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"Crossing Borders": Nationality, Ethnicity and Citizenship at the Margins of a Nation-State

A Russian, an American and a Tajik once decided to travel in Central Asia together... This might seem to be akin to the opening lines of a Russian joke. And indeed, the subject of this paper could have been the subject of a joke. But instead, it is an ethnographic examination of the experiences of crossing the borders and facing the predicament of citizenship, nationality and ethnicity as embodied by the holders of different passports.



NOTIONS of citizenship, nationality and ethnicity (and I might also add, race) have been defined by references to the question of borders – border maintenance and border transgression. Ethnic and national identification are calculated in this case through the concatenation of boundary markers (Barth 1969). It is not so much the essence of the categories – culture and cultural practices, - but differences between the groups that creates the phenomenon of a nation and, consequentially, ethnicity. In other words, it is the boundaries and delineation of different groups that allows for these phenomena to exist. In the following paper, I attempt to reverse the question. Instead of looking at the conceptual boundaries that define the phenomenon of ethnicity and nationalism, I propose to examine the phenomenon of the physical boundaries themselves – i.e. borders between nation-states. I suggest, that the experiences of migrants at actual borders highlight and problematize the notions of both a nation and an ethnic group.

The first part of this paper will present a brief overview of theory on the physical and ideological aspects of space, territory and boundaries. On the basis of this theoretical discussion, I will examine, more specifically, the relationship between territoriality and the concept of a nation. My theoretical discussion will be complimented and further tested with the analysis of ethnographic observations at the borders between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and Tajikistan and Russia. By examining the differing notions of borders between Tajikistan and its neighboring countries, I will explicate the meaning of the political divide between these countries and present borders as an ideological boundary that separates people much more powerfully than armed guards at a checkpoint. More spe-

cifically, I will examine borders as embodying the influence of history, politics and culture as they are interpreted and internalized by Tajik nationals. I will further problematize the concept of political borders by discussing the influence of history and culture as not only dividing but also as uniting factors that allow for cross-border communication to exist despite the political division of physical space.

Boundary: Defining a Territory. Anthropology, due to its focus on culture and worldview, has largely ignored the question of physical territories and borders as concepts that are beyond the scope of its investigation. Research has focused more on aspects of the ideational world of people who occupy a given territory rather than a definition of a territory itself. Only recently did the definition of a community – a traditional locus of ethnographic work, - come under scrutiny (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Wellman 1999). This reformulation of the concept of community is indicative of the increased interest in the theoretical issues of territory and geographical, political and ideological organization of space.

Territory has been defined in the literature as “a geographic strategy that connects society and space” (Penrose 2002: 279). As such, it is primarily a geographical expression of power. This definition implies that control over space is what creates and ensures the existence of physical territories. Control over space is characterized by the imposition of boundaries, that “may be simultaneously historical, natural, cultural, political, economic or symbolic phenomena and each of these dimensions may be exploited in diverging ways in the construction of territoriality” (Paasi 1995: 42). In other words, boundaries and territories are not as fixed, stable or uncontested as it might seem. Both territories and boundaries are created through complex processes of power

negotiation and, as such, need to be maintained and re-created in order for them to continue to ensure their significance. It is these processes of boundary negotiation and reconstruction that I will try to examine in this paper.

As a way to simultaneously divide and unite people by separating them into categories of “ours” vs. “theirs”, borders embody a number of different physical and symbolic dimensions. Penrose identifies three characteristics that define the concept of territory and boundaries (Penrose 2002: 279-283).

First, territories and borders are frequently conceptualized as “natural” divisions. Often, this division is strengthened by references to the physical characteristics of a territory – mountains, rivers and deserts attain their symbolic significance in being considered impenetrable demarcations of borders (ibid. 280). The naming of a territory and references to the longevity of its name are also used to instill a sense of “naturalness” about territorial boundaries in people (Smith 1999).

By extension of the first characteristic, the second feature of boundaries is defined as the perceived “naturalness” of the bond that ties people together within the territory that they occupy. Penrose emphasizes that this relationship is considered virtually inviolate by constructing it as a “biological” one (Penrose 2002: 281). Thus, the symbolic significance of citizenship attains some biological characteristics in its connection with the biological processes of birth. Being born within the boundaries of a given territory often bestows the status of citizenship upon a person. Also, funerals that unite a person’s physical body with the land of his/her ancestors can be seen as a symbolic expression of the “natural” tie between the territory and its people.

The third aspect that Penrose identifies as distinctive of territories is the emotional connection between people and the land that transforms the abstract notion of space into an ideologically and emotionally charged notion of “home” and “homeland” characterized by feelings of belonging and attachment. The degree of this attachment might differ according to the degree of urbanization in the region. Nevertheless, feelings of personal connection with homeland are pervasive and do not disappear in the urban environment even though they do become more abstract (ibid: 281). States often manipulate discourses of homeland and thereby strengthen the connection between its populace and the concept of nationhood. Boundaries in this respect are important as they serve as a distinct divide between “home” and “exile”, between the sense of “being in” vs. “being out”, feelings of being foreign vs. being native.

