

## **From the Pamir frontier to international borders: Exchange relations of the borderland population**

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### **1 Introduction**

This paper deals with a population dependent on interregional goods exchange for their basic needs, and will discuss the opportunities and restrictions that have arisen from past delimitations of the frontier region and present reconfigurations of the borders enclosing the post-Soviet Pamirs.

After the end of the cold war the iron curtain was lifted and the developments seemed to wipe out the prototype of a sealed border, the big dividing line between East and West. The predominant discourse of globalisation and deterritorialisation promised a borderless world and tremendous advantages resulting from free trade (see Caney 2005; Ohmae 1990).

However, not all borders became permeable after the ideological or political differences disappeared. On one hand, the borderlands in the converging European Union became the arena of trans-border cooperation and were frequently the subject of borderland studies (see Anderson/Wever 2003; Perkmann 1999; Perkmann/Sum 2002; Scott 2000). At the same time the administrative boundaries between the republics of the Soviet Union were transformed into international borders. This upgrading in many cases did not correspond with the integrity of its demarcation. Tensions arose from the enforcement of boundaries that were ignored by the infrastructure development and economic integration of the Soviet time. Although disputes arose along most of the 20 new international boundaries after the Soviet dissolution (see Kolossov/Gleser/Petrov 1992), comparably few studies have been published on post-Soviet border conflicts. Disputes that led to open conflicts, such as the cases of Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia seem to be studied most. Among the numerous disputes over boundaries within Soviet Central Asia the Tajik-Afghan boundary received a special focus because frequent penetrations took place due to the Civil War in Tajikistan (see Borcke 1994a, b; Halbach 1993; 1997). Especially this boundary has remained in focus because of the surge of Afghan drug production and trafficking through Central Asia (see Djalili et al. 1998; Gerstle 2006; Iskandarov/Lewington 2009).

Yet the majority of these borderland studies put a focus either on the inventarisation of border conflicts or on the international politics in the context of (critical) geopolitics (see Kolossov 1999; Kolossov/O'Loughlin 1998; Megoran 2004; Polat 2002).

However, the people that live in borderlands along unsettled boundaries are mentioned in most studies as passive victims of international politics. Although the new boundaries now trench the spaces of the everyday activities of these people, constraining their mobility and resulting insecurities, many of them can use the economic differences that have emerged from the different policies in the post-Soviet republics. For example differing market prices between both sides of the border are used through trans-border petty trade as an economic resource. Likewise, every borderland context comprises potentials and restrictions to the local population. They are perceived as options that translate into concrete actions. Only a few regional studies deal with the effects on the micro level (see Bichsel 2009; Gerstle 2006; Reeves 2005). Yet the outcome of individuals' activities in the borderland would deserve more attention in order to understand the effects of boundaries and bordering processes for the population.

Hence, the case study chosen for this paper will serve as an example for the consequences of border-making processes for the people in a post-Soviet setting. In this case a diachronic approach is helpful to show how emerging boundaries and reconfigured borders had positive and negative effects for the livelihoods of Kyrgyz mobile pastoralists who have lived in the eastern Pamirs for centuries. It is necessary to include the historical perspective in order to understand how the people, being exposed to the present-day borders, perceive their options to use their borderland status for securing their livelihoods. In order to reach these objectives, the paper has to deal with three questions. The first asks how geopolitical interests have shaped the opportunities and restrictions for the livelihoods of the local population, thus dealing with the structural preconditions' effects for the agency. The second one looks at the interplay between perceptions of structures and agency and calls for the mechanisms enabling the local population to use regional borders as a resource. Finally, it is necessary to find out how these mechanisms need to be differentiated for various social groups.

In a first step the developments of border conceptualisations are traced and actors in the social space of borders are introduced, followed by an outline of the case study area. In the methodological section the analytical framework is discussed and a short insight in the fieldwork is given. Now, the legacies of the colonial Russian boundary-making and the border enforcements as part of the Soviet modernisation project are outlined. Subsequently the current time period is depicted and viewed from the perspective of local livelihoods. Finally, in the conclusions the initial questions will be discussed.

## 2 Conceptualisations of the borders and their actors

Focussing on boundaries and arguing with power and politics, the discipline of geopolitics is concerned with nation states, its territories, and the dividing mechanisms between them. In the geopolitical discourse starting with Ratzel's *Politische Geographie* (1897), the boundary is primarily an object for the investigation of the spatial development of states.

Other geopolitically informed geographers continued to develop deterministic argumentations. In 1904, during the 'Great Game', the geographer Halford Mackinder held a lecture at the British Royal Geographical Society with an unambiguous argumentation: he identified the Eurasian territories ranging from Central and Inner Asia to Siberia as the 'pivot of history', where in his account "the expansive force of mobile power [was] originating in the steppe" (Mackinder 1904: 430). With an imperialistic argumentation he assessed the natural resources as sufficient for supporting an "empire of the world" (Mackinder 1904: 436). Other scholars followed him centring the 'Pivot of Asia' in Urumchi such as Owen Lattimore (1950) or Kabul like Milan Hauner (1989; cited after Kreutzmann 2005). The Russian school of centrography made similar attempts to define 'centres of gravity' that have to be moved by planning processes to geopolitically desired locations (see Poulsen 1959). These accounts seem to be rather interesting for the case of the Pamirs, as they might have informed not only political decisions on boundaries but also economic resources for borderlands.

