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Everyday Life
in
Central Asia
Past and Present

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18. Travels in the Margins of the State: Everyday Geography in the Ferghana Valley Borderlands

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"You see, then we were *free*. You could travel anywhere you wanted, get on a train and ride to Moscow if you wanted without even taking your passport with you! Now you just try! Now I become a criminal every time I want to visit my mother. What kind of freedom is that?" Saodat-*opa* thumbed her green Uzbek "citizen's passport" nervously as she spoke.¹ The pages, full of the stamps that traced her movement through the newly bordered routes of the Ferghana Valley, were soft at the edges from frequent checking.

We were waiting for the pages to be scrutinized once again. I was making the journey with Saodat-*opa* and the youngest of her seven children from the village where she had spent her married life to the childhood home where her parents and brothers still lived. When Saodat-*opa* and her husband, *Hkhom-aka*, had married thirty years previously, the two-hundred-kilometer distance separating their respective families was considered large, but not excessively so. Both husband and wife were in the first generation of their respective families to get a university education; they had met as foreign language students in Leninabad (today Khujand, Tajikistan) and had taken pride in holding a "komsomol" wedding, blending Brezhnev era innovations (a white dress for the bride, vodka at the wedding feast) with much older features of the Tajik culture to which they both subscribed.²

As custom dictated, Saodat-*opa* left her family home in the small industrial town of Komsomolsk, in the Tajik SSR, to live with her husband's family in his native village in *Sokh rayon* (district), in the neighboring Uzbek republic. Neither of their families considered the fact that they were from different union republics an obstacle to marriage. Indeed, as *peredovyye kadry* ("foremost cadres") who would be among the first to teach foreign languages in rural Tajik medium schools, their marriage brought pride to

both of their families as a sign of their progressiveness: they had married for love, after getting acquainted at the university. Ilkhom had waited for Saodat to finish her studies before asking for her hand. They were both members of the Communist youth league, and the fact that Ilkhom had chosen a wife from beyond his own locale was celebrated as a spur to his district's development. "I was," he commented with pride, "one of the first in Sokh to take a bride who was educated. Before Saodat started teaching, there were very few female teachers here. We were incredibly dedicated to Sokh's development. They gave us all kinds of awards (*mitrafi*) [. . .] We thought of ourselves as Soviet then."²²

Soviet internationalism now has a nostalgic ring for Ilkhom—aka and his family. Saodat-*opa* finds herself in a situation where she and her natal family are citizens of independent states, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, operating a visa regime with one another that is legitimated through a discourse of "security."²³ At the time of our journey, a visit such as Saodat's would officially require her relatives across the border to issue a letter of invitation, certified through their local office of internal affairs. Saodat, in turn, would have to travel to Tashkent where, ten days later and upon payment of a consular fee (a considerable sum on her teacher's salary), she would be issued a visa to enter Tajikistan.²⁴ An analogous situation faces citizens of Tajikistan wanting to enter or cross into Uzbekistan. In practice, the time, uncertainty, and expense involved in such a process means that for those, like Saodat-*opa*, wanting to snatch a quick visit to relatives amid her huge load of domestic responsibilities, to attend a lifecycle ceremony (*tor*) or funeral, this official route is never even considered, with families whose kin networks straddle the border preferring instead to "negotiate" a bribe (*pora*) with the border guards and customs officers at the relevant posts. Saodat-*opa*'s sweat-softened passport-cover, her nervous flicking of its pages, spoke of the tension, uncertainty, and humiliation that this informal route involved.

This chapter seeks to gain an analytical grasp on such transformation of everyday geographies in the Ferghana Valley by focusing on a single valley journey, made at the time of the spring new year (*Navrúz*) celebration between a married and a maternal home. Saodat-*opa*'s journey is chosen neither because it is especially dramatic or unusual, nor because her particular predicament as an Uzbekistani Tajik wanting to travel to relatives in Tajikistan is in any way exceptional. It is narrated, rather, because her journey and the elements it contains (checkpoints, admonishments, categorizations, bribes . . .) are repeated in myriad forms by men and women, young and old, Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Uzbek, going about their normal lives in the Ferghana valley. State borders have become part of everyday reality for thousands of people in Central Asia. By focusing on *practice*, retracing Saodat-*opa*'s journey, we can begin to get an insight into the micro-encounters through which this normalization occurs.²⁵

The idea, as Saodat-*opa* expressed it, that the Soviet Union was "free" and that the current post-Soviet condition is, by contrast, one of *restricted* mobility, perhaps rings unusually to Western ears. Dominant narratives of post-socialist "transition," captured in the compelling image of the Berlin wall being torn down by crowds of East Germans longing to rejoin the "West," have tended to presuppose that an era of restricted movement has given way to a period of greater mobility, un-freedom to freedom, the foreign transformed into the familiar.²⁶ Such images have been invoked as metaphors for the much broader collapse of Cold War ideological antagonisms, bolstering a discourse of post-Communist "transition" that has often been both teleological and triumphalist.²⁷

Anthropologists working in post-Communist states, including Central Asia, have been some of the most vocal in critiquing simplistic narratives of transition, encouraging instead a ground-up approach sensitive to what Morgan Liu has called "the actual processes of how values like entrepreneurship or citizenship take root (or fail to take root) at the level of mundane life."²⁸ However, while this approach has successfully helped us train our sights upon the micro-level, phenomenological dimensions of border openings that are typically approached from the "top down,"²⁹ there has been comparatively less discussion of the reverse side of this phenomenon: the *contraction* of everyday, experiential geographies in the wake of Soviet collapse;³⁰ the transformation of places once familiar, once "ours," into sites which remind of changed status—comrade into alien, fellow-citizen into foreigner; or the myriad daily performances of border-guards, newscasters, teachers, and village functionaries that construct difference, create an exception, imbue the abstract category "citizenship" with salience and emotion, with the state's terrifying magic.³¹