An additional characteristic, omitted by Penrose, but closely examined by Appadurai, is the fact that space and time – and I might add, boundaries that define the physical and symbolic extent of these concepts – are socialized and localized through complex practices of performance, representation and action (Appadurai 1996: 180-181). As such, boundaries and territories can be seen as zones “of danger requiring special ritual maintenance” (ibid: 179) that counteract societal processes of dispersal and fusion. Appadurai emphasizes that, as such, boundaries do not simply embody “mechanical techniques for social aggregation, but <are> social techniques for the production of ‘natives’” (ibid: 179).

To conclude, one can say that territories can be defined as a complex phenomenon of symbolic meaning born out of a complex power relationship within the context of a specific physical space. Human population exercises a certain degree of control over territories that retranslates itself into a “sense of control over one’s self and, by extrapolation, to a society’s control over itself” (Penrose 2002: 282).

Boundary: Defining a Nation. The rise of the nation state led to the change in the symbolic significance attached to the notion of boundaries. Penrose defines this shift as a transformation in the notion of territory that came to signify not only a geographical expression of cultural identity and locality, but also the fundamental basis for defining group and individual identities (Penrose 2002: 283). As such, “territory became the primary and overriding factor in defining the person” (ibid.).

In order to establish a “monopoly of the legitimate means of movement” (Torpey 2000: 1) and to distinguish the “others” from the legitimate citizens, nation states imposed a set of regulations that delineate physical and social space. One of the examples of such regulations is the use of personal identification documents (Arel 2002: 3). Control over external borders often led to greater control over population movements inside the nation-states through the introduction of internal documents (internal passport and the institute of internal registration in case of the Soviet Union). But the power of the state goes beyond mere control over physical movements of its subjects – it is directed at creating a particular sense of identity.

Penrose argues that the membership in a political unit is direct and as such aims to abolish “earlier forms of belonging <thereby> contribut<ing> to a new measure of uniformity within a state’s population” (Penrose 2002: 284). Thus, hierarchical subordination within the nation-state is replaced with the more “modern principle of exclusion” (ibid.). Indeed,

transformation of space into territory – a project central to the nation-state undertaking – is closely connected with the conceptualization of people as living within a single, shared spatial frame (Alonso 1994: 382). However, nationalism, as “an effect of totalizing and homogenizing projects of state formation” (ibid. 391), is nevertheless closely connected with the processes of heterogeneity that arise out of the dialectical relationship between the state and its subjects (Williams 1989: 408). Thus, despite the nation-state’s striving to enclose a homogenous time-space with the discrete spatial partitioning of the boundary, the nation-state territory and its borders are much more complex.

Boundary: Tajikistan-Uzbekistan. *It was several weeks before our trip to Uzbekistan that I began to realize all the complexities of the border-crossing endeavor. At one of the parties, a son of our travel companion approached me and conspiratorially whispered into my ear: “We are going to the wedding in Uzbekistan!”. By that time, the trip had been planned in what seemed to be all the details. And yet, the plans of attending a wedding were never discussed. As I was to find out later, the pretext of visiting a wedding was necessary so that our Tajik friend, prof. R., who was going to accompany us during our stay in Uzbekistan, could get an entry to the country. During the past 10 years, the border regime between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was getting more and more strict. Only those who have family emergency – weddings and/or funerals – can hope to secure one’s visas to go see their relatives and friends on the other side of the border. This “wedding scheme” seemed to set the tone for our entire trip.*

In order to fully appreciate the predicament of the border crossing endeavor and to understand all the complexities of the scheme described above, it is important to examine the history of the border that we were to cross on our way from Dushanbe to Bukhara. The boundary between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan reflects the divisions of the physical space imposed after the Socialist revolution of 1917. When the Russian Empire conquered Central Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century, there were three territorial states – the Kokan and Khivan khanates, and the Emirate of Bukhara. There were hardly any ethno-national distinctions among the peoples of these three polities (Abramson 2000: 179-180). Other distinctions such as religious, rural vs. urban, nomadic vs. sedentary, and linguistic, divided the area. Despite the fact that Turkic and Persian were the two main categories of languages spoken in the region, many people were multi-lingual. Thus, at the

onset of structural changes in Central Asia, the question of boundaries was rather problematic.

It was not until the 1920s that the Soviet state made the first effort to impose a more strictly defined grid of “national” boundaries on the population of Central Asia. In an attempt to standardize the state structure, the ethnographic map of the USSR was adjusted to reflect the consolidation of peoples with ethnic, cultural and linguistic similarities. In this context, nationality (the Russian equivalent of the English concept of “ethnicity”) was linked to territory and “economic viability” while often discounting other factors such as religion (Hirsch 1997: 255-257). Peoples of the area were reclassified in ethno-national terms such as Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kazakhs, etc (Abramson 2000: 180).