A large part of the border studies literature in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was concerned with static classifications of boundaries, whereat definitions of the terminology of geographical separation lines were developed (see Boggs 1940; Hartsthorne 1936; Jones 1943; Kristof 1959). These categorisations generated the impression that the socio-cultural perceptions and practices can be explained by the political history that lead to the creation of boundaries.

Functionalist viewpoints widened the view to different roles that constitute a border. In these accounts the border is used by the state to fulfil several functions beneficial to the nation-state. They state five different functions: Legal, fiscal, control, military and ideological (see Raffestin et al. 1975, listed in Leimgruber 2005: 240).

As the paper deals with delimitation processes, it is necessary to distinguish the meanings of identifiers for different lines and spaces of antagonism or transition.

The term frontier linguistically originates from the French *frontière* that was originally connoted with the military front. Different disciplines have adopted it and use it in a different way. In geography, two meanings prevail. The first

became popular with Frederick Jackson Turner. He used the term in his work dealing with the role of the frontier for American society (see Turner 1928[1920]) as a dividing line between settled, respective colonised, and 'unsettled', respective Native Americans' territory. The second meaning refers to the limits of a state, where it borders the neighbouring one. Historically, frontiers were rather areas than lines, where the ruler could not exercise absolute power. Significant levels of autonomy were granted to the *marcher lords* governing the frontier provinces (see Ellis 1995; Teschke 2003). Although in contemporary nation states sovereignty is considered to reach continuously to the edges, the borderland respective the frontier is often an arena of (military) conflict (see Kristof 1959; Prescott 1978; White 2004). Since the characteristics of classical frontier provinces are evident in this case study, I will use frontier for referring to a governed, but contested territory at the margin of a political entity.

The boundary, the next term in the vocabulary, denominates an imaginary or marked line on a map or the surface of the earth. When geographers became concerned with borders, they tried to understand its location and course. Subsequently, theories for natural respective 'scientific' justification of boundaries were developed. Some pretended that courses of boundaries could be settled 'scientifically'. The advocates of this account named the segregation of ethnic groups and land that is hard to settle or cross as a prerequisite for optimal boundaries (see Curzon 1888; 1908; Holdich 1916). In subsequent geographical discourses the meaning of boundary can be summarised as the "physical and geographical outcome of the political and historical process" (Newman 2006: 145). Although it was used increasingly metaphorically in the last two decades, in this paper the term boundary refers to the above mentioned line that is sanctioned by the state and confines its territory.

Finally, the use of the term border has to be defined. In this contribution, border will be regarded first and foremost as an institution of the modern nation state, which is related to the state boundary. The boundary is created, legally sanctioned, and maintained by the state (see Kristof 1959). In everyday social reality it is represented by the state border as a structural precondition, that poses as the arena for social and cultural practices (see Albert 1998). Although state borders are sustained and enforced by state structures, its functioning depends on the behaviour of the people interacting with this institution.

Accordingly, the research paradigms were broadened from the narrative of individuals exposed to the effects of borders to the acknowledgement of the interplay of structural state power and individual agency in the borderlands (see Newman/Paasi 1998). Research of the post-socialist transitions such as the post-Soviet republics during the past two decades has shown that the explanatory power of the politico-economic structures alone is very limited for the

understanding of socio-economic realities of the population and the ongoing transition processes of the societies. Instead, the way Giddens understood the mutual interdependencies of structure and agency in his structuration theory (1984) can be helpful. The agency is grasped as performed within the context of a pre-existing social structure governed by both informal and formal rules, such as norms and laws. However, these structures are not imperishable and external, but sustained and modified by actions of individuals.

In this vein, empirical fieldwork on the micro level is necessary to understand the realities of different actors at the border. This knowledge needs to be regarded within the complex contexts of politico-economic structures such as legal regulations, power, finances etc. Combining both components makes it possible to understand how structural preconditions of the border are perceived by individuals and translated into particular agency. The way border officials, border crossers and the individuals of the borderland act towards the border, permanently forms this institution.

### **3 Introduction to the Case Study: The District Murghab in the Eastern Pamirs**

The borders examined in this paper delimit the Tajik part of the eastern Pamir, a predominantly high mountain desert of Central Asia, located in the easternmost part of Tajikistan. This area is today bound in the north by Kyrgyzstan, in the east by the autonomous province of Xinjiang in China, and in the south by the narrow Wakhan corridor of Afghanistan, through which Pakistan can be reached. The eastern Pamirs is more or less congruent with the Murghab district and is located within the autonomous province of Gorno-Badakhshan in Tajikistan (fig. 22).

The high mountain plateaus are used by two different groups. Mountain farmers from the deep-cut Western Pamir valleys, where they cultivate irrigated terraces and drive their cattle to the eastern Pamir pastures during summers. The second group are Kyrgyz pastoralists. Some fled conflicts with emperors in the oases and came to live in the Pamirs all year round; others migrated seasonally over long distances from the fringes of the Pamirs and use the vast pastures of the Pamir plateaus in summer.

