on the *states* of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan but rather on what is happening in their peripheries and between them at a local level.

While Russia has had long experience dealing with the various local actors on the ground in the region and has largely been adept at mobilising old Soviet-era networks, new entrants such as the OSCE, NATO, the European Union, and China have found themselves confronted by a sometimes bewildering patchwork of local interests, opaquely powerful state elites, and fluid political constellations. The United States and its NATO allies rely logistically on the American air base at Manas in Kyrgyzstan on account of its transit centre and supply functions for the troops in Afghanistan, the only such Western military institution on the territory of the former Soviet Union. Both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are starting to feature prominently as part of a new northern supply route for the war in the Hindu Kush even as traditional supply routes from Pakistan become increasingly fraught with peril. Russia also operates an air base in Kyrgyzstan, just kilometres from its American counterpart (a unique post-Cold War constellation), and was until just five years ago the driving force guaranteeing the region's territorial integrity along its external borders to the south and east.

Furthermore, Russian interest in Central Asia is defined mainly by its historical (Soviet and imperial) involvement there, issues revolving around the transit of energy, and its perception of Central Asia's southern borders as forming a 'first line of defence' against Islamic extremism and, in particular, the massive influx of narcotics wending their way north from Afghanistan towards Russian territory. This last point also represents one of the European Union's central interests in the region. After stating that "the Central Asian states [...] have become closer to Europe", Finland's 'Wider Europe Initiative', designed to strengthen Finland's development cooperation in

the European Union's eastern neighbourhood in line with its EU obligations, introduces Central Asia tersely with[1]:

> The geopolitical situation in Central Asia is challenging: drug routes run from Afghanistan through Central Asia to Russia and Europe, and the unpredictability of the situation in Afghanistan and the neighbouring states causes concern about a build-up of extremist Islamic movements in the region. Central Asia is becoming an increasingly important area in terms of border security and international cooperation between border officials.
> Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are cognitively to the Russian Federation and, by extension, to the European Union what northern Mexico is to the United States: a drug-infested borderland that fails to stem the flow of narcotics to the 'heartland', where those who consume most of these drugs reside.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union nineteen short years ago, the new Republics have been faced with enormously complex internal realignments. They have been bound politically by the strictures of an international system of 'nation-states' that under no circumstances tolerates territorial inconsistencies in terms of state sovereignty and that is extremely loath to negotiate about lines on maps. Formerly internal boundaries within the Soviet Union, in effect borders in only an administrative sense, have become state borders. This has been leading to friction between groups now finding themselves on territories claimed by states struggling to assert their legitimacy both internally, to 'their own' titular group, as well as externally to newly neighbouring titular states.

On the international stage, members of the regional political elite representing the respective state governments have become adept at adopting the language of threat used in the context of Central Asia by outside policy makers and that figures so prominently in reports on the region by the OSCE, successive American administrations, and within EU bodies:[2]

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[1] Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2009:10.

[2] Ambassador of Tajikistan Nuriddin Shamsov, as quoted in OSCE Magazine, June/July 2007, available at http://www.osce.org, accessed November 10th, 2010.

> [M]y Government would like the Organization [for Security and Co-operation in Europe] to make its presence felt even more strongly, not only in Tajikistan, but also throughout Central Asia. We are a region made up of old nations but young countries. We face many challenges that have a direct impact on security and stability. And, since these challenges do not start or stop at our borders, we urgently need to involve our next-door neighbour, Afghanistan, more closely in our activities. My Government has presented a number of priorities including fostering economic activities, strengthening border management, and tackling land degradation and other environmental issues.

Such statements are obviously geared for consumption outside of Tajikistan for an international community less interested in actual dynamics within the individual states' borders. They focus far more on non-local issues such as the trafficking of narcotics and the 'seepage' of undesirable individuals and groups into the wider world beyond Central Asia. In other words, local governments have realised that the world's interest (and, hence, its financial and logistical support) hinges on geopolitics rather than humanitarian development, which in effect seems to come a distant second. Such statements, however, mask the complex interplay between former regional connectivity, present-day instability, domestic contestations of state legitimacy, and ethno-political dynamics within and across borders.

The borders that exist here today are problematic not because they exist, but rather because their enforcement is seen as crucial to the regionally novel domestic notions of legitimacy. People living along these borders are in the process of discovering how these borders impact their everyday interaction with 'their' state – that entity which has issued them with passports and other elements of bureaucratic identity now wedded to new demands for their loyalty. With the horrendous slaughter of Uzbek-speaking Kyrgyzstani citizens in and around the Ferghana Valley's ancient city of Osh in the summer of 2010 still fresh in observers' minds, it is easy to forget that exclusive ethnic categories are a very novel phenomenon in Central Asia and that, more significantly, the political mobilisation of such seemingly objective categories dates back just two decades. The Soviet Union took the process of nation-building very seriously, and the system of titular nations (the Kyrgyz, the Tajiks, etc.) still provides

groups in this region's borderlands (as well as, one can suspect, in the wider post-Soviet world) with the parameters of the negotiation of political power. It also forms the basis for understanding today's boundary issues in states that have imposed processes of state-building, national identity, and citizenships on these nations not foreseen by those who delimited the borders we find here today.

In this vein, border-related conflict in the Ferghana Valley is often represented as the product of Stalin's 'nonsensical' drawing of borders in the region in the 1920s and 1930s even by well-informed commentators such as The *Economist*[3] rather than as the dynamic process of interaction between local elites and the distant centre in Moscow that it was. Such conflict has less to do with members of ethnic groups professing this or that ethnic identity or speaking a language at odds with that of the titular majority. Rather, it has more to do with state-internal questions of disenfranchisement and the loyalty of groups at the peripheries that have arisen since the end of the Soviet Union. By and large, the Soviet state did not invent the categories to which people were to ascribe themselves, but it did objectify the categories of Kyrgyz-ness, Uzbek-ness, or Tajik-ness and make them exclusive categories (and, indeed, export them to northern Afghanistan). Pre-Soviet notions of belonging were adapted to a larger narrative of state inclusion and new forms of interaction developed. Today's states in Central Asia have not contested or renegotiated these ethno-political identities.

Although neither the putative origins and distribution of these groups nor the ascription of ethnic identities are the focus of this report, outsider observers of the region would be well advised to bear in mind that the ethnonyms, and thus the local socio-cultural boundaries around groups, used in this region are, in everyday life, rather more fluid than state and academic rhetoric would admit, thereby increasing the ethnic complexity of the region. Characterising Central Asian ethnic groups, be they titular or minority, as 'old' (as in the quote above) is a political statement on the legitimacy of certain groups, in this case Tajiks, to control certain territories, and it is these narratives that 'disenfranchised' minority groups must deal with when living their lives within newly-nationalising states such as Tajikistan. It is here that our attention is invariably directed

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[3] June 19th, 2010.

towards questions arising from the interaction between states and ethnic groups sharing some kind of common characteristics with groups across state boundaries, beyond the pale, so to speak, of the new national container. Bluntly speaking, Uzbek-speakers in the Kyrgyzstani segment of the Ferghana Valley have, since late 1991, no longer been citizens of the same state, the Soviet Union, as Uzbek-speakers in the Uzbekistani segment and nobody really knows why this should affect local livelihoods or even, in the extreme case of the summer just past, their very lives.

While a 'border-less' world may well be developing for the new, highly mobile trans-national elites of the Western world, most people experience borders as very much a container for their political lives. In the European Union, border-crossing has become a formality and, within the Schengen space, in effect an invisible process for the vast majority of crossers. The Central Asian Republics have experienced the reverse of this development: for decades, crossing the internal boundaries of the Soviet Union (i.e., those lines that today represent formal state borders) was more a matter of internal travel documents related to the Soviet system as a whole. Today, however, the region has become politically territorialized: goods need export/import documents, individuals might need permits and visas, and mutually exclusive citizenships have been created that superimpose a new nationality over ethnic identity. Thus, Central Asia has become less inter-connected over the past twenty years, and borders have impacted local lives in ways never imagined before in the region. Broadly speaking, the border regions of southern Central Asia and northern Afghanistan are spaces in which international strategic interests, minority nationalities, post-Soviet regimes, and local socio-economic realities all intertwine to constitute a political field fraught with uncertainty, risk, and conflict.

Aim and structure of the report

First and foremost, this report aims to provide debate on border policy in southern Central Asia with a new perspective: one not centred on the state as the most important actor in terms of border control, but rather on the empirically observed *interaction* between

the forces of border control and borderlanders. This interaction is more central to life in borderlands than the actual functionality of border control itself, and it is here, in the borderlands, that any given state's successes or failures in terms of border control become evident. Furthermore, this report's specific geographical focus on the borderlands of southern Kyrgyzstan, eastern Tajikistan, and north-eastern Afghanistan is quite unique. These areas are largely blank spaces in the minds of analysts and policy-makers outside the region, due largely to their remoteness and complex political status, often downplayed by the respective capitals of these states. Little research material exists that focuses on the region lying between the Ferghana Valley in the north and Afghanistan proper in the south, both regions that have themselves enjoyed a reasonable amount of broad discussion. This report concentrates on the spaces in between (and connecting) these two well-known flashpoints.

With the bottom-up framework of such interaction presented here we can discuss topics such as border porosity, potential spill-over effects, and state fragility without making the systemic error of focusing only on the institutions and functions of border control (so often subject to a state's rhetoric of what happens at its periphery). Instead, we will embed border control in its wider socio-political context, and in so doing, we will uncover realities frequently not readily 'admitted' by states.

Therefore, the centrepiece of this report is devoted to an analysis of internal narratives of power in southern Central Asia and northern Afghanistan easily hidden to outsiders: how do conflicts play out between local, regional, and state levels and institutions, and how is national identity and political loyalty negotiated at the interface between states? Which are the parameters influencing both cross-border interaction between local groups as well as these locals' interaction with ideological concepts of border control as posited in, for example, recent OSCE treaties? How do local dynamics 'throw back' issues of border policy and force the centre to adapt? How do actually practised cross-border trajectories and frequently hidden networks within borderlands contrast with official representations of the same? How far can border control extend into a state's territory? To what extent will new border-transcending infrastructure co-opt or empower local borderland polities?

After this brief introduction and the subsequent regional overview of ethnic groups and the terms that will be used throughout, the first section of this report addresses contemporary border-related issues that surround the borders of southern Central Asia and northern Afghanistan. This section serves to characterise contemporary forms of interaction between these states and their peripheries today, and it does so by emphasising the political realities vital to local groups in these borderlands. Who holds the power at the edges of these states, and how is this expressed? What kind of effects have recent political developments (post-Soviet independence, domestic political upheavals and realignment, the appearance of non-traditional actors such as Western military forces) had on the ability of these states to "control their borderlands"? In other words, how do state and periphery interact with each other in this region?

The Soviet legacy is crucial for comprehending how today's post-Soviet states in the region regard their capacities for border control. Therefore, a brief characterisation of the process of sudden and forceful devolution of power to the new state centres will introduce us to the developing dynamics between the newly independent Central Asian Republics and their new peripheries, which had unexpectedly shifted a lot closer to the respective centres. Following this, I devote three sections to the three states at the core of this report's analysis. These sub-sections discuss the contemporary framework of negotiation between the state and its borderlands and national minorities. The processes thus uncovered will serve as the basis for what, as the report proceeds, will be termed 'the internal discourses of control' taking place within these individual states. Themes such as the growing power of regional elites and the manoeuvring space of borderland minorities and groups will be seen to be prominent features of the new narrative of state weakness developing over the last two decades. Finally, after characterising these processes, I will widen the conceptual horizon to include the numerous 'outside actors' that today influence (either by supporting or by subverting) the discourses between the different actors in these states: OSCE border guard advisors, NATO troops, the Aga Khan Foundation, the (recently departed) CIS/Russian border troop detachments, and Chinese construction workers all figure as elements affecting the ways in which local and state elites, periphery and centre negotiate with each other.

The second section on interaction within and between borderlands is devoted to making visible the intricate connections between neighbouring states' border regions and, crucially, the often hidden networks stretching from borderland to state centre. It uncovers the processes and elements of borderland culture and identity and regards borders as both uniting and separating. How do political elites in borderlands influence the political centre? How do ethnic minorities figure in such internal discourses of control between centre and periphery? What kinds of interaction tie borderlands and their states together? The section argues, generally, that political borders are not simply lines on a map but rather zones surrounding and stretching away from the actual state boundary, thereby influencing (and influenced by) borderlander livelihoods, their local identities, and their political loyalties. Crucially, it takes as its focus a cross-border rather than a state-centred perspective and analyses trans-frontier and state-internal networks within their wider context of interacting with two states. A discussion on frontier economics, both officially accepted as well as within 'greyer', more subversive domains will illuminate concrete ways in which borderland populations discover powerful means of dealing with states. All sub-sections in this more conceptual part of the report are illustrated by concrete examples of processes taking place within the region: borderland realities will be used to underline the comparative value of this border-centred approach. Hence, themes such as corruption, narcotics trafficking, subversive entrepreneurship ('smuggling'), bureaucratic control regimes and their (dys)functionality, border markets, infrastructural (dis)connectivity, local political representation, and the indigenisation of power at the periphery in southern Central Asia and northern Afghanistan are addressed in turn.

The third part of this report reappraises the way in which border control is understood, especially in the context of post-Soviet Central Asia. How does border control depend on local support to succeed? Which are the parameters influencing the support or subversion of a state's desire to control its borders? How deep can border (and borderland) control be within a state's territory? Moving away from regarding it as "the sum of a state's institutions to regulate the movement of people, communication, and goods across borders"[4], I argue that *effective* border control includes two crucial

[4] Chandler 1998:19.

elements. First, understanding how agents of border control – the official and unofficial gatekeepers to a state's territory located at the boundary, regional centres, and the state centre – interact with border-crossers, local populations, and state elites. This will show us how such relationships are highly interdependent in nature and not merely of the patron-client type. Second, how the framework of controlling borders is best seen as a strategy of controlling movement deeper within a state's territory than is visible at first glance. It is thus a discourse that includes infrastructural trajectories, avenues of exchange, and regimes of administration that affect not only the actual borderline but have socio-political ramifications for the entire borderland. Before discussing these notions in a conceptual way, I will take a look at the specific case example of the Pamir Highway, the infrastructural avenue that connects northern Afghanistan with the Ferghana Valley. Here I will inspect local attitudes towards actually implemented border control through a borderland lens and examine what this has to say about the power of these states *as locally perceived.*

Regional overview

Before addressing the border-related challenges in Central Asia and northern Afghanistan today, a brief introduction to this region's complex mixture of ethnic groups and political boundaries is necessary. This report focuses predominantly on four nationality groups labelled as Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Pamiri, and Uzbeks, who are citizens of four states and, thus, are either Kyrgyzstani, Tajikistani, Uzbekistani, or Afghan – none of these states officially recognises mutual dual citizenship today. There is, however, a confusing array of other terms used locally that differ from the terms used by the states concerned as well as by outsiders to the region, and this report will limit itself to a minimum of such terms. Thus, the Uzbeks of Kyrgyzstan will here be labelled Kyrgyzstani Uzbek-speakers, the Kyrgyz minority in the northeast corner of Badakhshan in Tajikistan will be termed the Murghab Kyrgyz (after their main area of settlement in GBAO), and the various groups of people living in Badakhshan (both in Tajikistan and in Afghanistan) that speak Pamiri languages (as opposed to Tajik) will be called Pamiri even though

local practice assigns different labels to the very disparate sub-groups speaking barely mutually intelligible Pamiri dialects. What follows is an overview of ethnic group distribution and the ways in which they position themselves within the borderlands at the heart of this report.

Map 1: Southern Central Asia and northern Afghanistan, highlighting Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (region) (GBAO) and the Pamir Highway (from Khorog to Osh)

Generally speaking, the entire region in which the southern Central Asian and northern Afghan borderlands are situated is characterised by high mountain ranges: the Pamir and Alay ranges, and in Afghanistan, the Hindu Kush slicing the north of that country off from the south. Peaks of up to 7500 metres punctured by a handful

of accessible passes of between 3000 and 4000 metres, extreme continental climates, and remote valleys – in effect, the entire eastern Central Asian frontier can be described as geographically extremely remote and difficult to traverse. The few settlements here serve as focus points for a vast and sparsely populated, predominantly rural mountainous hinterland. Tajikistan is more or less evenly split into two parts: the eastern half, Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous *Oblast* (region) (GBAO), encompasses the immediate foothills as well as the rugged Pamir Plateau, the capital of which is Khorog. Remote villages and infrastructurally inaccessible Pamiri villages lie scattered throughout this vast province, loosely tied together by the Pamir Highway leading from Khorog on the Pyanj river that marks the Afghan border, through Murghab, a settlement of predominantly Kyrgyz groups, and on over the Qyzyl Art Pass into Osh *oblast* in southern Kyrgyzstan. Near Murghab, a new road leads yet farther east to the Qolma Pass, the new border port to Xinjiang province in China, opened in 2004.

Southern Kyrgyzstan is characterised by the Alay Range, a rugged series of peaks only rarely punctured by badly maintained Soviet-era roads leading north to the Ferghana Valley, the region's most fertile region split between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and a finger of Tajikistan. The ancient hub of Osh lies on the Kyrgyzstani side, only a few miles from Andijan in Uzbekistan. Western Tajikistan, which includes the capital city Dushanbe, is marked by a series of fertile mountain valleys and, farther south in the Khatlon *oblast*, more easily accessible plains dominated by agriculture and, in particular, cotton plantations. Northern Afghanistan, separated from the south by the Hindu Kush and western deserts leading into Turkmenistan, consists of two wildly different types of terrain. In the west (the provinces of Balkh bordering Uzbekistan) there are rich, flat plains, and the province of Kunduz (bordering western Tajikistan) is the most fertile agricultural area in the country. In the east, the provinces of Takhar and, in particular, Badakhshan (hereafter Afghan Badakhshan, the capital of which is Fayzabad) are characterised by remoteness and extreme weather.

The ascription of ethnic labels in pre-Soviet times was based on three interlocking oppositional criteria: sedentary socio-economic practices versus nomadic/semi-nomadic, Turkic-speaking versus

Farsi/Persian-speaking, and a hierarchy of clan ties[5]. Ethnic categories such as, for example, Kazakh or Kyrgyz traditionally denoted not ethnic affiliation but rather a political choice (concretely, not to belong to the loosely organised 'Uzbek' confederacy of the 16th century). Tajiks were Farsi-speakers occupying the economic niches provided by the foothills of the Pamir and Ferghana ranges. This fluidity changed in the early Soviet era, and today's labels stem from that time. Importantly, in our context of interaction in contemporary Central Asian borderlands, today all groups have clearly formulated notions of their own belonging within this system of discrete nations: while self-ascription by individuals does not contest today's official state categorisation, such labels do however contain different characteristics for different groups thus describing themselves. Hence, being Uzbek in Kyrgyzstan implies membership in a certain *mahalla* (neighbourhoods) and the use of an Uzbek dialect, but it neither cognitively connects such groups with a wider Uzbek political body nor carries any hints of allegiance to the Uzbekistani state.

Even today, Kyrgyz emphasise local and lineage identities over a putative pan-Kyrgyz identity, although the mobilisation of the Manas epic as a 'myth uniting the Kyrgyz' has been superimposed by independent Kyrgyzstan. These lineages also lie at the heart of the well-known differences between northern and southern Kyrgyz peoples, group differences that are underlined by the additional elements of heavier Russification in the north (that is, more Russian loanwords in Kyrgyz), differences in the emphasis on sedentary versus pastoralist lifestyles, and a more orthodox form of Sunni Islam practised in southern regions. The presence of the Kyrgyz of Murghab in Tajikistan's north-eastern Badakhshan stems from the late 19th century: originally only temporarily present in the high Pamir range, oscillating between summer pastures and winter camps, this group of southern Kyrgyz were 'caught' by hardening boundaries to Afghanistan and China and gradually became a central part of the local economy, providing much-needed meat and fur for the population of the Pamirs.

Tajiks, over most recent history generally regarded as akin to Uzbeks in all but language use, evince an even more complex form of group identity: if defined as the entire Sunni, Persian-speaking

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[5] See Roy (2000:63) for a fuller discussion of such phenomena in Central Asia.

community of the former Soviet Union, then half of Tajikistan's territory and a third of its population are not Tajik and the 'Tajik' cultural centres of Samarqand and Bukhara are outside the state; if they are the whole Sunni, Persian-speaking community of Central Asia, then many Afghans could be regarded as Tajiks; and if all Tajiks are Persians, then Iranians would also be Tajiks[6]. Yet, the Tajikistani state today claims a form of Tajik identity contested outside its borders by Iran and Uzbekistan, leading to confusion amongst outside observers over the use of the term 'Tajik'. In this report, 'Tajik' denotes a Tajik-speaker but not a Tajik citizen.

Finally, the Pamiri of Badakhshan (spanning eastern Tajikistan, north-eastern Afghanistan, and a corner of south-western Xinjiang province in China) are labelled as Tajiks in China and Afghanistan (and usually by outsiders as well) but neither share their languages with Tajik nor their religion. The inhabitants of Badakhshan have referred to themselves as Pamiri since at least the sixteenth-century conquest of the lower-lying and more westerly parts of the region by 'Uzbeks' (the Shaybanids), which caused the population in Badakhshan to swell and led to increasing conflicts between locals and outside political entities repeatedly attempting to establish their rule in Badakhshan[7]. Traditionally, there has been strong fragmentation of socio-cultural identities amongst Pamiri groups. Broadly speaking, however, there is general local agreement on the fact that 'the Pamiri' consist of six separate groups: Shugnani, Rushani, Wakhani, Yazgulyami, Ishkashimi, and Sarykuli, all of whose designations are connected to the valleys in which these groups reside. Linguistically, there are further sub-divisions in smaller valleys that figure as sub-groups. These major groups have all in pre-socialist times had periods of conflict with one another as well as (as a group in fluid internal alliances) with non-Pamiri such as Kyrgyz or Tajiks from the lowlands, and the sparse sources available seem to be unable to agree on whether there was indeed a strong degree of identification locally with an overarching Pamiri identity. However, one element informing feelings of internal cohesion has certainly been the fact that all Pamiri groups are followers of the Ismaili Sevener Shia. This has been inducing religious tensions over orthodoxy and heresy with

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[6] Roy 1998:145.

[7] Bliss 2006:60-3, 143-4.

lowland Tajiks who profess themselves as followers of the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam. The Ismailiyya and its religious head, the Aga Khan, remains to this day possibly the most influential focus of Pamiri loyalties.

Interaction between state and periphery in the region today

Before we turn our attention to the main focus of this report, that is, the processes, discourses, and networks that underlie the interaction between local borderlands and the states of southern Central Asia, it is vital that we outline the political environment in which the negotiation between the periphery and the centre, between local borderlanders and 'their' states takes place. We need to focus on who holds power at the edges of these states, and how this is expressed rather than how it is represented by these states. What kind of effects have recent political developments (post-Soviet independence, domestic political upheavals and realignment, the appearance of non-traditional actors such as Western military forces) had on the ability of these states to "control their borderlands"? In other words, how do state and periphery interact with each other in this region? This view of political dynamics in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and northern Afghanistan is informed by a focus on processes of importance to the respective peripheries, rather than by concentrating on the more visible discourses present at the centres of these states.

Factors of contemporary state-peripheryinteraction

Soviet legacy: More than seven decades of Soviet rule have left an indelible mark on the lives of Central Asian populations. Today's borders here are former administrative (internal) boundaries never designed to delimit independent states, but instead served to allocate resources to individual homelands. However, in the domain of border control, the new states have pursued a rhetoric of continuity; and today's state elites were largely enfranchised during the Soviet period, leading to continuities in the official relationship between state and society – a continuity that will be shown to be fictitious.

State-building by the centre: Both the post-Soviet states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as well as Afghanistan have over recent years sought to strengthen the power of the state to take precedence over the periphery. In *Kyrgyzstan*, institutional weakness, regional elites, and a centralised narrative of (Kyrgyz-only) nationalisation have resulted in extraordinarily fragile central authority. In *Tajikistan*, a fractious civil war between regional and local factions, economic collapse in Badakhshan, and the life-saving intervention of supra-state actors have deprived the central government of legitimacy and resources, and resulted in a reality of devolved power at the periphery. In *northern Afghanistan*, a nominally highly centralised state contends with local elites struggling to make their voices heard in a system beset by ethnic rivalry and the centre's demand for a form of control deemed irreconcilable with local needs.

Outside actors: Supranational actors in this region consist of five types: ISAF/NATO military personnel, OSCE advisors dealing with border management, the Ismaili Aga Khan Foundation, CIS/Russian bordertroops (but recently departed), and Chinese construction companies and their workers. These actors are forced into negotiating their operations primarily with representatives of the centre rather than the periphery (in which, significantly, these operations are located), and this is both affected by and, in turn, itself affects the ways in which local groups in the borderlands interact with their states: locals here cast the effective power of their states in terms of what such outsiders actually accomplish locally rather than merely how they support distant and weak states.

The passing of the Soviet Union in late 1991 brought the socialist era in Central Asia to an abrupt end. The Socialist Republics of the Union now became independent fully-fledged states even if it was to be years until all of them actually came to exhibit all the trappings of statehood such as national currencies (the *som* was introduced in

1993 in Kyrgyzstan and the *somani* in Tajikistan not until 2000) and the implementation of their own border control. The following years produced economic decline in all the Central Asian Republics and most critically in Kyrgyzstan. Tajikistan became embroiled in a civil war (lasting from 1992 until 1997) between various factions battling for the distribution of post-Soviet power amongst its different regions, and the peripheral regions of this volatile state, such as Badakhshan, witnessed a calamitous cessation of outside economic support that led to widespread starvation brought to an end only through the life-saving intervention of the Aga Khan Foundation. The latter is a supra-state organisation that has become an increasingly important provider of infrastructural, economic, educational and humanitarian support in the Tajikistani borderlands.

By the end of 2005, fourteen short years after the demise of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan had gone through the so-called Tulip Revolution[8], Tajikistan had finally acquired military sovereignty over its own boundaries with Afghanistan (controlled until then by Russian/CIS border guards), and northern Afghanistan was awash with foreign troops while the country was going to its first elections in decades. All three states had opened new border ports along their mutual boundaries (in the case of Tajikistan even the first modern-day such interface with the People's Republic of China), new roads were being built, and new trajectories opening up. Both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan had finally, after well over a century of contention, agreed on the precise location of their common boundary with China to the east: small territories 'changed hands' and the boundary discussion forum set up for this purpose grew into a regional alliance (the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, SCO) between these states and an ever-increasing number of further neighbouring states such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and, possibly in the near future, Iran and Mongolia.

[8] Hailed by the international press as one of the 'colour revolutions' supposedly bringing democracy to post-Soviet states, the 'Revolution' of March/April 2005 saw the ousting of long-term President Askar Akaev by a group of disgruntled Kyrgyzstani (mainly from the south) with the silent support of the armed forces and the installation of a new President, Kurmanbek Bakiev from Osh *oblast*. The months following the largely non-violent coup were characterised by frequent protests and counter-protests (and widespread lootings of non-Kyrgyz businesses in Bishkek) by various groups.