One explanation for such a mapping of Central Asia was the fact that Soviet state officials were convinced that “social and economic differentiation between the various Central Asian peoples rendered, in their minds, impossible the successful implementation of uniform regional policies, such as taxation and education, and others that required mass support” (Sabot 1995: 236). Another explanation focuses on the “divide and conquer principle” and specifies that the Islamic identity posed a threat to the emerging Soviet State. Thus, by dividing the region of Central Asia into a set of union republics and ensuring support from the local intelligentsia – now, the cream of society at the republican level – the state minimized the potential of an internal uprising that could have ignited volatility in numerous areas of the country (Zelkina 1999). Furthermore, the switch from Arabic to Latin and then to the Cyrillic alphabet further strengthened the outer boundaries of the Soviet Union thereby making the interaction between the central Asian republics and other Muslim countries, if not incomprehensible, significantly more difficult.

Despite the efforts to draw the boundaries in such a way that each republic would host its “titular nationality”, the Soviet-made national division of the region left large portions of ethnic groups outside of “their” republics (Tolipov 2001: 187). Along the border between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan this predicament is translated into ongoing disputes about the fate of Samarkand and Bukhara, cities important for Tajiks and Uzbeks both symbolically and ethnically. The majority of the population in this area of Uzbekistan is different from the rest of the country both in terms of language (Persian as opposed to Turkic) and ethnicity (Tajik as opposed to Uzbek). Ferghana valley, divided between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and

Tajikistan, presents a similar challenge to the process of nation-building in the region (Zelkina 1999: 359).

Thus, after the fall of the USSR, the newly independent states inherited national boundaries drawn back in the 1920s. However, these boundaries now attained a new status – that of a divide between sovereign nations. Given the complexity of the history in the region as well as the fact that the phenomenon of sovereignty is new and prone to contestation, it is natural to expect that the states would strive to manifest the strength of their nation-state. Challenges to the rising sense of nationhood can hardly be tolerated in this case. Attachment to other forms of “imagined communities” – kin and ethnic groups, locality-based types of identification – can be perceived as a direct threat to the integrity of a nation. As such, communication between the Tajiks who live in Uzbekistan and their relatives in Tajikistan is brought to a dire minimum. As the example above clearly shows, in the course of 10 years, the national border translated the divide between family members into that between members of different nations. Prof. R. mentioned that it has been over 2 years since he had a chance to visit his family in Uzbekistan. Only extraordinary circumstances could override the national attachment and grant one a passage to the nation-state, the doors of which are otherwise closed to the outsiders.

The long drive from Dushanbe to Pedjikent, a city at the border with Uzbekistan was not spectacular. Afghan winds that had been raging for several days brought with them gray clouds of sand that covered the sky. Hours in a car with the only entertainment of bleak scenery around and the uneven motion of the vehicle put you in a nearly comatose state. Yet, the awakening was to come soon. Once we approached the border, the car was immediately surrounded by the money dealers offering us to exchange our “Somonis” for “Soms” at the most favorable rate that we will never be able to get once we are on the other side. The border suddenly became very real as we ended up with a 10-inch thick stack of money given to us in exchange for several hundred dollar bills – the Uzbek currency has not been deflated yet.

Introduction of independent currency is an important step in manifesting the viability of a nation-state. Uzbekistan introduced its own currency in November 1993 that circulated along with Russian Rubles until July 1994. Tajikistan, on the other hand, continued to circulate Tajik Rubles until October 2000

when the Somoni was finally introduced. This move was explained by the necessity to improve the economic and banking system of the country as well as by the correspondence to historical traditions (www.somoni.com). It is interesting that in this context, economic interests alone are perceived as an insufficient justification for the switch from the Russian-associated currency to the purely Tajik. References to history and cultural legacy are invoked in order to support the case.

The symbolic meaning of national currency is evident in the parallels between the strength of a nation and the strength of its national currency. Thus, in Russia, derogatory references to the “wooden” Ruble were particularly prevalent at the early period of its “independence”. The circulation of dollars at par with the Russian currency was yet another confirmation of the transition period of the nation. It was evidence of not only a weak economy, but of problems in trying to conceptualize the idea of a nation. Similar processes can be seen taking place in the Central Asian republics. Also, the discrepancy between the official rate and the “black market” rate might be interpreted as another factor that defines the overall “rate” of a nation. In Uzbekistan, at the time of my trip, the official rate was 950 Soms while the “money dealers” could offer 1,400 Soms for \$1. It is important to point out here, that despite the challenges of establishing a nation-state, the introduction of its national currency can be seen as an important ritual meant to signify to the world community that a new nation is born.

As we got out of the car, we were immediately encircled by the next group of the eager “border” assistants – luggage handlers. Trying to out-yell each other, they insisted on carrying our bags: “The border is wide, you would have to walk for a whole kilometer with all your bags!”. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are separated by what seems to be an almost impenetrable border – strict visa regime aims to ensure that the flow of people crossing the border at the border post is relatively weak. No cars are allowed to cross at the checkpoint. Only those lucky enough to be associated with the diplomatic corpus can be granted permission to enter Uzbekistan on four wheels.