Some words may explain the natural resource base for local livelihoods. The altitude ranges from around 3500 m.a.s.l. in the valleys and reaches more than 7000 m.a.s.l. in the northern and western mountain ranges. This orographic situation causes low temperatures throughout the whole year, reaching annual

means of only  $-1$  to  $-3^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the villages. Additionally, the climatological situation is marked by extreme aridity with precipitation below  $100\text{ mm/a}$ .

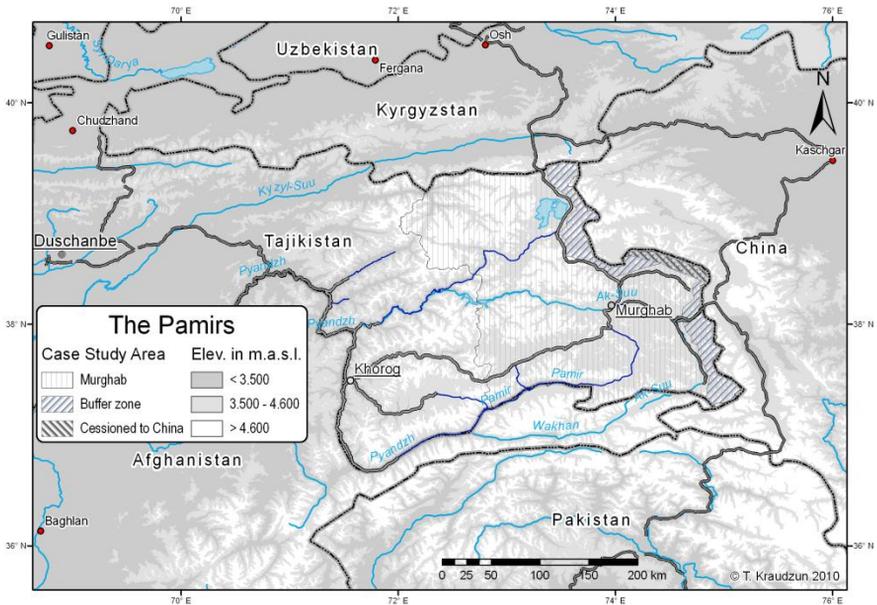


Fig. 22: Map of the case study area (own design).

These natural preconditions favour extensive livestock herding of yaks, sheep and goats as agricultural options. The population density today is still low in this district with an area of  $38,300\text{ km}^2$  but only 14,000 inhabitants, consisting of 77 % Kyrgyz and 23 % Pamiri. Half of the population lives in the district capital and economic centre Murghab, the other in remote villages (see GosKomStat 2007).

These poor preconditions of the physical environment would be less grave if the regional population could rely on substantial economic alternatives to the subsistence-based livestock economy, which relies solely on pasture resources. Even more negatively the current status quo is assessed by the local population when compared to the historical situation: The high degree of economic and social integration of this region into the Soviet Union is well remembered. Most of the installed infrastructure is now dysfunctional without permanent funding, with only a few exceptions. For example, the Pamir Highway, the first

infrastructural project of the Soviet Union here, is still a reliable transport connection despite long and heavy winters.

#### **4 Methodology and fieldwork**

To answer the above mentioned questions, some topics related to boundaries are especially important that follow out of the characteristics of mobile pastoralism. First, pastoralists need to move their herds to different pastures in order to use the meagre pastures. Second, the pastoralists are in the need of foods and goods that cannot be produced out of animal products. The full subsistence of nomads is a myth; the surplus of livestock breeding has to be exchanged for needed goods in the Central Asian oases where cultivation and trade connections make them available. Third, economic alternatives are helpful to absorb risks for the livelihoods relying solely on the income of animal breeding. These three preconditions shape the analytical framework to examine opportunities and restrictions in the border district. Accordingly, the analysis of how the borders impact on the livelihoods will focus on herd mobility, trade exchange and livelihood security.

Although the current situation may be most relevant for the local population, the institutions of the current borders must be seen as the result of the geopolitical confrontation of external powers. Hence, it is necessary to include a historical perspective in order to demonstrate how the differentiation of the Pamir frontier to diverse borders affects people's livelihoods. To do so, the above mentioned focus topics will be highlighted in a diachronic manner.

The access to information depends on the considered time period. During and after their acquisition of the Pamirs, the Tsarist Russian administration documented the social and economic life of the frontier region quite well. Yet the disturbances of the October Revolution did not leave much in the regional archives, instead the British intelligence could assist with the documentation. The administration and economic life of the Soviet era were documented exemplarily, all information concerning the external borders of the Soviet Union is still hard to obtain. However, the supposed distortion of official data to fit state plans and ideology suggest complementing information with alternative data, for instance oral history.

Since independence, official data has not gained in reliability. The informal economy constitutes a large share of border operations, giving benefits to most administrative, security and border officials. Therefore the hardest task is to assess the aggregated amount of the trans-border trade as the administration presents unrealistically low figures. Additionally, in the eastern Pamirs as a

border district, all state authorities have special policies concerning confidentiality hampering access to all kinds of information originating from these sources. Even foreign researchers are often met with suspicion and mistrust. Accordingly, information on individual household livelihoods can be the best data source to understand individual differences in the border-related agency. As in other contexts, where people are dependent on informal arrangements for their economic activities, trust is the key to reliable information. Hence only general data was gathered in standardised surveys. Sensitive information on the informal arrangements during the border crossings were only asked for during repeated meetings with confiding informants.