At the domestic level, both the Kyrgyzstani and Tajikistani governments have had to face local ire over territorial handovers (either rumoured or actual) to China[9], but at the international level the states here were cooperating to an unprecedented degree. This was a far cry from the thundering silence of the previous four decades that had enveloped Central Asia's Chinese frontier, thus setting in motion a number of processes in these two states' borderlands with their large eastern neighbour that have had implications on the wider region's connectivity, as will be discussed in this section of the report. Farther south, in Afghanistan, occupying Soviet troops had been replaced first by local militias fighting a vicious civil war and then by the military personnel of NATO. Institutions long abandoned at the state level (but not locally in the north) were being arduously rebuilt and constitutional reform discussed at international conferences.

By late summer 2010, this overall regional picture had once again evolved: massive 'ethnic' unrest in the Kyrgyzstani Ferghana Valley borderland with Uzbekistan had cost the lives of several hundred mainly Uzbek-speaking citizens of Kyrgyzstan after the 'Tulip Revolution' had fizzled and been brought to an abrupt end, ushering in a weak oppositional central government; Tajikistan had welcomed the OSCE's initiative in providing critical support for its dire border management; and northern Afghanistan was experiencing some form of political continuity in government for the first time since the 1960s following (arguably flawed) regional and presidential elections even while being confronted with resurgent Taliban activities. Let us now turn our attention to an analysis of the ways in which recent political discourses and events have influenced the practice of power in this region's peripheries.

[9] The Kyrgyzstani government's handover of the disputed Üzöngü-Kuush region (roughly 90,000 ha in the high Tian Shan range) in 2001 had an immediate effect on the popularity and legitimacy of the Akaev regime and is generally seen as having been the first serious sign of widespread public disaffection with the government, especially within the Bishkek elite, that led to its ultimate overthrow four years later. In GBAO, rumours persist that the Tajikistani government just recently handed over a section of disputed territory near the road to the Qolma Pass to the PRC, a region in Murghab *raion* "east of Chechekde that contains gold and uranium mines – mines that the Soviet Union successfully kept from Chinese hands and that now the ineffectual government has given away, just like that!" (interview by the author with an anonymous official, November 2005, in Khorog).

Soviet legacy

The Soviet legacy in Central Asian states is strong and fundamentally affects the contemporary framework of these states' political lives. How did the momentous happenings surrounding the collapse of the Soviet Union affect the nations 'between' the decayed Soviet state and the initially off-balance political leadership in the Central Asian periphery? The Union did not collapse due to centrifugal pressure at the Central Asian periphery – it may not have been the socialist paradise it purported to represent but, certainly in Central Asia as opposed to the Union's former Baltic periphery, neither did people see it generally as a prison or purgatory. Indeed, the elites in the Central Asian Republics, whatever their reinvention in the following years as 'nationalist leaders', were reluctant to sign away their political legitimacy; the attempted *coup d'état* in Moscow in 1991 enjoyed Central Asian elites' support, and these states were among the last to declare their independence from the defunct Union[10].

To this day, the Central Asian Republics (with the exception of Kyrgyzstan since the Tulip Revolution and the fall of Askar Akayev) are all governed by the successor regimes to the Soviet Communist Party, while the official institutional structures of the Soviet era have remained largely unchanged, in particular in the domain of the institution of border control. This, however, is where the similarities between the Republics end: while Kazakhstan has changed its internal (*oblast*) boundaries numerous times along with the seats of local governments and even the state capital (from Almaty to Astana), Kyrgyzstan has done this only in the Ferghana Valley (creating Jalal-Abad *oblast* from a part of Osh *oblast*), and Tajikistan has been forced in the interest of maintaining territorial integrity to retain the autonomous *oblast* status of Gorno-Badakhshan's. Moreover, borderlanders in Kyrgyzstan have adopted different strategies of dealing with the new state's control over its periphery than have borderlanders in GBAO, with both cases exhibiting a high degree of continuity with processes set in motion during the Soviet era.

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[10] Kyrgyzstan was the first of these five states to do so in August 1991; Tajikistan was the last in September 1991.

The single most momentous change in the post-Soviet lives of Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Pamiris brought about by the transition of their political environment from Soviet Socialist Republics to independent states, and the one of most interest to us here in the context of Central Asian boundaries and borderlanders' interactions with their states, has been their reclassification from Soviet citizens to Kyrgyzstani, Uzbekistani, or Tajikistani citizens. Concomitantly, there has been a hardening of former internal boundaries (those between the Socialist Republics, i.e., those meant to represent these socialist nations' boundaries within the Union) into external (sovereign state) boundaries. Locally, this hardening is often seen as the conclusion of a process begun in the early decades of the Soviet Union – a conclusion that has resulted in disunity[11]:

> After 1933 all Turkic peoples started drawing apart because by then the Soviet Union had created boundaries between different families now in different 'stans' and so divided everybody. Before this there had been centuries-long unity, now there is disunity and more local nationalism and mutual dislike, but also more peace than before.

In other words, new borderlanders have been created, one might say, inadvertently – the ethnic Kyrgyz of the Murghab region of Tajikistan's Badakhshan *oblast* are now Tajikistani borderlanders, members of a trans-frontier state group, and Kyrgyz elites there must position themselves in relation to two states, two economic systems, two sets of bureaucratic regulations and border personnel, and two competing focus points of political loyalty. Similarly, Uzbek-speaking citizens of Kyrgyzstan along the Ferghana Valley frontier with Uzbekistan find themselves caught up in the rhetorics of border control between two states exhibiting a high degree of mutual distrust in regard to their newly threatened territorial integrity.

In effect, these are borderlanders within a most peripheral borderland characterised, as we shall see, by the inability of the state to enact what I will term deep borderland control. This inability stands in stark contrast to the new states' *rhetoric* of border control which, notwithstanding the ideological break with the Soviet

[11] Interview by the author with a Kyrgyz student in Bishkek, summer 2006.

past, reproduces many of the former Soviet systems' features and justifications for imposing controls at state boundaries. I will be discussing the gap between such rhetoric and actual implementation as observed in our borderlands in the next section of this report.

Whatever one might have expected would happen with such fundamental and visible changes in the political landscape, we must observe that with the passing of the Soviet Union its boundaries did not crumble. There was no joyous reunion between sundered peoples sharing an ethnonym and distant past, and there was no brave new trans-frontier world to be negotiated between borderlanders and their new/old political centres. What has crumbled since the dissolution of a Union which had brought this formerly so inaccessible region into a globally more connected world is infrastructure: physical infrastructure such as roads, railways, canals, and pipelines has suffered over the past two decades just as much as social infrastructure in the form of educational institutions, avenues of cultural exchange, and state mechanisms to support the population in times of economic hardship. Originally, in newly independent Central Asia, the shift of the political centre from Moscow to the Republican capitals had been supported by Soviet-era institutional infrastructure and avenues of hierarchical communication. The new Republics were already imbued with a well-developed set of formal and informal institutions stemming from the Soviet era; in the former domain these comprised a bloated bureaucracy, centralised economic planning, a system of being provided for – which the citizens automatically expected the new regimes to continue – and, of central importance in our context, a multi-faceted system of border control in place along the *external* (i.e., international Soviet) state boundaries of the Soviet Union.

In the informal domain, states inherited strong regionally based patronage networks serving as the basis for the allocation of scarce economic and political resources, and which had been instrumental in developing robust administrative-territorial identities linked to the respective sub-divisions of the Union. Far more contentious than discourses of an evolving new civil society has been the enforcing of the former administrative (i.e., internal, national) boundaries to adhere to new principles of national sovereign territory marked by external, state boundaries replete with the structures of border control. Infrastructure such as roads and railways were constructed with supra-regional concerns in mind, that is, designed to link the

periphery with the centre in the Russian part of the Union, and therefore they cross the new boundaries frequently and arbitrarily. Similarly, control over water resources, exclusively to be found in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan but mainly of importance in the cotton fields and urban areas of the downstream states of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, has led to frequent and on-going boundary conflicts between all the Central Asian Republics, in particular between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan[12].

Kyrgyzstan

The state of Kyrgyzstan has experienced its own sequence of post-independence internal political realignments, contestations of legitimacy, and fragmentation whilst simultaneously pursuing a narrative of nationalisation that has not contested Soviet-era notions of the right of representation for titular groups over all others – here, the Kyrgyz. A central element figuring in Kyrgyzstan's transition, and possibly the most dominant discourse in the interaction between the *oblasts* and the new government in Bishkek since 1992, has been the pervasion of the new Kyrgyzstani *apparat* by clans seeking to consolidate their Soviet-era horizontal bonds and preserve their bargaining power with central authorities[13]. It is readily observable that effective power in the *oblasts* is wielded by members of elites empowered during the Soviet era and who, during that time, had established a vibrant network tying inhabitants to the fate of the regional and local elites. In effect, the central government in Bishkek has relied on clan networks both to maintain its own position at the centre as well as to retain nominal control over Kyrgyzstani territory.

At the same time, institutional weakness of state authorities is also reflected in newly arising processes of inclusion and exclusion within Kyrgyzstan, thereby supporting a new narrative of 'true belonging' within a state that has sought to legitimate itself by employing symbols of Kyrgyz-ness that supersede Soviet-era symbols of 'fraternal cooperation' between the different ethnic groups living

[12] For an excellent and comprehensive overview of all systemic boundary conflicts in post-Soviet Central Asia, see Polat (2002).

[13] Collins 2006:225.

on what is increasingly seen as *Kyrgyz* territory rather than *Kyrgyzstani* territory. Non-Kyrgyz citizens of Kyrgyzstan, be they Uzbek speakers, Dungani, or Tajiks, for example, can frequently be heard resenting the passing of an old Soviet system that generally allocated them some form of cultural autonomy, linguistic rights, and political representation. Such (often revisionist) sentiments are shared by many non-Kyrgyz Kyrgyzstani citizens today, in particular since the Tulip Revolution of March 2005, which vividly showed how easily non-Kyrgyz could become the target of physical violence and political criticism. One interviewee, herself a Dungani (a group misleadingly known as Chinese Muslims, or Hui in China) teenager whose family relocated to Kyrgyzstan in the late 19th century, had this to say about how her immediate family members experience present-day feelings of exclusion within Kyrgyzstani society:

> I always thought that Kyrgyzstan was a country for Kyrgyzstani citizens. But not all Kyrgyzstani are alike! Sometimes I think the Kyrgyz want us out because they think we're Chinese and don't belong on this side of the border. I have a Kyrgyz name because my father wanted it thus so that the authorities wouldn't take advantage or I'd have problems getting into Kyrgyz school. He always says that before independence we had autonomy rights, you know like schools and the like, but now our freedom resides only in being able to decide to leave this country and go maybe to Russia. We're not rich like some Dungani so nobody is jealous of my family as they are of other families – no, they just don't like us because we claim a different history, you know, without Manas and all that. So do the Russians who are still here, but they at least are seen as sophisticated and strong.

Elections since then have further sidelined the political representation of minorities, and debates over 'the designs' of groups such as the Dungani and Uighurs, but also the Uzbek-speaking families of Osh and Jalal-Abad *oblasts* in the Kyrgyzstani segment of the Ferghana Valley, have focused on the perceived lack of their loyalty to the

Kyrgyzstani state and their potentially subversive connections to the neighbouring states of China's Xinjiang province or Uzbekistan[14].

Under the regime of Kurmanbek Bakiev, lasting from 2005 until his ousting in the uprising of April 2010, popular perceptions of a central government in thrall to local clan interests became even stronger than they had been before. This was exacerbated by the fact that Bakiev hails from the south of the country, making him the first non-northern head of state in Kyrgyzstan since the early Soviet period. His time in office was marred by assassinations of members of parliament, the undue economic profiteering of members of his closest family as well as the rise of several businessmen from his home region, and a steady concentration of central power in the person of the president. Simultaneously, traditional elites in the north were excluded from decision-making, leading to the creation of a group of powerful regional politicians disaffected with a government characterised as nepotistic and antagonistic to vital northern interests.

In order to understand in which ways the Kyrgyzstani state interacts with its periphery and, thus, how state and borderland, majority Kyrgyz and minority Uzbeks and Tajiks interact with each other, we must turn our attention briefly to Kyrgyzstani forms of state-building and its concomitant elements of nationalisation. So as to create unified and distinctive states and impart a sense of common destiny to their members, processes of national identity formation must build on the symbolic resources at the state's disposal. All ruling elites in the Central Asian Republics accord great meaning to the ideology of unity of the titular nation (as retained in all cases from the Soviet-era definition of the term that saw titularity as the highest level of socio-cultural development) and the strengthening of this group identity vis-à-vis other identities within the state[15]. Thus, the political representation of the Kyrgyz takes precedence over that of the minority Uzbeks, Dungani, Tajiks and others in Kyrgyzstan. The

[14] Rumours abound relating to Dungani acting as middlemen for Chinese businesses buying prime real estate in the capital (which can only be done by Kyrgyzstani citizens), or Uighur 'mafias' intent on 'bleeding' the state dry so that China could wield more economic control over Kyrgyzstan. See, for example, *The Times of Central Asia* article "The Chinese Expansionist Threat in Kyrgyzstan" (September 30th 2005) that compares Dungani and Uighurs in Kyrgyzstan to Overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) on the eve of the Vietnamese- Chinese war of 1979.

[15] Smith et al. 1998.

emphasis in much state discourse is on the 'glorious history' of the respective titular group and the historiographic continuities from the days of yore that are presented as rooting the homeland in history, with Kyrgyzstan adopting the mythical (Kyrgyz-speaking) hero Manas as a state symbol and promoting the orally transmitted epic to the level of a text said to represent and incorporate the 'mentality of all Kyrgyz'[16].

The tacit belief, and in the case of Kyrgyzstan this has been cemented in the 1993 Constitution, is that the titular nation has exclusive ownership rights to 'the land' and that its members especially should benefit from new-found freedoms. It follows that a key component of the nationalisation process in post-Soviet Central Asia has been the steady indigenisation of those who wield institutional power, thereby, I suggest, completing a process begun under Soviet *korenizatsiya* (the institutional indigenisation of local titular cadres). However, while the Soviet version thereof employed quotas to represent the distribution of different groups in the Soviet Republics' populations, today's indigenisation looks suspiciously like what Soviet authorities would have described as 'local chauvinism': qualified non-titular doctors or teachers, for example, are replaced by less qualified colleagues of the 'correct' titular category, language laws are passed that marginalize the non-titular languages[17], and employment in administration is generally reserved for Kyrgyz rather than Kyrgyzstani.

In the 1993 Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, a distinction is made between the *'Kyrgyz nation'* and 'the people of Kyrgyzstan', i.e., between nationality (in the Soviet sense) and citizenship (Preamble of the 1993 Constitution, emphases added):

> We, the people of Kyrgyzstan, striving to provide *national revival of the Kyrgyz*, the protection and development of all nationalities,

[16] Lowe 2003:116-7.

[17] Kyrgyzstan, however, has implemented such language laws in a more pragmatic way than, for example, Kazakhstan has done (Dave 2004) by guaranteeing "the preservation, equality and free development and functioning of the Russian language" (1993 Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, Article 5). In Kazakhstan one often encounters the joke that President Nazarbaev, who could not speak a word of Kazakh when he passed the law that made Kazakh the sole language of state, clandestinely started visiting Kazakh language courses.

> forming *along with the Kyrgyz* the people of Kyrgyzstan, based on the commandment of the ancestors to live in unity, peace and concordance, [...] wishing to confirm ourselves as a free and democratic civil society among the peoples of the world, in the face of our authorized representatives, hereby adopt this Constitution.

Kyrgyzstan does not administratively recognise any autonomous regions with their provisions for minority rights (as opposed to Tajikistan's Badakhshan or Uzbekistan's Karakalpakstan) for any of the diverse non-Kyrgyz peoples on its territory and does not pursue a system of quota representation for these groups. Thus, in 1995, ethnic Kyrgyz represented some 60 per cent of the electorate but held over 80 per cent of the state parliament's seats. Such over-representation of the titular nation has sparked fears amongst other groups of discriminatory policies and unofficial discrimination in everyday life.

Furthermore, in Kyrgyzstan much emphasis has been placed on overcoming what is commonly perceived as the divide between the heavily Russified northern part and the more traditionally-minded southern part of the state. Sub-national allegiances in this 'weakest' of states in regard to top-down state-building policies[18] remain strong and an 'in-gathering' of diasporic Kyrgyz communities has not taken place to the degree that it has in Kazakhstan since independence. The debate over the abolishment of the infamous Soviet-era 'fifth column' in Kyrgyzstani passports was, after attempts by the government to abandon it in favour of the ethnically neutral line 'citizen of the Kyrgyz Republic', hijacked by more nationalistically-minded pressure groups and re-instituted, thereby leading Kyrgyzstan to retain the potentially discriminatory line denoting ethnic affiliation by descent[19].

[18] Weak in the sense of not having developed a narrative of authoritarian central control such as has been the case in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and to a certain degree in Kazakhstan; see Jones-Luong 2004.

[19] The fifth column distinguishes between an individual's citizenship and nationality (in the Marxist-Leninist sense of 'nation'); thus, minorities (i.e., non-Kyrgyz citizens of Kyrgyzstan) are, on the one hand, more frequently asked for bribes upon leaving the country or at traffic police checkpoints and, on the other hand, can find it more difficult to find employment. See Smith et al. 1998:155.

Until 1997 the government more or less freely issued Kyrgyzstani passports to migrants arriving from war-torn Tajikistan, who frequently described themselves as 'ethnic Kyrgyz' from Murghab or Jirgital (in the southern Pamir Alay mountains just south of the Kyrgyzstan boundary). Since then, tensions have risen over the perceived influx of rural Southerners (described locally as *myrk*, a derogatory Kyrgyz term for non-Russian speaking, traditionally agricultural Kyrgyz) into the suburbs of Bishkek in the north, especially since they are seen by educated Bishkekis as supporting the so-called Tulip Revolution of March 2005 that ended decades of northern control over political power within Kyrgyzstan. Prior to independence, and for most of the Soviet era, political power had resided with powerful elites from Naryn *oblast* on the frontier with China's Xinjiang province, an area felt to belong to northern Kyrgyzstan. Akin to Badakhshan across the border with Tajikistan to the south, Naryn's population generally benefited from high education and preferential treatment in terms of lucrative and prestigious employment with the security and border forces, a situation which was to come to an end with the withdrawal of Russian/CIS border troops.

With Kyrgyzstani independence, socio-political networks that had been institutionalised during the Soviet era and which, through their adherence to local-level administrative boundaries that had been devised along clan faultlines in the 1930s, exhibited a high degree of regionalisation now became mandatory for survival during the economic woes that have wracked the state ever since[20]: the post-Soviet local *raion* (district) and regional *oblast* elites maintain their power through their abilities to provide employment opportunities or access to resources just as in the past except that, as opposed to the times of the Soviet state when that supra-regional actor had the capacity to use coercion or invest resources, now the weakness of the state in preventing subversion and direct contestation of central authority by regional elites is evident. This conflict between the growing effective autonomy of *oblasts* and the increasing inability of central authorities to maintain state control over the economic and social domains of citizens' lives is exacerbated by the fact that the state is centrally dependent on support by regional leaders in

[20] Collins 2006:99; Roy 2000:89; Jones-Luong 2004:272.

maintaining a functioning system of institutions such as schools, police forces, and infrastructure maintenance. If regional leaders withdraw their support from the president, the government falls, as was the case in the ignominious end to the Akaev regime that had governed Kyrgyzstan from 1991 until 2005[21].

With the undermining of central state authority by regional political elites in the crucial domains of the constitutional separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary, and government accountability, a monopolisation of state power in the *oblasts* has taken place, with the provincial governors acting there in a largely autonomous way[22]:

> The freedom of the *oblast* from the authorities' meddling and the wealth we can generate and keep here locally all depends on the personage of the *gubernator* – if he astutely selects his *akims* and can rely on the people to elect his candidates, then he can wield much power in Bishkek and the presidential *apparat* will have to leave us alone. Actually, they [the state] should be thankful if the Sarybagysh [clan] resolutely governs Naryn – I mean, they can't even ensure peace and stability in the capital [a reference to the Tulip Revolution and the subsequent lootings (S.P.)] so how would they want to do that out in the Tian Shan [in the east of Kyrgyzstan]? Naryn is a frontier land [*granicheskaya zemlya*] and thus more independent, but don't you worry – we'll keep the Chinese and Tajiks out.

Thus, while *raion akims* (local district heads) are supposedly elected by the people of the *raion*, the choice of *akim* is, in all instances I am aware of, a matter for the provincial governor. These *akims* tend to be individuals who, under the Soviet system, were influential heads of local *kolkhoz* and have profited from the conversion of the state

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[21] See Collins (2006:224–6 and 345–7) for a detailed overview of the interaction between clan leaders and President Akaev and how the removal of local support affected the regime.

[22] Interview by the author with a member of the local elite in Naryn *oblast* (near the border with China), autumn 2005.

farms into 'private' shareholder farms[23], to name just one example that frequently figures in local discussions on the lack of state control over local livelihoods. Importantly, in the context here of a characterisation of local and regional power structures in the weak Kyrgyzstani state, it is regional authorities (as represented in the *oblustuk kengesh*, the provincial government) who maintain control over individuals' access to resources.

Tajikistan

As in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, independent Tajikistan has been largely unsuccessful in promoting a state-wide Tajikistani identity. Regional and, in particular, local clan allegiances largely deriving from Soviet-era administrative and *kolkhoz* networks supersede political loyalty to a weak state. However, Tajikistan exhibits three characteristics absent in its northern neighbour: half the state territory is a designated autonomous *oblast* (officially, the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast GBAO) with its own nominal titular majority of Pamiri; Tajikistan was rent apart in the 1990s by a traumatic civil war fought between factions hailing from the different regions of the country; and outside concern about the porosity and stability of its borders with its volatile southern neighbour Afghanistan.

The civil war and its violent aftermath, lasting altogether from 1992 until 1997 although the capital city Dushanbe had been brought back under government control by the end of 1992, is a complex conflict to approach due to the intricate interplay of ideological, ethnic, religious, and socio-political factors that underlay it. Furthermore, a number of these factors have been mobilised by different participants in the war, and outsiders' understanding of the relationship between the Tajikistani state and the groups residing at and along its southern and eastern periphery has been coloured by a

[23] A topic that greatly exceeds the scope of this report, land reform in Kyrgyzstan, while theoretically performed through the institutions of the state (such as Gosregister, the State Registration Office) has increased the power of raion and oblast officials through their control of the local registration offices that arbitrate on land allocation to individuals. See Dekker (2003:62-3) for a discussion of Kyrgyzstani property regime transition and local power.

lack of awareness as to the importance of very local processes in this former Soviet borderland.

Briefly[24], this most violent conflict anywhere in Central Asia since the 1920s on the surface saw armed members of the 'Islamic-democratic' coalition (headed by the Islamic Renaissance Party IRP) fight against troops loyal to the *ancien regime* of the Tajik Communist Party. The IRP, similar in inspiration to other Sunni movements in the Islamic world such as the Muslim Brothers in Arab regions or the Jama'at-i Islami in Pakistan, based its 'Islamist' outlook heavily on Persian nationalism and borrowed many of its slogans from the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The 'conservatives', on the other hand, derived their legitimacy largely from propagating the secularism and heritage of the Soviet era. With the victory of these conservatives, largely also due to the intervention of Russian troops still stationed along the newly independent Republic's southern borders, the IRP opposition fled to northern Afghanistan which at that time was effectively under the control of Hekmatyar and his Iranian-backed Hizb-i Islami, later to join the Northern Alliance in its resistance to Taliban rule in the rest of Afghanistan. With the signing of the peace accord in 1997, the IRP has become part of the officially recognised political opposition within Tajikistan and, thus, represents the only officially permitted political party in Central Asia which promotes Islamic ideology within the confines of the secular state.

Importantly, the factions of the civil war were, however, only superficially opposed on ideological grounds. Both major antagonists' leadership stemmed from the old Soviet-era nomenklatura, and allegiances within the two groups derived more from belonging within solidarity groups than from religious or political conviction. At first glance, an ethnic component seems to become evident: the oppositional IRP enjoyed full-scale support from the Pamiri of Badakhshan and Tajik-speakers of the Garm Valley, while the conservative faction was supported almost exclusively by Uzbek-speakers from both Khojand in the north and central Tajikistan as well as the Tajiks of Kulyab in the south. However, despite the (losing) IRP's representation of the civil war as an ethnic conflict between regional groups, closer scrutiny reveals that the faultlines between the two antagonists were centrally characterised by sub-ethnic,

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[24] For an excellent overview of the players in this conflict see Roy (1998).

local factors[25]. Just as it had in Kyrgyzstan, the Soviet system of regionalising indigenisation with its effect of politically empowering certain regionally based groups over others had benefited mainly Tajiks from the Leninabad region (today's Khojand in the Tajikistani Ferghana Valley), and power in the Tajik Soviet Republic had generally been wielded by members of that local elite. While GBAO had enjoyed preferential economic treatment under the Soviet system, Pamiris had been largely excluded from political power in Dushanbe throughout the Soviet period, apart from in relation to their over-representation within the security following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

With the dissolution of the Union and the rise of Tajik nationalist rhetoric, along with the explicit targeting of the large groups of Pamiri living in Dushanbe and the Vakhsh valley in western Tajikistan by local armed gangs[26], a newly formed Badakhshani political party (Lal-i Badakhshan, 'Ruby of Badakhshan') declared independence from the Tajikistani state in late 1991. The immediate effect of this was the imposition of blockades against the breakaway *oblast*, the leftovers of which are still evident in the form of the internal borderland checkpoints between GBAO and Tajikistan proper. De facto, until 1997 GBAO was independent of the government, and its re-integration into the state was not accomplished until after the Taliban had seized power in Afghanistan and thereby provoked a Russian initiative to present a 'united front' against radical Islamic groups from the south[27]. The peace deal brokered in 1997 by Russia, Iran, and the United Nations in effect resulted in maintaining the status quo of political power concentrated in the Communist Party successor regime of President Rakhmon, even if the regional group now in power was not from Leninabad/Khojand but rather from Kulyab, the president's native region. GBAO and its regional elites were completely excluded from these negotiations, its population swollen by displaced persons from western Tajikistan and its heavily subsidised economy irrevocably ruined.

To this day, the civil war has had severe consequences for the lives of people living in GBAO and has affected the structures of state authority in all domains. Three such domains stand out: ethno-

[25] Roy (1998:136), Collins (2006:280-285).

[26] Jonson 2006:42.

[27] Bliss 2006:274-5.

political differentiation, ethnic distribution, and new cross-border economic connectivity. *First*, the open politicisation of regional loyalties based on locale, present but hidden during the Soviet period, has included discourses of religious affiliation and differentiation between Ismaili Pamiri and Sunni Tajiks and the Sunni Kyrgyz minority in the north of Badakhshan. The declaration of Badakhshani independence in 1991 was legitimised by mobilising a discourse of national difference between Pamiri and Tajiks, which centrally included the argument that the Ismaili faith was incompatible with the Sunni traditions of the non-Pamiri Tajik titular majority (an argument that had never been possible during Soviet times due to its emphasis on religious identity). In numerous interviews, Pamiri today emphasise that there is no religious tension with Tajiks as such, but that the rise of 'Tajik Islamic radicalism' as perceived by the Ismailis of GBAO is incompatible with peaceful coexistence within the Tajikistani state[28]:

> We Pamiri are an independent *natsionalnost* [nationality], not just *a narod* [people] belonging to the Tajik *natsiya* [nation]. We aren't feudal primitives scratching around in the dust, but neither are we like the Tajiks: we have different languages, a different religion, we live in the mountains rather than in the lowlands and practise a different way of life, our dress is different just as our traditions are different – women are much freer in Badakhshan than they are in Tajikistan and our men don't practise polygamy. Actually, we believe in equality for everybody, also equality for Pamiri and Tajiks, but there truly are no elements in common between us from Badakhshan and those from the rest of the state – we are in truth neighbours but not brothers.