The lack of ethnographic attention to globalization's Janus-face in the post-Soviet space—to the appearance of *new* boundaries, new points of exclusion, at the same time that they are being dismantled elsewhere—is also characteristic of contemporary anthropologies more generally. As a discipline historically focused on small-scale and seemingly static communities, anthropology has undergone a radical disciplinary shift in recent decades toward accounting for "flows" and "displacements" of people, projects, concepts, and practices that cannot easily be contained within traditional analytical categories, nor grasped with the timeworn tools of village fieldwork.³² This has prompted a rich and productive strand of theorizing, but it risks generating its own scholarly lacunae: the reality in many sites around that increasing globalization has fostered its own forms of closure. As Yael

Navaro-Yashin has argued in the context of the heavily bordered Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, "[a]nthropologies of globalization [...] fail to study the ways in which the very processes of transnationalism which supposedly promote mobility and flexibility also engender the opposite: immobility, entrapment, confinement, incarceration."¹⁴

This omission is significant for our understanding of everyday life in Central Asia. For less visible and less triumphal than the dramatic reopening of borders is the reality that for many citizens the collapse of Communism has actually entailed a *de facto* decrease in mobility, whether through the vagaries of newly installed visa regimes, dramatic hikes in fuel prices, or the collapse of state-run transport systems. It has transformed travel within neighboring republics into a nervous attempt to avoid the document check (*proverka*). It has also meant that distant sites to which one formerly traveled as citizen are now encountered in a different guise—as labor migrant, guest-worker (*gizstarbeiter*), even, in popular discourse, slave (*nabkul*)—the latter term capturing not just new contours of economic dependence, but radically transformed status in sites where one would formerly have been “one of ours” (*svoj*).¹⁵

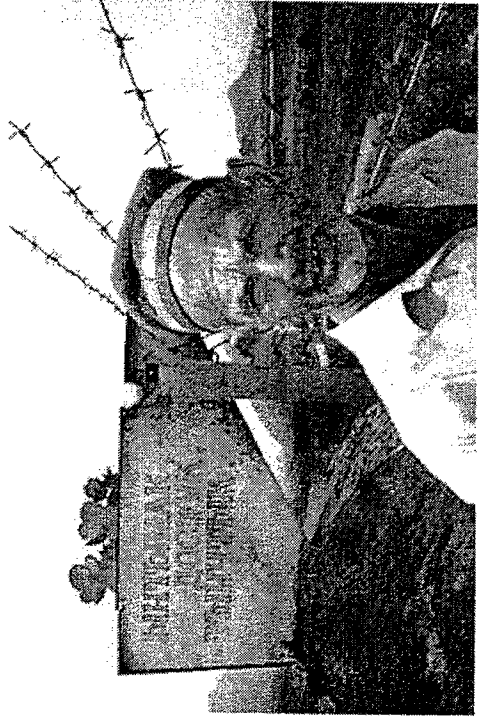
Nowhere is this more true than in Central Asia's Ferghana Valley, a broad fertile zone (22,000 square kilometers) that is encircled by the by the Tien Shan and Pamir Alay ranges to north and south to create a distinct, densely populated ecological and cultural zone. Inhabited by Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and a number of smaller ethnic groups who migrated or were deported as part of the great Soviet modernizing project, the valley has historically been marked by a high degree of ethnic interdependence, with shared bazaars, trade routes, sacred sites, and canal systems, coupled with elaborate unofficial mechanisms for regulating water use between upstream and downstream communities.¹⁶ Following the national-territorial delimitation of 1924, the valley was divided administratively between Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and later Tajik union republics in a complex and contested process that was crucial in mobilizing and crystallizing identities along “ethnic” lines.¹⁷ As well as marking out the exterior contours of the new Union republics, the delimitation process and subsequent adjustments to the borders during collectivization created a series of enclaves—“islands” of territory belonging to one union republic entirely enclosed within the territory of another; yet these, like all borders in the Ferghana Valley, unmarked and frequently unknown in their precise contours, had little salience for locals, even for those living at their edge. It was to one of the larger of these enclaves, Sokh, that Saodat-opa moved on getting married, joining her husband to live in his parents' home. A mountainous district of twenty-three *mahallas* (neighborhoods) watered by the Sokh river, it is administratively part of Uzbekistan, entirely encircled by Kyrgyzstani territory and with an ethnically Tajik population.¹⁸

Sokh's challenge to a nationalist logic in the Ferghana Valley—a logic

in which ethnic and administrative boundaries are seen as ideally co-extensive, ambiguity is eliminated, and cultural diversity seen as inherently threatening—was of little significance for locals when, as one elderly schoolteacher put it, “You could travel with the same passport from here to Murmansk [in northern Russia].” In the geographical imaginary of Sokh residents, the administrative status of “enclave” has gained salience only in the post-Soviet period. In the evocative image of a former music teacher turned car mechanic, who traced out the new boundary with an oily thumb for added emphasis, “We have *become* an island. In Soviet times we never thought of ourselves as living separately from our neighbors [in Kyrgyzstan]. Do you see? It's like we're stranded, an island in the sea.”

Images of “islands” and “oases” recur frequently in the descriptions of Sokh presented by its residents, as do rather bleaker allusions to spatial confinement in the form of military garrisons and prison cells. It is not difficult to see why. In recent years internal USSR borders between Tajik, Uzbek, and Kyrgyz republics have been transformed into militarized international boundaries, backed up by an elaborate system of visa controls regulating population movement and customs regulations to limit cross-border trade.¹⁹ For those living in border regions, one-time “lines on a map” have now become salient as sites where the “state” must be negotiated on an everyday basis: to get to local markets, to visit friends, to reach relatives in neighboring villages who happen to have become citizens of a different state, or to reach ancestral burial grounds. It also renders villagers acutely conscious of the extent to which local livelihoods depend on the play of politics between the “big ones” (*chongdor/kattalar*) in Tashkent, Bishkek, and Dushanbe. As one NGO activist had put it to me a few months previously, “At moments of tension, it is the border regimes that are tightened, and it is we who [are] taken hostage in our own states.” Ideas about what is “local” and “foreign” are being transformed, discourses and practices of citizenship are taking on new significance in an area where other modes of identification (according to settled or nomadic lifestyle, ethnicity, region of origin or religion) were historically far more salient; and a whole host of new agents and technologies of governance are being introduced into border towns and villages.