The very organization of physical space at the border – a wide strip of land that divides Tajik customs officials from their Uzbek counterparts – seems to emphasize the significance of the act of crossing the border. The strength of the state(s) is manifested

in the impressive structures erected at the border to keep unwelcome visitors away. In view of such an imposing institution travelers can fully understand all the humility of their actions. Thus, border maintenance can be considered as yet another important ritual in the manifestation and maintenance of a nation-state. However, the seeming impenetrability of the border and hence the success of the nation-state in its task of delineation between "them" and "us" is challenged by the processes of illegal trade going on across the borders. According to S. Buckley, over 30% of the economic exchange between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan should be attributed to underground trade (Buckley; personal communication). Thus, economic activity that ties two regions together into a complex economic system circumvents the ambitions of a nation-state. Also, it forces one to rethink the very concept of the border as based solely as a political demarcation on a map.

A long walk with heavy bags across a wide strip of the "neutral" territory heightened our experience of liminality – being neither there, i.e., in Uzbekistan, nor here, i.e., in Tajikistan. As we reached the Uzbek customs and passport control, it became obvious that this experience of liminality is highly differentiated by the citizenship and nationality of the people trying to get to the other side. As a Russian national, I did not seem to have any problems. Authority of the Russian Federation was behind me as I handed over my red passport to the passport control guards. Upon getting my passport, they immediately switched to Russian and tried to make "small talk" with me. The American passport of prof. X. invoked a more mixed reaction. One of the guards addressed him in a broken English and refused to communicate in Russian despite prof. X.'s efforts. The other guard grimly investigated in Russian about the aim of his arrival to Uzbekistan. Both guards carefully scrutinized the passport trying to make sure that all the stamps and registration marks were in place. Prof. R. with his Tajik passport received an even less affectionate welcome from the guards. Smiles were immediately erased from the guards' faces once they saw his Tajik passport. Fifteen-minute investigation of the reasons behind the visit followed.

To understand the differences in attitudes as exhibited by the border guards it is important to keep in mind that the manifestation of nationalism cannot be considered independent of the geopolitics of a region as well as the complexity of global international relations. After the redrawing of the national

boundaries in 1925, Moscow officials did not make a secret out of their intentions to transform Uzbekistan into the most powerful republic in Central Asia whose position within the region would be equal to that of Russia within the entire Soviet Union (Zelenkina 1999: 359). After the fall of the USSR, Uzbekistan continued to support its image as a guarantor of security within the region. At the same time, creating its nationhood on the premise of opposition to the past and present power of the Russian Federation, Uzbekistan has resisted initiatives for a new Eurasian Union thus emphasizing the uniqueness of its history and its future development.

Efforts to ensure the existence of the nation-state go hand in hand with the creation of the national armed forces that could defend a nation against the external as well as internal threats to its integrity. During the first years of its independence, Uzbekistan managed to build up a regionally-strong national force that as of 1995 included 20,000 in the army, a small but modern airforce (32 MiG-29s and 32 Su-27s), plus paramilitary units of some 16,000 men, and Internal Security troops of 15,300 (Chipman 1995: 166-7). By 1998, this was strengthened further, with some 50,000 in the army, 17-19,000 Internal Security Troops, and 1,000 in the national guard (Chipman 1998: 164), figures that remained stable through 1999.

Increased spending on the military sector found further justification through alliance established between Uzbekistan and the United States in military actions against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda bases in Afghanistan. After negotiations with both the United States and Russia, bases and facilities in Uzbekistan were used to set up communication, command and control centers. As a result, Uzbekistan presented itself as being at the front lines in the struggle against terrorism. The government of Uzbekistan also gained international support for its hardline policies against Islam. Connections with the United States were used by the Uzbek government as a way to challenge the power distribution within the political space of the former Soviet Union. Increased involvement with the US can be seen as an alternative to the connections with the Russian Federation.

The complex interplay of political interests at the level of the government finds its reinterpretation at the level of people's daily lives. In this case, one can see how the border guards interpret the international involvement in the region. The importance of the United States within the "Big Game" is counter-

acted with people's overall negative perception of American policies in the Middle East (and Afghanistan more specifically). The direct switch from Russian to English and the refusal to communicate in Tajik by one of the guards clearly shows the discrepancy between the processes of nation building at the state level and the lived experiences of the people. Furthermore, the friendly response to my Russian passport goes against the overall muscle flexing policies of Uzbekistan. In a sense, such a response problematizes further the question of timeframe within which national borders exist. This topic will be further developed in the consecutive sections of this paper.