Second, the vagaries of the war and its aftermath have caused shifts in the distribution of the Pamiri within Tajikistan and abroad as well as within GBAO itself. Many returned to their hometowns in GBAO to escape personal persecution in the 1990s[29], while others made use

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[28] Interview by the author with an elderly Pamiri lady resident in Dushanbe, winter 2005.

[29] Bliss (2006:276) concludes that between 30,000 and 50,000 people fled to GBAO in the 1990s. Furthermore, up to 100,000 people were killed in the fighting, with many more raped and traumatised.

of Soviet-era personal networks to migrate to Russia (where possibly around 20,000 live today). The swelling of GBAO's population beyond the even remotely sustainable maximum in this marginal region has had severe repercussions on the relations between Pamiri and the Kyrgyz minority in Badakhshan, up to 35 per cent of whom left for Kyrgyzstan during the war[30]. Russians from Dushanbe and also from Khorog left for Russia at this time, causing a critical brain-drain in regional administration and the education sectors.

Third, the economic collapse precipitated by the withdrawal of Soviet subsidies was made complete with the destruction of much infrastructure and the closing of businesses during the war. As a consequence, new local economies arose: the Kyrgyz in Murghab with their production of meat and the establishment of networks to Kyrgyzstan that could enable the sale of their produce at the bazaar in Osh in Kyrgyzstan's Ferghana Valley attained a form of local power through guaranteeing the survival of Murghab residents; the Russian/CIS border guards stationed along the boundaries to China's Xinjiang province and Afghanistan became local motors of employment and represented the major purchasers of goods at the pathetically understocked bazaars at the time in GBAO; and the trade in narcotics such as opium and, increasingly, heroin from Afghanistan grew immeasurably.

With the Tajikistani state weak (its institutions riddled with localised factions and their particularistic individual interests) and distant (the infrastructural avenues to its eastern periphery frequently physically impassable), the negotiation of power in GBAO has evinced a considerable disparity between constitutional power and local implementation. With the direct nomination of the governor of GBAO and the individual *hokkims* in the eight districts of GBAO, the president of the Tajikistani state officially exerts direct and centralised control over executive power at the regional level. Similarly, the security forces in GBAO as well as local branches of the state administration, all of which are directly subordinated to the state-wide respective ministries, tie the *oblast* directly to Tajikistani

[30] Personal interview with Ken Nakanishi of the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, September 2005, in Bishkek, himself a long-term resident of Bishkek and advisor to Japanese research councils and the Japanese embassy there.

state institutions[31]. However, on the ground, the rise of the new class of *rais qishloq* (village chiefs) empowered by the Aga Khan Foundation has, I believe, led to a new form of political interaction in the everyday lives of GBAO's population which, until very recently, was notable for the glaring absence of the Tajikistani state and its representatives (the governor of the *oblast* and the *hokkims* of the *raions*) in decision-making processes that produce the framework for economic survival throughout GBAO. It is these village organisations which, in effect, have been the driving force behind implementing new infrastructural connectivity. The formal administrative structure of government in GBAO with its departments of construction and irrigation, while technically subject to the respective state-wide departments in Dushanbe, is financed almost exclusively through the Aga Khan Foundation and is therefore, in reality, dependent on this supra-national organisation's demands for local involvement.

Northern Afghanistan

State-building in Afghanistan has always been, and still remains today, a highly complex process, characterised in this state's most recent history by the disjuncture between a de jure highly centralised political system and the de facto rule of local political leaders. Traditionally, since the introduction of a central government in what is today Afghanistan, caught as it was between the British and Russian Empires, it has been Pashtun leaders from the south of the country who have wielded power, thus exacerbating tensions between the overwhelmingly Pashtun south and the ethnically very diverse north of the country. Starting at the beginning of the 20th century, and lasting until the 1960s, central control was in effect ensured through a system of internal colonialism, entailing the relocation of select Pashtun groups into areas lacking Pashtun presence; in particular, this affected northern Afghanistan as well as the inaccessible centre

[31] See *Constitutional Law of the Republic Tadzhikistan On The Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region* (adopted November 4th 1995), reprinted and translated in Butler (1999). Other departments subjected to central rather than *oblast* control are the Financial Department, Customs, the military Commissariat, the Construction Department, and water and power departments; education, significantly, is not subject to such central control.

of the state (dominated by tightly-knit Hazara groups). Orally transmitted memories amongst Tajik and Uzbek-speaking groups in the north underline local beliefs that central government goes hand-in-hand with suppression of non-Pashtun languages, religious beliefs, and identities, and it was resentments such as these that were exploited by the invading Soviet army following 1979, in particular amongst the smaller minorities in the north such as Uzbek-speaking groups.

The occupation of Afghanistan by Soviet forces set in motion forces that were to influence the constitution of local power in the north and fundamentally structure the modes of discourse between the non-Pashtun borderlands and the central state in Kabul to this day. During the struggle against the occupying forces and the pro-Soviet regime that outlived the occupation (and fell in 1992 to be succeeded by a mujaheddin regime headed by Rabbani, a Tajik, which was in turn to be violently brought down by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar), communities organised themselves militarily to defend and control their individual local territories, thus spawning the warlords that have come to characterise the imagery of Afghan politics in the early 21st century. In addition, civilian structures were created at the local level that ensured a minimum of educational and judiciary institutions.

It was precisely these very local structures and institutions that both General Abdul Rashid Dostum, an Uzbek warlord, and Ahmad Shah Massoud, the Tajik leader of the resistance both to the Soviet invasion as well as, later, to the Taliban (as head of the Northern Alliance), were able to mobilise and expand upon in controlling, respectively, the north-west and north-east of Afghanistan in the years following the withdrawal of the Red Army, the civil war raging amongst rival claimants to central power, and, later, the war against the encroaching Taliban from the south. Indeed, both men are credited by local communities today in the north with having preserved peace and order there, of promoting local autonomy, keeping schools open, and creating new commercial ties with the now-independent Central Asian Republics of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and (after the civil war there) Tajikistan[32]. This perpetuated the uniqueness of a 'northern system' within Afghanistan, which had been unleashed

[32] Shahrani 2002:719.

by the Soviet strategy of promoting northern autonomy through territorial bordering, that is, the administrative reconfiguration of the boundaries of local power[33]. Today's provinces in the north stem from this reorganisation and, significantly, ISAF command structures today in the north replicate the old military administrative zoning introduced by the last foreign troops to 'invade' Afghanistan[34].

The impact of local autonomy in northern Afghanistan on the wider state cannot be over-emphasised. Its success as a system against the Soviet occupation propelled its leaders to Kabul and led to a backlash from the Pashtun majority, suddenly seeing their traditional influence over matters of state threatened and, therefore, creating a base for support for the Taliban amongst the suddenly disenfranchised (Pashtun) majority outside the north. With Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara forces at the very heart of central power for a couple of brief years in the early 1990s, resentment rose against non-Pashtun dominance and culminated in initial broad support for the Taliban (who were to remain exclusively backed by Pashtun groups)[35]. In other words, dominance of the state institutions by minorities from the northern periphery was instrumental in the downfall of this non-Pashtun experiment in central government. After the end of the Taliban regime, the overthrow of which is seen in general by Afghans as being due to Northern resistance rather than outside invasion, these minority groups are once again at the centre of disputes between Pashtun and non-Pashtun factions, as is expressed by discourses surrounding the new Constitution of Afghanistan that was passed in 2004, one year before the first elections.

The adoption of this new state constitution was accompanied by much debate in the various regions of Afghanistan, and particularly in the north different groups pursued different purposes in this regard. The council of local elites (the *Loya Jirga*) that was enfranchised to negotiate between local demands and the political form that the state was to take henceforth, was consistently found to be divided

[33] Newman 1988:731-2.

[34] For a military break-down of ISAF zone structures, see The Institute for the Study of War, at http://www.understandingwar.org, accessed November 10th, 2010. ISAF's Regional Command North in effect uses the old Soviet administrative infrastructure in northern Afghanistan's nine provinces.

[35] Hyman 2002:312.

along ethnic lines. Thus, Pashtun elites were pushed to support a strongly centralised, presidential system while all smaller groups argued in favour of parliamentary federation. Crucially, and in the end decisively, the Tajik elites supported Pashtun calls for a strongly centralised state, and it was this system that was adopted over the wishes of groups such as the Uzbeks[36]. Tajik support is due to their status as the second-largest group in the state and their relatively wide distribution outside their immediate homelands in the north (including a strong presence in the environs of Kabul), whereas Uzbeks and Hazara are concentrated in specific localities.

In terms of the representational rights in the post-Taliban state, Pashtuns (with American support) were able to institute a presidential system over the wishes of Tajiks, Uzbeks, and others, who feared they would be excluded from Kabul. However, with the guarantee of vice-presidential representation for non-Pashtuns (a Tajik in this case), an agreement was made. More saliently in the context of northern Afghanistan's borderlands, provincial governors are appointed by the centre and these regional representatives are always non-local and are, thus, not seen by local elites as representing local interests at the state level – an area of increasing conflict in Afghanistan today.

To exacerbate this lack of representation, the effectiveness of provincial government is curtailed by the flow of all local taxes straight to the centre (from where funds could theoretically then be re-invested locally), which is charged with drafting budgets for regional and local-level government[37]. In effect, local elites are constitutionally dependent on the state centre for all kinds of official local-level decision-making, and the oppositional United National Front (consisting predominantly of former members of the Northern Alliance as well as local Tajik and Uzbek elites) has consistently advocated direct elections for provincial governors as well as local-level control over budgetary matters. It goes without saying that the potential subversion of the state in terms of financial income in the borderlands is a considerable risk to the centre. With the presence in the relatively peaceful north of Turkish and Chinese construction firms, entrepreneurs operating across the newly opened borders to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and newly reconnecting border markets,

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[36] Adeney 2008:543.

[37] *ibid.*:544.

local elites here will and do take advantage of the new connectivity financially, thereby depriving the state of much-needed income and fuelling local feelings of cognitive distance to Kabul. State demands for local income to be redirected to the core are met with the same disregard locally as have been calls for local militias to make their weapons available to government troops in the fight against the Taliban insurgency in the south of the country.

This report focuses solely on the northern parts of Afghanistan, that is, the borderlands to post-Soviet Central Asia, rather than including a wider discussion of internal Afghan narratives of power or governance, and we focus our attention on the special circumstances of local power in the north. However, it is important to note that even in the north, locally held notions of 'being an Afghan', that is, a citizen of Afghanistan, have evolved greatly since the late 1970s. While before this, identification with a state dominated by Pashtun groups was minimal at best in minority areas, decades of war against both outsiders as well as between groups have led to wider acceptance by minority groups of a supra-regional, political identity as Afghans[38]: old local elites in the borderlands were supplanted by the rise of militias and their concomitant political parties based on narratives of resistance to both Soviet power and the old families in control of local affairs (some of which had been regarded as too pliant to the Soviet regime). All non-Pashtun groups that lacked political influence on the state found themselves constituting their resistance along ethnic lines in order to challenge Pashtun dominance; however, empirically, such resistance has not expressed itself in narratives of separation from the state. There has been no secessionist movement within Afghanistan even while there have been grave conflicts between different segments of the state. Furthermore, exile, as experienced by the at least 5 million Afghan refugees, has also contributed to new identification with a political homeland.

Rather, ethnic and religious diversity within this weak state has been available to groups in Afghan society as well as the state itself, and it has been mobilised and manipulated not only to further the state's goals, but also to further individuals' aspirations deriving from discourses between majority and minority, state and periphery. In addition, the boundaries between various groups here

[38] Hyman 2002:310–311.

seem much clearer on maps and in the minds of outsiders than they do on the ground. Thus, while the last census to be completed by the American Central Intelligence Agency in 2008[39] put the Tajik population of Afghanistan at 27% (hence, the second-largest group after the Pashtuns at 42%, and more than the Uzbeks at about 9%), this conceals differences within the 'Tajik' group: Pamiri groups in Afghanistan's Badakhshan region are seen as Tajiks although, as we have already seen in the context of Tajikistan, they do not regard themselves as such. Pamiris in Afghanistan are an invisible group, subsumed under an ethnonym not applicable to speakers of different languages who also practise a completely different form of Islam (being part of the Ismailiyya); their inclusion within the Tajik group boosts Tajik political strength relative to other groups.

Outside actors

This section serves to identify a number of actors pursuing concrete goals within the borderlands of southern Central Asia and northern Afghanistan and, crucially, to locate the interfaces at which such outside forces affect, influence, and are influenced by discourses taking place between the states here and in their peripheries. These actors are supranational in nature and, due to the international system's strictures of upholding local national sovereignty, they see themselves forced into negotiating their operations primarily with representatives of the centre rather than the periphery (in which, significantly, these operations are located). Who are these outside forces, how do they fit in within internal discourses of control, and in which way can we position their narratives within our context of uncovering the framework of interaction between the state and the borderland? Seen from the perspective of local populations at the edges of these states, five such actors figure in local perceptions of outside influence, and we shall now regard each in turn:

[39] CIA World Factbook 2008, available at https://www.cia.gov/library, accessed November 10th, 2010. The last Afghan census was in 1979, the year of the Soviet invasion.

Outside actors in the region

NATO/ISAF forces militarily active in the Afghan borderlands but also involved in infrastructural and logistical support in Tajikistan (the new Northern Distribution Network) and Kyrgyzstan (Manas Airbase);

OSCE involvement with border control and border management at the state level in Tajikistan;
the Aga Khan Foundation and its developmental programmes in the two segments of Badakhshan (GBAO in Tajikistan and the north-west of Afghanistan);

CIS border guards and locals' lingering memories of their presence in Tajikistan (withdrawal in 2005) and Kyrgyzstan (withdrawal in 1999);

A number of Chinese companies operating infrastructural projects and transporting goods especially in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (and, it is to be assumed, increasingly in Afghanistan).

First, with the expansion of the International Security Assistance Force ISAF in Afghanistan to deploy outside of Kabul following its takeover by NATO in 2003, a new mandate was created for outside military forces that resulted in the establishment of regional commands in order to assist the Afghan government in exercising its authority and influence throughout the state. Its core responsibilities are to assist the Afghan government in the establishment of a "secure and stable environment", to support reconstruction and development, to support the growth of governance structures and promote an environment within which governance can improve, and to assist in counter-narcotics efforts[40]. In the northern Afghan borderlands, where counter-insurgency operations have been rare

[40] See the site on NATO's role in Afghanistan, available at http://www.nato.int, accessed November 10th, 2010.

at best and the Taliban have not made much impact on the general security situation, the presence of foreign troops (in our region, mainly under German command) affects locals in a limited number of ways. Most significantly, this is in the form of so-called Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), which are charged with providing security through development and reconstruction and extending the reach and influence of both the Coalition Forces and the Afghan government. Operating in an environment less prone to unexpected attack, the German PRTs, the first in the country in 2004, strictly separate civilian (reconstruction) from military (force protection) tasks, and base the civilian arm of the teams in structures separate from the standard military compounds to be found elsewhere in Afghanistan. This certainly enhances acceptance amongst locals and yet, as a policy paper points out, the lack of local involvement in structures more or less entirely run by outsiders will lead to resentment amongst locals[41].

More significant than actual troop presence in northern Afghanistan is what we may call the 'regional spill-over effect' of the war in Afghanistan on neighbouring Tajikistan. From a local perspective, such spill-over is evident not in locals' heightened fears of any putative Islamic insurgency moving northwards in search of secure territory to regroup in (a fear not shared by any individuals interviewed in the region, as opposed to what either Western media or regional governments might suggest), but rather in the most recent developments involving logistical support for NATO's war effort. With the increase of attacks on troop supplies transiting from Pakistan over the Khyber Pass and into eastern Afghanistan, effort has been put into the development of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), one of whose vital trajectories is projected to run through Tajikistan, connecting to Manas airbase in Kyrgyzstan.

These logistical networks are intended to relieve supply concerns for the increased number of troops in Afghanistan following the 2009 surge authorised by the Obama administration[42]. The fear

[41] See Eronen 2008:38-9. The author also points out the dire lack of research on local attitudes to these PRTs.

[42] The Center for Strategic & International Studies, a Washington-based think-tank, estimates that demand for non-military supplies will rise 200-300% in 2010-2011 as compared to 2008. See http://csis.org/program, accessed November 10th, 2010.

within NATO is that attacks will be re-focused to now include northern Afghanistan (including the main electricity lines supplying Kabul with power exported from Uzbekistan) and, specifically, infrastructure promoting the war. In fact, according to unverified reports, this has begun to happen already in the north[43]. It is feared, furthermore, that such attacks will migrate northwards to Tajikistani territory, and it can be assumed that new infrastructure there will be placed under special security regimes. In effect, such a network will result in increased control over the major arteries of southern Central Asia, and such control will be enacted in collusion with the military support of the Tajikistani and Uzbekistani states.

While American policy-makers might well be quick to point out that the institutionalisation of the NDN should bring economic opportunity to local communities (presumably by giving contracts to local companies and providing local employment opportunities in maintenance, servicing, and transport), local attitudes in southern Tajikistan's borderlands are likely to emphasise another aspect: the increased presence of central state authorities even in small local communities hitherto only lightly (if at all) under the watchful and suspicious eye of the state. Furthermore, locals may well be asking themselves what is to happen with such improved connectivity once the outsiders it is designed for disappear, as they inevitably will following withdrawal from Afghanistan. Data are as yet unavailable, but it stands to reason that local elites as well as borderlanders themselves will seek to contest central state control over arteries that have the potential to fundamentally affect political and economic local conditions.

Second, both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are members of the OSCE, and Afghanistan enjoys the status of a Partner for Co-operation. The presence of an OSCE centre in Dushanbe and the adoption of its new mandate there in 2008 has implications for the ways in which Tajikistan manages both its relations with the international community as well as for its strategies of border control. Indeed, these two domains are closely entwined, with the state actively pursuing a rhetoric of 'assistance in matters of security and stability' that chimes well with international concerns over the region and, in particular, the Afghan frontier, thereby lending legitimacy and

[43] See, for example, http://www.eursia.net, accessed November 10th, 2010.

credibility to an embattled regime. Explicitly, the presence of the OSCE here is designed to[44]

> promote the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments as well as the co-operation of the Republic of Tajikistan within the OSCE framework, with special emphasis on the regional context, in all OSCE dimensions, including the economic, environmental, human and political aspects of security and stability;
> and assist the Republic of Tajikistan in the development of common approaches to problems and threats to security, taking into account the commitments of the Republic of Tajikistan to contribute to stability and security, to prevent conflicts and take measures for crisis management, as well as in the areas of, inter alia, police-related activities, border management and security and anti-trafficking[.]

In order to address these concerns, an OSCE Border Management Staff College was inaugurated in mid-2009, with the explicit aim of acting as a central institution where officials from all border-related agencies throughout the OSCE area can enhance their knowledge and exchange information on keeping borders "open and secure". This is in accordance with OSCE beliefs that "good border management" is essential to preventing terrorism and combating transnational crimes such as the trafficking of drugs, weapons, human beings and contraband. To achieve this, the College has been holding workshops on "Leadership and Management", "National Border Management Strategies", and "Travel Documents Security", as well as providing training opportunities for officers from border-related agencies in Afghanistan and Tajikistan[45]. Furthermore, OSCE activities concretely seek to enable Tajikistani border troops to detect and prevent illegal movement across the Tajikistani-Afghan border, and to help the Tajikistani customs service and a group of Afghan customs officials to detect precursor chemicals and other commodities illegally entering

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[44] See the regional OSCE homepage at http://www.osce.org/tajikistan, accessed November 10th, 2010. All OSCE quotes in these paragraphs are taken from this site.

[45] Although, by late 2009, no border officials from Afghanistan had been able to actually participate in the College's activities due to "unforeseen circumstances" (not further elaborated upon, however).

Tajikistan from China's Xinjiang province through the Qolma Pass border crossing point in the far eastern borderlands of GBAO, near Murghab (opened in 2004, and which will be examined shortly when we discuss Chinese entrepreneurs in GBAO and their co-optation of local border control).

Strikingly, but absolutely in accordance with OSCE structures, much emphasis is placed on enabling the state to project power into its periphery. In its efforts to effectively control borderlands whose inhabitants might well be deemed by central authorities as possessing dubious allegiances to the state, such outside support for state structures does not go unnoticed locally. That is, the framework of negotiation between local elites and the state will be influenced, especially in a region such as GBAO where post-Soviet structures of control have until now been weak. Fundamentally, OSCE personnel (just like United Nations staff) are perceived locally as powerful outsiders who choose to place the centre's concerns over local concerns. This impression is reinforced by local mockery of the aloofness of such individuals of the Organisation who actually make it to local areas: expensive jeeps (usually non-Russian-made), accommodation in "state guesthouses", and lack of language skills beyond possibly Russian (with its association of Soviet-era state structures), as well as beamingly positive coverage in state-run media outlets of their value to Tajikistan as a whole, all serve to reinforce local suspicions that the interests of the state are paramount.

Furthermore, the OSCE's focus on physical border control, a domain that affects most livelihoods in some way, especially in peripheral GBAO, additionally connects the Organisation with state institutions which, in Tajikistan, are seen as ineffective, corrupt, and self-serving. In reality, in peripheral borderlands such as these, "border management" and "security" are arguably not local concerns, and the implementation thereof will be open to contestation at local levels. Naturally, OSCE work in other domains finds much greater local approval, especially in the area of micro-finance assistance to local NGOs and the re-integration of refugees from the civil war[46]. And yet the imagery of an organisation tightly bound to the state does persist while commendable de-mining activities, for example,

[46] For more information on such activities, see OSCE Magazine, June/July 2007, available at http://www.osce.org, accessed November 10th, 2010.

are carried out in tandem with members of the Tajikistani Ministry of Defence.

Third, in Tajikistan's Badakhshan region, from 1993 until 2000 the entire *oblast*, experiencing up to 90% unemployment and terrible starvation, was run by the Aga Khan Foundation which, to this day, remains the largest provider of jobs, development programmes, and infrastructural maintenance and support[47]. In fact, the involvement of this supra-state Ismaili organisation in GBAO has had far-reaching implications for this borderland, both domestically and across the boundary to Afghanistan in terms of creating new avenues of contact such as new border bridges and roads that supercede state-sanctioned policies of permissible trajectories, thus effectively competing with the Tajikistani state. The Aga Khan, spiritual head of the Ismailiyya, moved quickly to lend substantial financial support to the Pamiri and is widely seen by the inhabitants of GBAO as, in the words of one local leader in Khorog in 2006, "having saved Pamiri lives when the Tajikistani state could not have cared less". Indeed, with the war and the subsequent drying up of supplies organised by the state, local administration within the *oblast* basically lost all efficacy in providing the fundamental necessities of life to the inhabitants, and the administration's legitimacy became void in the eyes of the population.

The Aga Khan's support agencies over the following years came to institutionalise a system of 'coordinators' elected informally by locals at the lowest administrative level of the *qishloq* (village) who took charge of such supplies, the distribution of food, and, increasingly, the communication of the need for locals' involvement in infrastructural schemes such as road maintenance and the formalisation of market places. By and large, the individuals thus employed were well-educated men and women such as teachers and Soviet-era *kolkhoz* leaders who supported the Aga Khan's revolutionary call for land

[47] For a more in-depth overview of the functions and structures of the Aga Khan Foundation and its related Mountain Society Development Support Programme (MSDSP) see Chatterjee (2002:111) and Bliss (2006:297-329).

privatisation in GBAO[48]; according to interviews, the incipient new village-level elite were often Pamiri returnees from other parts of Tajikistan. Since 2000, the direct influence of the Aga Khan Foundation has been diluted by the introduction of new NGOs in GBAO[49] as well as a shift in the organisation's financial support from GBAO across the boundary to Afghanistan and the substantial Ismaili population there (since then expanded to include a wide range of programmes throughout central and northern Afghanistan, including microfinance, mobile telephone networks, and the protection of cultural heritage)[50]. It is since then that new boundary-transcending infrastructure has been most actively promoted in the form of bridges at Khorog (erected 2003/4) and other settlements along the Pyanj River, a promotion that serves to cognitively expand locals' inclusion in a larger market space.

Fourth, a non-local, non-Tajikistani actor present in GBAO, which has critically influenced the way in which this borderland has experienced the lack of Tajikistani state control over its borderlanders, has been the Russian and CIS military forces charged by the Russian Federation with guarding the post-Soviet frontier with Afghanistan. The dissolution of the Union stranded three bodies of such forces on Tajikistani territory: an airforce regiment, the infamous 201st Motor Rifle Division[51], and, significantly, the border troops of the KGB. The lack of a Tajikistani Ministry of Defence at the time of independence, and the non-existence of a regular army throughout the civil war, gave the new state very little say in the continued presence of these troops and the boundaries to Xinjiang and Afghanistan remained firmly

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[48] As Bliss (2006:308) discusses, 'privatisation' in GBAO, which is unique in Tajikistan, means 'private land management' rather than 'private land use'. This difference points to the fact that land may not be owned but rather is leased and that this lease is inheritable on former *sovkhoz* lands; in addition, 'managers' of pasture land in Murghab raion are, as opposed to in the rest of GBAO, exempt from all land tax (Robinson 2005:204), meaning that Kyrgyz herders around Murghab are unpopularly given an edge in the local GBAO economy.

[49] Such as the French NGO 'Acted' that has established a strong presence in Murghab.

[50] See the Foundation's site at http://www.akdn.org/afghanistan, accessed November 10th, 2010.

[51] The 201st MRD was part of the 40th Army in the Afghanistan invasion in 1979 and has developed a name for itself as both an elite force as well as a form of Russian 'Foreign Legion'. See Orr (1998) for an excellent overview.

under the control of the KGB (to be renamed FSB) of the Ministry of the Interior of the Russian Federation rather than Tajikistan. The old Soviet system of the *zapretnaya pogranichnaya zona* (forbidden borderzone) was upheld and, thus, Tajikistani sovereignty over its territory was entirely a myth until their official final withdrawal in 2005: internal access to GBAO was granted by these Russian troops, as was movement within GBAO – entirely as in the Soviet period.

The make-up of these forces is crucial to understanding their gatekeeper function in regard to borderlander negotiation with these 'occupiers'. The 201st consisted overwhelmingly of a Russian professional cadre of officers and a large number of Tajik conscripts, mainly from the west of the state; the border guards, with their personnel bases in Murghab, Khorog, and three other towns, consisted of an entirely Russian officer cadre and mainly Tajikistani citizens (many of whom were Russians) and reported directly to State Security in Moscow[52]. When the civil war ended and the Tajikistani state began to implement its desire to militarily control its own territory, conflict between decommissioned guerrilla forces now serving in the new Tajikistani Army and the Russian military forces was unavoidable and actual on-the-ground stability was not guaranteed by anyone except the aforementioned Russian forces until after 2001[53].