The result of these processes in the Ferghana Valley has, however, been more complex than a simple contraction of space, a “retreat” to the village, a reconfiguration of identities along nation-state lines. For one thing, there are too many cross-cutting family ties, too much resource interdependence, for everyday geographies to fit easily within the new boundaries of nation-state. People, stories, rumors, television broadcasts, and jokes move across borders and re-embed in new contexts just as much as goods and currency and contraband do. For another, the very fact that the three states into which the valley falls are experimenting with widely divergent economic and political programs means that the fortunes of valley residents are also beginning to stratify along a far greater continuum than was imaginable



Man at Ferghana valley border crossing between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Sign reads: "Unity, friendship, peace."

in Soviet times—a process which itself generates new patterns of cross-border movement and relations of dependence.²⁰ It is in this context of simultaneous crossing and closure, subversion and control, that movement itself becomes politicized. By traveling with Saodat-*opa* and her daughter through an area that has, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, been "taken over by a thought of the state,"²¹ we can begin to trace some of the ways in which the divergent interventions of territorializing states are being mediated at the local level and incorporated into the everyday.

A BORDERLAND JOURNEY

We climbed out of the small Damaz minivan that runs between the center of Sokh and the enclave's westernmost border post and gathered our three small bags by the side of the customs building. Having deposited us, the Damaz sped on along its route toward the outlying villages at the mountainous south of the enclave, the driver turning and bowing deeply in a gesture of respect to the border guard manning the exit barrier so as to avoid having to stop his engine and show his documents. The border guard obliged: the Damaz had local, Uzbekistani number plates and the driver was a regular on this route. It was, as the young soldier at the barrier shouted out to his superior further back, "one of ours," and as such could be spared the time-consuming registration and customs checks that

would add minutes, even hours, to journeys begun further afield in Kyrgyzstani cars.

To the unsuspecting passenger seeking to travel between Kyrgyzstan's southern oblasts, the border posts at either end of the Sokh enclave are a strange and unwelcome anomaly—proud assertions of the state's territoriality, its impulse to control, its fear of intrusion in a remote, rural space that is otherwise scarred with all the signs of the state's hasty post-Soviet retreat: abandoned mercury mines, roads with cavernous potholes, abandoned *kolkhoz* machinery rusting with disuse, schools long in need of new roofs. Many are the times when, traveling west along Kyrgyzstan's southern flank with weary Kyrgyz shuttle-traders, heavy-laden with goods from the huge wholesale bazaars in Osh and Kara-Suu, the Sokh border posts prompt otherwise nonchalant passengers into angry soliloquies—the absurdity of the controls just to pass from one piece of "our" country to another; the unfairness of it ("They never check anyone with an Uzbek number plate. Why? Do they think terrorists won't sit in an Uzbek car?"); the expense involved in bribes and favors to get through without a full customs check; the extra time added to an already long journey when a queue of cars and trucks builds up.

For Saodat-*opa*, however, the feelings invoked by the post were rather different. The large metal customs cabin, decked out proudly in the blue, green, and white colors of the Uzbek flag, beside which we now sheltered, marked the boundaries of the familiar. It was the journey beyond that provoked concern. We had disembarked there in the hope of flagging down a car to take us to the small Kyrgyz town of Batken, an hour away to our west. Sokh and Batken are no longer connected by a regular bus service, though there at the post we knew that if we were to wait long enough we could pick up the old, overworked Ikarus bus that connects the southern Kyrgyz towns of Osh and Batken in an eight-hour bone-jerker of a ride as it is stopped for the regular passport and customs checks. The customs officer sauntered over to eye the strange trio that had been deposited outside his post: Saodat-*opa*, in her early fifties, shy little Zulaikho, the youngest of her seven children, and me, an English anthropologist who had been living in Sokh for the previous four months. "Where are you going?" he asked. "Batken," Saodat-*opa* replied on our behalf, pronouncing the word in Tajik. In response to the officer's raised eyebrow she added, in Uzbek, that I had asked her to accompany me to the family with whom I had lived several months previously in Batken for the spring Navruz holiday.

Like many border exchanges, Saodat-*opa*'s story contained a partial truth, a reflex rendering of reality to forestall the questions and accusations that would follow any mention, in this politicized space, of Tajikistan. We would, indeed, be going to Batken, and staying overnight with the Kyrgyz family with whom I had lived earlier in the year before setting off at dawn

the following morning for Tajikistan. But Batken was not our final destination, and the journey in question was not entirely my initiative. Saodat-opa was planning to be with her parents in Komsomolsk in time for Navruz, and to stay a few days beyond to attend the huge ceremonial feast, *sunnat tol*, that was to be held to mark a nephew's circumcision. Batken was merely a stopping point for us. But Saodat-opa knew from bitter experience that it was better not to mention Khujand or Komsomolsk at the border here: unlike the familiar destination of Batken, where Sokh residents could legally travel without visas, to mention a destination in Tajikistan would be to invite a thorough search of one's bag, a series of unwanted questions, and possibly the payment of a bribe—the guards' "take" (*sizka*) for turning a blind eye to a journey that was technically illegal.

Several cars passed us heading toward Batken, but all were full, heaving with passengers and with young saplings tied precariously to their roofs, for this was the start of the planting season. Every car doubles as a taxi in these parts and most already had a full load of clients. The large Kamaz trucks that run the "detour route" (*ob'ezd jol*) north of Sokh speak, in turn, of the informal economy that feeds the valley, and which the customs services can make only a token gesture to contain: clothes and household wares from the Kyrgyz bazaars further east in Osh and Kara-Suu, the cheapest in the region because of their imported Chinese goods; contraband petrol from Uzbekistan, on sale throughout Kyrgyzstan's southern regions; base metals obtained from rusting factories for export to Xinjiang; livestock and apples making their way from the higher plains to the cities in the valley's heartlands; Uzbek cotton for illegal processing in Osh, where a far higher price will be paid. To stand at the border and to watch the passing traffic is to glimpse the valley and its life-force in microcosm—the density of production, the trade that links the corners of the valley into a single whole despite the border controls, the risks that are taken to squeeze a profit from the different economic regimes that operate, and the unofficial deals that bind state functionaries into relations of mutual dependency with the traders whose movement they nominally control.²¹

With car after heaving car passing on its way, we waited outside the customs post for the Ikarus to rumble up—there is no schedule, and at this far end of its journey, its arrival time is hard to predict. In between the cars, we chatted with the border guards about their aspirations—most of them *kontraktniki*, contract soldiers here for a six-month posting, happy with their pay but disappointed by the lack of drama that characterizes their day. I pointed to the mug shots of terrorist suspects that were posted on the wall of their cabin behind us. "Have you come across any of these?" I asked. "Not yet. But I'm sure we will one day. When the fighters (*boeviki*) tried to enter Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000, they nearly got as far as Sokh."