Boundary: Tajikistan-Afghanistan. *It is obvious that crossing the border is not easy. However, getting to the border itself is quite a predicament. The story of my trip to Khorog, a town in Pamir mountains usually referred to as the "roof of the world", deserves a separate treatment. But I will mention here that it took me almost 2 days to get there by plane (taking into account all the time spent waiting at the airport, waiting in the plane, waiting, waiting, waiting). A special permission to enter the border zone of Khorog graced the final page of my passport. Ironically, it was not dated and seemed to indicate to world that the permission to Elisaveta Koriouchkina to be at the border with Afghanistan was granted forever.*

And finally, I am in Khorog and am going to Ishkashim, the southern most point of the former Soviet Empire. The road along the river that demarcates the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan is dreadful. It seems that I am spending more time levitating in the air than firmly sitting on the worn out seat of the old Volga. All the way from Khorog to Ishkashim is dotted with numerous check posts with the Russian officers and Tajik soldiers making sure that people striving to get to Ishkashim have the permission to do so. Nationality and Citizenship of the travelers do not cause too much trouble in this case. Prof. X.'s American passport is examined with curiosity rather than hostility. The Russian passport is given respect unheard of in the countries outside of the former Soviet territories.

The national border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan reflects the complexity of the nation-building process in Tajikistan. The paradox of this process is evident in the fact that the Russian army is currently guarding the national boundaries of the now sovereign Tajik state. In order to fully understand this

predicament, it is important to examine the history of Russian involvement in the region after the fall of the USSR.

Following the early days of its independence, Tajikistan found itself torn between different political parties trying to secure their position in the country. Political disputes over power ignited a seven-year long civil war in Tajikistan. Some of the observers explained the conflict in terms of weak national identification in the region that was often challenged by the strong local and regional identities (Akbarzadeh 1996). Other analysts emphasize that the civil conflict in Tajikistan had clear ethnic overtones, in that the conflict was primarily between titular ethnic group and the indigenous small groups of Gorno-Badakhshan (Tishkov 1997: 128). As such, it can be seen as both the result of the ethnic policies in Tajikistan and the rise of the sovereign nation-state.

Even though many factors contributed to the final resolution of the conflict, it is important to acknowledge the extent of Russia's involvement that helped to reinstate peace in Tajikistan. The 201st Motor Rifle Division, which served in a peacekeeping role during the Tajik civil war, remained in the country even after June 1997 when a ceasefire was agreed between the government forces and the United Tajik Opposition, UTO. Observers agree that the Russian military presence in Tajikistan is felt across the Central Asian region. Uzbekistan fiercely opposed the move since it wielded considerable influence over Tajikistan during the Soviet era and hence resented Dushanbe's «defection». And, as soon as it became clear that Russia and Tajikistan were considering military cooperation, Uzbekistan raised the possibility of inviting NATO to establish bases on Uzbek territory.

Disposition of the Russian forces at the national borders of Tajikistan reflects the complexity of the nation-building project as well as the intricacy of international relations in Central Asia. Thus, one of the possible explanations for the continued Russian presence at the borders is President Rakhmonov's use of the Russian division in Tajikistan as an insurance policy against any future coups d'état. Also, the Russian military presence serves as an additional indicator of Russian interests in Tajikistan and imply not only military but also humanitarian and economic support (Kubicek 1997). But besides the purely instrumental purpose of the Russian dislocation at the border of Tajikistan, the Russian military presence is indicative of the developing stage of a nation-

state that has to appeal to external sources of power to create and maintain its stability. Russia's involvement has lasted long enough to take on a unique complexion at the border patrol units. Nearly half its warrant officers and nearly all its conscripts are Tajik citizens. It is also interesting to note that service in the Russian army in Tajikistan is considered more prestigious than affiliation with the Tajik military service. But the odd dual-national character of the regiment at the border seems to compromise its role as a tool of Tajik policy. As such, the Tajik army has not acquired the status as symbolic guardians of an emerging nation-state.

It is strange to be at the border with Afghanistan, the country whose image invoked numerous horror stories in the mass media. Yet, the border here is not as dramatic as the border between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan at the Pedjikent guard post. It is even difficult to believe that you are at the border. The river flows swiftly. The landscape is impressive with the mountains surrounding us from both sides. It is the same on the right side of the river (the Tajik side) as it is on the left (the Afghani side). People, who live on both sides of the river, belong to the same ethnic group, speak the same language. Yet, the driver makes clear that the difference that I, slightly disappointed with the relative bleakness of the border seem to miss, is straightforward. "You see, on the other side, - the driver pointed to the Afghani side of the river. - They do not have roads, do not have proper houses. All they have is a winding narrow path that can only allow for their donkeys and people. And here, - he pointed at the rocky road that was clearly destroying the car. - We have roads. Even though we speak the same language, belong to the same religion, now our history is different. Without that history, we would have been like them".