As far as is evident in interviews in Khorog and Murghab with local residents of these towns, by 1998 local militias in GBAO that had been set up during the war were cooperating with the Russian troops in ensuring a minimum of social order and assuming the administrative duties of the Tajikistani state, such as the checking of internal travel documents. Tajikistani military forces did not penetrate GBAO until after the road linking Khorog with Dushanbe (that had been destroyed in the war) was restored in 2004, and the Tajikistani KGB and Ministry of the Interior with its OVIR (Division of Visas and Registration) department did not begin exercising control over the means of movement within its borderlands until 2005. Thus, internal control over the borderland was exclusively enacted by non-local forces until just five years ago. In other words, cognitively from a local perspective, the Tajikistani state had been invisible in terms of

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52 Orr 1998:156.

53 Jonson 2006:46–7.

actual territorial control, with locals experiencing what control there was as a direct structural continuation of Soviet discourses of control.

Fifth, the presence of individuals and private companies in local settings in southern Central Asia is having an impact on local perceptions of state power as well as creating new friction between the periphery and the centre. Specifically, this is most noticeable in the region in the form of Chinese labourers, truck drivers, and small enterprises. It also succinctly shows populations in post-Soviet Central Asia that China has cognitively come much closer than it ever did during the Soviet period, when the frontier to the People's Republic was, in effect, sealed shut from the late 1950s onwards. This new proximity is, without exception in the opinion of the author, locally seen as threatening rather than as an opportunity for local economic development[54]. Both in Kyrgyzstan and in Tajikistan, narratives of the weakness of the state in enforcing effective border control to China crucially contain an increased presence of Chinese citizens as ultimate proof. Border officials are not seen as protecting the state from such outsiders, but rather as profiting from them themselves. One former Russian border guard (now a Kyrgyzstani citizen) interviewed by the author in Bishkek in summer 2006 had this to say in regard to customs checks on Chinese trucks:

> Our customs officials at Torugart and especially at Irkeshtam [both on the Kyrgyzstan-Chinese border], praise their honesty – do you think anybody in Bishkek ever sees any of the confiscated material and goods? Hell, it all goes right into their pockets and from there to god knows what vodka shop or brothel. Actually no, a certain part will go to the [Ministry of Internal Affairs] – and those [...] don't hand it over to the state. If they did, we'd actually get some investment in our infrastructure and show it to the Chinese. Now that would stop them laughing at our poverty and just doing as they like here!

Indeed, the Kyrgyzstani side of this boundary sports decrepit barbed wire that is missing in places, unlit customs buildings, old Soviet-era

[54] For more on new forms of interaction between China and the Central Asian Republics, see Parham (2009), which is based on anthropological observations in the region. This section derives largely from that insight.

plaques in fading Russian, and border guards equipped with little but old Kalashnikovs and non-functioning portable military phone boxes.

The scene on the Tajikistani side of the Qolma port to China is not much different, with the same poor infrastructure and equipment glaringly at odds with the shiny buildings and nifty gadgets found on Chinese side. Here, in addition, conflict between the Aga Khan Foundation's support for infrastructural projects and the distant state's prioritisation of projects not supported locally continuously leads to difficult implementation of projects funded by the state. Thus, when the horrendous floods of spring 2004 washed away both a large section of the Pamir Highway north of Murghab and obliterated a section of the new road to Qolma (just opened that year), the state for political reasons directed its attention to the latter, to the disgruntlement of locals in GBAO (who argued rightly that the Pamir Highway to Osh was critical to their survival). The result was the slipshod reconstruction of the Qolma road and a drastic deterioration of the road to Osh. In the words of one resident of Murghab interviewed in winter 2005:

> Now Dushanbe managed to get both things wrong: we suffered because the road to the bazaar in Osh was impassable for ages and our border traffic suffered because the Chinese had to first come and repair the road here in GBAO and we lost out on jobs. If they'd just let the Aga Khan finance the Osh road, we could have then done something about the other one without needing to employ Chinese, of all people.

Chinese trucks now appear deep within the Kyrgyzstani and Tajikistani hinterland. Unlike at other former Soviet boundaries[55], here trucks continue through the borderlands unsealed and relatively unimpeded, selling off goods en route to the final destination as decided by the driver – most, however, do this at local bazaars (in the provincial centres of Naryn or Sary Tash, respectively) or most profitably outside Bishkek or Osh, respectively, depending on the

[55] At the Kazakhstani or Russian boundaries with China, all trans-boundary goods traffic must switch vehicle to a locally registered form of transport and all container contents are sealed by customs not to be opened until the final destination (Almaty or Vladivostok/Khabarovsk/Chita, respectively).

driver's abilities in negotiating such penetration with local officials. Such negotiation skills are vital to Chinese companies' profits, and Chinese networks exist especially in Kyrgyzstan that coordinate distribution to these markets, and also facilitate interaction with local security and administrative bodies[56].

Driving from Dushanbe, Tajikistan's capital, to Khorog in GBAO, one encounters numerous Chinese construction companies as well as Chinese trucks and Chinese workers driving the heavy machinery needed for road construction. This, despite the fact that access is officially complicated by onerous paperwork requirements: as we shall see in the Case Study of the Pamir Highway at the end of this report, obtaining the necessary internal travel documents can be avoided on a case-by-case basis. In the case of Chinese 'businesspeople', collusion with gatekeepers is possible depending on the connections a driver and/or his employer in China possesses within Tajikistan. One of the major reasons empirically encountered again and again by the author for local borderlanders' resentment of the ease with which Chinese citizens are seen to "flaunt our laws and make fools of our police" is the fact that their presence is seen as[57]

> supporting Dushanbe's claim of control over GBAO: by paying bribes they accept Dushanbe's political conditions and the money does not come here [to GBAO], and the central government's rules then make it difficult for those Chinese to deal directly with us. I bet Rakhmon [the Tajikistani president (S.P.)] sits at a table in Dushanbe with Chinese businessmen laughing at our impotence.

Such 'impotence' is empirically reflected in precisely those Chinese individuals' own appraisals of the ease with which they cross over; and such an imagery is underlined by observations made by Chinese citizens on the conditions pertaining on the Kyrgyzstani side of the border[58]:

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[56] Interview with an anonymous Chinese businessman at the "Kashgar Representative Office of Xinjiang China in the Bishkek of Kyrgyzstan" [sic], autumn 2006.

[57] Interview with an anonymous official (a local member of the oblast government in Khorog), November 2005, in Khorog.

[58] Interview with a Chinese businessman from Kashgar, with whom the author crossed the border from China to Kyrgyzstan, summer 2006.

> Welcome to Kyrgyzstan! They drink vodka here instead of tea, and they mingle their blood and minds with Russians. This makes them poor despite independence. Just look at how this road [leading away from the border] is neglected, and how the fence to China over there has holes in it. Those 'professionals' [i.e., the border guards (S.P.)] back there are the very people stripping the barbed wire off the fence to sell it to us. Do you remember all the trucks from Kyrgyzstan on the Chinese side standing around waiting for their goods to be inspected and reloaded onto Chinese trucks? How many trucks did you see at Torugart [the Kyrgyzstani checkpoint (S.P)]? Not one was waiting – they all continue straight through the port and right into Naryn these days. The truck drivers bring some *baijiu* [Chinese vodka] for your professionals, and maybe a Hong Kong porno movie or two, and they're through. Good for business at home, good for the guards, good for the Naryn market I suppose – but the people here know who makes the decisions these days and ever since the Russians left: it's us.

From the perspective of borderlanders here, the Chinese presence is not subversive but rather a symbol of the lack of local political power to regulate (and thereby benefit from) trans-frontier traffic. It remains to be seen how Chinese construction workers in Afghanistan will be received locally following the deal signed in September 2010 by a Chinese company to construct a railway link between Kabul and the Uzbekistani border[59].

[59] Xinhua news agency, available at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn, accessed November 10th, 2010.

Dynamics of borderland interaction

We have seen in the preceding section of this report how state weakness relates to life at the periphery: interaction between central states here and their peripheries has come to be characterised by the burgeoning power of regional elites. As discussed, regional power over local livelihoods in these borderlands is wielded not by state authorities but by members of elites enfranchised in Soviet times (in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) or, in northern Afghanistan, by elites who successfully defended local interests against occupation and non-local insurgents. These elites have interacted with outside forces to ensure local survival. The state in these regions has been seen to be distant and not the crucial actor in the borderlands of southern Central Asia and northern Afghanistan that it likes to present itself as (and that it is regarded as by the international community).

Now, in this more conceptual section, we will introduce a new, bottom-up perspective on the dynamics playing out at states' peripheries. This will not only serve to place our region into a larger framework of comparativity with global border processes and state – periphery interaction in general, but also enable us to draw conclusions that have a wider range of applicability in terms of policy design. How do elites in borderlands influence the political centre? In what way does the presence of an international border influence their opportunities to negotiate power? How do ethnic minorities figure in such internal discourses of control between centre and periphery? Which kinds of interaction tie borderlands and their states together, and how can such frequently hidden networks be uncovered for analysis?

These are the questions that are addressed here, and the concepts introduced in this section are intended to offer us a novel view of peripheral places by adopting a dynamic cross-border rather than a state-centred perspective. In this way, we can uncover the cracks in political discourse upon which borderlanders depend in their negotiation with 'their' state, and we can analyse cross-border and state-internal networks within their wider context of interaction between two states.

Framework of the dynamics of borderland interaction

The borderland perspective is a call to systemically regard borderlands sundered by an international state boundary as one socio-economic space: a Borderland. This allows us to realise that any given state's internal dynamics influence (and are in turn influenced by) a territory in a neighbouring state. Thus, by shifting the actual borderline between states to the centre of attention (and, hence, also the groups inhabiting its immediate vicinity on either side), we can adjust our understanding of the inter-relatedness of adjacent political spaces and systematically analyse what actually happens alongside, on, and through/across borders.

Being a borderlander means belonging to a group caught between two different social, political, and economic systems vying for influence on local identities and political loyalties. They are shrouded in ambivalence, both politically (in their relationships with 'their' state) and socio-culturally (in their relationships with other groups in both states), and inhabit an environment (a Borderland milieu) that displays transnationalism, threat, a sense of otherness and of separation. Therefore, they are both powerful in their ability to question state control as well as contested in terms of state loyalty.

Borderland elites and trans-frontier networks are at the interface between local borderland populations and the states that they straddle. Local elites in the borderlands negotiate with the state centre and can employ their usually hidden cross-border networks to influence policy on both sides of the border. Such networks have a profound effect on questions of borderland stability and, in our region here, have been used to ideologically project a state's power as well as threaten that power.

Frontier economics revolve around issues arising from a simple realisation: borderlands are economically peripheral from the perspective of any one state but, from a cross-border

perspective that includes both states simultaneously, they form one economic space spread over two systems. The differential between these generates local economic opportunity. To combat this, states tend to connect local economic activity to political loyalty. Thus, the discourses of subversion generated are at odds with local livelihoods unless states succeed in addressing local socio-economic issues and thereby create internal connectivity.

The relevance of this type of analysis for our understanding of processes actually taking place on the ground in the borderlands of southern Central Asia and northern Afghanistan will be shown in the individual sections that follow. The concepts outlined will be applied to various processes taking place in this report's regional focus, but the primary focus of this section is on discussing the socio-political parameters of life at the state's margins.

Academic, economic, and political research into frontiers and boundaries conducted over most of the 20th century, and the analyses that have accompanied such work, has been seen to take for granted an inherent centre-based perspective. That perspective has focused on the problematic demarcation of certain boundaries, territorial disputes, the infiltration of undesirable persons and goods, to name just a few classic themes. In contrast to this, we shall begin our discussion of the dynamics of borderland interaction by introducing a perspective that moves the state's periphery to the centre of attention. This will make us sensitive to new ways of looking at regions which, on maps at least, seem like any other part of a state's territory. This allows us to focus on how inhabitants of such regions adapt to or struggle against the imposition of a boundary.

The borderland perspective

Central Asian borders are not all alike despite their common genesis. Empirically observed structural differences exist between the respective borders of the Republics despite their common history as

internal Soviet boundaries. In order to appreciate these differences and illuminate the basic parameters of state-to-borderland interaction, what follows is a classification of the types of borderlands[60] which we will subsequently apply to this region.

Typologies of borderlands

Alienated borderlands are those where mutual state animosity, either towards each other or towards the borderland population, has led to heavy militarisation and the establishment of stifling controls over trans-boundary traffic, preventing any form of regularised ties across the boundary. *Co-existent borderlands* exist when the states involved are capable of reducing the threat of armed conflict along the border and officially allow limited trans-boundary interaction, generally within formal parameters established by the neighbouring states. *Interdependent borderlands* are to be found where borderlands are symbiotically linked in terms of economic climate and probably social and cultural systems, but where concerns over 'national interests' in either or both states compel the governments to carefully monitor the boundary and borderland and only allow an opening to the extent that this serves the state's agenda; interdependence does not imply a symmetrical relationship but rather can include economic complementarity. Finally, *integrated borderlands* represent a stage in which neighbouring states have decided to eliminate the boundary in all but name between them, and where there no longer exist significant barriers to economic transactions or human movement and exchange; borderlanders for all practical purposes mingle economically and socially with their neighbouring counterparts in an environment of political stability, military security, and economic strength.

[60] Martinez 1994:1–5.

Examples of these four types may include: the Central Asian Sino-Soviet borderlands from the 1960s until 1990 ('alienated' due to a complete closure of cross-border interaction), the Israel-Jordan borderland ('co-existent' since the mid-1990s), the USA-Mexico borderlands ('interdependent'), and European Union borderlands between states having signed the Schengen Agreement, but also the administratively generated borderlands between the Soviet Republics within the Soviet Union ('integrated').

Central Asian borders between the former Soviet republics present us with a rare example of a highly dynamic kaleidoscope of shifts in borderland interaction taking place while we watch, so to speak. This is the first time since the end of the colonial period in Africa that observers can study the wider regional implications of the systemic realignment of life at hardening international boundaries. Crucially in our region, the emergence of new states has led to a range of differing experiences in regard to borderland typology at the various new Central Asian frontiers – an initial indicator of a more highly differentiated view than is typical of the five Central Asian successor states of the Soviet Union, whose post-independence development most certainly differs in terms of border control and borderland reality.

Turkmenistan's borderland with Uzbekistan is most easily classified as alienated. Uzbekistan's borderlands with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan exhibit a high degree of alienation but, at times of relative stability in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the Ferghana Valley borderlands in particular can be described as co-existent and predominantly controlled by Uzbekistani policies of control. This is regardless of its neighbouring states' diplomatic wishes – the Uzbekistani boundaries are also the only boundaries in the region to have been heavily mined since independence. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan share a borderland which can be classified as interdependent, and only very recently (most obviously since the so-called Tulip Revolution of 2005 in Kyrgyzstan) have heightened Kazakhstani anxieties led to gradual but still weak forms of official control mechanisms, pointing to a desire for a more co-existent type.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the two poorest regional states and arguably the least politically stable in terms of internal, centralised control over their peripheries, have not been able to impose effective border control between them as enacted by these two sovereign states

themselves. Their borderlands can be regarded as interdependent in reality whilst being merely co-existent in state rhetoric. In terms of the former Soviet Union's external boundaries, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have loosened slightly the Soviet-era alienation of, respectively, the Chinese and Iranian borderlands while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have, as I argue elsewhere at length[61], seen themselves gradually obliged to adopt a more co-existent type in their respective borderlands with China's Xinjiang province. Tajikistan's borderlands with northern Afghanistan are more complex to classify in this context: heavy militarisation and alienation on the Soviet side in the 1970s and 1980s, followed by a decade of what in effect amounted to high interdependency loosely monitored by the remnants of the Soviet border guard regiments left behind. Today, renewed connectivity driven by new infrastructure and local-level economic interaction factor alongside global narratives of threat emanating from an unstable Afghanistan.

Of central importance in determining the role of borderlands and borderlanders both within and in transcending their states is being able to locate these entities in time and space. While traditionally political geography has thought in terms of two separate borderlands straddling a common boundary, a more differentiated approach is to regard two adjacent borderlands as segments of a single, trans-boundary borderland. For clarity, I will here use the term 'the Borderland' (with a capital B), which can be assumed to be analogous to a trans-state social, economic, and/or cultural unit in all but administrative practice. Following this, it becomes crucial to delimit the extent of the areas being dealt with and to explore the disparities between official spatial representations of borderlands and the area that border studies deal with: how far away from the boundary does the Borderland extend in each direction? How far from the boundary must one go to no longer be able to identify frontier-related social, political, and/or economic phenomena?

[61] Parham 2009.

Borderlands as zones

Starting on both sides of the boundary, there is first the *border heartland*, a zone where social networks are shaped directly by the boundary and depend on its vagaries for their survival. Following this there is the *intermediate borderland*, the region that continually feels the influence of the boundary within its social networks but in intensities varying from moderate to weak. Finally, there is the *outer borderland*, which only feels the effects of the boundary in relation to local social networks under exceptional circumstances (such as the flaring up of armed hostilities or a radical change in economic permeability). This typology identifies spatial zones based on the strength and omnipresence of the trans-boundary social networks that serve to distinguish borderlands from the rest of their states[62]. With it, we can approach the Borderland with a critical eye to administrative territorial units and normative assumptions: borderlands are changeable spatial and temporal units that are hidden on maps. As far as the state's administration of its borderlands is concerned, it readily becomes obvious that administrative internal boundaries between primary sub-state level units such as provinces, cantons, or autonomous (minority) regions would rarely, if indeed ever, conform neatly with this spatial typology[63].

[62] Baud & van Schendel 1997:221-3.

[63] In respect of my interpretation of this typology, examples of these three zones may include: urban border cities such as Shenzhen between the PRC and Hong Kong, Basle between Germany, Switzerland and France, or Tijuana between the USA and Mexico; and lowest-level administrative units immediately along the boundary like Murghab *raion* in Tajikistan's Badakhshan (border heartland). Parts of mid-level administrative units like Naryn *oblast* in Kyrgyzstan or GBAO in Tajikistan (intermediate borderland). And, finally, parts of the highest sub-state level of administrative units like the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic during Soviet times (outer borderland).

Essential questions are raised here as to how states attempt to administer and control their segment of the Borderland. The social networks that serve as the defining element of this typology, and which will now be examined more closely, will be found to transcend official categories demarcating states and administrative units, thereby turning these into "impassioned zones of political dispute [that] can never be passively accepted"[64]. Understanding border processes must, furthermore, be grounded in local perceptions of social networks between adjacent borderlands and between borderlands and their respective states, whilst also taking into account that official categories do indeed influence (and are influenced by) local realities. A cognitive map of the Borderland must be developed that takes into account the fuzzy areas of meaning that boundaries and border control convey to borderlanders and how this affects local perceptions of ascribed ethnic identity and actual political loyalty.

Borderlands are areas where a local population must and generally does deal with two states. Frequently, and most obviously along southern Central Asian and Afghan borders, this local population constitutes a 'national minority' within at least one of these states and, thus, by implication it represents a 'cultural frontier' between ethnic state majorities and minorities, influencing for example policy decisions and diplomatic arrangements. Indeed, "border communities are implicated in a wide range of local, national and international negotiations"[65] of cultural and political frontiers. Their active role in these negotiations has been stressed in recent research[66]: borderland elites and borderlanders in general can be adept at using such discourses to their advantage and, in the process, undergo cultural transformations. Uncovering the elements and processes of borderland culture and identity is crucial; whatever their real impact, political boundaries and their borderlands become part of the perception and mental maps of borderlanders by being simultaneously institutions and processes of separation *and* of uniting[67].

[64] Donnan & Wilson 1994:7.

[65] Donnan & Wilson 2001:12.

[66] For example, Sahlins 1998.

[67] Baud & van Schendel 1997:242.

It goes without saying that many of the characteristics of culture and discourse in borderlands are similar to processes found in other segments of state society. However, some things *can only* occur in borderlands at the territorial margins of the political state and some things *never* occur here[68]. Concerning the former category, it is readily observable that economic free trade zones that can offer duty-free goods really only make sense at the edge of a state's economic space; similarly, the cohabitation of local populations with special military zones (and the effects thereof on settlement restrictions) can only be found at the frontier. Beyond the obvious, it is borderlands that witness media influence from the adjacent state (both inadvertent seepage and purposive propaganda), physical population flows, and blatant systemic economic differentials. In regard to the latter category, freedom of movement is never to be found in the vicinity of boundaries, just as purely locally-run state institutions do not exist here. Furthermore, even in states that generally do not restrict the ownership of land and property rights, buying and selling land in the immediate vicinity of the boundary always becomes a matter of national debate and, thus, political concern or, indeed, is forbidden outright.

Symptomatic of the weakness of the state in Kyrgyzstan, the local influx of Chinese buyers of real estate, especially in Naryn *oblast*, has fundamentally affected local borderlanders' perceptions of the power of the state to reign in the regional government's corruption. Thus, local Kyrgyz in Naryn *oblast* in the east of the country as well as in the tri-partite borderland between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan's GBAO, and China in the south-east cite, as examples of their disaffection with the Bishkek government to sufficiently supervise the respective regional governments' business interests, the construction of hotels for Chinese citizens by Chinese construction firms on prime real estate bought by Chinese in Naryn itself as well as Sary Tash. This phenomenon relates, on the one hand, to lax local implementation of the law against non-Kyrgyzstani citizens buying property in Kyrgyzstan (indicative of the regionalised nature of political power in this state) and presents us, on the other, with a subversion of the notion of what a state should be able to and is, indeed, expected to enforce in its borderlands.

[68] Donnan & Wilson 2001:4.

In terms of analysing the processes influencing the interaction of borderlands both with their 'own' states and with the state beyond the border (and in particular that neighbouring state's borderland), three elements will now be discussed in more detail: the socio-political characteristics of membership within the group of borderlanders; the parameters of functioning trans-frontier networks and the local borderland elites that control the interaction between state and borderland population; and the role of frontier economics. These elements will help us to understand how, for example, a state's policies on smuggling are received locally, or in which way the interaction between ethnic groups affects state power in southern Central Asia.

Being a borderlander

> Those so-called Kyrgyz up there in the *prostor* [here: wastes (S.P.)] of Murghab are all representatives of Chinese *rody* [tribes]. They look like Chinese and not like the real Kyrgyz of Kyrgyzstan and they understand the Chinese language. When they come here to Khorog [the capital of Tajikistan's GBAO], which is rare these days, they are afraid of us Pamiri and only come in groups – they think we'll beat them up. This has happened in the past because some here think they are part of the Chinese mafia. Of course that's rubbish but one does wonder why they haven't all gone to Kyrgyzstan if they think they're Kyrgyz. [...] I think they're not Kyrgyz because if they were they would have left by now.[69]

Such was the exclamation by a Pamiri interviewee when asked what she thought about the Kyrgyz minority of Murghab (all of them Tajikistani citizens and members of an ethnic group that has been settled in that region for well over a century). These Kyrgyz groups are generally seen by local Pamiri as 'not belonging' in GBAO, just as Pamiri themselves are frequently seen as 'not belonging' in Tajikistan. Both groups, from the state's point of view, are peripheral borderland populations. And yet, fundamental differences exist between them.

[69] Interview by the author with a Pamiri school teacher in Khorog, winter 2005.

How can we understand what differentiates one minority from another?

Types of borderland groups

Not all communities of borderlanders are affected in the same way by the existence of boundaries. There will exist very different processes of identity and negotiation depending on the appreciation of bonds transgressing the boundary, bonds in effect potentially tying the Borderland together. Let us differentiate between three basic types of borderlanders[70]: *first*, those who share ethnic ties across the boundary as well as with those within the core of their state; *second*, those who share ties across the boundary with borderland communities in the adjacent state but not with those within either state's core; and, *third*, those who share ethnic ties only with members of their state's core population and not with borderlanders across the boundary (i.e., those borderlanders who could be regarded as members of their state's nation, or ethnic majority)[71]. This typology serves to classify a first look at borderlanders and their ties with the state-transcending Borderland. However, it is fundamentally important to view such ties diachronically for the simple reason that ethnic ties are by no means static and unchangeable – the states involved can (and so often do) pursue a 'rhetoric of difference' that will have effects on perceptions of cross-border ethnic proximity.

While borderlanders may be regarded by foreign anthropologists and journalists – and sometimes also by concerned politicians at

[70] Based on Wilson and Donnan 1998:13-14.

[71] The authors mention the following examples in accordance with their types: first, the Irish-Northern Irish Borderland and the Hungarian Borderland (shared by Hungary, Slovenia, Romania, and Slovakia); second, the Basque Borderland between France and Spain; third, the Hatay Turks in the Turkey-Syria Borderland.

the cores of the states involved – as belonging to one or another of these types, local attitudes within borderland communities towards such communities in the wider Borderland may very well be in conflict with such representations. This is evident in the quotation introducing this sub-section: taking the logic of “all Kyrgyz belong in Kyrgyzstan”, the Kyrgyz minority of Murghab is characterised as “not Kyrgyz”. Similarly, Pamiri until the independence of Tajikistan were referred to as “Mountain Tajiks” (despite the lack of Tajik-ness already discussed) because otherwise the logic of Soviet nationality policy would have granted them their own Republic. There is confusion over ‘Tajik’ groups: in China, Pamiri are labelled as Tajiks (and a potential loyalty to Tajikistan is feared in certain policy circles in Beijing), just as they are in Afghanistan (which adopted Soviet labels quite readily). Such local-level processes are important in understanding that group loyalties need not be as normative as commonly assumed at the state level or by outside observers (who generally rely on state representations rather than on local attitudes).

In other words, local (borderland) and non-local (state or outsider) ascriptions of ethnic proximity and the similarities and the differences, affinities and antagonisms this implies can vary widely depending on who is asked, thereby in effect representing a distortion depending on the point of view of the observer. In addition to this, borderlands can be territories inhabited both by ‘new’ trans-frontier peoples and ‘old’ groups. This is especially the case where vaguely defined imperial frontiers have mutated into modern state boundaries and witnessed an influx of members of the state’s ethnic majority who are frequently perceived as displacing or ‘diluting’ indigenous populations now finding themselves the subjects of new minority discourses in ‘their own’ homelands. This, of course, is the situation as perceived locally within large parts of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region on the Chinese side of the Central Asian frontier, where the massive migration of Han Chinese since the 1990s is perceived by Uighurs as a policy of demographic engineering directed at frontier control. Similarly, the relocation of Pashtun groups to Tajik-dominated areas in fertile regions of northern Afghanistan, implemented in several waves throughout the 20th century, has caused resentment locally and promotes the belief

among minorities that state control is synonymous with domination of the ethnic majority[72].