The Ikarus gradually swung into sight, rolling down the smooth dip

that marks the western side of the Sokh Valley before pulling up in front of the first of the two large cabins. The passport check that followed was a speedy affair, a familiar routine for border guards and driver and passengers alike, and many of the latter drew a visible sigh of relief when a soldier hopped on board and asked the passengers simply to hold their passports in the air for a quick, visual check. That would mean no unbundling of goods, no long registration process, no frantic squabbles, altogether a shorter journey. Everyone on the bus knows that the scale of scrutiny on these large public buses is a litmus test of interstate relations, an index of the sincerity of "brotherly friendship" that is proclaimed in official Kyrgyz and Uzbek discourse. When relations turn stormy, bus passengers are some of the first to feel the thunder.

Within moments we were on our way toward Batken, Saodat-opa smiling at me with a mixture of excitement and fear. As the bus lunged through the grey, stony wasteland that opens out west beyond the Sokh Valley—the Soviet Union collapsed too soon for grand plans for a reservoir in these parts to be realized, though soon enough for whole villages to be resettled in anticipation—I sensed that Saodat-opa was scanning the landscape for signs of difference. It is a habit I have often noticed when residents of one Ferghana valley settlement have the chance to call on, or even just drive past, the homes of those across the border. In Batken I was quizzed on lifeways in Sokh; in Sokh, it was Batken that was of interest. "Does everyone there have television? What do they watch? Do they have piped gas like us? How much does it cost?" In such questions difference is calibrated—the different economic policies that the two states have introduced, converted into meaningful units of tarmac and pension levels and petrol prices. We passed through three kilometers of waterless land before meeting the Kyrgyz border post at Kyzyl-Bulak, a disused railway wagon parked on an empty stretch of road. It was a smaller and seemingly more temporary affair than the Uzbek post we had just left, but the red Kyrgyz flag painted on to the camouflage background reminded that this, just as much as the more impressive set of buildings that marked the edge of Sokh, was state space *par excellence*—a random assertion of its claim to monopolize legitimate violence and legitimize movement, a point of entry and control, a reminder of the state's territoriality, its "spatializing" impulse.²²

A soldier climbed on board, asking of the driver, "Tajikler barby?" ("Are there any Tajiks [on board]?") The question caught both our ears, and though it was said without aggression, in the matter-of-fact way that one might ask whether there were children present, it made us both glance at each other and slip instinctively deeper into our seats. Was he enquiring about citizenship? Or ethnicity? And did it matter? For a moment we just waited as he paced up the bus eyeing the passports held out. Virtually all were turquoise, the color, here, of belonging, for the passengers were mostly from Batken and beyond in Kyrgyzstan, weary after their long journey. My heart

instinctively started to beat faster at the soldier's question, and I sensed from Saodat-opa's sideways glance that hers was too. "But this is silly!" I thought. "We have every right to be here, I have a Kyrgyz visa; Saodat-opa doesn't need one." The soldier came over to us, our passports giving us away even if our appearance—my glasses, Saodat-opa's gold-speckled scarf done up the typical Sokh way, with two ends dangling behind her—didn't. He flicked the pages nonchalantly, scrutinizing the pictures, my series of visas and our respective passport covers for some sign of fault. I instinctively started rehearsing the story that Saodat-opa had given earlier in my head: we were going to Batken; where I had taught English for several months; we needed to be there for the forthcoming Navruz celebration; Saodat-opa was my guest. . . . But we did not need to—he thrust our passports back into Saodat-opa's hand, calling out to the driver, "Kefik!"—"('Let's go!') and the old Ikarus engine splintered into action again.

It is in such micro-encounters as these that the power of the border regime is contained, that the "border" itself becomes salient not just as abstract geopolitical fact—a line on a map to be traced and memorized in geography lessons—but as a materialization of power that carves itself into the consciousness of valley populations. We had not been hurt or abused or mocked, we had merely been picked out and *classified*—reminded by an eighteen-year-old with a Kalashnikov on his back that whether we were from Sokh or from England, we were, in this patched corner of Kyrgyzstan, *equally* foreign; that the Kalashnikov was there because foreignness is threatening. The salience of the border for locals lies less in its overt violence, less in the shots that are occasionally fired or the landmines that have been scattered at various sensitive border-points, maiming children who roam too far with their cattle and killing livestock, than in the threat that is implicit. It is the unstated *possibility* of violence, the capacity to mark an exception, to create a category, to fix the political bodies inside and out in spaces still remembered as "common," that is significant. From the ethnographic perspective it is in such myriad everyday encounters—in the very *banality* of the passport check—that borders, together with the citizenship regimes they would enforce, "become" real for the Ferghana Valley residents.

With evening just beginning to set in, we arrived in Batken, the cows roaming along its main street giving it the feel more of an oversized village than a regional (*oblast*) center. This settlement of 20,000 had been designated the regional capital after the notorious "Batken events" five years earlier, when an incursion of Islamic militants across the Alay mountains to the south had suddenly focused the attention of the government and international organizations on the region's isolation and relative deprivation. It still had the feel of a settlement struggling to adjust to its sudden shift in status: the thrusting monument to *Ervkindik*, freedom, that had been mounted a few months earlier, a copy of the monument found in

Bishkek's central Ala-Too square, still looked rather out of place among the squat low houses and dusty streets above which she presided.

Our arrival at the home of Turat-aka and Jamilya-eje, the Kyrgyz family with whom I had lived the preceding year, was unannounced. Telephone connections as much as road communication have been transformed by the nationalization of space in the Ferghana Valley, and a call from Sokh to Batken is not just costly, but dependent on a fragile link with the Uzbek "mainland." As we approached the recently whitewashed wall of Turat-aka's house, a moment's nervousness—would Jamilya-eje be at home? Was it acceptable for me to roll up at this late hour with guests from Sokh?—gave way, with hugs and smiles and the presenting of *sumalak*, ritual spring food, into the relief of coming "home."