During the civil war, close to 100,000 refugees had fled to Afghanistan, creating a complex border situation with insurgents able to re-enter Tajikistan until the border was more securely patrolled after 1993. Today, the border with Afghanistan remains highly militarized (the Russians only reluctantly allowed it to be re-opened as part of support operations in the campaign against the Taliban during 2001-2002). The situation was reversed when in 2000-2001 over 10,000 refugees from Afghanistan tried to find refuge in Tajikistan. They were never allowed into the country and had to establish settlements on the islands in the middle of the river Pyanj – the natural boundary that separates Tajikistan from Afghanistan.

Tajikistan explained its unwillingness to accept refugees as a fear that such a large flow of people would destabilize an already shaky status quo in the country. One can also explain this unwillingness by reference to international relations. Taliban leaders indicated they would try to retaliate against Central Asian states that decided to assist the US war effort. Thus, Tajikistan's alliance with Russia rather than the US and strict policies about refugee acceptance seem to be aimed at reinforcing the ideological boundary between Tajikistan and Afghanistan by presenting it as both uninvolved with the US and separate from Afghanistan.

My driver's interpretation of the recent history of the region is interesting as it presents the popular discourse on the dividing power of history that overrides the uniting force of culture (ethnicity) and religion. Paradoxically, it also serves as a perfect expression of the attempts on behalf of the Tajik nation-state to craft the idea of the people. Thus, Tajikistan's complex maneuvering between the US, Russia and Afghanistan can be seen as an attempt to secure the outer limits of the nation by "turning the differentiated spatial boundary, the 'outside', into the authenticating 'inward' time of Tradition" (Bhabha 1994:149). As such, it reflects a complex interplay of love-hate relationships that bind a community together. By referring to Freud's analysis of feuds between Spanish and Portuguese territories, one agrees that "it is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left to receive the manifestation of their aggressiveness" (Freud in Bhabha 1994: 149).

On our way from Ishkashim, late at night, I have another encounter with the borders. This time with the lived experiences of the Imperial borders that united 1/6 of land and people that lived there. As the road is dangerous and it is late, I am trying to keep our driver awake by talking to him about Soviet films, jokes, and songs. Even though I am thousands of kilometers away from the city where I was born and brought up, our dialogue is not any different than a discussion I could have had in any city in Russia. We share the knowledge of the same everyday folklore that creates an invisible field of unstated understanding between us. "The White Sun of the Desert" and "The Three Musketeers", "Sherlock Holmes" and "The Seven Moments of the Spring" are classics that demarcate the boundaries of the former Soviet Empire embodied in us as its citizens who used to share not only the legal status, but a wide range of cultural

phenomena that comprised the phenomenon of "Homo Sovieticus".

My late night chitchat with the driver reflects another important feature of the nation-state project – inherent ambiguity of its temporal framework. Bhabha describes this predicament of the nation as the “distracting presence of another temporality that disturbs the contemporaneity of the national present” (Bhabha 1994: 143). By emphasizing this temporal disjuncture, Bhabha is pointing at the paradox of a nation that refers to the past in order to legitimize the creation of a people in the present. The example of nation-building processes in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan problematizes Bhabha’s statement even further. Thus, examination of my experiences in Central Asia raises the following question: “When does empire / nation-state disappear and is completely taken over by another nation-state?” Boundaries of the Soviet Union as an empire were erased over 10 years ago. However, its boundaries as a unique cultural phenomenon are still evident within the space of the Newly Independent States. One can conclude that the timeline of a nation as a cultural phenomenon does not have to correspond with the standard time of the state. Homogenizing efforts on behalf of a nation to unite its populace within the time/space continuum are undermined by the very nature of its inherent hybridity.

Boundary: Tajikistan-Russia. *And here I am – at the last border to cross on this trip in Central Asia – a border between Russia and Tajikistan on my way back. Flights between Dushanbe and St. Petersburg were renewed several days prior to my return. So, instead of having to take a flight to Moscow or to endure a horrifyingly long journey across the deserts of Central Asia by train or by bus, I can enjoy the luxury of space traversing direct plane.*

In the airport waiting area, there are only people going to St. Petersburg – it is the only plane leaving at this time of night. Despite fatigue, I cannot help noticing skewed gender ratio of my travel companions. Out of 60 people making their way to Russia, 40 are men. The other 15 are women with children (under the age of 5). Five remaining passengers are single women. Several of them seem to be related to the women with children. Two women (including myself) who are on this trip alone are clearly not Tajik.

Out of 40 men, 35 appear to be between ages 20 and 50. Certain similarity in the dress code – neatly ironed blue or black pants, tucked in buttoned down shirts, caps, - emphasizes the similarity in their aims behind this trip. They are going to work in order to

support families they're leaving behind in Tajikistan. Several other men, much older than the “workforce” group, carry large baskets of fruits with them. It seems possible to conclude that they are going to visit their families – most probably, their sons' families, - in Russia.