Be that as it may, the degree of political loyalty to the state *as perceived by* representatives of the state hinges crucially on how a state's borderlanders are classified according to this typology: state discourses on 'dangerous' borderlanders will focus on the second of these types, whereas borderlanders of the third type will be more likely to be represented as 'innocuous'. First-type borderlanders will generally find themselves the centrepiece of political negotiations between the state in which they enjoy citizenship and the neighbouring state that could lay claim to their ethnic allegiance. In the borderlands of Central Asia and Afghanistan there are to be found groups seen as constituting types one and two, but not the third type: Uzbek-speakers in the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Ferghana Valley, the Kyrgyz of north-eastern GBAO in Tajikistan, Tajiks in northern Afghanistan (first type); and Ismaili Pamiri groups in the Badakhshan regions of Tajikistan and Afghanistan (second).

Elements of borderlander ambivalence

State-centred political and ethnic ambivalence is underlined by other ambivalent factors in borderlanders' lives: they are confronted with dealing with two (or more) different economic systems (currencies and fluctuating exchange rates being the strongest symbols of such a boundary) and languages. They are subject to meta-discourses of international relations and the international community's unwavering and monolithic belief in the territorial integrity of 'nation-states'. At the same level, they are the object of suspicion in regard to their assumed role in illegal trafficking (of narcotics, people, and subversive or 'terrorist' ideologies) and other clandestine activities. Images of borderlanders within their states' cores frequently carry derogative connotations and contain stereotypes such as 'economically backward', 'immoral', and 'opportunistic'. Borderlanders are, however, often also seen as powerful: they

[72] Hyman 2002:307.

stand to gain from their position economically in an illicit manner through smuggling and regional 'brokerage' thanks to their boundary proximity but also politically in the form of special institutional attention (in the form of infrastructural aid projects, minority laws, and lobby groups). On the one hand, borderlanders are seen to be able to pick and choose the most advantageous elements of either system and, on the other, they are ascribed with the power to 'exit' (by becoming rebellious and contesting state hegemony, for example, or by attempting to play off states against one another). States have therefore seen it in their best interest to attempt to decisively orient borderlanders' loyalties inwards to the state, a strategy that includes generating economic and political incentives for locals.

In this vein, in Tajikistan, Tajiks in Dushanbe can be heard to frequently accuse the Pamiri of Badakhshan of benefiting unfairly from the Aga Khan's involvement in GBAO, which is perceived by many non-Pamiri as disproportionately focusing on Ismaili groups to the disadvantage of the Sunni Kyrgyz or Tajiks. Historically during the late Soviet period, and with important implications even today, mountainous and inaccessible GBAO enjoyed preferential treatment by the Union's centre in comparison to the rural areas of western Tajikistan[73]. Due to the sub-titular status of the Pamiri, the vagaries of the Soviet system gave them direct representation at the centre (in the Soviet of Nationalities). This was thanks to GBAO's autonomous status and the very strong presence locally of the Soviet military that was not subject to the Tajik Soviet Republic's political decisions but rather to the all-Union Central Committee[74]:

> Until the 1980s we had real autonomy from the Tajiks: the Khorog *hukumat* [district] had two phone lines: one to Dushanbe, one to

[73] See Kreutzmann 2004, and Bliss 2006:255.

[74] Interview by the author with a Pamiri member of GBAO's political elite (who had served for twenty years under Soviet rule, as well), winter 2005.

> Moscow. The first line was not important to the *oblast* [GBAO], the second was. Ah, we were so much more integrated in the Soviet Union than was the rest [of the Soviet Republic of Tajikistan], and they [the Tajiks] really didn't like that, but what could they do?

The concomitant structures of subsidies granted disproportionately to GBAO had the effect of largely keeping internal tensions within the *oblast* between titular Tajiks and sub-titular Pamiris to a strict minimum because the Soviet centre in Moscow was the arbitrator of such allocations and not, as in other cases, the local Soviet Republic's government. Outside of GBAO, however, Pamiri had no political influence in the Tajik Soviet Republic, despite a large diaspora of Pamiri throughout its territory, and the tensions that were to erupt in the Tajikistani civil war of the 1990s (following the Soviet dissolution and the end of subsidies) had been simmering for years.

Characteristics of the borderland milieu

At a conceptual level, borderlands are set apart from interior zones through unique processes, all of which together constitute a 'borderland milieu': transnationalism, international conflict and accommodation, ethnic conflict and accommodation, otherness, and separateness. *First*, 'transnationalism' denotes avenues of contact between adjacent borderlanders that foster substantive trade, tourism, local migration, flows of information, cultural and educational exchanges, and other personal relationships such as close family ties and religious or ritual attachment to locations across the boundary.

Second, due to the immediate proximity to the boundary, frontier-related strife between states is distinctive of a borderlander identity because of the possibility of being subject to attack (either physically or politically or even economically) from either their own state (which may well doubt local loyalties) or the neighbouring state (which may be suspicious of the cross-border influence borderlanders exert on their own

territory). However close states may come to be politically or economically, borderlands always witness boundary-inherent restrictions that frequently may seem to be more abrasive than the international climate would suggest, thereby adding a new, localised perspective to the *rhetoric* of two states' dealings with each other.

Third, borderlanders tend to be faced with complex ethnic realities both in relation to their states' majority population and borderlanders across the boundary. Conquered peoples often have oral traditions describing the intrusion of unwelcome cultural 'aliens' into their homelands; mainstream societies in modern states often attempt to forcefully assimilate peripheral minorities.

Fourth, the uniqueness of a borderland environment leads to both local and national perceptions of the otherness of borderlander society. State laws deemed injurious to regional interests (in particular language and economic legislation) are bent or ignored because they are felt to fail in taking into account the unique conditions of the boundary. Contact with members of other states and with mobile individuals from diverse ethnic groups and foreign places leads to higher rates of multilinguality and complex hybridity in many borderlands.

Fifth, a sense of separateness and possibly even alienation is not uncommon in many borderlands due to the development of local interests that frequently and fundamentally clash with central governments or mainstream cultural codes. The open negotiation of such interests (for example with the aim of differentiated enforcement of state laws) in political arenas such as parliaments or national assemblies is often made difficult by lack of direct political influence at the centre, leading to local frustration and methods of 'self-help'.

The milieu of borderlands in this region has seen considerable shifts take place in the last two decades. Along the formerly internal boundaries of the Soviet Union, borders that now separate the independent states of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, 'transnationalism' has shrunk immeasurably in all the domains of exchange and flows alluded to here, with the possible (and volatile) exceptions of petty trade in the Ferghana Valley (most of which is focused on connecting markets in Osh with Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent)[75]. In terms of official proclamations on new close international economic cooperation, the on-the-ground benefits thereof for local borderlanders between, for example, China and Kyrgyzstan are negligible. Contrary to the *rhetoric*, on the Chinese side of the boundary, local (mainly Kyrgyz-speaking) borderlanders are in effect excluded from participation in the burgeoning cross-boundary economic exchanges taking place today because of internal travel restrictions in the Chinese borderlands[76].

A 'sense of separateness' was at the root of GBAO's alignment with an Islamist political party seeking to oust the successor regime to the Tajik Communist Party in the civil war of the 1990s. Following the state's recognition of Badakhshan's autonomous status, local groups were, however, largely excluded from the state's body politic and it fell to outside, supra-state organisations (the Aga Khan Foundation and the United Nations Development Program) as well as various NGOs such as the French-based Acted to support local livelihoods. Critically, it was up to such actors to negotiate large infrastructural projects such as new border bridges to Afghanistan's Badakhshan region as well as minimum maintenance of the Soviet-era arteries such as the vital and irreplaceable Pamir Highway linking GBAO to the Ferghana Valley, a topic we shall return to in the last chapter of this report.

[75] The one former internal Soviet boundary that has not witnessed serious shifts in transnational flows is the one between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, although the political upheavals in 2005 and again in 2010 have led to at least a discourse (in Kazakhstan) of the need for a more tightly controlled border. However, in everyday life Kazakhs and Kyrgyz pass more or less freely through the borderlands lying between Bishkek and Almaty (in Kazakhstan).

[76] For a complete discussion of this phenomenon, see Parham 2009:331.

Ethnic identity and political loyalty of groups

The strength of the processes informing borderlanders' identities (the milieu) depends not only on borderlands' distinctiveness to the states involved but crucially also on whether borderlanders, so frequently members of the first type described above, are members of a trans-frontier *state* group (i.e., with titular status in another state) or trans-frontier *non-state* group (without any titular status abroad).

The former type of borderlanders see themselves, or are seen by those with the power to ascribe such ties to borderlanders, as a minority group within their own state and simultaneously as being closely related to a dominant ethnic majority in the neighbouring state. The latter represent a group without such a state on either side of the boundary, in other words they are seen as belonging to a non-state ethnic group[77].

Both the identities and the political loyalties of borderlanders of the first kind are influenced by the proximity of such a state – whether to the detriment or advancement of their status within their 'host' state depends largely on relationships that are often framed in terms of majority-minority discourses. Hence, borderlanders of the first kind can find negotiating their role within their state influenced by, and influencing, inter-state relations. They often manoeuvre themselves into a central position in such relations by representing an ethnic minority 'exclave' within their state and thereby gaining sometimes powerful avenues of 'voice' and the implicit threat of 'exit'[78]. Borderlanders of the second kind must find other avenues to negotiate their relationship within their state. Such groups are at first glance more exposed to state-centred hegemonic and

[77] Examples of the first type are Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland, Hungarians in Romania, Russians in Kazakhstan, or Uzbek-speakers in Kyrgyzstan as well as Tajik-speakers in Afghanistan; examples of the second type are Basques in France and Spain, Uighurs in Central Asia and Xinjiang, or Pamiri in Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

[78] Hirschman 1970:90-107.

inclusivist policies geared towards locating them at the bottom of this hierarchical scale through majority-minority discourses. Opportunities for 'voice' and, in particular, 'exit' are far more limited and must, if they are not to be deemed irredentist, take place within the severely limited areas of expression allowed by their state. For such groups, contesting state policies in the borderland and promoting local identities can be seen by the state as an attempt at delegitimising that state's control over its (officially rarely emphasised) ethnically heterogeneous borderlands.

Pamiri groups in Tajikistan's GBAO and north-eastern Afghanistan belong to this second type, and local conflict with the Kyrgyz of Murghab certainly in part arises from Pamiri perceptions of that group's status as a trans-frontier state group[79]:

> Why do we have to share administrative and political power in our rightful homeland when now those Kyrgyz are lucky enough to have their own independent state right across the border? Why are they still here? Why don't they just go home?

In the recent unrest in the Kyrgyzstani Uzbek-dominated parts of Kyrgyzstan's Ferghana Valley segment, similar sentiments must have been raised, although the Uzbek-speakers who fled the violence did not find a warm welcome in their so-called titular state of Uzbekistan (due to their status as Kyrgyzstani citizens). Simultaneously, members of the various Pamiri groups in Tajikistan's GBAO are viewed as far more 'dangerous' to the Tajikistani state than are the Kyrgyz of GBAO's Murghab district.

In both cases of borderlanders' social and political relationships with their states, then, avenues to the centre(s), networks of communication, and modes of expression are the contested fields of negotiation which will be the subject of the remainder of this section. First and foremost, we must approach the question as to

[79] Interview by the author with a Pamiri bazaar saleswoman in Khorog, spring 2006.

who is enfranchised by both the state and borderlanders themselves to negotiate local Borderland loyalties and 'interpret' the narrative of control over borderlands.

Borderland elites and trans-frontier networks

At the interface between state and borderland population there is to be found a group that we shall term 'the borderland elites'. Local and regional elites are crucial in the relationship between states and those to be governed, regardless of the location where state power is meant to be applied. These are the powerful actors influencing states' control over borderlands. Such elites affect interaction involving competition and conflict for political power, economic benefits, social status, and the negotiation of ethnic identities within multi-ethnic settings between competing elite, class, and leadership groups both within and among different ethnic categories[80]. In borderlands, the power of a state pursuing the project of total control (militarily, economically, socially) over its territorial integrity is also circumscribed by local borderland political networks that can be trans-boundary in nature, and therefore 'international' in an immediate way. We should realise that, thus, the focus must become not one of ethnic identity but rather one of political loyalty as mediated by elites. That is, borderland elites become mobilisers of political loyalties.

In other words, an undue focus solely on ethnic labels obscures such loyalties. In the fight against Taliban encroachment upon northern Afghanistan, two names associated with the Northern Alliance stand out in particular: Abdul Rashid Dostum, an 'ethnic Uzbek' centrally involved in supporting the Soviet invasion into his native Afghanistan (and to this day a member of the current regime's innermost circle), and Ahmad Shah Massoud, an 'ethnic Tajik', widely credited with successfully fighting against the Soviet invaders as well as holding out against the Taliban until his assassination in 2001. Both of these ethnic groups had titular Republics of corresponding Soviet groups, and both were targeted by Soviet policy aimed at gaining their allegiance prior to the invasion. The Tajiks of northern Afghanistan, however, saw themselves as having much to lose under Soviet control

[80] Brass 1991:25.

whereas Uzbeks initially supported it[81]. Merely the status of 'sharing an ethnonym' with the neighbouring Soviet Union did not suffice to gain local elites' support; rather, Uzbeks, as the smaller minority, were less loyal to the notion of 'belonging' to Afghanistan than were Tajiks, who had more to lose from loyalty to the neighbouring state. In other words, loyalty to an Afghan polity among the Uzbek and Tajik minorities in northern Afghanistan is independent of ethnic group membership.

State elites have often been internally divided over a demarcation that would, depending on the faction, best serve individual interests – be it those of the armed forces, bureaucrats, politicians, the aristocracy, landowners, traders, or of industry[82]. Relationships between borderland elites and elites at the centre are influenced by the internal cohesion of the respective groups, the strategic and economic importance of the borderland *per se* for both groups, and the actual presence of the state in the borderland in the form of state representatives.

Borderland elites and state power

In cases where states are successful at integrating local elites into networks of state power, borderland elites derive much of their local power through their legitimation by the state and become *nationalised borderland elites*. Their success at upholding their political position within the borderland depends crucially on their success in assuaging doubts both at the centre (over the degree of control the state has over the borderland) and within the borderland itself (over the degree to which local interests can be addressed in the state).

Often, states find themselves dealing with borderland elites with at least some degree of political networks transcending the boundary, networks that are based within the wider Borderland and offer an alternative, regional legitimation of power. In

[81] Newman 1988:732–3.

[82] Baud & van Schendel 1997:217.

cases where these networks are relatively weak and persist in domains tolerated by the Borderland's states, local elites will find themselves defending local interests towards the states' centres. This they do by employing state-sanctioned codes of expression (such as unequivocal commitments to the central political system or leader, or the exclusive use of an officially recognised language). Their continued political survival will still largely depend on state tolerance.

However, in cases where networks are stronger, alternatives to state legitimation will enable local elites to oppose state policies deemed detrimental to local interests more openly, possibly using state institutions within the borderlands for their own ends and playing states off against one another. These are *trans-frontier borderland elites* – their success at upholding their political position depends crucially on maintaining avenues of contact and frames of negotiation with the state(s) whilst cementing their local power base through representing borderlander interests. In other words, here local elites can fulfil a role as political 'brokers' between the centre and the borderland as long as both the state *and* borderlanders see their interests (state control over the periphery for the former, and mediation of policies and 'localness' for the latter) as being addressed.

Borderland governors in independent post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan *oblasts* are an example of such nationalised borderland elites. Also, the titular nationalities (the Kyrgyz, the Tajiks, etc., but not Pamiri groups) in the periphery of the Soviet Union can be seen as such, particularly during *korenizatsiya* (indigenisation of power) from the 1950s until 1991. This becomes evident in the Soviet legacy of internal administrative boundaries[83]:

[83] Interview by the author with an elderly Tajikistani Kyrgyz in Murghab, winter 2005. The settlements of Sary Tash (Kyrgyzstan) and Karakul (Tajikistan's GBAO) are separated by the new border.

> This boundary [between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan] marks the edges of two states that back then didn't exist outside of the classroom – in Soviet times kids in Sary Tash [in Kyrgyzstan's Osh *oblast*] learned Kyrgyz and Russian and kids in Karakul [in Tajikistan's GBAO] learned Tajik and Russian. The only boundary that was visible was the one that resulted in our school in Karakul being larger and prettier than the one down in Sary Tash because more was invested in GBAO than in Kirgizia [the Kyrgyz SSR]. And our kids then went to Dushanbe whereas the kids from Sary Tash went to Frunze [today's Bishkek], perhaps after that to meet again in Leningrad or Moscow and become colleagues.

On the other hand, if states fail to incorporate borderland elites into the state structure or if borderland elites fail to be integrated into a borderland milieu in the eyes of borderlanders, the chances are that state control will be severely hampered. In cases of local elites being excluded from the participation in state power, these elites are likely to side with (or indeed to incite so as to protect their claim to power) borderlanders in contesting state hegemony over the borderland. At its most extreme, this sometimes precipitates rebellion, in particular when states decide to regain control through military means, as occurred in the context of GBAO's declaration of independence from Tajikistan in 1991[84].

In cases where local elites are not (or are no longer) accepted as representing borderlander interests and identities, borderlanders will regard these elites as betraying 'localness', as agents of an undesirable and distant hegemon rather than as protectors and spokespeople. Rebellion may be held in abeyance but certainly will not be far from the surface. Those we have termed 'nationalised borderland elites' above will be seen by borderlanders as 'nationalised turncoats' or 'corrupted elites' (in cases of traditional borderland elites having distanced themselves from local identification), or as 'agents of exploitation' or a 'colonial upper-class' lording it over the local population (in cases of the replacement of traditional local elites). This is a frequently heard accusation from Uighurs in China's Xinjiang province when talking about certain Uighur politicians in

[84] Pakistan's tribal Northwest Frontier Province is another good contemporary example of this process.

the provincial government. In northern Afghanistan, Tajik elites have been wary of being seen locally as co-operating too closely with the Karzai regime in Kabul in case they are accused of perpetuating Pashtun dominance locally. From this perspective it remains to be seen whether Tajik leaders can successfully position themselves between state and region following the increased demands by the centre for local co-operation.

In order to move away from a simplistic description of the functions of borderland elites and a state-biased focus on what they 'are to accomplish' in borderlands, an on-the-ground inquiry into the nature of the aforementioned trans-frontier networks seems particularly well suited to characterise borderland elites and their central role in negotiating loyalties and political realities in and between states. Who are these groups? How are they constituted? What interests do they pursue, and how do these interests fit in with borderlanders themselves? In order to approach the construction of the political Borderland and to discover which avenues exist and tie the borderlands together internally and across the boundary, locating local elites and differentiating between the types of networks crossing the boundary and tying the Borderland to their respective centres is crucial.

Framework of borderland interaction

The actual forms that the connections between all protagonists involved in borderland interaction take reveals that there exist basically three types of discourses. First, *trans-state policies* between states, usually routed through the respective state centres. These are forms of discourse constituted in the form of bilateral (but not necessarily equitable) treaties and agreements based on policies of states' self-interest. Second, *discourses of control* are geared, from the state's perspective, towards including the borderland within its territorial and political orbit and exerting some form of control over internal Borderland processes, and, from the borderland's perspective, towards mitigating and negotiating this control. Third, *trans-frontier*

networks between the two state segments of the Borderland are those social networks that underlie the ways in which borderlanders relate to one another and influence locally held notions of proximity and a sense of borderland identity and competing state loyalties. These three types are displayed in Figure 1:

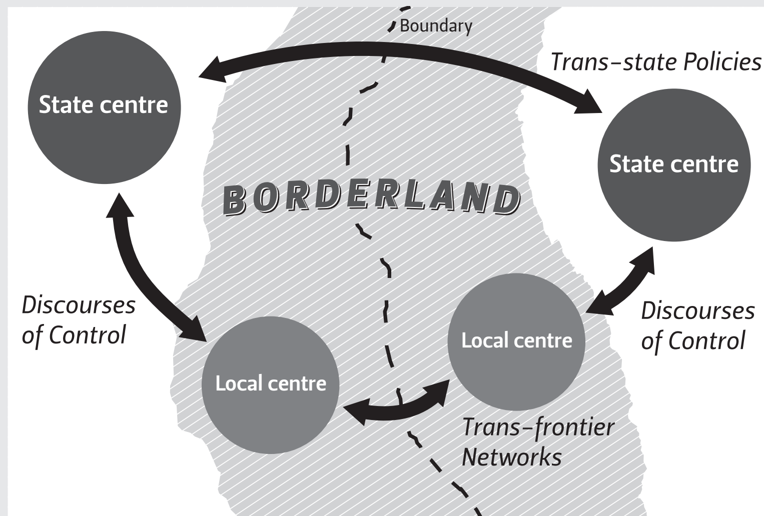

Figure 1: Framework of Borderland interaction

Influence over a state's adjacent segment of the Borderland (i.e., the neighbouring state's borderland) will often be attempted through mobilizing certain trans-frontier networks via discourses of control and depends crucially on borderland elites' middleman function in accomplishing this. An example of this strategy can be seen in Soviet attempts at influencing ethnic relations within China's Xinjiang province through propaganda published and disseminated through trans-frontier networks in Central Asia. Such strategies of subversion and projections of control were also practised across the border to Afghanistan.

Let us apply this framework to the concrete example of the dynamic and fitful evolution of the milieu along the Tajikistan-Afghanistan frontier. This will illustrate the importance of regarding borderlands in terms of local borderlander ambivalence and trans-frontier networks that are intricately entwined with respective internal negotiations of power. In the years prior to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, local transnationalism was promoted in regard to the positive effect Tajik networks could have on bringing the Soviet system to that country. Projecting the 'successes' of the political system in the Soviet Republic of Tajikistan was accomplished by highlighting the oppression of minorities in northern Afghanistan under the old regime of the Afghan Shah. Over the course of the war, radio broadcasts into Afghan territory became common, socialist literature underlining the common heritage of the peoples of northern Afghanistan with those of Soviet Central Asia was disseminated in local languages (presumably Tajik and Uzbek only, however), and 'experts' belonging to Uzbek and Tajik Soviet cadres were sent with their families into villages to connect with the locals[85].

In the early 1980s, as locals recall, Khorog itself teemed with members of the Soviet Army and those engaged in supporting it logistically. It was a busy town all of a sudden, and the black market, supplied with scarce goods from the Kyrgyz Republic, was thriving. However, Afghans from the Soviet-occupied territory just across the Pyanj River were not to be found here due to strictly enforced travel restrictions and the lack of any non-temporary bridges across the raging river (not to be built until the late 1990s and after). North and east of Khorog along the Pamir Highway, heavy traffic dominated (mainly trucks supplying the settlements between Khorog and Osh and mining equipment for the uranium and plutonium mines near Murghab) and endless columns of military vehicles (including tanks, heavy supply trucks, motorised armoured vehicles, etc.) were a common occurrence. Infrastructural projects were started, originating on Soviet territory and designed to focus northern Afghanistan's connectivity away from the south of that state and instead towards the north and Soviet Central Asia.

[85] Newman 1988:732-3.

Simultaneously, such projects in Afghanistan served a domestic purpose: they projected the might of the Soviet state into its own borderlands as well as abroad. An elderly Pamiri recalled his first impressions of the situation of Pamiri life in Afghanistan as follows[86]:

> Following the invasion [of Afghanistan in 1979], we all became aware of the extreme luck (*mi udachniki*) we enjoyed in being Soviet. Every border guard had a story to tell about how children could not read or write, about how women were slaves to their husbands, about how a vehicle needed an hour to cover fifteen kilometres. A friend once brought a crate of candles from Osh to trade at Khorog [the new site of an Afghan bazaar following the invasion] and made a fortune selling them to Soviet soldiers, who used them to bribe important people in Fayzabad [in northern Afghanistan]. Imagine: no electricity, just like here when my father was still alive. All we ever saw across the Pyanj [border river to Afghanistan] was utter darkness and, at day, the *owringi* [rough trails] hugging the cliffs that pass as Afghan 'roads'. When I once travelled to Fayzabad myself no one believed I was Pamiri because I had studied in Moscow. It was terrible to see other Pamiri in such poverty, owning nothing.

Policy across the Soviet border was also intended to be an internal discourse of control over Soviet borderlanders themselves. Confronting locals with the advantages of their own system created loyalty amongst borderlanders who might otherwise have seen newly opened borders as an opportunity for 'exit'. Traditional trans-frontier networks spanning the border had been severely fractured over the past decades by the imposition of strong border control along the Soviet periphery (see next chapter of this report), and new such networks were easily co-opted by the state. Economic ties, especially between the lowland areas of northern Afghanistan and western Tajikistan (as well as Uzbekistan), did in fact succeed in gaining local support within Afghanistan's north, mainly because infrastructural projects were more easily realised here, and local economies profited very quickly from integration into the wider Soviet 'market'[87]. It was

[86] Interview by the author in Khorog, spring 2006.

[87] Newman 1988:738-9.

in the mountainous and neglected north-east (bordering GBAO) that local resistance was fiercest to Soviet control, but this resistance did not initially rely on trans-frontier networks within the Pamiri Borderland.

Soviet mobilisation of internal discourses of control, the setting up of new trans-frontier networks, and the trans-state policies that resulted in Soviet rezoning in the north with the tacit agreement of the Afghan central government did not, however, suffice. While the Soviet war effort largely came to an end due to internal Soviet contingencies rather than actual defeat in the field, armed resistance succeeded in subverting the new trans-frontier networks set up during this period. Thus, towards the end of the occupation the forces of Ahmad Shah Massoud succeeded in inverting these networks and bringing the war onto Soviet territory. This process is reminiscent of contemporary types of inversion taking place today in the Afghan-Pakistani borderlands, with networks set up from Pakistan in support of the Taliban effort in Afghanistan being inverted to reflect back upon Pakistani state territory. Commonly referred to as a "Spill-over Effect", I suspect it is better characterised in these cases as a phenomenon deriving from the subversion of trans-frontier networks that originally supported internal discourses of control but now throw back those discourses by threatening the state's very integrity itself.

During the civil war in Tajikistan, trans-frontier networks set up in the Soviet period were used by Tajik and Pamiri alike to escape the state and seek temporary refuge in northern Afghanistan. With the increase of hostilities in Afghanistan following the rise of the Taliban and with a simmering down of the conflict at home, many of these refugees were to return in the late 1990s. To date, research is lacking on how these returnees from Afghanistan have figured in the survival of trans-frontier networks and their role in the two 'security' issues concerning the Tajikistani state, namely the growth of new forms of Islamic identity (usually referred to as radicalism or extremism by the states of the region) quite new in Tajikistan as well as the cross-border trade in narcotics. However, it is reasonable to assume that the roots of these networks are to be found in Soviet-era networks designed to propagate socialism within Afghanistan. The infiltration, then, of ideological and economic contraband (i.e., Islamic 'fundamentalism' and narcotics) is, from a Borderland perspective, not due to spill-over processes but rather depends on the interaction of internal discourses

of control (now enacted by a weak state) and trans-frontier networks that have taken on new life parallel to the new connectivity of the region set in motion by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

This helps to explain why, at least at an empirically observed level, the Pamiri Borderland has been less susceptible to backdraft effects coming from Afghanistan: Pamiri trans-frontier networks were never mobilised in the Soviet era to the degree that Uzbek and Tajik ones were. This was due mainly to Soviet wariness of 'awakening' Pamiri loyalties to a newly discovered wider Pamiri homeland which could also have included Chinese territory. Tajiks and Uzbeks were, however, by the late 1970s assumed to be more loyal and, in particular, could serve as role models of the Soviet success to their ethnic brethren in Afghanistan to a degree that Pamiri (a technically invisible group in Afghanistan) could not.