The findings are based on extensive fieldwork conducted since 2003, and mainly between 2007 and 2009 (14 months) in the eastern Pamir. Information is derived from topic-specific interviews with key and knowledgeable informants about pastoral strategies, livestock economy and political frame conditions. Enquiries about historical contexts are based on regional archives and provided helpful insight into the current situation.

## **5 The historical legacy: Boundary-making, economic integration, external delimitation**

### *5.1 Russian Colonisation: Restructuring the Pamirs through boundaries*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the territory of Central Asia was under the command of different principalities and China. The Pamirs were still shown as a blank spot on the map (see Boulger 2004[1878]: map). Prior to the encroachment of Tsarist Russian forces the khanate of Kokand claimed the Pamirs as its territory. Although the rulers took no efforts towards a permanent presence, they tried to levy taxes through the commitment of local leaders as representatives. The Chinese-ruled region of Xinjiang in the east claimed these mountains as well and intensified attempts to dominate the Pamirs, when the Russian forces were approaching this area after capturing Kokand in 1875. The western Pamirs were claimed by the Bukharan Emirate, but in the inaccessible valleys different local principalities resided, were comparably isolated and free from obligations. In 1883, however, these principalities came under Afghan rule and were subject to taxation. Furthermore, Afghan forces even tried to extend their rule to the plateaus of the eastern Pamirs.

Groups of Kyrgyz pastoralists used the pastures of the eastern Pamir; borders were unknown and even boundaries were unclear at this time. This situation presented them with some opportunities but also constraints. The Pamirs have

long been a major transport route between adjacent markets. With their vast knowledge about routes and related risks of the vast high mountains, Kyrgyz pastoralists often served as experienced guides and guards for trade caravans, some of them acted as caravan robbers. On the other hand, they took unpredictable risks when operating with their own belongings. The pastoralists depend on the exchange of their livestock surplus against foodstuffs and other goods in agricultural markets like Kashgar. En route they risked being deprived of the flocks, in the market towns they tried to avoid being charged with extraordinary taxes by negotiating special arrangements for market access in Kashgar (see Di Cosmo 1993).

With Tsarist Russia's advance into the Pamirs during the crucial phase of the 'Great Game' the situation changed significantly. Pamirskiy Post was erected in 1893 as an outpost to show the military presence of the Russian empire and to control the activities of other powers in the vast territory (see Serebrennikov 1899: 235). Russian and British envoys agreed on the boundary between the Russian Empire and Afghanistan in 1895. When the Russian empire was entitled to exercise territorial sovereignty, the Pamirs were incorporated into the Governorate-General of Turkestan and control over the population was developed in a classical colonial way. At the same time, the Russian troops started to prohibit crossings of the new boundary.

Kyrgyz pastoralists were surprised that they were now hindered to move to valleys belonging to Afghanistan or China, as they had always had freedom of movement before (see Zajcev 1903: 49). British India and Russian Turkestan were separated only by Afghanistan's narrow Wakhan strip, and Britain as well as Tsarist Russia produced mutual suspicions on encroachment plans by the respective other power. The Russian administration emphasized that the boundary served the military purpose of protecting against the sudden intrusion of 'foreign' forces or people in general (see Skyes/Sykes 1920: 144). In the numerous accounts of Russian explorers, scientists and officers describing the new acquisition of the Pamirs, guaranteeing security to the local population was emphasised. This narrative was retained even during the Soviet period (see Masov 1985: 235; Serebrennikov 1899). Additionally, long distance trade between Kashgar and Badakhshan traversing the Pamirs was affected by mutual suspicion of political enemies (see Hedin 1899: 99; Serebrennikov 1899: 222). At the same time, the regular needs of the local population were satisfied by Russian goods brought by external traders. This increasingly channelled the source of supply from Kashgar to Osh (see Serebrennikov 1899: 235).

## 5.2 Soviet Modernisation: Internal economic integration, external delimitation

After the October Revolution, when Soviet forces gained power in Russian Turkestan, administrative units were reconfigured several times. As a result, in 1925 the Pamirs got the status of an autonomous province, the 'Gorno-Badachshanskaja Avtonomnaja Oblast' (GBAO), and were joined to the Tajik Soviet republic in 1929 (see GosArchiv-GBAO 1992: 6f). Now the region, which was historically connected to Kashgar and Osh, was attached to the poorly accessible lowlands of the Tajik Soviet Republic.

After settling the administrative structure, the major goals pursued by the Soviet power were to persuade the local population of the advantages of an integrated rural development and to convince them of the utility of producing in collective farms. Every endeavour was made to improve the supply of foods and goods, channelled via the railheads of Andizhan and Osh. For example, more than 7,500 tons of goods had to be brought into the Pamirs in the planning year 1936/37 to supply about 29,000 people who were living in the region in 1935<sup>93</sup>. The crossing of a *de jure* international border caused no restrictions.