Saodat-opa and Jamilya-eje started chatting to one another in the heavily inflected Uzbek that serves as a cross-border *lingua franca* in the Ferghana Valley, Saodat-opa's speech dotted with Tajik idioms, Jamilya's with Kyrgyz. As we sat eating *plow*, the rice dish traditionally served to guests throughout much of Central Asia, and watching a home video of a recent circumcision feast, the conversation slipped into discussion of weddings, the cost of flour, the parlous state of schooling as increasing numbers of teachers left to work on building sites in Russia, and, as ever, the border regime that has carved the valley up. Jamilya-eje recalled having traveled regularly to Sokh in her youth: "We would go there to the bazaar, sometimes even just to have lunch. The *chikhannas* were much more civilized than ours ever were, really cultured (*ku' turnije*), even in Soviet times. Then it was all easy, we were all one country." Jamilya has not stopped there now for years.

The following morning we set off early for what we knew to be the most unpredictable part of our journey. Dilapidated yellow buses still ply the route from Batken to Chor-Tepa, just across the border in Tajikistan, but they take several times longer than a share-taxi on the twenty-kilometer journey, stopping at all the villages dotted along the way. Saodat-opa was eager to reach Chor-Tepa as soon as possible. "From there," she said, "we will be okay. No more checks." As we sat waiting at the bus stop for an additional pair of passengers to make the requisite foursome for a share-taxi, a group of tenth-graders passed us on their way to school. All four were wearing jeans, one had a stars-and-stripes scarf tied, bandana-style, around her head. This change in dress-style, according to Batkeners, has just taken root in the last few years, a reflection of the settlement's shift up the civilizational ladder from a mere "village with urban features" (*poselok gorodskogo tipa*) into a fully fledged town. I recalled a Batken University teacher having commented to me with pride several months before that "our girls have become just a little bit urban (*shardyk*)," their style now having more in common with the capital city, Bishkek, than with that found in villages just a few kilometers away. The change in style was not lost on Saodat-opa

as she watched the girls walking confidently past. "Look how cultured the girls are here. It'll be decades before our girls dress like that. In Sokh it's considered shameful if you let your girl out without covering up, even if she is Zulaikho's age."

After a short wait, a red Audi rolled up at the bus stop, its gleaming exterior contrasting with the dilapidated Soviet *Moskvich* cars that are more commonly seen in Batken. "Anyone for Chor-Tepa?" the driver called out, adding, as emphasis of his credentials, "*inonarka*" ("foreign car"). The car was, it turns out, the driver's pride and joy, the trophy of two successful seasons' work in Russia, driven back from a second-hand car market in Moscow. We piled in gladly, along with a pair of men who had been waiting with us at the bus stop. The road between Batken and Chor-Tepa is lined with the apricot trees on which both communities depend for their livelihood, just beginning, on this sunny mid-March morning, to open into stunning white blossoms in the more sheltered fields. "The apricot tree is like a woman," our driver joked, "very beautiful but totally unpredictable." As the owner of some of the trees just outside Batken—he pointed them out with pride—he well knew that if a frost were suddenly to strike during the next two weeks, he would be without a harvest.²⁴

As we neared the border with Tajikistan, beyond a half-completed park honoring the epic hero Manas, we could see the beginnings of a new border post being constructed, this time a much grander and more permanent-looking building than the single disused railway wagon that marked the "edge of the state" further east toward Sokh. Piles of radiators stood in stacks in the sun alongside sheets of futuristic plate glass. Like other Central Asian border posts that have metamorphosed in recent years from disused railway wagons to grand multi-story complexes (invariably to be followed by a much more haphazard trail of money-changing kiosks, mini-markets, and taxi stands), this relatively quiet stretch of road looked set to be transformed by the grand new building that was taking shape at its side.²⁵

For the time being, however, the border post we were set to cross between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan was still of the informal "wagon" variety, and within moments the first of the two wagon-posts swung into view. A Kyrgyz soldier peered in the driver's window and asked for passports. Saodat-opa and I exchanged brief glances and extracted ours to hand over for inspection. Our driver turned around, his eye initially caught by my document, and then by Saodat-opa's. "What? You've got a *green* passport, *fiere*? That's not good for us . . ." He instinctively slid out of his seat to try to speak to the border guard outside the car, for in the unwritten rules of border exchange at this end of the valley, the driver answers for the passengers' documents in the first instance. Nobody mentioned citizenship. Nobody needed to: in the color-coded world of state bureaucracies, a passport cover is enough to signal citizen or foreigner. As the soldier scoured

our documents, one of our fellow passengers, a Tajik from Chor-Tepa, turned to Saodat-opa and commented in Uzbek, "I thought you were one of ours (*bizniki*), from Chor-Tepa. You look to me like you are Tajik!" "I am," responded Saodat-opa, "but I live in Uzbekistan." And she sketched to him her life trajectory: born in one republic, living now in another, entirely enclosed within a third. "A true valley person, then," laughed our fellow passenger. "Crazy valley (*duratskaya dolina*)!" Saodat-opa answered back, glancing over nervously to the soldier as she did.