The gender ratio among the passengers at the airport reflects economic problems experienced by Tajikistan during the transition period of the last 10 years. The lack of jobs in Tajikistan, where the unemployment rate runs around 30 percent, has forced a growing number of Tajiks to seek employment elsewhere in the Commonwealth of Independent States. More than 500,000 of Tajikistan's 6.1 million citizens are believed to leave their homes every year in search of seasonal employment abroad (REF). Amicable relations between Russia and Tajikistan find their implementation in the lack of visa regime between these countries. Relations on the government level retranslate as a stable flow of Tajik migrants in search of jobs. More than 80 percent of these migrants go to Russia, where their status is neither defined nor protected by any bilateral agreements (REF).

Remittances sent back home contribute significantly to the well being of the Tajik population. However, this labor migration presents a certain predicament for the nation-state. Money earned in Russia avoids direct taxation and comprises the “shadowy” sector of economy. The overall level of state economy is weakened as the control over the flow of finances is lost and it is difficult to estimate the amount of money that crosses the border. Internal economic pressures force the state to attempt to establish “normative and legislative” base to improve rights of migrant workers and to gain greater control over their movements. The state’s striving to have a hold over intra- as well as trans-national processes leads to the state’s efforts to give migrant workers some legality and protection despite the fact that it is essentially resulting in the “dissemination” of a nation.

Two men attract my attention. Loose shirts, fancy jeans, a large umbrella one of the guys is carrying like a walking stick are at stark contrast with the rest of the group. Their behavior – loud conversation, animated gestures, - are meant to show that these two are not afraid of the upcoming trip – it is a routine rather than a new endeavor for them. As I was to find out later from their loud conversation, they were students returning to St. Petersburg to continue their education. Despite their citizenship – both of these two men are Tajik nationals, - there seems

to be a boundary dividing these men from the rest of the travelers.

The two men appear to be almost an anomaly relative to the general flow of migrants to Russia. The Russians in general associate migrants from Tajikistan with seasonal cheap labor force. In February 2002, the Russian president's representative to the State Duma, Aleksandr Kotenkov, said during a debate on a citizenship bill that Moscow is full of what he called «beggars and Tajiks» (www.gazeta.ru/news). Escalating violence towards the foreign nationals (particularly Muslims from the former Soviet Republics) characterizes much of the relationship among different ethnic groups in Russia. This raises two questions. First of all, it shows that class experiences and experiences of national identification are closely intertwined. Russians' negative imagining of themselves vis-a-vis relatively recent newcomers is based not only on cultural (or what political scientists refer to as "civilizational") differences, but differences in class standing. However, these class differences are conceived on a very general level since internal differentiation of Tajiks as a group does not play a significant role in this case. The two students returning to their studies in St. Petersburg are at odds with the rest of their fellow countrymen. One of the explanations for differences in behavior would focus on differences in class standing between the rich students and the poor migrant workers. But it seems to me that the story is a bit more complex. It is important to keep in mind the specifics of national "imagining". Thus even though class does indeed play a role in defining these people's behavior, the border that divides the students from the rest of the migrants is double fold. The students' arrogant behavior presents them as "the other Tajiks" who even though hold Tajik passports do not want to be associated with the traditional Tajik-seasonal-worker image. Secondly, it shows dialectical nature of the formation of national identity. Russian identification is strengthened by and in turn reinforces Tajik identification. I refer here to the national rather than ethnic identification because the migrants from Tajikistan belong to different ethnic backgrounds. Yet, they're all classified as being Tajik. Also, the question about migrants' lack of rights shifts one's analytical focus from individual identification to the identification of a group as defined by a country of origin.

I sit down beside a young woman with a little child. After a brief conversation I learn that 22-year-old Firuza is going to see her husband who left for

Russia almost immediately after their wedding, over a year ago. Their child – a four-month-old girl – was born while he was away. It will be the first time the father would see his daughter. In this men-dominated space of the waiting room, our gender and age overcome differences in ethnicity and nationality and bring us together as Firuza is narrating to me little details of her life. Her little baby daughter is fast asleep, the plane is still hours away and there is nothing that can disturb our conversation.

Labor migration is generally perceived as a strictly male endeavor. Only recently did sociological and anthropological studies of migration include women in their analytical framework (Kearney 1986). Examination of change in power distribution along the gender lines caused by migration shows that women gain in status when men move out to work (ibid: 345). In the context of Tajikistan this topic still requires further investigation. However, even superficial observation of migration exchange between Tajikistan and Russia shows that migration considerably affects family relations. Discrepancy between the economic situation in Russia and Tajikistan creates a barrier that cuts across kin relationships separating men from their families and relatives in Tajikistan. The national border between Tajikistan and Russia takes on a new meaning in this case. On the one hand, given the scale of labor migration, labor exchange becomes a regular event that affects almost every family in Tajikistan (average family size in Tajikistan is 5.8- (Sanjian 1991). Thus, one can hypothesize, this would firmly posit Russia on the Tajiks' conceptual map of the region. On the other hand, change in gender roles and specifics of interaction among genders are affected as well.