A higher degree of relevance was attributed to the Tajik Pamir's boundaries with Afghanistan and China. In the aftermath of the October Revolution, a struggle for power broke out in the region. Both communist party commissars and counter-revolutionary forces infiltrating from Afghanistan, tried to convince the local population of the advantages of one or another politico-economic system (see Taipov 2002: 48f). In addition, subsidised, and therefore cheap, goods from the emerging Soviet supply organisations became preferred items for smuggling. Furthermore, numerous people escaped the Tajik Pamirs to avoid their compulsory dispossession by the Soviet authorities (see Audouin-Dubreuil 2008: 182). These factors made the enforcement of the closure of the external borders to Afghanistan and Xinjiang the top priority of the Soviet power in the 1930s, resulting in the total closure in the 1940s. Supply and emerging economic integration of the established collective farms were organised within the boundaries of the Soviet Union. Therefore extraordinary efforts were made by the Soviet state to build a road from Osh in the Fergana valley via Murghab in the eastern Pamirs to Khorog, the provincial centre of the GBAO. The so-called 'Pamir Highway' was opened in 1934 (see Popov 1935). The efforts were

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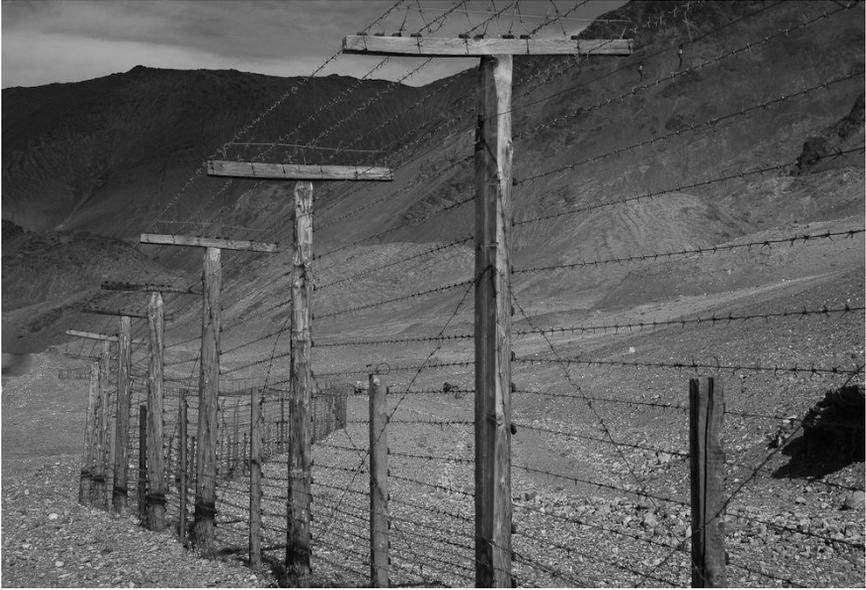
93 Although the official state statistics claim more than 55,200 inhabitants in 1932 (see Bushkov/Kalandarov 2003: 106), regional archive documents show a population of 39,320 for 1935, and only of 28,924 for 1936 (GosArchiv-GBAO: 1/3/27). The data were collected by a special brigade activated jointly by the communist party and the government of the Tajik Soviet republic that was sent in order to speed up collectivisation in the Pamirs. The sharp decline gives a hint for the amount of forced migrations during the high time of the repression.

continued by building another challenging engineered road to connect Khorog, the administrative centre of the Tajik Pamir, with the capital of the republic in Stalinabad (Dushanbe). Although opened in 1940, its disadvantage was its regular closure during several months of the winter season due to large amounts of snowfall. Accordingly, the Pamir Highway, crossing the border, continued to be the main supply channel for the Pamirs.

The population of the Soviet Pamirs experienced different restrictions and opportunities arising from the new situation, depending on the socio-economic status of its members. Most of the few wealthy leaders of lineage groups tried to escape before the borders were sealed, anticipating losing their status or even their integrity. The majority of the tributary households and forced migrants from the Basmachi conflict-torn regions had not much to lose and were open to the collective experiment. Formerly depending in their nutrition on the grace and the successful economic exchange of the lineage leaders, they could now rely on the absolute commitment of the Soviet system to supply the geopolitically important region to keep the inhabitants loyal.

A special case is the Sino-Soviet boundary, which was delimited legally binding only in parts. To take the watershed of the Sarikol range as the dividing line was agreed upon in 1884, but only in the northern part. Russia then occupied all territories west of the range also in the south; ignoring China's claims of large parts of the area (see Garver 1981: 115). In the aftermath of the Sino-Soviet border conflicts in the Far East, the tensions increased in all regions with disputed territories. Consequently the Pamir border guards were restructured and reinforced again in 1973. The result of these measures is visible still today: Beginning in the 1970s, an electrically secured, barbed-wire fence was set up along the external boundaries of the Soviet Pamir. Due to the unsettled territorial claims it was set up with a distance of several kilometres from the Sarikol range, constituting the de-facto border (fig. 23).