The border guard beckoned me to the wagon. "Registration," he said. I went in, to find another pair of soldiers playing cards to while away the time. A buxom blonde in traditional Russian costume smiled out from an election poster on the wall above their heads advertising the Agrarian Party of Russia—a small, intimate reminder in this ultimate "sovereign space" of the multiple ties that continue to link livelihoods in Central Asia with the former Soviet center. The wagon was sparsely decorated: bunk beds, a small cooking stove, a table with the books to register comings and goings, and that ultimate instrument of bureaucratic power—the rubber stamp. It is in the elaborate play of stamps that movement is regulated and tribute extracted. On several occasions I have witnessed passengers being waved through a border post without having their document stamped by one guard, only to be stopped a few kilometers further along their journey for a "spot check" by another guard from the same shift. The unlucky passenger is forced to pay a "fine" in order to continue along his or her journey, ostensibly for having entered the country without the stamp to prove it, thereby having broken the law on the border. According to locals, this is a common scam, based on a tacit agreement (*dogovor*) between the soldiers involved, in which both take a cut of the bribe, with the rest going to the officer in charge of the post (*nachal'nik zastavy*).²⁶

My conversation in the stuffy border post wagon was jovial and light-hearted: one of the card-playing soldiers had remembered me from a crossing through the post a year before, and we spent time chatting about our lives in between. I declined an offer of tea, and the chance to join in a hand of their game: foreigners from the "far abroad" are a rarity here, and they were eager to find out about life "over there." How much do border guards earn there? What do people know about Kyrgyzstan? How difficult is it to get a visa to Britain? But the friendly tone immediately changed when they turned to asking about Saodat-opa. "Is that lady traveling with you?" they probed. I explained that we were colleagues, that Saodat-opa was born in Komsomolsk, that all she wanted was to return to her home for the brief spring break that accompanied Navruz. "Please don't give her a hard time," I commented, anticipating the hassles that her Uzbek passport were likely to cause at this border. "Go and call her in," was the noncommittal reply, with one of the two adding quietly, "and you just wait outside." Any deal that was to be negotiated was clearly to be conducted in private.

I climbed down from the wagon and beckoned to Saodat-*opa* to enter. For the ten minutes that she was gone, I stood outside the wagon, joining my fellow passengers in their conversation about Sokh. As Chor-Tepa Tajiks, they, too, were interested to know how their "brothers" in Sokh lived, for the territory there was as much off-limits to them as Tajikistan technically was for Saodat-*opa*.²⁷ "The *Sokhs* used to travel all the time through Chor-Tepa. Their best and brightest would study in our cities; you know—Dushanbe had one of the union's finest medical schools, and dozens of them would be studying in Leninabad at any one time. Now they're all studying in Uzbek, there's hardly any of them left here now."

Saodat-*opa* emerged from the wagon, her hands plunged deep into the pockets of her long cardigan. Her brow was strained in thought. "How much?" one of our passengers asked in Tajik, the context obviating any need to elaborate how much of what had been presented to whom. All knew that an Uzbek passport here would mean a certain bribe: the only question was how strong Saodat-*opa*'s bargaining position had been. "Six thousand" was her answer—six dollars' worth of Uzbek *sum*, and almost a quarter of her monthly teacher's salary. "They asked for ten [thousand sum], but I told them that I just wouldn't be able to get home then. Even now, I don't know how we're going to make it to Komsomolsk and back. I can't afford to give any more." "And that wasn't even the Tajik post!" commented our driver. "The rate (*stavka*) for your passport will be double that there." Saodat-*opa* described how they had forced her to pay up, holding their stamp poised over her passport with the comment, "A mark from here will create problems for you back home," until she had laid out sufficient notes on the table in front of them to concede and withdraw their weapon. Saodat-*opa* wasn't sure whether a Kyrgyz border stamp would really have created problems for her in Sokh, but she was not willing to take the risk: she well knew that an "unusual" stamp, even one marked in another country entirely, could be the excuse for hassles at future border crossings. Her eldest son, who traveled regularly to Russia to work on building sites in Siberia, had often recounted how even Russian and Kazakh border guards would scrutinize one's passport, scouring its pages for the slightest unusual mark. "You should have paid in Kyrgyz money. They might have taken less then," was the driver's comment as he restarted his engine. "Well, shall we get going? We've still got another one to get through and we've already wasted twenty minutes here." Saodat-*opa* nodded silently.

The Tajik post was in sight of the Kyrgyz, distinguished from the latter only by the flag, now faded slightly, painted on its side. The outward signs indicated that a repeat of the ritual of stately verification awaited all of us. Yet, as we pulled up by the Tajik post, there was a discernible shift in dynamic. Farkhod, the passenger sitting next to me, gestured to Saodat-*opa* not to get her passport out again. We were inches into Tajik territory, and his manner was signaling that here he knew himself to be

local and would be taking charge of the situation. "*Assabmualeikum*," he called out in greeting to the border guard now bending in at the open window, holding out his hand. "You'd better register this foreigner," he said matter-of-factly, pointing to me, "and this is my wife," he added, gesturing nonchalantly to Saodat-*opa*. The soldier glanced over at Saodat-*opa*. It was plausible—her features and dress suggested she was Tajik, and there was no reason why she shouldn't pass as the wife of this middle-aged Chor-Tepa man. The border guard nodded, indicating to me that I should go and register.

I wilted the process to be over as soon as possible, for we were not off the hook until we were all back in the car, speeding on along our way to Chor-Tepa. The process was slow: three grand ledgers had to be filled by hand, in considerable detail, a procedure slowed all the more by a flurry of questions that blurred the boundary between the soldiers' official and unofficial personae. Indeed, it is precisely in the oscillation between these two personae that the power of the border encounter is maintained: officious scrutinizing of documents is interspersed with familiar, domestic questions; stern reminders that this space is charged with the full force of the state's monopoly of legitimate violence are coupled with jokes that gently mock the very powers these officers would serve. To my great relief, however, the questions did not turn to Saodat-*opa*, and the guards did not suspect that we had ever met before this morning's journey. Passport safely back in hand (though without the all-important stamp: it had apparently been taken by one of the guards on military service the year before and they were still waiting for a replacement to be sent), I climbed out into the sunlight and we were left to drive off along our journey, without so much as a glimpse of Saodat-*opa*'s "dangerous" document.

"Thank you, husband!" she joked, turning to Farkhod, "you saved my skin! I'd have no money at all now if they'd seen my passport." And then, reclaiming the landscape and the day as normal, she rolled down the window, stuck her arm out as though to touch the apricot trees that rolled past, and added, jovially, "welcome, at last, to my motherland (*rodina*). I'll buy you all ice-cream when we get to Chor-Tepa."