Frontier economics

None of the three types of Borderland discourse mentioned in the last section take place without influencing, and being influenced by, at least one of the other two types. Thus, borderland militarisation, for example, takes place against a backdrop of trans-state policy (e.g., keeping the other state informed of troop movements or abiding by agreements of troop levels within a defined zone) and a discourse of control (e.g., in the level of local involvement in requisitioning and participation in troop formations). From this angle, economic reality in borderlands represents a case in which, as I will now outline more closely, all three types of discourse are intricately involved.

Borders as economic barriers and/or filters

National economic space is, in theory, bounded by international boundaries. Terms such as the 'national economy', 'national currency', and 'national bank' are obviously linked to an imagination of a discretely defined and economically sovereign actor on an international stage. From the perspective of trans-

state policies, the boundary between two states represents the limits between internal economic affairs and foreign economic affairs, with the latter of interest to a neighbouring state only inasmuch as this affects international, state-condoned trade. Seen like this, boundaries serve primarily as *barriers* – a line of control both containing the domestic market and excluding foreign forms of exchange. Such barriers are institutionalised through trade tariffs, administrative obstacles to population flow, and restrictions on external investment and the flow of goods.

However, from the same state-centred approach, boundaries can surely also be regarded as fulfilling a *filter* function, one which mediates discrimination "between a number of political and economic systems [and brings] in the key concept of differential revenue"[88]. Differential revenue, deriving from macroeconomic features such as currency value, the labour market, and production regulations, accrues through differences between states' 'market spaces', 'production spaces', and 'support spaces'. Economic value deriving from filtering processes (such as customs payments or 'official' exchange rate differentials) will be seen as belonging to the state and its representatives in borderlands. Fundamentally, political aspects of borderlands take precedence over the economics of borderlands[89].

Representations of boundaries as being barriers or filters invariably stem from the centres' political needs and not from considerations of economic opportunity, especially when a boundary divides (from the state's point of view) two political systems and two economic systems that are potentially in conflict with one another. A major characteristic of borderlands, especially in such cases, is economic peripherality, often caused by states' efforts to curb cross-boundary

[88] Ratti 1993:244–5.

[89] Anderson & O'Dowd 1999:597.

trade and trans-frontier systems of production or, in other words, either keeping market, production, and support spaces national rather than trans-national, or indeed redefining them as such. This is a particularly salient point because boundaries very often artificially fragment market areas, with states seeking to re-orientate economic networks within their borderlands towards the centre and away from the Borderland.

Two examples in our region present themselves in this context: first, the fragmenting of the high-altitude socio-economic Pamir unit, trisected in the late 19th century by the slowly hardening borders of the Russian, British, and Chinese Empires that were to become first the borderlands between the Soviet Union, Afghanistan, and the People's Republic of China, and which is now being reconnected in the borderlands of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Second, the natural market area of the Ferghana Valley, which, after a long period of merely cartographic trisection between the Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Tajik Soviet Republics, is now truly fragmented by the three Soviet successor states sharing the valley.

First, what was to become Soviet GBAO more or less resembled the settlement areas of all six ethnic Pamiri sub-groups, save the Sarykuli and Wakhani; after the boundary delimitations of the late 19th century, the former found themselves on Chinese territory in what is today Tashkurgan Tajik Autonomous County, and the latter were bisected by the Soviet-Afghan boundary marked by the Pyanj River. The new boundary, not enforced to much extent until the late 1930s, politically fragmented a vibrant network of economic and social exchange between the Pamiri groups as well as between Pamiri traders and Ismaili communities in the Northwest Frontier Province of today's Pakistan (then still part of British India). These Pamiri acted as middlemen between Kyrgyz producers of felt products in the southern part of today's Kyrgyzstan and salesmen in Chitral and Hunza trading in household utensils and grain[90]. The sole three small markets in the entire Pamir region itself (Khorog, Murghab, and Tashkurgan) all reflected Pamiri nodes of interaction with non-Pamiri groups that had come to be established in the early 19th century: Khorog served trade networks between Tajiks and Pamiri, Murghab between Kyrgyz pastoralists and Pamiri, and Tashkurgan between

[90] Cobbold 1900, as quoted in Bliss 2006:142.

Pamiri, Kyrgyz, and Uighurs from Kashgar, the largest bazaar in the entire region to this day. With the closing of the Chinese boundary after the revolution there in 1949 as well as the Afghan boundary by Soviet border control, this market space was successfully replaced with greater socio-political inclusion of GBAO within the Union, as discussed above. Thus, the loss of economic opportunity was to a degree compensated by other opportunities for the newly bounded Pamiri of today's Tajikistan.

Following the collapse of that system, this old market space has been slowly re-establishing itself with the help of new infrastructural connectivity (bridges across the raging Pyanj, some road upgrading in northern Afghanistan and Tajikistan). Significantly, however, this market space today produces and markets goods that have a far wider distribution network than has ever been the case historically – regionally produced opium is brought to faraway markets by means of Soviet-era infrastructure such as the slowly degrading Pamir Highway.

Second, the market space of the Ferghana Valley, the bread basket of the entire region that is now politically (and thus economically) more fragmented than ever before in its ancient agricultural history. Traditionally, the entire valley successfully cultivated fruit and various cereal crops as well as being a renowned area for horse and cattle breeding. However, during the Soviet period the valley's abundant water resources were redirected to cotton monoculture and the various food and fodder crops were subsequently heavily marginalized. Cotton production depended on the economic integrity of the entire region due to the vital necessity of the water resources upstream in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and food for this region was imported from other parts of the Union, most notably from western Siberia.

The dissolution of the Union entailed the hardening of the formerly administrative borders, making the water supply for the cotton fields (predominantly in the Uzbekistani segment of the valley) an international issue, due to Kyrgyzstan's and Tajikistan's dependency on the same water for electricity generation. Even more vitally for local residents in the three parts of the valley, however, is that infrastructure was similarly designed with one market space in mind, thereby newly affecting the transportation of food and goods, none of which were any longer produced self-sufficiently by any

one of these three states. This, then, is an example of a market space being established by the core's fiat only to then become fragmented with the core's demise and subsequent replacement by multiple sovereignties claiming segments of the same market space. Crucially, and as opposed to the case in Badakhshan, no newly evolving market reconnection is in sight in the Ferghana Valley, given the ever-tightening strategies of border control practised in particular by Uzbekistan, and locals in the valley have to resort to (and are dependent on for their supply of vital goods) individual and mostly illegal livelihood strategies.

Borders as a local resource

If states tend to frame their boundaries in terms of 'filters' or 'barriers', the tendency in borderlands is often to view the boundary as a 'corridor of opportunity', bridging two different state economies and located in the grey area between what is condoned by the state and that which it prohibits. It is, in fact, the immediate presence of an adjacent state economy that influences borderlanders in their (economic) lives and livelihoods.

Economically speaking, trans-frontier networks and discourses between borderlanders focus on their "unique locational ambiguity by building [Borderland] lives and livelihoods around the particular resource which borders offers"[91], a resource consisting of trading, migration and migrant labour, consumption, and transporting. This resource, and the exploitation thereof, is the subject of a narrative of 'legality' versus 'illegality' entertained both between states as trans-state policies and between states and their borderlanders as discourses of control. It goes without saying that what states regard as being illegal does not necessarily need to match individually held beliefs, and interpretations of the grey areas in between state categories of legal and illegal forms of

[91] Donnan & Wilson 2001:87.

economic exchange and transactions vary widely depending on situational contingencies. The Borderland thus becomes a region of danger to 'national economic interests' because borderlanders transgress the legal boundary for their own economic interests when they see fit, thereby subverting official rhetoric on loyalty to the state.

In regard to the borderland's 'subversive economy', three major elements are found most commonly at the edges of states[92]: prostitution, the passage of undocumented migrant labour, and smuggling. It is in these three domains that state institutions are subverted by compromising the ability of these institutions to control their self-defined domain. These activities do not conform to the laws set up by states in most cases and ignore, contest, and thereby subvert state power in the borderland. This challenges state-driven discourses of control and a state's attempts at constructing the 'terms of engagement' with the adjacent state. All three activities are carried out by entrepreneurs criminalized by states; and these entrepreneurs are represented as threats to security and state power. However, such entrepreneurs would rarely seek the overthrow of state power or even want to damage the wider state economy: such business is conducted merely due to the existence of the boundary and the opportunities it offers. Hence, crucially, contraband is imported or exported not due to a desire to undermine the law but rather because of a demand at home or abroad. 'Demand', of course, can be seen as being centrally influenced (if not created) by a state's ideological contingencies.

Thus, for example, a political desire to resist the ideological influence stemming from a neighbouring state's differing system frequently creates demand for what might be termed 'ideological contraband' (called 'foreign propaganda' in states like China or the Soviet Union).

[92] Donnan & Wilson 2001:88.

With all Central Asian states fearful of so-called Islamic extremism emanating from Afghanistan, border control is also charged with preventing the import of publications promoting unofficial forms of Islam, often termed 'Wahhabist propaganda' and, thus, foreign in nature due to its inferred link to Saudi Arabia.

The Soviet Union took the connection between political loyalty and economic activity very seriously indeed: borderlanders were, in this context, automatically suspect due to their proximity to the 'corrupting' influence of contraband which, especially during the 1920s, was smuggled endemically through the Soviet borderlands. It is here that we witness the first institutionalisation of the *pogranichnaya zona* ('border zone') at its most extreme, in the form of the *zapretnaya zona* ('forbidden zone') – concepts which were to outlast the Soviet Union and remain a key element of post-Soviet border control in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan today[93].

In terms of continuity, the post-Soviet states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have inherited not just a common Soviet legacy but, crucially, an ongoing presence of agents of border control (until 1999 for the former and 2005 for the latter) from the Russian state (euphemistically termed CIS bordertroops). Their constitution and the discourses of control they have been cementing in the post-Soviet period have changed very little from Soviet times in jurisdictional terms even if, as we shall see below, these two states' efficacy in actually implementing the model thus inherited is at best questionable.

'Second' economies such as the three domains mentioned above are by no means separate from regular or legal economic life, often providing income and work in areas which generally experience a dearth of legal opportunities. Smuggling is a case of the discrepancy between states' and borderlanders' respective interpretation of permissible economic pursuits. It develops when states impose restrictions on trade that are not acceptable to (some) borderlanders and, therefore, cannot be enforced. Sometimes such trade is just the

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[93] Early examples of such zones were to be found in the Ukrainian borderlands where, in 1923, all trade in financial commodities such as *valiuta* ('hard currency') and gold was forbidden in a twenty-kilometre area of the boundary, and repeat offenders against this injunction could be exiled outside of a fifty-kilometre border zone (see Chandler 1998:49, 51). The borderlands were to be cleared of unwanted and/or subversive economic (and, hence, political) activities.

continuation of traditional exchange networks which now happen to be international in nature, and sometimes such trade springs up precisely because state policy makes certain goods lucrative to deal in due to price differentials. In either case, the legal boundary itself is the crucial normative element in defining 'smuggle'. This category of economic activity is rarely seen by borderlanders themselves as being criminalized to their own benefit. Therefore, smuggling (either actively through participation or passively by not reporting it to authorities) can often be seen as constituting a part of local borderlander identity[94], and it is because of this local perception that states can decide to influence the physical avenues of contact and exchange between borderlands by limiting trans-boundary trajectories and increasing internal connectivity. This is what we have seen in the context of socio-economically 'persuading' Pamiri inhabitants of Soviet-era GBAO to redirect their loyalties to the Soviet state rather than pursuing cross-boundary, state-subverting ties to Afghanistan and/or China.

Such influence is, in effect, an 'economic discourse of control' playing out between the borderland and the centre. Thus, it is a direct answer to the twin questions of, first, how borderlanders succeed in 'throwing back' economic policies at the state; and, second, what such 'rethinking' at the centre entails for the borderland and its economy. One strategy pursued, in particular in the wider area of Central Asian borderlands, is the establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in the immediate vicinity of the boundary. Conceptually, such special 'free zones' are a characteristic of 'borders seen as barriers' by the state in question (as opposed to open borders or borders fulfilling a filtering function). These zones serve to ease price differentials in the borderland by regularising market spaces, and settlements included within these become 'gateway cities' – borderland cities "given the function of entrance-exit gates, of bridges for the flux of international merchandise, services, capital and human beings"[95] and serving to nationalise the surrounding support space. However, such zones and cities, while purporting

[94] As a selection of examples, see Flynn (1997) on West Africa, Pelkmans (2006) on Georgia, Driessen (1999) on the Mediterranean, Barrett (1997) on the Caucasus in the 18th century, and van Spengen (2000) on Tibetan trans-frontier trade.

[95] Ratti 1993:249.

to benefit borderlanders can also be used to bring the centre right up to the boundary by institutionalising (and hence legalising) former smuggling networks and ingenuously making these serve the state. Locating such gateway cities and discovering their on-the-ground role in serving local economic interests (as opposed to merely fulfilling the centre's needs, be they political, ideological, or economic in nature) must form a vital part of an analysis of life along a state's boundaries.

To conclude this section on economic dynamics in borderlands, it is vital to note that economic relationships do not always conveniently stop at state boundaries: those involved in pursuing trans-frontier economic exchange will continue to do so whenever possible, and the act of doing this influences borderland society and state attitudes. This has, to a certain degree at least, been realised by organisations such as the OSCE. In its "Border Security and Management Concept" (2005) it provides a framework for co-operation by the participating states of that organisation (thus also including Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan)[96]. Here a commitment is shown "to creat[ing] beneficial conditions for social and economic development in border territories, as well as for the prosperity and cultural development of persons belonging to all communities residing in border areas, with access to all opportunities" (§4.6), as well as the "promotion of economic cross-border co-operation and facilitation of local border trade" (Annex §3.ii).

Cross-border co-operation and border trade depend, in effect, on a vital element present at state borders: the agents of border control. These are institutionalised gatekeepers charged with regulating and monitoring goings-on in the vicinity of the border, and they are at the centre of all cross-border transactions. Crucially in the context of the role of state institutions attempting to curb 'illegal' practices, criminalized economic relationships within and between borderlands are by no means limited to borderlanders themselves. Frequently such practices also include representatives of the state (who are rarely, if ever, themselves locals; see next section) such as customs officials, border guards, and immigration and military authorities. Indeed, the borderland provides sustenance, both legal and illegal, to these individuals consigned by the state to make boundaries less

[96] Available at http://www.osce.org, accessed November 10th, 2010.

penetrable and negotiable in the political and economic interests of the state. These relationships are crucial in understanding frontier economics and play a central role in approaching trans-frontier realities in borderlands, especially as they are 'hidden' and often 'invisible' in accounts of the ways in which states 'exist' at their frontier. Thus, we shall now turn our attention to the powerful ways in which borderlines themselves can be and actually are negotiated.

Agents and means of border control

So far, this report has discussed what may be called the multiplicity of degrees of partnership involved in life in the vicinity of political state boundaries. Thus, we have seen that borderland groups are by no means passive receptacles of state policy but, rather, actively structure the political environment at the periphery. They derive their power from proximity to a neighbouring state, and this creates resentment between groups and affects regional interaction with the state; their perceived (dis)loyalty derives from their relative relationship across the border (a relationship often cast in ethnic terms). Borderland elites are primarily political and not ethnic actors. They perform a middleman function in states' dealings with their neighbours by influencing the efficiency of internal discourses of control and they characterise trans-state policies through trans-frontier networks. From a borderland perspective, borders are an economic resource and locals often become the subject of a state's narrative of disloyalty when they act in a border-transcending market space. Furthermore, borderland groups can be surprisingly adept at inverting state-condoned discourses of control and official trans-frontier networks to reflect back upon the state that had originally supported them.

Following this framework informing the social, cultural, and economic interaction between borderlanders and the states involved in negotiating borderland realities and livelihoods, we now turn to scrutinising what border control actually entails in southern Central Asia and northern Afghanistan. Border control is a fact of life very much evident in a state's borderlands, and its framework represents parameters borderlanders must deal with in their lives at the state's margins. This manifestation of the state can be co-opted, evaded, or accepted but it cannot be simply ignored by borderlanders and their local elites – here, the state cannot be taken out of local discourses.

These issues are relevant for understanding how life at the margins of the state interacts with such manifestations of the state. For parties such as the OSCE, border control is a main objective of co-operation and a potential source of the perceived instability of this region. Indeed, as its Border Security and Management Concept states[97]:

[97] Available at http://www.osce.org, accessed November 10th, 2010.

> The participating States will promote co-operation between their border services, customs authorities, agencies issuing travel documents and visas, and law enforcement and migration agencies, as well as other competent national services, with a view to achieving the following aims:
>
> - To promote free and secure movement of persons, goods, services and investments across border, in conformity with relevant frameworks, international law and OSCE commitments [...];
> - To promote high standards in border services and competent national structures[.]

Border control is the single most visible element of any state's narrative of control over its territory: it makes a state's territorial integrity visible to outsiders as well as to citizens, and it figures prominently in the international political system of states that dominates global discourses of foreign policy, for example. In many Western states today, the forces of border control remain just another form of police and/or military activity by the state, largely invisible to those not actually crossing borders. In Central Asia, however, the forces of border control figure very prominently in everyday life in the periphery. How does this forceful and powerful manifestation of the state impact local lives? What role does it play in the framework of borderland loyalties? And how have shifts away from the efficient form of Soviet border control to the border control of today's states in this region affected and been affected by political borderland realities?

Moving away from regarding border control as "the sum of a state's institutions to regulate the movement of people, communication, and goods across borders"[98], I argue that *effective* border control includes understanding two crucial elements. First, seeing how agents of border control – the official and unofficial gatekeepers to a state's territory located at the boundary, regional centres, and the state centre – interact with border-crossers, local populations, and state elites. This will show us how such relationships are highly interdependent in nature and not merely of the patron-client type. Second, how the framework of controlling borders is best seen as a strategy of territorially deep control of borderlands, thus, a discourse

[98] Chandler 1998:19.

that includes infrastructural trajectories, avenues of exchange, and regimes of administration that affect not only the actual borderline but have socio-political ramifications for the entire borderland. This section focuses on two key issues that exemplify the interface between the state and its borderlanders: gatekeepers (who structure movement) and the physical-administrative environment of the borderland, the attempted control of which we shall term 'deep control'.

Framework of border control

Gatekeeping at a state's borders has become the hallmark of all modern states in an international system that regards territorial inviolability as paramount. Gatekeepers derive their power and prestige from their position between crosser and state. Yet, there are a multitude of such gatekeepers to be negotiated by the crosser, both those 'officially licensed' by the state (border guards, customs officials, bureaucrats, etc.) as well as less obvious (and less legally accepted) individuals endowed for numerous reasons with the ability to negotiate access or egress. Relationships between gatekeepers and the state whose gates they keep are critical; but, more hidden, so are the relationships between gatekeepers and the local borderlanders whose locales they make 'gated'. Both types of relationship can be seen as one of great interdependence, and one that will greatly influence the efficacy of border control itself.

Deep control is a notion that seeks to connect the political institutions of border control with the socio-political implications of infrastructural (dis)connectivity, the functions of gateway locales, and the practical control and/or surveillance of trajectories into, through, and out of administrative borderlands. Livelihoods at borders and in borderlands are framed by the political geography at the state's margins, and the state ideally seeks to influence mobility and avenues of exchange in the vicinity of its border between the borderland and the rest of the state. This is accomplished through

infrastructural collaterality or transversality, the choice of which greatly influences effective border control.

In order to bring these two themes to bear upon our borderlands, this section begins with an in-depth, bottom-up analysis of the single most important piece of infrastructure connecting, in effect, the gateway settlements of northern Afghanistan with the Central Asian hub in the Ferghana Valley: the Pamir Highway that runs for 730 km from the Afghan border through GBAO and southern Kyrgyzstan to terminate in Osh. This is the magistrale around which all interaction between these states' borderlanders revolves in regard to their respective states, and thus it forms a vital case study of regarding the control of borderlands through a local lens.

The case of the Pamir Highway magistrale

The following case example is an on-the-ground characterisation of the processes outlined in this report, which become evident when anthropologically approaching the environment in which local parameters contest a monolithic notion of how states ought to control their borders. It regards the interaction between borderlanders and their respective segments of the Kyrgyzstani, Tajikistani, and Afghan state through a local lens[99]. First, we will inspect the form of infrastructure tying together this vast region. This will be followed by a discussion of, on the one hand, state internal movement (in the individual borderland segments) and then, on the other, movement crossing the actual borderlines, thereby portraying mechanisms of border control and infrastructural connectivity in these states.

[99] Unfortunately, the Afghan segment was inaccessible to the author during his last visit to the region. Therefore, it will be alluded to only in more general terms. To the best of my knowledge, there exists no extant overview of contemporary borderland connectivity on that side of the border; on-the-ground research is yet to be carried out that goes beyond the anecdotal evidence of infrequently visiting journalists or aid personnel (and even these are exceedingly rare in Afghan border regions).

To conclude this depiction of border realities, I will empirically characterise the classes of individuals actually crossing over as well as illuminate their relationships with the agents of border control to be found on the ground here.

Fundamentally, the Highway is the physical artery that passes from the border of northern Afghanistan to the south through Tajikistan's Badakhshan region, over the Qyzyl Art border to Kyrgyzstan and on to Osh and the Uzbekistani border in the Ferghana Valley (and also linking up to the burgeoning Chinese markets in Xinjiang province such as Kashgar and the provincial capital of Urumqi). It connects the respective borderlands with each other and, hence, certain settlements along such infrastructure have become gateway towns or cities. The nature of this infrastructure, that is, the way in which the respective states have inscribed the wider Borderland with observable connectivity representing the political negotiation between the borderlands and the state centres, has turned the settlements of Osh, Khorog, and Fayzabad (all of which are administrative regional centres in their respective states) into gateways for trans-frontier trajectories. These are the places from which border crossings are negotiated and, therefore, they are fundamentally important locales in this context. The agents of border control charged with keeping the state's gates at the boundary work in collusion with other agents and both official as well as unofficial gatekeepers in these gateway locales.

All direct movement in this Borderland is by way of the Pamir Highway and the rough tracks feeding into it – there are no direct point-to-point trajectories (or 'pockets' as we have termed them) available in this region: there is no air travel between Osh and Khorog, or between either of these and Afghanistan. In fact, Khorog itself operates infrequent and often cancelled flights to Dushanbe only (with seats only available for locals at short notice or through informal economic networks). Osh is well connected to Bishkek, Dushanbe and Russia as well as offering infrequent flights to Xinjiang in China.

To the south of the Central Asian border with Afghanistan, Fayzabad is infrequently connected to Kabul but, as in the case of Khorog, movement to the respective capitals of Kabul or Dushanbe is generally restricted to arduous road travel. Thus, all locales south of Osh, east of Dushanbe, and north of Kabul are, in effect, accessible even for Borderland elites only by road; plans for the construction of a rail link with China through the Irkeshtam port in the tri-partite

Kyrgyzstan–Tajikistan–Xinjiang Borderland have been mooted for several years, and construction thereof is reportedly in preparation.

An intriguing anomaly in this landscape is the military airfield in GBAO's Murghab: technically closed since the withdrawal of the Russian/CIS bordertroops, it still operates clandestine flights directly to Dushanbe and Moscow. Therefore, it represents a window of direct access ('transversality', see sections below) otherwise non-existent in these borderlands. These flights are available to military personnel such as Russian advisors (but not their Tajikistani colleagues) and Tajikistani political elites. Similar transversality exists in northern Afghanistan at various military airports operated by NATO.

The infrastructure encountered at the actual new state boundary between Tajikistan's GBAO and Kyrgyzstan stands as a testament to the financial inability of either state to even approach a successful upkeep of the former Soviet infrastructure in this important frontier region with the People's Republic of China[100], let alone their ability to systematically implement border control at this new external boundary. If this frontier region had been traversed but twenty years earlier, one would have witnessed a frontier heavily patrolled and under intense surveillance by the agents of Soviet border control. Today, the numerous buildings that once were used to store ammunition, machinery, and personnel are derelict, the watchtowers unmanned, and the lines of communication and infrastructural avenues frequently unusable. Border guards stamp passports if there is ink available and they frequently work by candlelight, especially on the Kyrgyzstani side; patrols are on foot, radios do not work. This is in stark contrast to what this section of the frontier to China looked like in the 1980s[101]:

> Just beyond Murghab we successively pass through two layers of the borderzone, enforced by Soviet KGB border guards at highly fortified checkpoints (one every 5 to 10 kilometres). These are

[100] I call to mind here that the Pamir Highway in GBAO at times runs parallel to the formerly electrified fence marking the no-man's-land to Xinjiang – at its closest a mere 50-odd metres away; nowadays the fence is without power and many of the posts have been taken down by locals for use as firewood or construction material.

[101] Taken from personal interviews in the region and complemented with material from Bliss (2006) and Reitz (1982).

> the so-called *zastavy* (line outposts); they generally had roughly fifty men in charge of a zone between 5-by-3 kilometres and 20-by-15 kilometres. Three to seven such *zastavy* formed a *kommendatura* (line command) that always comprised at least one high-ranking officer. The *otriad* (border detachment) was in command of an entire border region and probably consisted of three to five *kommendaturi*. Murghab *raion* was controlled by one such *otriad*, Osh *oblast* by another, and Naryn *oblast* by a third – thus, these administrative divisions were also military divisions. All three administrative borderlands (plus at least also the southern Kazakh Republic's borderland around Ili as well as all the Turkmen Republic's boundaries) were part of the Central Asian Border District.

For decades, today's border between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan was a state-internal boundary between two administrative units of the same state. While movement within the Soviet Union was never a simple matter, the presence of this administrative boundary was not marked by border control per se but rather through institutions and the mechanisms of resource distribution tied to the respective national Soviet Republic. The checkpoints on the Pamir Highway between Khorog in southern GBAO and Osh in the Kyrgyzstani Ferghana Valley were designed to monitor the frontier to the People's Republic of China and cement Soviet control over its mountainous south-eastern periphery, seen to lie in a political neighbourhood of seeming instability and importance to the Soviet regime. Thus, individuals, provided they possessed the appropriate internal Soviet travel documents[102], could negotiate the future boundary between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan just like any other such boundary between other administrative entities of the Union. Both the wider trajectories crossing this new boundary at Qyzyl Art as well as the types of individuals doing so have changed fundamentally over the last nigh-on two decades, and this has led to a new form of wider Borderland and borderlander interaction beyond the strictures imposed in theory by both states that derive from a rhetoric of territorial integrity.

[102] See Parham (2009:241-244) for a historical overview of bureaucratic control over Soviet citizens' movements in border regions.

Border infrastructure linking southern Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan is, without exception, new. The mobile pontoons of the Soviet era, used to transport special forces into Afghanistan's Badakhshan region have gone, and, since the fall of the Taliban, new infrastructure has been set up. Bridges span the Pyanj river at several places in Badakhshan, and the roads farther west linking Mazar-i Sharif with Kulyab in Tajikistan have been upgraded, now approximating the old Soviet quality of the 1980s. The road leading from Fayzabad to the Tajikistani border is still poor by any account, but at least it is no longer closed for months at a time due to subsidence, thanks mainly to the efforts of the Aga Khan Foundation's infrastructural projects. Even in 2004, before the opening of the main bridges between the two countries, crossing the Pyanj took place by way of makeshift ropes slung across the ravine in between.