This buffer zone excluded the collective farms from substantial pasture areas, comprising about 14 % of the district's territory (fig. 22). Later, access was granted, but remained strictly restricted to *sovkhoz* workers approved by the Committee for State Security. Only in 2004, Sino-Tajik negotiations resulted in a final demarcation of the provisional boundary between the states. One item of the agreement was the cession of a territory of about 980 km<sup>2</sup> to China, with disagreeable effects for the pastoralists of the sub-district Rang-Kul who used the pastures now handed over to China (fig. 22). Furthermore it excluded the biggest part of the population, military and security forces as well as border guards used it as some kind of a resource. Behind the fences they hunted unique wildlife unobserved like the world renowned Marco Polo sheep (*Ovis ammon polii*) and the endangered snow leopard (*Uncia uncia*) – then and now.



**Fig. 23:** Surreal appearance of closure in an open mountain landscape: The electrically secured, barbed-wire fence, called *sistema elketrosignalizacija* (vernacularly ‘the system’), delimits the buffer zone of the Sino-Tajik border (near Kara-Kul Nov 2007; Source: Tobias Kraudzun).

In contrast, the internal border between the Kyrgyz and the Tajik Socialist Soviet Republic functioned as a demarcation line. The biggest share of supplies for the Pamirs continued to be transported from the economic centres of the Fergana valley. The Soviet Union made extraordinary efforts to increase the living standards of the population in the Pamirs as a territory of highly geopolitical interest. For a region traditionally used by pastoralists this implied the construction of the complete civil infrastructure. Enormous amounts of building materials, foodstuffs, goods and fuel had to be brought in regularly. To fulfil this task a special transport organisation, the ‘Pamirskoe Avtotransportnoe Upravlenie’ was established, financed and controlled by the supranational administrative level. Running hundreds of trucks on the route of Osh-Murghab-Khorog, the transport of supplies was of highest priority and crossing the border caused no problems. Accordingly, the Soviet Pamirs was almost entirely dependent on the flows of trade.

Former exchange relations of the local population with regions now beyond the Soviet Union's external border were effectively cut. The source of the goods

– previously Kashgar or Tagarma in China – was substituted by the well-developed Fergana valley. Another change concerned the involvement of the local population. Where in pre-Soviet times exchange was organised individually, all transportation of goods was now under the control of the state. Individual trans-border trade, even in small quantities, was banned as *spekulacija*.

## 6 Independent Tajikistan's borders: Revived but restricted exchange

The dissolution of the USSR and the independence of Tajikistan resulted in significant structural changes of the political and socio-economic frame conditions. As a result of the hyperinflation of the Russian Rouble and the Tajik civil war regular interregional trade relations were discontinued. The basic supply was maintained for some time by the state farms bartering their livestock in direct exchange for fuel and flour in the Fergana valley.

The mass exodus from Tajikistan's war-torn south-west resulted in a dramatic increase of the Pamir population just at the moment when the local economy could not cope at all. Including the official figures of 54,800 displaced people (see Herbers 2006: 213), the population rose by one third according to official sources (the real figures likely being higher), just when the former state supply structures had collapsed. During the Soviet era, agricultural production and the economy of the region were transformed to meet external needs; in exchange the Pamirs were supplied with all necessary goods from outside. The effects of this production system were low rates of self sufficiency: Less than 20 % of the cereal needs could be met by local agriculture production (see Breu 2006: 80; Herbers 2006: 231)

In order to alleviate the disastrous supply situation, the Aga-Khan Foundation attracted several international donors for the disastrous situation and organised humanitarian food supplies within the framework of the '*Pamir Relief and Development Project*' (see Bliss 2006: 300ff.). This meant transporting a yearly supply of 300 to 1800 tons of foodstuff for the district Murghab. Beginning with these provisions the exchange relations on the basis of the Soviet system ceased entirely.

Private trade was only slowly established and several years later. One reason is that the Soviet proscription of private trading activities as *spekulacija* was fixed in the minds of the Murghab population. Even 15 years after the turnover of the ideological frame conditions, interviewees recurred to the negative connotation of private trade. Secondly, the basic food supply was secured during the years of humanitarian aid. Thirdly, many obstacles hampered personal journeys. During

the time of the civil war the passage to the centre of Tajikistan was dangerous because different warlords controlled the main transport routes. The alternative, to go to the previous supply markets in the Fergana valley, was hard to reach because Russian forces were policing all the traffic in the Pamirs. The deployment of Russian border guards in Tajikistan substituted the Soviet military structures. This was agreed bilaterally in 1993 because of Russia's fear of infiltration by the *Mujahidin*, the acrimonious enemies of the Soviet forces during their Afghanistan occupation (International Crisis Group 2004: 17). Immediately after independence, Tajikistan was caught up in a civil war and its state forces were unable to deal with border control, especially in the remote Pamirs. Russia feared the exploitation of the weak state control in the newborn republics of Central Asia that could give Islamic movements the opportunity to gain hegemony. In practice, the presence of the Russian border guards meant rigorous searches on frequent road blocks along the Pamir highway. In addition to these difficulties, the official status of the Tajik-Kyrgyz border was not clear before the regulations were decreed by the re-strengthened Tajik state in the late 1990s (idem. 2001: 3). This caused confusion concerning permissiveness, checking and customs clearance of traded goods beyond the humanitarian and military supplies at the border. This situation made it very risky to transport livestock to Osh in order to buy goods to bring home, resulting in very infrequent private trading activities.