COMMENTARY: BORDER ENCOUNTERS AND THE REMAKING OF THE "EVERYDAY"

Saodat-*opa*'s journey, and the thousands like it traced everyday through the borderlands of the Ferghana Valley, are a salient reminder to the champions of global ethnoscapes, borderless flows and "cosmopolitan ethnography" as that the end of a bipolar world and increasingly rapid capital flows do not, *ipso facto*, result in borders becoming any less salient or space being marked with any less intensity. For many residents of the Ferghana Valley, whose

kinship networks straddle newly nationalizing states, the spatial and temporal contours of everyday life have been profoundly transformed in the last decade, and with them the experiential significance of such categories as "citizenship," "independence," "homeland," and even "family." From the actor-centered view privileged by anthropology, we see that for Saodat-opa the distance between natal and married homes has become *greater*, not smaller, as a result of independence, and the regular cycle of visits has collapsed into much longer periods of absence. The cost and stress of "going home" mean that, experientially, time and space have expanded, not contracted in the ways that classic accounts of globalization would suggest.²⁶

In addition to this very obvious impact of border regimes for those who live in the state's margins, there is a more subtle, though no less consequential, effect that the classificatory logic of nation-state is having on inhabitants of the Ferghana Valley. This has to do with what might be called the "location of threat": the fact that border posts, and the more general étatisation of space of which they are just one manifestation, foster a perception that "otherness" (whether a difference of ethnicity or citizenship) is inherently threatening, such that contact must be regulated, contained, seen, and thus *managed*.²⁷ The internalization of this threat produces a particular kind of border subjectivity, a heightened awareness that "protection" is territorially defined and that crossing a border means entering a space "beyond law."²⁸ As Parviz, an exceptionally insightful former teacher, commented as we crossed the border at Sokh's southern end, where Tajik and Kyrgyz villages back onto one another in a dense knot of streets, "You see, the problem with all these border controls is that they work on our unconscious, they start to make us react differently without even noticing it. When I am able to cross this [Uzbekistani] post without any checks because I'm Sokhskii, but I see that Kyrgyz from Tuz-Bel (a Kyrgyzstani village at Sokh's southern border) are stopped and checked, it sends out a signal to me: "They must be dangerous," I start to think. And the reverse is also true. I will be stopped at a Kyrgyz post and they won't be. At an unconscious (*podsozhatel'nyi*) level, we come to see each other as threatening, for why have a post between us if not?"

The attempt of the state to assert its territoriality is not lost on borderland villagers like Parviz, both in Sokh as elsewhere throughout the valley. His remarks, based on a decade of border controls around his district, echo Bourdieu's profound observation that it is through the elicitation of such "doxic submission" rather than simply the imposition of "ideology" that the state comes to appear to us as natural: "State injunctions owe their obviousness, and thus their potency, to the fact that the state has imposed the very cognitive structures through which it is perceived."²⁹ Yet the experience of Saodat-opa on her journey home also demonstrates that the new set of classifications that the border regime would impose

is neither immediate nor unambiguous in its impact. Former modes of identification are not somehow suddenly erased by the establishment of passport controls or the increased cost of local transport. That Saodat-opa and Jamilya-eje were able immediately to strike up conversation was possible because they could tap into a large reservoir of common experience and shared cultural practice. The passenger who saved Saodat-opa from a bribe did so by invoking an idiom of relatedness that directly challenged two states' attempts to impose a line of exclusion between them. These random gestures of kindness are *also* part of the valley's everyday, just as much as the exclusions are; the reassuring sight of apricot trees in spring is as much part of its experiential reality as the visceral nervousness, the adrenalin rush associated with a checkpoint suddenly emerging into view. Indeed, the analytical challenge for an account of "everyday" experience in the Ferghana Valley borderlands is to capture precisely this duality—the simultaneity of familiarity and threat, of movement and constraint, incorporation and exclusion. Everyday life here, shot through as it is with globalism's "Janus-face," has challenged, just as much as it has been transformed by, the border-fixing impulse of three vigorously nationalizing states.

NOTES

1. The names of all people and places other than regional (oblast) centers and administrative districts (rayons) have been changed in the text.
2. Discussion of the Soviet transformation of wedding ceremonies in Sokh can be found in Urumbol Saifiev, *Traditsii i innovatsii v sovetskoykh obshchestvennykh i obriadnykh taizhnikov doliiny r. Sokh*. Unpublished candidate of science dissertation, Leningrad filial, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Leningrad: 1991.
3. This and subsequent quotes from Ilkhom-aka and his family are taken from fieldnotes and interviews during fieldwork in Sokh from November 2004 to March 2005.
4. On "security" as a legitimizing discourse, see David Campbell, *Writing Security* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); on its application to the contemporary Central Asian context, see Nick Megoran, "The critical geopolitics of danger in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24 (3), August 2005: 555–580.
5. Detailed analysis of the normative acts regulating movement between different states of the Ferghana Valley can be found in A. T. Ismailov et al. (eds.), *Putevoditel' "puteshestviya po Ferghanskot doline"* (Osh: Ferghana Valley Lawyers Without Borders, 2006).
6. In doing so I have been influenced by Michel de Certeau's discussion of the "innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy" that make up the "practice of everyday life," and by Sheila Fitzpatrick's application of this approach to the analysis of everyday life under Stalinism. See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall

(Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1984), and Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

7. See, for instance, Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down* (New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993).

8. See, for instance, Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992).

9. Morgan Liu, "Detours from utopia on the Silk Road: Ethical dilemmas of neoliberal triumphalism," *Central Eurasian Studies Review* 2(2), 2003: 2-10. For anthropological critiques of teleological accounts of post-Soviet "transition," see Daphne Berdahl et al., eds., *Altering States: Ethnographies of Transition in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Caroline Humphrey, *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economics After Socialism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002). For an application of this critique to accounts of Central Asia, see especially Deniz Kandiyoti and Ruth Mandel, eds., *Market Reforms, Social Dislocations and Survival in Post-Soviet Central Asia*, special issue of *Central Asian Survey* 17 (4), 1998.

10. See especially John Borneman, *After the Wall: East Meets West in the New Berlin* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ends: Remittances and Identity in the German Borderland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

11. Though note, in the Central Asian context, the important contribution of Nick Megoran, *The Borders of Eternal Friendship? The Politics and Pain of Nationalism and Identity Along the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan Ferghana Valley Boundary, 1999-2000*, PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2002, 164-208.

12. Michael Taussig, *The Magic of the State* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997); Eleni Myrivili, *The Liquid Border: Subjectivity at the Limits of the Nation-State in South East Europe*, Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2004.