Moving away from the actual infrastructural arteries in this region, let us regard the parameters informing actual movement within the respective segments of this Borderland. A fundamental parameter of the borderland environment are the state-internal regulations regarding movement within the respective borderlands; understanding these is a precondition for placing trans-frontier trajectories in their proper context. Hence, here I briefly characterise the framework of mobility within the borderlands themselves, both former Soviet segments of which exhibit two different frameworks of internal movement by individuals resident within the respective borderland[103]. In effect, it is these frameworks which make administrative-territorial borderlands into territories *actually perceived as being borderlands by locals* due to the special nature of control pursued at all visible levels in locals' everyday lives.

GBAO presents a system in which internal travel documents (the GBAO *propusk*), just as in the Soviet era, theoretically severely limit locals' freedom of movement; however, in 2005 Badakhshani residents temporarily living outside of GBAO were exempted from needing this document to gain access to their homes – all other Tajikistani citizens (as well as all other visitors) still need the *propusk* to enter the region, which is valid for just one entry at a time and, at the time of writing, cost 15 somani (about 3 US$) per visit for

[103] Once again and unfortunately, the current situation of Afghan internal movement is opaque due to lack of empirically researched data.

Tajikistani. The permit lists the *raions* within GBAO which the bearer may visit and is valid for a specific period of time, after which it must be re-applied for. Application must be made in all cases to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the Tajikistani capital and is granted pending consultation with the central office of the Tajikistani state security agency in Dushanbe, but, following central approval by both authorities in Dushanbe, the actual document can be issued in either the state centre of Dushanbe, the regional GBAO centre of Khorog, or the local centre of Murghab by the respective Ministry and security authorities.

In theory, until 2005 only residents of GBAO were able to receive their *propusk* in Khorog or Murghab; all non-locals must apply in person in Dushanbe or commission an agent to do so for them there. Possession of the internal permit is supposed to be enforced at a state security and Interior Ministry checkpoint on the only infrastructural route into GBAO that does not also cross a state boundary, namely the M41 road leading to Kalaikhum (on the border between GBAO and Tajikistan proper). Until the hand-over of the checkpoint from the Russian/CIS border guards to their Tajikistani colleagues in early 2005, *propusk* checks were unavoidable here. Once within GBAO, every administrative district has a small checkpoint run by members of the *oblast* branch of the Interior Ministry located on every road crossing *raion* boundaries. In practice, the officials charged with enforcing the *propusk* requirement for movement into GBAO and between the *raions* of the region are exceedingly negligent in maintaining the stringency of such checks – since the departure of the Russian troops in 2005 (who officiously carried out such checks at the *raion* boundaries) it is only at the checkpoints on the Pamir Highway that this document is reliably checked.

As opposed to this intricate system, access to locales within the Kyrgyzstani borderlands is no longer restricted for local borderlanders in any way today, although memories of such regulations from the Soviet period are still very present in locals' narratives. Internal movement is not systematically controlled by Kyrgyzstani institutions and, since the Russian/CIS forces left Kyrgyzstan in 1999, in effect even possible within the theoretically off-limits *zapretnaya zona* along the Chinese frontier. In terms of borderland movement for non-locals, prior to 2002 all non-Kyrgyzstani citizens were obliged to register at the official registration office (OVIR) in the respective

oblast centre within three days of having crossed the boundary; thus, movement within the borderlands of Kyrgyzstan was a matter of passing through regional centres and keeping the Interior Ministry (that controls OVIR) informed of all activities. However, even then this requirement was more of a formality and a way of generating financial income for the Ministry than an effective and consistent form of control. Since 2002, the only form of control that the Kyrgyzstani authorities exercise over movement within the borderlands is vis-à-vis foreign tour groups seeking to spend more than 24 hours in the *zapretnaya* zona, for example for trekking expeditions; apart from this special case, the Kyrgyzstani borderlands are accessible to all individuals – a fact that has had repercussions locally on notions of borderlander power, as we have already seen.

Having looked at internal movement, we now shift our attention to actual border crossing. Crossing the boundary between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (at the high-altitude mountain pass of Qyzyl Art, the only border port between GBAO and Kyrgyzstan) requires a visa for citizens of either state and a passport. The possession of passports, and in quite a few cases the possession of both a Kyrgyzstani and Tajikistani passport, is widespread in both states. In regard to crossing the boundary, one interviewee knowledgeable about trans-boundary networks and their use of several passports told me in 2006 that "with the right financial incentive and a good network of relations in Osh it is possible for us Murghab Kyrgyz to possess two valid passports: one for the boundary and one for the GAI [traffic police] in Kyrgyzstan"[104]. In other words, the boundary is generally crossed with the Tajikistani passport as this enables the easiest type of negotiation with the forces of border control: the Tajikistani border guards and customs officials are quicker to grant egress to Tajikistani citizens than to Kyrgyzstani citizens, and the Kyrgyzstani border guards and especially customs "are corrupt no matter which passport you show – better to show the one you left Tajikistan with and avoid unpleasant questions"[105]. Furthermore, in terms of an official force that could be poised to enact duties of border control beyond the boundary, the traffic police GAI with its large number of officers distributed throughout the state's

[104] Interview by the author with a 50-year-old Murghab Kyrgyz whose business is plying the route between Osh and Khorog.

[105] *ibid.*

territory would be ideally suited for this purpose; however, its agents are notoriously easy to co-opt through the paying of 'fines'.

The visa regulations between these two states present us with a convoluted system that is, in the cases of citizens of these two states, rarely implemented as prescribed. As opposed to this, Afghan citizens always need passports and visas to enter Tajikistan: the lack of obtainability of either for the vast majority of borderlanders means that Afghan citizens of this Borderland do not generally cross into Tajikistan and are limited to trading at border posts on the borderline. For Tajikistanis seeking to enter Kyrgyzstan a visa is required today that can only be issued in Dushanbe by the Kyrgyz consulate there; however, arrival at the Qyzyl Art port without such a visa does not prevent entry because the Kyrgyzstani organs of state security are only too happy to issue a temporary *propusk* (permit), valid for between three and six days, for a negotiable sum to be paid alongside a similarly flexible fine (for 'unlawful entry')[106]. According to local borderlanders here, it is always cheaper and faster to 'sort things out at the boundary' rather than to go through the difficult and distant official channels. Tajikistani citizens with accredited family members in Kyrgyzstan do not need a visa but rather a *propusk* that is valid for the same duration as the crosser's passport and cheap and easy to obtain through those relatives' local branch of state security in Kyrgyzstan. However, the border guards at Qyzyl Art do not always respect the authority of this document and frequently force crossers to 'purchase' further documentation (and pay a fine for this 'service').

For travel in the other direction (from Kyrgyzstan to GBAO), the visa requirement is supplemented by the requirement for the possession of a special document allowing travel within GBAO (the GBAO *propusk*). However, interviews held revealed that neither the visa nor the *propusk* requirement are enforced at the boundary. It is entirely possible to travel to Murghab without either if one is in possession of just a Kyrgyzstani passport (or, for non-regional citizens such as Russians or Uzbeks but, importantly, not for non-CIS citizens, with a valid Kyrgyzstani visa); usually, such boundary crossing without the official documents will involve a small fine at

[106] Crucially, in all situations encountered by the author and in line with all informants' statements, the temporary *propusk* is always paid for in Tajik somani (and therefore is an official transaction) whereas the fine is in Kyrgyz som and goes straight into the officers' pockets.

the Tajikistani side of the Qyzyl Art port and another fine at the first checkpoint within GBAO proper, the combined sum of which is lower than the cost of a visa which would have to be organised through a travel agent in Osh (who thus actually functions as an unofficial gatekeeper for those with the financial means).

As we see, the system of reciprocal visa requirements is rarely implemented for local boundary crossers. Exceptions in the visa requirement are made for citizens of either state with family members resident on the respective other state's territory; in effect, this applies in the vast majority of cases to ethnic Kyrgyz, who today have come to represent a trans-frontier ethnic group with strong local networks spanning the region from the city of Osh in Kyrgyzstan to Murghab *raion* in GBAO. The possession of passports, and in quite a few cases the possession of both a Kyrgyzstani and Tajikistani passport, is widespread amongst members of this group due to the fact that obtaining a passport in post-Soviet states has become a financial matter rather than a political one (as it was in the Soviet Union and still is in China, just across the border to the east).

The type of borderlander most frequently encountered crossing at Qyzyl Art can most easily be classified as 'entrepreneurial'. Individuals crossing here almost without exception do so with goods destined for sale at one of the locales along the Pamir Highway. Coming from Kyrgyzstan, such goods are generally consumer articles, many of which are Chinese products that had entered the region through the Irkeshtam port, just to the east of Qyzyl Art. The vast majority of goods for sale or exchange at the bazaar in Murghab originated in China and are vital to local livelihoods in Murghab *raion*, consisting as they do of foodstuffs such as grain and rice but also clothes and simple appliances as well as cigarettes and alcohol.

It is here that we witness a significant recent development in the constitution of entrepreneurs supplying local markets in GBAO: a shift has taken place that now excludes borderland entrepreneurs from the major markets in Osh and Khorog. Instead, these small-time traders from Murghab *raion* and other locales along the Kyrgyzstani section of the Pamir Highway supply smaller bazaars in Sary Tash, Murghab, and other small settlements. The major Osh and Khorog bazaars

have increasingly come to be dominated by 'Chinese' traders[107], who trade there with an eye to wider regional markets across the boundaries to, respectively, Uzbekistan and the all-important Tashkent market and Afghanistan's slowly accessible northern areas of Fayzabad and Mazar-i Sharif. With the gradual improvement of the quality of Chinese products, there is a concomitant differential in the availability of the higher standard products in the borderlands. As empirically observed, the major markets are witnessing a trend towards higher quality while small markets actually within the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan Borderland contain mainly goods of inferior quality made locally in Xinjiang province rather than eastern China. This is having a significant effect on local images of peripherality expressed in statements such as "if you want a mobile phone that works, don't buy it in Murghab even if one is available – go to Khorog: there they hoard them. It's amazing: they're transported through our town [Murghab] but do you think anybody would bother to offer one up for sale here? Instead we get the rubbish they can't sell anywhere else".

In effect, it is readily observable that the closer the market lies to the boundary, the worse the quality of products. If for a moment we extend our focus on the Kyrgyzstani-Tajikistani borderland to include the two ports to the PRC in the immediate vicinity (that is, Irkeshtam in Kyrgyzstan just to the north and the newly opened Qolma port in Badakhshan immediately to the south), a crucial factor influencing local entrepreneurship comes to light: the port at Qyzyl Art is not accessible for Chinese vehicles under any circumstances. Thus, all movement from China is directed from Xinjiang over the Irkeshtam port *or* over the Qolma port; all transverse movement between these two ports is by local Kyrgyzstani or Tajikistani citizens only in respect to economic exchange. The two borderland local centres of, respectively, Sary Tash and Murghab are generally supplied not directly from Xinjiang (which would be so much closer) but rather at considerably more expense from the more distant cities of Osh and Khorog by borderland entrepreneurs.

A particularly striking type of entrepreneur using the Qyzyl Art as a port to move goods, in this case, from GBAO to the north (and one that captures the international community's attention) is the

[107] Such traders are referred to as 'Chinese' by locals but usually can be Han, Uighur, or especially Dungani (Chinese Muslims, or Hui).

‘trafficker’ – individuals transporting narcotics out of Afghanistan. An ever-present theme in the entire region (although less so than the international attention given to this in these borderlands would suggest), the Khorog-to-Osh magistrale is one of two alternate routes serving as the major supply artery for opium and its heroin derivative, with the second, more difficult and circuitous route coming through from Kulyab and on to Khatlon, and from there by off-road transport through the largely impenetrable mountains to the west of GBAO across the border and on to Osh. Truly a global trade, the narcotics networks in our borderlands are made up mainly of ‘businesspeople’ in the centres of Khorog and Osh who coordinate the enrichment of the raw opium (increasingly done in Afghanistan itself but still also at mobile laboratories to be found in GBAO, generally with the aid of so-called precursor chemicals imported through the Qolma port from China) and its subsequent distribution locally, and further transport it along this early stage of its long journey.

The presence of what locals term ‘the Osh mafia’ is by no means invisible anymore. Before the withdrawal of the Russian/CIS bordertroops in 2005, such operations were conducted in a more clandestine way; now their replacement with Tajikistani forces of border control, themselves widely rumoured (not only by locals) to be centrally involved in this business, has emboldened the actors. Today, Kyrgyzstani vehicles with number plates registered in Osh as well as Russian-registered vehicles most frequently from southern and western Siberia transport both such goods as well as the entrepreneurs themselves. This is because being involved in this line of business requires constant personal surveillance by entrepreneurs of the changing parameters of state (i.e., border control) and outsider (i.e., NGO agencies or foreign military advisors to these states) involvement that could influence this most crucial stage of supply. Borderlander involvement in the opium/heroin business here is minimal[108]: GBAO does not contain significant opium plantations due to climatic conditions and middlemen buying these narcotics for onward sale are individuals with excellent connections both to local border guards/customs officials as well as state institutions

[108] Consumption of these narcotics by locals has, however, risen dramatically and visibly over recent years.

and, furthermore, these are individuals with a significant amount of capital unavailable to any of the impoverished local borderlanders.

Nevertheless, the vibrant narcotics trade that passes through local centres in the Tajikistani-Kyrgyzstani Borderland has a significant effect on the discourses and parameters of border control which, in turn, affect borderlanders' negotiation of the boundary at Qyzyl Art. This effect is best represented by customs officials on the Kyrgyzstani side of the borderzone: all boundary-crossers on the Pamir Highway trajectory must pass these gatekeepers, who are financed not by the Kyrgyzstani state but rather by a committee under the control of the Interior Ministry of the Russian Federation. Charged with preventing the influx of narcotics into the territory of the geographically distant Russian state, these officials are under obligation to fulfil a quota of confiscated heroin. Neither the planting of such contraband on innocent boundary-crossers nor the occasional fictitious 'heroic' intervention in a pre-arranged and staged coup against the *narkomani* (drug addicts and traffickers) is unheard of, especially at times when reports on on-the-ground progress are due in Moscow, thereby creating moments that, as candidly stated by one customs official, "are not the most ideal of times to encounter us, I guess". According to one such official unofficially queried by the author regarding these reports to Moscow, customs officials' salaries are proportional to their 'success' in confiscating narcotics; also, these reports are made at the end of every quarter, making March, June, September, and December such 'not ideal months' for encounters. Both such planting and this kind of coup are frequently heard elements of locals' characterisation of their own personal trajectories.

To summarise this case study, with the withdrawal of the Russian/CIS border troops from this region it has now become a fact that entering GBAO from Kyrgyzstan is considerably easier than entering GBAO from the rest of Tajikistan. This clearly underlines, on the one hand, the existence of strong cross-border processes and, on the other, points to the wariness with which this borderland is regarded by the Tajikistani state. In its campaign for borderlander loyalty, the Soviet system had introduced various positive measures to combat the borderlander options of 'exit' and 'voice', thereby improving local livelihoods and guaranteeing effective control of this borderland; the result was local support of the state's border control. This has changed fundamentally in the post-Soviet era and the 'thickening' of the

non-state point of reference for borderlanders represented by the Pamir Highway.

The accessibility of the Pamir Highway is centrally dependent on processes in two different states today: whether Tajikistan is embroiled in a bloody civil war or whether Kyrgyzstan is going through the woes of internal political realignment during a 'Revolution' – the Highway is directly affected in an equal way and is shut down by the respective authorities of the neighbouring state. Thus, borderlanders in Osh *oblast* and in GBAO are exposed in an immediate way to events taking place at either anchoring node of this infrastructural artery. It is in this context of political events, seemingly beyond the power of borderlanders to influence to their own advantage, that a new evolving image is emerging of the role that the Kyrgyz of Murghab play in conjunction with their position as a trans-frontier state group. They are seen as a group with a titular state just across the boundary, which is now an independent state that can influence the lifeworlds of all along this avenue of trans-frontier exchange. Their role in the immediate GBAO borderland as the largest group of boundary-crossers casts doubts amongst the Pamiri majority of GBAO regarding that group's political loyalties

Gatekeeping, access, and egress

> It is always the same [at this border post]. The *pogranichniki* [border guards] hate us Kyrgyz from Badakhshan. They call us *myrk* [disparaging term for non-Russified Kyrgyz-speaking sedentaries (S.P.)] even if we speak Russian and herd sheep. They are paid by a Russian-financed *komitet* [committee] to find Afghan heroin but let all the Osh mafia through the checkpoints because they are rich. So many Kyrgyz people come to Badakhshan and our [Tajikistani] *pogranichniki* let them pass because they bring goods from Osh, but we from Badakhshan are at the mercy of corrupt people in stolen uniforms. By law, we are allowed to come here these days without passports [since 1997 and the change in passport regulations in Kyrgyzstan (S.P.)] if we have family members in Osh *oblast* but the guards don't respect this. I just paid 5 [Tajik] somani for a temporary *propusk* for each of us [nearly

2 US dollars] and a 250 [Kyrgyz] som fine [over 6 US dollars] – all that is my daughter's monthly salary as a teacher. Ten years ago there was no *granitsa* [border] here, and no special zone, no *pogranichniki*, and no money economy – we were Soviet and who cared what Bishkek said. Now the Russians are gone and we have Taliban heroin, *pogranichniki*, mafias, and no fuel and everybody wants money for us to use this [terrible] road to get to market.[109]

Much has been said about the notorious 'corruption' of the multitudinous forces of border control present at Central Asian borders. This is too simple an assumption, as I will show in this section: those watching over access and egress at these borders are to be found in multiple locations, fulfilling a range of functions not always readily identifiable or even officially recognised, and interact with crossers and locals in a differentiated way. 'Corruption' is better regarded as varying degrees of co-optation, and such co-optation is to be found in the economic domain as well as the political domain. Such distinctions are relevant both for outsiders attempting to comprehend the perceived deficiencies of border control here as well as being important in our context of identifying the discourses (dis) connecting the state with its borderlanders.

Negotiating boundaries, attempting to cross lines, and narratives of permission, transgression, and prohibition include not only official policies and unofficial strategies but, most centrally from an 'on-the-ground' perspective, revolve around dealing with those groups of individuals *actually acting* as wardens at the state's portals and arbitrating on passage on a case-by-case basis: the gatekeepers. Such gatekeepers are to be found in, on the one hand, the official domain of state-endowed legitimate agency ('border control') and, on the other hand, in the domain of agents controlling the negotiation of the boundary in degrees of legitimacy ranging from the legal to the strictly illegal-but-nevertheless-crucial. Representatives of the former class include border guards, customs officials, immigration authorities, and members of various security forces charged by the state with ensuring against infringements on the boundary and, frequently,

[109] Interview by the author with an elderly Kyrgyz man from Murghab in Tajikistan's GBAO, winter 2005. The interview took place while waiting together in a line of vehicles at the Qyzyl Art border crossing, going from Tajikistan to Kyrgyzstan.

that region of the state officially recognized as the administrative borderland. It also includes bureaucrats (in the borderland or, more frequently, in the state's centre) endowed with the power to grant the 'papers' necessary for negotiating a boundary crossing.

Including not only the actual borderline itself but also an officially delimited 'administrative borderland' is an important expansion of our focus on borderlands. Administrative borderlands represent an administrative sub-division of a state's territory with its own rules and regulations pertaining to, for example, the movement and stationing of troops and checkpoints. Tajikistan's GBAO is one such administrative borderland, replete as it is with requirements for documents necessary for internal travel, frequent checkpoints, and special no-go zones scattered throughout the vast region. Kyrgyzstan no longer enforces such special regimes in its administrative borderlands (but see below). Northern Afghanistan was such a zone in its entirety under Soviet occupation, with travel to and from the rest of Afghanistan all but impossible due to Soviet military roadblocks; today, ISAF troops in collusion with the Afghan army have, in effect, institutionalised a similar type of administrative borderland.

In regard to the two categories of gatekeepers just mentioned, the latter less obvious class consists of private persons who, under varying circumstances, control the means of negotiating passage to, through, and beyond a state's borderland in ways not necessarily in accordance with officially condoned strategies. This group includes criminalized networks operating in a trans-frontier manner, individuals with personal access to or influence over members of the first class (such as members of the borderland elite, family members, and persons with large social or economic capital resources), and the euphemistic 'travel agents' and their transportation companies operating trans-frontier trader-tourist routes, as we have seen in regard to the penetration of Central Asia by Chinese individuals in the first chapter of this report.

The power of gatekeepers

Gatekeepers, both officially sanctioned types such as border guards and customs officials as well as the unofficial type,

are powerful in multiple ways. They are the agents placed at both the ports of entry/exit and at the desks charged with processing permission or rejection of applications to enter/exit. They also have resources of bureaucratic capital and the potential ability to trace a path through (and often around) the thicket of documentation. This is why states vigorously strive to limit 'unlicensed' gatekeepers' structural power through the imagery of illegality and organised crime. Above and beyond this, however, they are regarded as being powerful by those encountering these agents of control, as we have seen in the case study above.

The relationship between gatekeepers and the states whose gates they 'keep' is one of great interdependence. Officially sanctioned gatekeepers such as border guards, customs officials, and immigration officers at all levels embody the state's institutional control over boundary and borderland alike. In other words, the state imbues members of border control with the power to arbitrate over case-by-case trajectories crossing the boundary. Simultaneously, the state guarantees the framework for these gatekeepers' social and political environment and lifeworlds, thereby theoretically keeping this power in check – without the backing of the state they lose their legitimacy and status as licensed intermediaries at the interstices of states able to impose sanctions on transgressors.

Border guards and frontier security forces are mobilised by the state to cement discourses of control, reconnoitre and keep under surveillance trans-frontier networks (and, when necessary, to attempt to terminate them), and implement trans-state policies. Customs officials are charged with perpetuating the state's rhetoric of economic hegemony (and, where applicable, guarding against ideologically threatening material). Relations between the different classes of gatekeepers (within the group of the first type just as between these as a whole and the gatekeepers at the margins of the law) are centrally based upon reciprocity: *effective* border control (as opposed to mere rhetoric on border control efficacy) will depend on cooperation (or at least pragmatic tolerance) between all forms of gatekeepers empowered by the boundary. Likewise,

the relationship between gatekeepers and borderlanders is informed by interdependence, either supportive in nature (when both sides profit) or subversive (when one side profits from undermining the other).

Few states go as far as the Soviet Union did in regard to nurturing an intimate relationship between members of border control and local borderlanders (culminating in what could be termed a veritable Cult of the Borderguard). All states, however, do generally pursue a depiction of official gatekeepers as beneficial to borderlanders, sometimes through the imagery of security or stability. Finding faultlines in such rhetoric, unlicensed gatekeepers find room to thrive and come to play a crucial role in borderland processes. To uncover the general faultlines in the relationship between borderlanders and gatekeepers, a contrast between Soviet and post-Soviet interaction between borderlanders and gatekeepers is relevant in understanding contemporary border control and its failures here.

In Soviet times, employment opportunities arose from the presence, in the borderlands, of large numbers of officially recognised agents of border control. Originally, there was concern that populations and the state institutions in borderlands were not offering sufficient vigilance and security for the sensitive frontier: local Communist Party organisations were considered weak and not politically educated enough, and the Russian cadres to be found amongst the border troops at the time considered their assignment to such localities as 'exile'. The state and its institutions were seen by borderlanders at this time as detrimental to local livelihoods. The initial composition of border troops was here seen as contributing to local dissatisfaction considering that in Central Asia an ethnic dimension came into play: confrontation between the state and local particularities in the borderland was played out as a conflict between *chuzhaki* (outsiders) and locals.

Involving the local borderland population had to take place in other ways that could make up for this lack of local institutional presence in actual border control: starting in the 1920s, local soviets, *kolkhoz*, and party organisations were actively required to 'sponsor' border troop units by constructing buildings to house them, securing

their supplies from the local borderland population, and contributing their local budgets to their upkeep. The reverse side of this early policy immediately became obvious, however: dependent on locals for their housing, upkeep, and daily support in remote areas, the Soviet agents of border control were indeed vulnerable to local subversive activities in regard to central policy.

This was combated by enlisting 'auxiliary support' from borderlanders through institutions such as schools and local political organisations such as Komsomol (Young Communists). Networks of school children and youths in the borderlands were mobilised to give agents of border control all the support possible and such grass-roots organisations enjoyed much publicity in Soviet media. By the end of the Soviet Union, local narratives had come to exhibit a system of privilege and prestige in individuals' support of border control[110]. Excursions to locales controlled by state representatives, the presentation of the state's vitality and potency in the immediate neighbourhood of locals' settlements, and institutionalisation of locally based networks cognitively strengthening the proximity between locals and border guards – such elements all seem to have reinforced border control with the aid of local borderlanders. The following quotation by a man in eastern Kyrgyzstan underlines such a narrative[111]:

> When I was thirteen years old [in 1973] our school organised a field trip to Tash Rabat, the place where a very famous caravanserai used to exist. It is very close to the borderzone with China, and we were accompanied by men in uniform so that nothing would happen to us. We spent two days there and once we were allowed to visit the Ak Beyit checkpoint, you know, where the Soviet troops were located to keep the Chinese out. I was even allowed to hold a border guard's gun and my friend was given a uniform cap to keep – we were all jealous! The next week, back at school, we were given a writing assignment dealing with border control, and the friend who had received the cap wrote the best essay and was invited to read it aloud in Frunze [today's Bishkek] on *dyen pogranichnika* [May 28th, National Soviet Borderguard Day]

[110] Chandler, 1998:58–9, 78.

[111] Interview by the author in Naryn, autumn 2006.

> the following year. I remember that when he came back from the capital with his father (they were so proud!) he was made an honorary member of Naryn Komsomol [the Communist Youth organisation]. After this his parents never really had problems anymore in getting holiday time up at Lake Issyk-Kul in summer – my friend even once asked me to come on holiday with him!

In stark contrast to this, today's interaction between residents of GBAO and the forces of border control is primarily characterised by co-optation and the concomitant impossibility of effective control in the Pamirs. In Tajikistan, such co-optation of the Tajikistani forces of border control by Tajikistani Kyrgyz and Pamiri borderlanders is not political in nature but rather, significantly, in the economic domain: the local inhabitants of GBAO provide forces not belonging to state security[112] with the basics of survival – meat, clothes, medical aid, and sometimes accommodation. Conditions in barracks housing border guards and the military conscripts 'patrolling' the border zone are abysmal with most of the installations one would expect to encounter therein (such as stoves, radio equipment, bedding, and even ammunition) having, in the words of one teenage Tajik conscript near the Qyzyl Art border post in 2006, "disappeared along with the Russians who used to be here".

Locals, at least in these two settlements, see it as being in their own interest to supply these barracks as far as possible with their own meagre means to ensure "good neighbourly relations", in effect a type of reciprocity that makes life bearable for state personnel whilst simultaneously enabling local borderlanders to go about their own lives with a minimum of interference. This despite these men's role as representatives of, from a local point of view, an unpopular and 'corrupt' Tajikistani state. Important systemic shifts in such local-to-state interaction is succinctly formulated in the following quote, expressed in the words of an elderly Pamiri man in the settlement of Karakul in GBAO that is located on the Pamir Highway immediately before the Qyzyl Art border post (2006):

[112] Members of state security organs are better paid than individuals belonging to the Interior Ministry or military forces. Even more importantly, the state security service has not had significant periods in which members were left unpaid due to the state's bankruptcy whereas other state employees (including the military) have at times received no salaries for several years.