In one case the high risk is rewarded with the possibility of enormous profits. The weakened border infrastructure made the smuggling of Afghanistan's most valuable products feasible (ibid.: 19). Opium and opiates were abundant because poppy production rose in Afghanistan when the Soviet army loosened control and left the country (see Kreutzmann 2004: 57). The so-called 'northern route' leading to the huge Russian market opened up through the Central Asian countries. The biggest share of this drug flow of yearly 95 t (2008) goes through Tajikistan which ranked first with 1.5 t (2007) annual heroine seizures ahead of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Pamir route to Osh/Kyrgyzstan is still one of the major ones crossing the country (see Madi 2004; UNODC 2010). Respondents reported that in the mid 1990s opiates were easily available in Khorog at low prices, and that the value could be multiplied when sold in Osh<sup>94</sup>. Due to the absence of individual traffic at this time, ironically, the empty trucks

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94 Madi (2004) numbers enormous profits for the transborder trade – 1996 prices: Badakhshan (Afghanistan) 60-100, Dushanbe (Tajikistan) 1,000, Osh (Kyrgyzstan) 3,000-4,000 USD per kg heroine; 2003: Badakhshan (Afghanistan) 240-400, Dushanbe (Tajikistan) 1,500-2,000, Osh (Kyrgyzstan) 4,000-5,000 USD per kg heroine. The updated estimates of UNODC (2010) show similar price differences for 2009: Afghanistan (farm gate) 64, Tajikistan border 250, Dushanbe (Tajikistan) 750 USD per kg heroine.

going back to Osh to pick up the next load of humanitarian goods were used by both drivers and passengers to smuggle drugs, usually in small quantities. Rumours circulate that some people gained resources to start up new businesses, while several dozen people who were caught at one of the numerous checkpoints are still serving their sentences in Tajik and Kyrgyz prisons. Informants from security forces stated that the trafficking of drugs ceased when the state structures were reinforced and professionalised. In fact, individual small-scale trafficking seems to persist, as ongoing cases of seizures from individuals show. Respondent's observations from the population strongly suggest that most of the drug trafficking is currently organised by a small number of businessmen, who avoid search by including border guards through profit sharing. This observation is backed by the UNODC (2010).

The transformation of the post-Soviet Tajik-Kyrgyz border from a boundary controlled by external forces to a 'regular' border operated by state authorities made regular trade with goods possible. More traders became active in the last years of the 1990s. Since the passage was still not easy, people gathered in shared transport. Some shared a hired truck; others used a somewhat regular bus service offering the roundtrip Murghab-Osh-Murghab journey. A former operator of this kind of bus service remembered:

“I wanted to have a regular timetable, but it was hard to keep; ... The journeys to Osh were no problem. ... The return journeys were awful. Imagine: 10-20 trade women in the bus, each of them with two, three or more packages full of different goods. Usually the customs officials made a search to get an overview, what the traders were carrying. They tried to assess the amount and value of the goods for assigning the custom fees. The back of the bus was full of bags and boxes up to the ceiling, often we had to unload the entire bus. ... When they [the customs officials] started to ask for custom fees, the discussion started, with every single trader. ... Sometimes we were at the border for more than 24 hours!”<sup>95</sup>

As described, these first attempts at trade match with the description of petty trade. Yet after some time, the transportation of goods was organised differently. A growing share of the journeys was executed at the expense of a single trader who acted in the capacity of a freight forwarder. He offered the transportation as a service: in Osh the goods were handed over to him by different individuals and the entrepreneur was solely responsible for transportation and settling trouble at road blocks and borders. As the freight forwarders do the passage fairly regularly, they have good opportunities to establish which goods they can smuggle better and for which it pays off to make arrangements at road blocks and border crossings in order to avoid time consuming searches and official fees and taxes. Several interviewed drivers reported the payment of agreed informal

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95 Azimbek (14.04.2008); names are changed.

payments depending on the amount and especially the kind of goods. Figure 24 shows that the difficulties of trans-border transport results in enormous price differences of several food items.

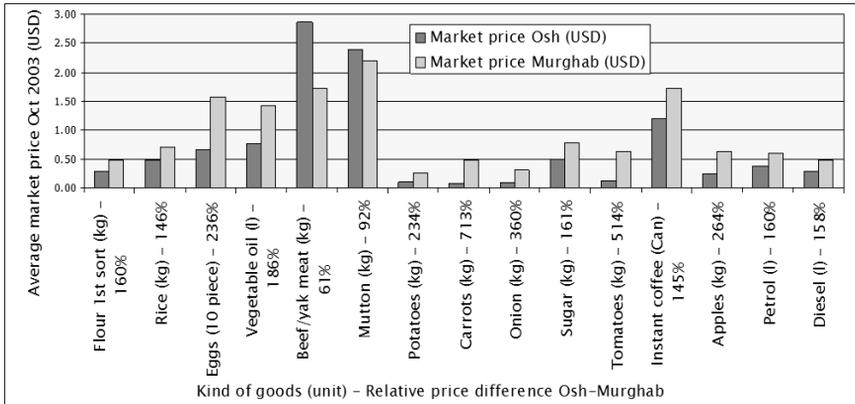


Fig. 24: Price differences between the markets of Osh and Murghab in October 2003 (own survey).