As I get on the plane, I realize that the border – boundary between Russia and Tajikistan, Russians and Tajiks – is becoming more physically apparent. The crowd of people trying to get on the plane separates me from Firuza. Flight attendants – primarily Russian – are hustling people into the seats. Seats are not specified on the ticket. And so it is flight attendants discretion as to where people will sit. To bring some order to the chaotic group of passengers eager to take their places, flight attendants are forcing everybody to sit together without leaving empty seats in between. I am directed towards a row of 3 empty seats and take the one by the window. Even though seats in the rows in front and behind me are filled completely, the two seats beside me are empty. When a hesitant Tajik approaches towards these

seats, he is hurriedly redirected by flight attendants to the seats in another aisle: "Move, move, we do not need gaps in the middle" – they urge him. The story repeats itself when another Tajik tries to land beside me. This time he is sent towards the row somewhere in the back.

The plane is now full with all the seats uniformly taken by the passengers. Only two seats beside me seem to create an odd breach in the middle of the plane. I do not object to this arrangement since I can stretch and sleep. But I cannot help wondering whether the Russian flight attendants contributed to the recreation of the physical boundary between Russia and Tajikistan in their seat assignment.

The problem of seat assignment in the example above shows another important feature of boundary maintenance – the question of agency. In my discussion about formation of nationalism in Central Asia I provided an extensive overview of the state-level processes that lead to the creation (and re-creation) of national borders. In my discussion, states were presented as active agents whose interests often take precedence over that of their citizens. The breach in the middle of the airplane, however, signifies that borders are not only created by the states. It is individual people – Russian, Tajik, Kazakh, etc. nationals – who actively contribute to the project of border maintenance. Of course, passenger allocation might have been purely accidental – it is difficult to keep track of everyone at 4 o'clock in the morning. But despite the possibility that it was a matter of chance, the 3-seat luxury makes a strong symbolic statement about the power of borders that differentiate people according to their citizenship, skin color, class standing, ethnicity, gender. These borders are not only imposed upon us – we take active participation in ensuring their persistence.

As we land in Pulkovo, St. Petersburg airport, I am trying to find Firuza. Soon I see her in a company of another Tajik woman with a child. I can hardly recognize Firuza. She is no longer smiling or chatting. The friendly expression of her face is unusually grim and concentrated. Even though she is not talking with her new travel companion, similarity in their nervous stances, stiffened postures, tighter than usual grasp of their babies indicate uneasiness that both these women face at the border. It is this tense feeling of the lived experience of the border that heightens their perception of their ethnicity, citizenship, nationality, gender and family roles that brings these women together. It is also this experi-

ence of the border that precludes me from reinstating worryless chitchat with Firuza.

Conclusion. Using a series of vignettes that describe my experiences of crossing borders, I have tried to show the complexity of borders as a product of nationalist imagination in this essay. I discussed at length how boundaries, originally created as internal divisions within a Soviet state, were transformed into the seemingly impenetrable border checkpoints of nations. The division of the post-Soviet physical space was reinforced by the segregation of linguistic, monetary, economic space. Thus, for a nation-state, mere political demarcations on a map are insufficient as evidence of its strength and power. Color-coded silhouettes on a map have to become real through the introduction of national currency, linguistic modifications, and military forces amongst the many other rituals of a nation. An examination of these characteristic features of a nation allows one to get a better understanding of the processes of nation-building taking place within the country.

In my discussion about my experiences at the Tajik- Afghani border I problematized the concept of national time. Here, I was indirectly arguing with Anderson's discussion of a nation as existing within "empty, homogenous time" (Anderson 1983). Instead, following Bhabha's framework of analysis I show that time for a nation – despite its increased efforts for homogeneity – is nevertheless hybrid. As such, it is striving to contain both the past and the present within one framework. I further raise questions regarding the context within which a nation exists and within which a nation ceases to exist. The examples of the Soviet Union and Tajikistan provided ample evidence to support the argument that the cultural timeframe of a nation does not necessarily correspond with the political timeframe. Although a nation can be erased from the political map, it can and often does continue to exercise an important influence on people's daily lives.

In the final section of this paper I continued the discussion about the paradoxical nature of a nation-state. The hybridity of the nation-state project was illustrated with examples of the intersection between categories of class, gender and national identification. In this section I also addressed a question that was invoked indirectly by earlier sections of the paper – that regarding agency in the creation of a nation. In my discussion I show that the nation is a project of communal creation in which we all partake even if indirectly and sometimes unconsciously.

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«Пересекая границы»: национальность, этничность и гражданство на границах нации-государства

Статья, написанная Елизаветой Корюшкиной, аспирантом университета Брауна, США, посвящена проблемам восприятия гражданства, национальности и этничности в ситуации пересечения границ. Автор дает краткий обзор теории физического и идеологического аспектов существования пространства, территории и границ. Теоретические рассуждения перекликаются в тексте с этнографическими наблюдениями границ Таджикистана с Узбекистаном, Таджикистана с Афганистаном и Таджикистана с Россией.