> Actually, we are just doing what we always used to do. In Soviet times the *kolkhoz* had to provide free food to the [border guards]; during the [civil] war, the Russians then became important purchasers of our produce, actually the only buyers at the market; after the war they then started to hire locals for menial jobs in the barracks and for surveillance; and today, after the Russians, we now provide for them again! A cycle, I suppose. Thus, while before we just had to give, now we give again but for that they don't check our papers quite as stringently and our daughters and wives don't have to worry like they used to when the unaccountable Soviet forces were here because they so depend on us. Of course it would be best if they weren't here in the first place, but then we might have Taliban or the Chinese instead – and that would be far worse!

In other words, in post-war Tajikistan and since the cessation of direct outside control of its boundaries, the power of officially licensed gatekeepers within GBAO has been severely curtailed through their dependency on borderlanders for their survival. The state has become unable to pursue effective control over its borderlanders' movement except at a handful of checkpoints staffed by state security personnel and centred around Khorog, the seat of the GBAO government and the locale of the remaining Russian 'advisers' to Tajikistani border control. Borderlanders have attained a *modus vivendi* with the agents of border control in GBAO, and this allows us to conclude that discourses of control over this borderland as enacted in everyday lives are merely symbolic in nature and do not translate into actual control over either territory or local loyalties. These loyalties are evolving in two different directions for the two groups of borderlanders involved in GBAO: Murghab Kyrgyz increasingly find their livelihoods connected to the wider Kyrgyz Borderland (as extending into Kyrgyzstan) whilst Pamiri find themselves in a renewed environment influenced by supra-state and (in regard to new trajectories to Afghanistan) trans-frontier processes.

Across the border, in southern Kyrgyzstan, local co-optation of the forces of border control takes place not in the economic domain but rather at a political level. In theory, and according to a high-ranking official at the Military Border Patrol Service office in Bishkek (2006), access to the immediate border zone to Tajikistan

(and China's Xinjiang province as well, for that matter) must be applied for in all cases regardless of the identity of the individual in question at this office in conjunction with application to the central state security agency in Bishkek – basically the Soviet gatekeeping scenario[113]. In reality, and as confirmed by the local offices of the Interior Ministry in Naryn or Osh, this is only necessary for 'casual visitors to the zone', in other words foreign tourists on trekking tours, and only for stays of longer than 24 hours. This discrepancy reveals a fundamental dysfunctionality in Kyrgyzstani border control: the zone is patrolled (infrequently) by Interior Ministry personnel who should be enforcing individuals' possession of official *propuski* issued by the security forces but who in reality are accountable to *oblast* branches of the Ministry. Locals who desire to enter this zone, for example in order to pursue pastoralist activities in the fertile valleys surrounding the boundary, do so unhindered if they have, in the words of local residents, good connections to somebody in office in one of the settlements in the *oblast* – in exchange for permission they usually offer produce or a slice of profit from the sale thereof. Neither herders nor officials ask for formal permission from Bishkek as this would be both time-consuming and expensive. Thus, central state control over borderlander livelihoods in Kyrgyzstan can be regarded as weak at best.

Deep control

Border control is not only about controlling the line at the edge of the state – it can also entail control mechanisms that extend far into a state's hinterland. This is most definitely the case in contemporary Tajikistan; it also seems the aim of outside actors in northern (and indeed all of) Afghanistan. Borderlands between Mexico and the United States, and at the edges of the Schengen space, for example, also evince manifestations of border control at considerable depth from the actual boundary. Thus, controlling borders is best seen as a strategy of controlling movement deeper within a state's territory than is visible at first glance. It is a discourse of control that includes infrastructural trajectories, avenues of exchange, and regimes of

[113] Interview by the author in Bishkek, June 2006.

administration that affect not only the actual borderline but have socio-political ramifications for the entire borderland. Importantly, manifestations of such deep control are rarely recognised outside the state in question: while border control per se is an object of international scrutiny, internal deep control is not. As a final element in our discussion of life at the state's edges, we shall here look at the way in which the borderlands in southern Central Asia and northern Afghanistan experience such manifestations.

The degree to which states control (or claim to control) their boundaries ranges from open or light control (integrated borderlands) to closed or tight control (alienated borderlands). The functions that such control are meant to have are easily divided into vigilance, monitoring, and restriction. These functions are accomplished through militarisation, surveillance bureaucracies, and state-endorsed gatekeepers such as border guards and customs officials. *From a borderland perspective*, border control also goes beyond such readily observable processes and affects a whole range of behaviours and parameters of boundary processes. Most importantly, border control matters because it matters to borderlanders – the agents of border control can be co-opted, cooperated with, or evaded but they cannot be ignored. In order to live their lives at the state's margins (and possibly beyond these in the wider Borderland), the intricate structures of hierarchical command, military control, effective gatekeeper power, and functioning bureaucratic channels and its language of interaction must be learned by locals. Conceptually, the *interaction* between the forces of border control and borderlanders is more central to life in borderlands than the actual functionality of border control itself, and this is why border-related policy would do well to take the framework suggested here under consideration when tackling questions of, for example, border porosity.

In places such as contemporary GBAO, survival, especially in the economic domain, depends on locals understanding precisely *who* is being dealt with – only thus can the minefield of danger so imminently threatening to life and limb be navigated. Similarly, in contemporary northern Afghanistan not all checkpoints are alike: German ISAF troops are said to be less 'trigger-happy', and thus preferable to encounter, than their U.S. counterparts, and all NATO-operated checkpoints enjoy a good reputation as opposed to their

Afghan colleagues, who are rumoured to be both more corrupt and less reluctant to use force against individual travellers.

While boundaries symbolically and institutionally embody a state's control over its territory, we have seen that we must also centrally include the locales and their inhabitants immediately and directly affected by the boundary in an inquiry into borderland discourses. Borderlands are very much seen as an integral part of state territory in all official rhetoric – to believe otherwise is seen by state representatives as calling into question a state's territoriality: its integrity and, thus, its very existence. And yet, as discussed, this is precisely what processes within borderlands, the Borderland, and between borderlands and centres seem to point to on the ground: while the state may be seen by many as the geographical container of modern society[114], borderlands give the lie to such assumptions by being, at least in part, larger than such containers. Thus, mobility within the actual borderlands (rather than merely across the border itself) is a central concern, and control over it can be as oppressive as actual border control itself.

Zones of border control

Borderlanders and their networks can and do find ways of evading state control in many instances. Thus, controlling borderland mobility also carries the central function of at least routing potential exchange through controllable avenues and along observable trajectories in addition to its regular border control functions. The zones in which this takes place wax and wane depending on how states perceive their efficacy in accomplishing such 'deep' control and can be found far from the boundary itself. At the extreme, they even exist to a limited degree at all ports of entry well away from the physical boundary in the form of *pockets* to be found, for example, at airports and seaports.

[114] See Agnew (1987) for the 'territorial trap' this image presents social scientists with. Others such as Hobsbawm (1990) and Paasi (2005) discuss how historians and geographers, for example, produce and perpetuate such normativity.

Aside from such pockets, states practise such deep control along certain strips of territory extending back inwards from the boundary: *grooves* are generally infrastructural arteries along which border control can penetrate state territory to a sometimes considerable depth. Such grooves terminate in what can be termed *gateway cities* – nodes which themselves allow unrestricted access from the wider state territory, but from which further progression in the direction of the boundary must take place along precisely these grooves, that is, sanctioned and controlled trajectories.

The Pamir Highway can be regarded as such a groove, as can the arteries that are coming to form NATO's Northern Distribution Network in southern Central Asia, control over which (as discussed in this report's first section) is an issue that will come to figure in the coming years. Similarly, this new distribution network will come to emphasise certain locales as gateway cities, some of which already fulfil such a function but some of which will be newly elevated to this position. With the construction of the Pamir Highway, locales such as Khorog and Murghab either came into existence or took on an entirely new function.

Identifying the depth of such zones, the existence of pockets and grooves, and the importance of gateway cities presents a vital element of actually mapping local realities at state boundaries. Refocusing on actual borderland processes going beyond officially admitted processes taking place in a narrowly circumscribed container hinges upon characterising the physical parameters of access. In order to discover how livelihoods around boundaries are framed by the presence of the boundary itself, borderland political geography reveals the framework of physical accessibility to, from, and through borderlands that fundamentally influences perceptions of peripherality, opportunity, and connectivity. By this I mean in particular the availability and accessibility of avenues of contact, exchange, and/or threat that tie borderlands together or split them apart, that is, actual trajectories and their relationship to the boundary itself. Crucially, these are factors unobservable from a

distance due to, on the one hand, their fluidity and, on the other, official reluctance to loudly proclaim the existence of such control mechanisms, evident in the surprising realisation at how imprecisely many maps show boundary-crossing infrastructure[115]. It is here that research must be conducted on the ground in order to capture such fluidity and observe how changing connectivity affects life at the state's margins.

In this context I suggest two new terms that will aid us in comparatively identifying the cognitive and political territorial depth of borderlands as expressed in control over infrastructural and/or communication avenues. Such depth is either 'collateral' or 'transversal'. *Collaterality* describes such avenues tying a borderland together internally in a way that can be seen as running parallel to the boundary itself with few (if any) avenues leading out of the borderland and into regular state territory. *Transversality* refers to an opposite form in which locales within a borderland are connected by avenues to the rest of the state rather than to one another within the borderland. An extreme example of both types is shown in Figure 2:

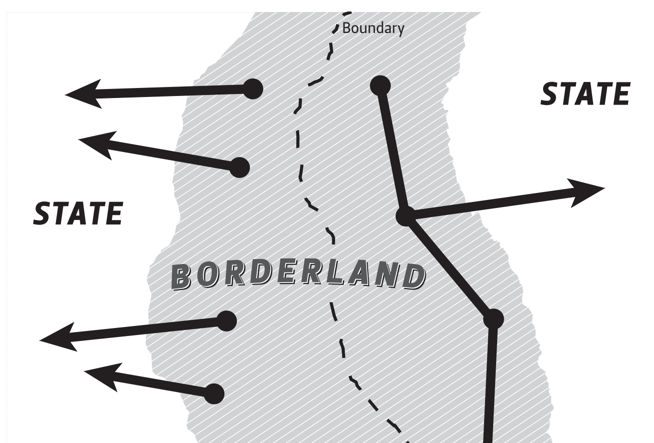

Figure 2: Access to settlements in borderlands: high transversality and no collaterality (left), high collaterality and a minimum in transversality (right)

[115] Thus, many maps depict roads that seemingly end before the line on the map, thereby suggesting that no infrastructure actually exists connecting both 'dead-ends'. For a particularly striking example see maps of Finland during the Cold War as shown in Paasi (1999).

Avenues of communication and control

Collaterality creates networks within the borderland that establish direct communication between a borderland gateway node and the centre, from which internal borderland control is then enacted. Here, a state directly confronts the existence and communication power of trans-frontier networks as well as the possibility for a neighbouring state to subvert borderland control whilst leaving borderlanders' notions of internal cohesion relatively untouched, or at least subject only to top-down, outside discourses. Transversality empowers a multitude of individual borderland nodes in their dealings with a state and has the effect of thinning out local communication between these nodes within the borderland whilst thickening a local feeling of political proximity to the state. In terms of the power of local borderland elites, collaterality supports centralised control and thus is likely to empower a select group within the borderland that mediates between internally connected locales and the state through the gateway node, while transversality would seem to create multiple voices negotiating control.

In the borderlands of southern Central Asia and northern Afghanistan we witness both types generally in their respective extreme forms. In Soviet times, GBAO exhibited strong supra-regional transversality with direct avenues to its own state centre of Dushanbe (through the regional centre of Khorog), the neighbouring Kyrgyzstani centre of Osh, as well as direct trajectories to Moscow. Both Osh *oblast* and Naryn *oblast* were, once again, more collateral than transversal. In the post-Soviet situation, independent Kyrgyzstan has institutionalised collaterality (in the form of powerful regional borderland elites dealing directly with the centre), whereas in GBAO with its supra-state actors and extreme peripherality deriving from the Tajikistani civil war, transversality is a matter of economic survival for local borderlanders there. In northern Afghanistan it is to be assumed that Badakhshan (with its gateway city of Fayzabad and the new grooves represented by bridges to the north) will increasingly become

transversally connected to GBAO (and possibly China in the near future). However, ongoing foreign efforts to improve roads directly leading from remote Fayzabad to Kabul betray outside interest in promoting collaterality, possibly to assuage state doubts on the wisdom of only providing new border-crossing infrastructure to GBAO. Farther west in northern Afghanistan, the power of local elites, although curtailed officially by a highly centralised state, points to collateral control of most northern Afghan territory, underlined by the presence locally of outside actors forced to deal with local elites.

Returning to the case study at the beginning of this section of the report, the magistrale that is the Pamir Highway is, from a Borderland perspective, the region's economic lifeline that structures all interaction between borderlanders and their respective states as well as between the segments of the wider Borderland. Its construction in Soviet times brought GBAO's economy closer to Osh than to Dushanbe, the nominal Tajikistani state centre. Its existence made the population of the Pamirs dependent on transversal connection rather than subject to effective collateral control (as would have been expressed in the promotion of infrastructural avenues directed towards Dushanbe). Since the collapse of the state that enacted deep control in this mountainous and peripheral region, the transversality of the Highway has become a boon for borderlanders and their survival whilst becoming the bane of, in particular, the Tajikistani state because of the cost of maintenance, the avenues of interaction it offers that are difficult to control by the weak government in Dushanbe, and the tensions it generates between the state and outside actors such as the Aga Khan Foundation discussed earlier.

Conclusion

This report has sought to shed light on a region grappling with political transformations that are seen to have implications for wider regional stability and global security. Central Asia, for long a blank space in the minds of most outsiders, has re-emerged onto the global stage due mainly to its neighbourhood: in between Russia, China, Afghanistan, and Iran, the region is once again figuring prominently in its role as a Eurasian bridge. And yet, there is a paradox inherent in this sitiuation: from an outside perspective Central Asia is becoming increasingly connected while from a local perspective interconnectivity and wider notions of belonging today have shrunk from what they were and are at their lowest in a century. In other words, outside actors have acquired for themselves wide-ranging access to a region formerly off-limits whilst the entire region itself has gone through a process of downsizing in terms of political integration, socio-economic integration, notions of ethnic belonging, and cognitive inclusion.

The first part of this report has discussed the ways in which populations at the peripheries of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and northern Afghanistan interact with their respective states. Not yet focusing systemically on a cross-border perspective, it found that in all three cases this interaction was characterised mainly through the power of regional rather than state elites. These regional elites have become more powerful over recent decades, and it is these actors who exert control over local livelihoods rather than state authorities. In all three cases the Soviet legacy is of paramount importance: in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, themselves post-Soviet states, this regional power is a continuation of processes started in the Soviet era. However, as opposed to that system, now new rhetorics of nationalism have highlighted the perceived differences in treatment and political representation of ethnic groups 'stranded' outside 'their' titular states by the dissolution of the Union. In northern Afghanistan, administrative zoning introduced during the Soviet occupation has been upheld by all regimes since, and this part of the state remains better connected to Central Asia than to the rest of Afghanistan in terms of infrastructure and trade. All three states are officially centralised political systems, and yet in all three states local elites pursue local interests at the expense of central control.

This trend is highlighted by the recent appearance of outside actors in the region, such as the Aga Khan Foundation. Just like the recently departed post-Soviet bordertroops, such a supra-national organisation interacts strongly with locals and is vital for local livelihoods. On the other hand, ISAF/NATO troops and personnel as well as the experts, trainers, and consultants of the OSCE can often be regarded as supporting unwelcome state interests over local interests and, therefore, can be seen as detrimental to local livelihoods.

In Kyrgyzstan state power is weak anywhere on Kyrgyzstani territory, and in many ways the borderlands of Naryn (bordering China's Xinjiang province) and southern Osh (bordering Tajikistan) *oblasts* are, from a local perspective, more stable than the centre. In these regions the local elites are powerful and effective and, in effect, the main actors conditioning borderland interaction. In Tajikistan's GBAO, the state has yet to regain any legitimacy in providing for local livelihoods, and new cross-border connectivity is providing both Pamiri as well as the Kyrgyz of Murghab with opportunities that Tajikistan cannot (or will not) offer. However, the relationship between these two groups has deteriorated considerably over recent years.

In northern Afghanistan the state has not yet come to figure in local livelihoods, except for in a largely negative manner: tax and resource demands by Kabul, as well as the new Afghan army's attempts at demilitarisation of local militias, is not greeted with enthusiasm. Security, so much higher here than elsewhere in Afghanistan, is provided by outside forces, thereby adding to local perceptions of an ineffectual and distant state. Here, more than in the other two states, political activity is framed in ethnic terms, and this can be seen as a direct effect of a centralising political system that objectifies such criteria – a process, we might speculate, set in motion in the north by Soviet-era nationality policies. Importantly, certain officially disenfranchised groups here also remain invisible: just as in Tajikistan, Pamiri groups in northern Afghanistan are generally subsumed under the 'Tajik' label despite the insupportability of such a categorisation.

At the heart of this report has been an analysis of how groups of people living at state margins interact with both their own state as well as the neighbouring state. Consequently, this report argues that adopting a perspective of borders from the borderland as

opposed to from the political centre of the state uncovers a number of processes that are fundamental to understanding how power is actually negotiated at the periphery amongst multiple actors. At this conceptual level, two different domains have been discussed here, both of which enhance our view of the way in which states seek to control their territories and the socio-political realities they face in borderlands.

First, the *dynamics of borderland interaction* show us how local elites in borderlands influence their state's domestic policy by employing (or threatening to employ) networks that at least in part lie beyond the reach of the state. Often characterised as ethnic elites by their state and by outsiders, they are, in fact, political actors who mobilise local loyalties either supporting or subverting central discourses of control. Furthermore, while the ethnic dimension surely plays a role in negotiating local particularities and modes of expression, an undue focus on the ethnic dimension obscures the ways in which borderlanders actually deal politically with states as citizens of the state. More generally, the wider borderland population as a whole is characterised by a local awareness of transnational opportunity, otherness to other groups, and separateness from the rest of the state. This gives them power as a group to demand concessions from the centre, although the centre's response can range from autonomy rights (in the best case) to outright suppression of local culture and socio-economic activity.

Most explicitly, these dynamics are expressed in the economic realities of living between two differing economic systems. Analysing frontier economics is based on the realisation that borders are a resource for those able to exploit them. Borderlanders are well placed in this regard, and it is here that the interplay between internal discourses of control, trans-frontier networks, and international policy is most visible. Economic activity at the state's margins is also often cast as activity at the margins of legality and morality; however, local borderlanders will not necessarily accept the centre's definition of what is acceptable and what is not. Local economies here divorce notions of loyalty to the state from surviving the vagaries of a region usually underdeveloped in terms of employment opportunities and investment.

It is here that the second domain of discussion becomes vital for our comprehension of life in border regions: the *agents and means*

of border control are by no means simply a matter of central state policy, even if they are framed as such by central authorities. At the gates of the state an array of officially licensed and prestigious gatekeepers are to be found and they are often complemented by a diverse assortment of unofficially operating individuals with the ability to negotiate access to and egress from state territory. The manner of interaction between gatekeepers, the state, crossers, and local populations serves to make clear in which way a state's territory is controlled at its most vulnerable physical interface. Importantly, border guards and security officials are also charged with keeping the operating of trans-frontier networks under surveillance or indeed inhibiting them. Commonly assumed to be bastions of state strength at the border, from our borderland perspective another characteristic becomes evident: gatekeepers interact significantly with local borderland populations, and their efficacy depends centrally on interdependence, which entails either support (with both sides gaining) or subversion (where one side profits from undermining the other); it is here that border control and its successes or failures are to be measured.

Border control goes beyond controlling the actual physical line between states. From our perspective here it has been shown to also crucially include discovering what the implications are that the political institution of border control has on local livelihoods in terms of connectivity, mobility, and avenues of exchange both across the line and, significantly, with the hinterland. States manifest themselves in multiple ways in their borderlands: infrastructural avenues, state-wide connectivity in terms of educational and employment opportunities, and communicational trajectories all involve the state here and control over them is what we have termed deep control. Such deep control is hidden to casual observers but it is this type of control that affects borderlander livelihoods most. Understanding the parameters of deep control gives us a more differentiated view of the reasons for the success or failure of border control in general, as well as uncovering internal discourses of control between centre and periphery that would otherwise remain hidden to outsiders.

Issues of wider regional and even global security matter little to borderlanders here – state access and increased control over already highly restricted livelihood opportunities figure far more prominently

in local discourses. The influx of foreign experts intending to manage southern Central Asian borders "in a better way" is compared unfavourably with the last such intrusion of a distant centre: the Soviet Union that posted its border guards here, however, also took great care to not only bring the centre to the periphery but also to bring the periphery into the centre. As has been discussed here, the Soviet campaign for borderlander loyalties was largely successful in this region. Today, it is asked, how will outside forces wage this campaign for local support? As discussed, the ongoing establishment of NATO's Northern Distribution Network may well come to play a significant role in centre-periphery interaction in the years to come. Who will get to use such infrastructural connectivity, and who controls access to it and guarantees its use as a trajectory? Will it bring the agents of internal control to hitherto only weakly observed locales? Those involved in constructing and maintaining infrastructure with so vital an importance to the operations in Afghanistan are unlikely to be local borderlanders and far likelier outside groups such as Chinese entrepreneurs, highly unpopular locally for their perceived power in subverting the border. Will borderlanders be able to rely on new such transversality remaining accessible to them once NATO departs, or will it become a tool of deep control by the Tajikistani state or even regional factions that would exclude certain borderlanders?

Similar questions may have surrounded the construction of the Pamir Highway in the 1930s, and indeed one official reason for its construction then was the fight against local rebels (the *basmachi*) resisting increased Soviet control. The *basmachi*, however, were co-opted by the Soviet state in that Moscow successfully wooed local borderlanders with increased internal connectivity and immediately improved local livelihoods, especially in terms of regional mobility and political representation – and the Soviet border troops were there to stay, at least from a generational point of view. It is doubtful whether NATO awakens similar notions of opportunity here, especially as Western governments have opted to work closely with state regimes deemed locally to be inimical to local interests – in contrast to utter Soviet disregard for the political entities that may initially have vied for local loyalties.

Also of wider interest is the question of whether these states' borders truly are porous. Analysts appear to be in two minds: on the one hand, much is made of the apparent ease with which narcotics,

'dangerous' ideologies, and weapons are moved with relative impunity across them; on the other hand, regional bureaucracies and opaque implementation are deplored. Applying the insight gained from illuminating southern Central Asian borderland dynamics and deep control of borders and borderlands here, the answer would seem to be "yes, they are more porous nowadays, depending on who you are". Specifically, the agents of border control can be co-opted quite successfully by members of local elites in both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Individuals, be they locals or outsiders who have access within the borderland to these elites, have few problems negotiating the thicket of regulations and concomitant paperwork that was designed in the Soviet era to keep individuals closely monitored and restricted. We have seen how this pertains to at least one powerful group of outsiders in the region: Chinese entrepreneurs appear to have rapidly gained access to the appropriate nodes within the framework of deep control. However, porosity at former external boundaries of the Soviet world order have been matched with a steady hardening and thickening of borders that have been born over the past two decades.

The perspective adopted here shows the intricate nature of the discourses entertained by both the representatives of the state and the inhabitants at its frontiers, by both the effect official policies have on the implementation of control over boundaries and borderlands and how this implementation is received and influenced by those it affects. It also highlights the channels of communication and exchange, be they economic, political, and/or socio-cultural, which exist between the inhabitants of the frontier on both sides of the boundary in regard to the respective states involved. Regardless of official rhetoric on border control, reality takes on a different form when observed in the borderlands or at the actual boundary itself, where the unofficial and the official are closely entwined. Furthermore, it has shown itself to be necessary to consider local borderlander attitudes in order to approach a qualitative analysis of the relationship of power between the respective gatekeepers, the local borderland elites, and the people on both sides of the boundary, and so to be able to examine the nature of one state's interface with another's.

We have seen that going beyond governments' rhetoric on what border control is meant to accomplish allows us to refocus on what

is actually happening in regions so frequently off-limits to observers. Mapping the faultlines between narratives of stability and security requires on-the-ground research into how borderlanders, political elites, official gatekeepers, and state representatives interact. The entire region has a long modern history of containing some of the most difficult borders to cross anywhere: Soviet border control here was highly efficient, and memories in the entire region of this strength are well preserved and frequently used as a foil for casting today's states in terms of countries with dwindling power. Not one of these states is seen in its borderlands as successfully fulfilling the function expected of a state; local borderlanders are justified in asking which state exactly they are meant to owe their allegiances to, especially as these states are not seen as being able to provide for their borderland populations. The crux of the connection between socio-economic livelihoods, notions of belonging, and shifts in state power is hence best summed up in the words of a borderlander himself[116]:

> You know, you ask about boundaries, but do you know what one of the best things about the time before [i.e., before 1992 (S.P)] was? It was that *everybody knew where they belonged*! This was the Soviet Union, that was China; this was Kirgizia [the Kyrgyz Soviet Republic], that was the Uzbek Soviet Republic; here [in Osh], there were Kyrgyz officials implementing Soviet law, there [in Andijan] it was Uzbek officials implementing Soviet law; and here it was a Kyrgyz bazaar and there were no Chinese or Afghans. Of course things would go wrong – mistakes were made, corruption existed, all that! But at least you knew the parameters of how things worked, especially after Stalin had died. After all that changed, suddenly nobody knew who was in charge: us, the Uzbeks, or the Chinese? Today's problems derive from the fact that the state has forgotten its duty. We have Chinese here because the state no longer cares to uphold border control – they just come whenever they want to and we have to deal with them. The Chinese and others are taking advantage of this forgetfulness!

[116] Interview by the author with a Kyrgyzstani Kyrgyz trader in Osh (the Kyrgyzstani segment of the Ferghana Valley), spring 2007.

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Controlling borderlands?

New perspectives on state peripheries in southern Central Asia and northern Afghanistan

Steven Parham

In Central Asia, as elsewhere throughout the former Soviet Union, new states have inherited old external state borders as well as new (formerly internal, administrative) borders. The border regions of southern Central Asia are spaces in which international strategic interests, minority nationalities, post-Soviet regimes, and new socio-economic realities all intertwine to constitute a political field fraught with uncertainty and conflict. In the midst of these spaces, local borderlanders display hidden and sometimes subversive political loyalties which are negotiated in a field characterised by these states' institutional weakness, opaque border control policies, and powerful local networks.

By adopting a local rather than a state-centred perspective, this report empirically and theoretically discusses the relevant parameters of this region's borderlanders' interaction with "their" states through a local lens. Such a bottom-up perspective *from and at* the edges of states contributes significantly to international debate on southern Central Asian border stability and state power by going beyond mere official rhetoric on territorial control.

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