This system of international freight transport proved to be a reliable transport service, regardless of import/export regulations or taxation policies. This can be demonstrated with the obstacles of the trans-border trade flows. Although not all households were successful in livestock breeding after privatisation, total numbers recovered and many herders were able to sell the herd surplus. Animal prices in this exclusively livestock region are expectably low; therefore the breeders seek to sell their livestock in Kyrgyzstan, predominantly in Osh, where meat is in demand. Therefore, wealthy herders and professional traders are the second group of individuals that undertake roundtrips to Osh on their own account for selling the livestock and supplying the household. However, the Tajik government looks somewhat differently on these exports. Since 2000, the local administration has refused to issue export permits; for yaks entirely, for sheep and goats in very limited numbers. In the opposite direction, several goods are banned from import, basic ones like fuel, as well as stimulants such as alcohol and tobacco products. Likewise, basic foods are temporarily banned for export from Kyrgyzstan, as e.g. flour in late 2008 when world market prices rocketed.

Normally, all these bans would lead to an economic or supply crisis in the Murghab district. However the symbiosis of ambitious freight forwarders together with underpaid border officials enables a steady flow of foods and

goods, notwithstanding changing import/export policies. The fact that no amenities in taxation and customs duties are granted to the comparatively disadvantaged region together with the underpayment of state employees encouraged the establishment of a culture of informal operations at the border. Possible public revenues from international trade are now diverted to the pockets of border police and customs officials. Figure 25 shows that traders can save money in comparison to follow official procedures if they find informal arrangements with border officials.



**Fig. 25:** Costs and profits of the trade between the markets of Osh and Murghab in October 2003 (own survey).

In 2004 a new border crossing with China was opened at the Kulma pass, which connects the Pamir Highway with the Friendship Highway between China and Pakistan. It is the only direct connection of Tajikistan to the Chinese market. In comparison to the Kyrgyz-Tajik border, much more goods cross the Sino-Tajik border, meaning a bigger importance of the informal border economies. However, the organisation of the border procedures leaves fewer opportunities to the employees at the border crossing itself. The main customs operations take place at a terminal near Khorog, thus a position there is highly valued. The local population rarely participates in this border trade, as the traders are usually businessmen from the central regions of Tajikistan, where most goods are transported to.

## 7 Conclusions

In the last 120 years, the mobile pastoralists roaming through the Pamirs have witnessed processes that have restructured the remote mountain region they live in. First they did not know boundaries that confine their mobility. Usually the pastoralists perceived the restrictions as borders that they faced when tempting to access the markets in order to exchange livestock for supplies. When in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century imperial interests culminated in agreements between the Russian, the British, and the Chinese empires, the Pamir frontier was delimited with boundaries, thus constraining the mobility of the Kyrgyz pastoralists for herding and trade. They became dependent on the terms of trade of the predominantly Russian traders. The economic benefits of bargaining at the bazaars that they could use only if transgressing the border to gain access to the markets can be seen as a resource that disappeared.

The Soviet power transformed the dividing lines between colonial spheres of influence into hermetically closed nation-state borders of the Soviet Union. While the former trade mobility patterns of the Kyrgyz pastoralists remained discontinued, new opportunities opened up. The Soviet system showed an absolute commitment to supply this geopolitically important region in order to maintain the population's loyalty. Consequently the inhabitants could benefit from multiple supplemental resource allocations that substitute for lost mobility resources. On the other hand, the restrictions of the pasture use in the extensive buffer zone demonstrate that the borders are still contested. Although Murghab district's status of an ideologically charged frontier zone implied a lot of constraints affecting the everyday life of the population and the regional economy as a whole, the existence of the geopolitically attributed border can be regarded as an indirect resource that resulted in benefits for the population.

The dissolution of the Soviet economy and the Tajik civil war caused an isolation of the Pamirs and led to a discontinuation of supply and exchange. On the other hand, a number of local households could benefit from small-scale drug trafficking, since the weakened Afghan-Tajik border became permeable. Although the policies of Russian border guards tried to limit interregional exchange, this trade can be seen as a new resource that the border people used. After the Tajik state regained its sovereignty, the crossing of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border began to function as a regular border crossing thus enabling private trade on a small-scale basis. Likewise, previously hermetically closed borders gained permeability with the opening of border crossings to China and Afghanistan. Despite reopened borders, the trade vital for the population of such a disadvantaged region is constrained by inscrutable import/export regulations. This urged traders to avoid customs regulations and tariffs by smuggling or

making informal payments to border officials. Only frequent traders gained enough knowledge and connections to perform cross-border trade in a profitable manner under these conditions. Consequently, only traders well-equipped with resources and connections as well as the border officials can use the border as a resource. The majority of the population has to pay the higher prices at the Murghab bazaar.

This border study from a historical perspective showed that the boundary-making processes first of all restricted the opportunities for local livelihoods. However, if hegemonic interests towards boundaries are translated into external inputs, it can compensate for the restrictions. Nevertheless, after the recent reconfigurations of independent Tajikistan's Pamir borders only few people can use the borders as a resource, whereas the majority has to live with the disadvantages.

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