13. See, programmatically, Arjun Appadurai, "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology," in Richard Fox, ed., *Reconfiguring Anthropology: Working in the Present* (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1991), 191-210; James Clifford, "Traveling Cultures," in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 96-111. For explorations of the methodological implications of this critique, see especially the essays collected in Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, eds., *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

14. Yael Navaro-Yashin, "Life is dead here": sensing the political in 'no man's land,'" *Anthropological Theory* 3(1), 2002: 107-125; 108.

15. For references to slavery in relation to the new labor migration from Central Asia, see Ulugbek Babakulov, Natalya Domagalskaya, Asef Sagynbaeva, and Aitken Kadribekov, "Kyrgyz 'slaves' on Kazakh plantations," *Institute of War and Peace Reporting Central Asia*, no. 272, August 5, 2003.

16. Usto Jahanov, *Zemledelie i tsel'nikov doliny Sokhla v kontse XIX—nach. XX v. Istoričko-etnografičeskoe issledovanie* (Dushanbe: Donish, 1989).

17. Sergei Abashin, "Naselenie Ferganskoi doliny (k stanovleniiu etnograficheskoi nomenklatury v kontse XIX—nachale XX veka)," in S. N. Abashin and V. I. Bushkov, eds., *Ferganskaya dolina: Etničnost', etničeskije professii, etničeskii konflikt* (Moscow: Nauka, 2004); Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003).

18. Indeed, the Sokhskie are eager to point out that they are the only remaining "truly Tajik rayon" in Uzbekistan, where schools and technical colleges teach

entirely in Tajik. Although there is a Kyrgyz minority in several of the villages in Sokh district, the younger Kyrgyz are much more comfortable speaking Tajik and Uzbek than Kyrgyz, and are closer to their fellow Sokh youth in terms of dress, religious practice, gender dynamics, and everyday practice than to young people living in neighboring Kyrgyz villages.

19. On obstacles to cross-border trade in the Ferghana Valley, see A. Iusupova, "Khozhdenie za tri granitsy ili o tom, kak mozno profiti uzbekskije programisty," *Vechernii Bishkek*, August 20, 1999; UNDP, *Bringing Down Barriers: Regional Cooperation for Human Development and Human Security* (Bratislava: UNDP, 2005), 51-67. On border violations as a result of restriction on movement, see Dolina Mira, *Analiz situatsii po perekhodu granits v Ferganskoi Doline* (Osh: Dolina Mira, 2005).

20. Beginning in the spring planting season, for instance, it is possible in border villages throughout the Ferghana Valley to find informal, illegal labor exchanges in which poorer villagers, predominantly from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, sell their labor to the more land-wealthy of the Kyrgyz farmers. In the spring and summer of 2004, Kyrgyz farmers from Batken would regularly talk about "picking up a dozen Tajiks" from the informal roadside labor market near Chor-Tepa to work on their fields. This overwhelmingly female labor would cost their temporary employer 35-40 Kyrgyz som (\$90-\$100) per employee per day, and its presence was a source of considerable local tension, indexing for the "selling" population the extent to which divergent policies toward land distribution were impacting upon the relative well-being of neighbors just a couple of kilometers away. The extent and precise dynamics of this micro-stratification deserve further research, and the degree of difference in economic well-being should not be overstated. Many Kyrgyz villages are characterized by considerable poverty and land shortage, and the phenomenon of labor hiring seems to be localized to areas where privatization resulted in a greater area of land being redistributed. Nonetheless, the ethnographically significant point is that villagers in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan perceive the difference in well-being to be linked to the fact of land privatization *per se*. Many times I heard comments analogous to that from a housewife in Sokh who, when asked whether she would be better off if land there were privatized, gave the typical Central Asian gesture of material abundance: a hand swept along the top of her neck. "We'd live like that!" she said, "we'd live like the Kyrgyz!"

21. Pierre Bourdieu, "Rethinking the state: genesis and structure of the bureaucratic field," in George Steinmetz, ed., *State/Culture: State Formation After the Cultural Turn* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), 53.

22. According to traders in Sokh, a single *Kamaz* truck must pay 100,000 sum (approximately \$100) in bribes to pass through the six border posts separating the enclave from the oblast center of Ferghana. See also Sveta Lokteva, "Nachal'nik zastavy: sam sebe 'krysha,'" *Vechernii Bishkek*, August 13, 2002.

23. On the state's claim to monopolize legitimation of the legitimate 'means of movement,' see *Sociological Theory* 16 (3) 1997: 239-259.

24. Indeed, just days after our conversation, temperatures that had been pushing the mid-20s centigrade suddenly plunged to cover the whole of Kyrgyzstan in a blanket of snow. Snow enters the apricot blossom, preventing the fertilization that would result in fruit. Jamilya and her family lost their entire harvest, depriving them of over a ton of apricots, their single main source of income. "It's God's will" was her response to her feelings about this loss. "Perhaps it will be better next year."

25. For a striking account of one such border transformation, see the depiction

of the "friendship" (*dostlik/dostuk*) border post between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan just west of Osh in Morgan Liu, *Recognizing the Khan: Authority, Space and Political Imagination Among Uzbek Men in Post-Soviet Osh, Kyrgyzstan*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2002, 36-43.

26. The real extent of an upward flow of tribute throughout the border control system is extremely difficult to assess. It is widely rumored that the "tax" to become a head of a lucrative (*khlebnyi*) post in the Ferghana Valley is several thousand dollars.

27. Indeed, anyone wanting to travel from Tajikistan eastward through southern Kyrgyzstan is obliged to bypass the Sokh enclave altogether, traveling along a rocky "detour route" (*ob'ezdnaya doroga*) that is only passable in summer.

28. Appadurai, 197-210.

29. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989).

30. An impulse, I would argue, that is also reflected in a number of internationally sponsored projects committed to conflict prevention in the Ferghana Valley. See Madeleine Reeves, "Locating danger: *konfliktologiya* and the search for fixity in the Ferghana Valley borderlands." *Central Asian Survey* 24 (1), 2005: 67-81

31. See Mirivili, 247-274, for a fascinating analysis of such "border subjectivity" in the contemporary Balkan context.

32. Bourdieu, 69.