

# SUDANWORKINGPAPER

## Comparing borderland dynamics

Processes of territorialisation  
in the Nuba Mountains in Sudan,  
southern Yunnan in China, and the  
Pamir Mountains in Tajikistan

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The programme Assisting Regional Universities in Sudan and South Sudan (ARUSS) aims to build academic bridges between Sudan and South Sudan. The overall objective is to enhance the quality and relevance of teaching and research in regional universities.

As part of the program, research is carried out on a number of topics which are deemed important for lasting peace and development within and between the two countries. Efforts are also made to influence policy debates and improve the basis for decision making in both countries as well as among international actors. ARUSS is supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## About the author

Leif Ole Manger is Professor in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Bergen. His research has emphasis on the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and the Indian Ocean, with long-term field research in the Sudan, and shorter fieldworks in Yemen, Hyderabad, India, Singapore and China. His research focuses on economic and ecological anthropology, development studies, planning, land tenure, trade, communal labour, Arabization and Islamization. Mixing a broad cultural historical understanding of a region with current events is also important in Manger's latest work on borders and borderland populations. Regionally this work focuses the borderland situations between Sudan and the new nation state of South Sudan, between post-Soviet Tajikistan, China and Afghanistan, and between contemporary China, Myanmar and India. Manger was among the key persons in developing a special undergraduate course on Middle Eastern and Islamic studies at UiB. He has also been involved in distant education, developing courses relating to tropical biology and development.

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## Major global dynamics

In the new borderland situation, analytical attention is not on the state centres but on activities and dynamics in the margins. While this approach is good, we must not turn it into a “local study” type of analysis. It is still important to keep the state level in mind, as is keeping the dynamics of different types of capitalist relations, locally, nationally and globally. To understand borderland processes we need to focus on transformations of the contemporary world in relation to state, capital, labour, consumption, and place. This historical reality has changed the spatial articulation of politics and economy, as capital is affecting the nation-state to operate on its behalf and protect its interests. We see governments making new accommodations for market forces, protecting their market interests in exploitative enclaves of free trade zones, privatizing their own government and state functions, subcontracting various tasks to the same market forces. All this undermines the nation-state and challenges traditional notions about who “we” are and who “the others” are.

Arrighi links such processes to territoriality, stating: “Central to such an understanding is the definition of ‘capitalism’ and ‘territorialism’ as opposite modes of rule or logics of power. Territorialist rulers identify power with the extent and populousness of their domains, and conceive of wealth/capital as a means or a by-product of the pursuit of territorial expansion. Capitalist rulers, in contrast, identify power with the extent of their command over scarce resources and consider territorial acquisitions as a means and a by-product of the accumulation of capital” (1994, 33). This is what David Harvey (2001) in turn called the “logic of territory” and the “logic of capital.” The two logics operate in relation to each other within specific spatio-temporal contexts. For instance, whereas territorial control was of strategic importance during the period of colonial imperialism, it is only of tactical importance to the core countries in the contemporary situation. Hence, the question of whether the United States, as the sole remaining superpower, is developing into an American empire is of less interest, if we think of empire in a more traditional sense. As Elden (2009) reminds us, it is the importance of territory that remains interesting, thus challenging us not only to focus on processes of globalisation and *de-territorialisation*, but also to understand processes of *re-territorialisation*.

Rather than looking at processes of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation in general, we shall focus on specific types of spaces, what Eileen Scully (2001), with reference to Western colonial concessions in China, called “anomalous zones” in which the government suspends fundamental norms. Such zones may be close to Giorgio Agamben’s (2005) notion of exception, referring to places in which national rules are suspended and human beings can be stripped of their rights and dignity. Agamben mentions Auschwitz and Guantanamo Bay as examples of such “zones of exception,” with conditions so extreme that, analytically speaking, they can be described as areas in which normal limitations do not apply. Such zones are of key importance in the current neoliberal era, in which the colonisation of the social by the economic has become hegemonic. In the absence of consensus, violence is used to achieve certain goals, taking over where power is not defined. But through violence and war, a new consensus can be reached as the basis for a new sociopolitical organisation built on a new sovereignty. In this sense, violence and war are very creative forces. While many national leaders call for a return to an ordered state, based on respect for national institutions, the use of violence in the contemporary world also helps transform the participants, and instead of the state conquering rebels, restoring “order”, we see the emergence of a transformed state that contains both the traditional, Weberian elements based on hierarchy, and the more decentralised and Deleuzian “nomadic” elements that resonate with the rebel groups. Violent action is said to be “necessary” and the sphere of

violent actions is enlarged, bringing nation-states into phases of decay and new ethnic sovereignties into being. Such militarisms have often depended on older racialised forms of power. Drawing again on the works of Agamben (1998), we can for instance see how a notion of “necrocapitalism” could be useful, based on Achille Mbembe's concept of “necropolitics” which he defined as “contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death” (Mbembe 2003, 39). I believe we can argue that some contemporary capitalist practices contribute to “the subjugation of life to the power of death” in a variety of contexts, for example in the management of global violence and the increasing use of privatised military forces in the so-called war on terror. But we also see it in more marginal cases, such as in the Nuba Mountains in the Sudan. Here, various groups, already marginalised by an Arabic- and Islamic-dominated state as non-Arabic and non-Islamic, as former slaves, and as primitive “infidels,” experience further ethnic marginalisation. This happens through a stigmatised identity, making them second class citizens; through the loss of land to capitalist agricultural schemes, turning them into cheap labour power; and through increased violence, by government forces as well as Arab pastoralist groups, as their territories are close to the oil fields in the border areas between Sudan and South Sudan. The result is a violent civil war and a humanitarian disaster. The situation in the Nuba Mountains may certainly be a case that fills concepts such as necrocapitalism and necropolitics with ethnographic content.

However, the concept has also been extended into more “normal” zones. Aihwa Ong (2000), for instance, has argued that one can look at other zones of exception—such as free trade areas, export manufacturing zones, or construction sites populated by foreign workers—in which prevalent labour and civil rights are suspended. Such zones are crucial for the functioning of flexible capitalism in the contemporary world, and in contemporary Asia in particular. I shall use China, and the border areas between the Yunnan Province and Myanmar and Laos as examples of areas in which China has established zones of the type Ong talks about. Global and Chinese capitalism create new linkages and new dependencies in these areas, not only through an ideological hegemony, but also in terms of material consequences. Different forms of power—institutional, material, and discursive—operate in the political economy and produce radical changes in communities. Certainly less violent than what we see in the Nuba Mountains today, but still a process generated by the same type of forces, the alliance between global and national capitalist groups, the workings of a developing state and the attempt to use market and economic development as a basis for organizing society. The Chinese state plays a major economic and political role in the establishment and operation of these zones—the government initiating some of them, state banks providing credit, state construction companies building facilities, state resource companies exploiting them—just as Western powers did in the operation of concessions in China during the colonial era. In China, the post-1978 development crucially relied on the Special Economic Zones (SEZs), a form of “internal concession” within which foreign investors as well as their Chinese employees, in exchange for helping develop the nation, were given greater economic and social freedom than elsewhere. While these freedoms were significant for people's everyday lives and the running of business, they were of course relative: the zones' administration was firmly integrated into the national party and state bureaucracies, and state enterprises flocking to them were some of their main beneficiaries.

We should note that extraterritoriality and concessions were also mechanisms in the spread of global modernity in the era of colonialism and imperialism, and that this did not disappear in the era of decolonisation. Rather, the zones came back in various forms, underpinned by the economic logic of flexible capitalism, the securitising logic of post-9/11, and the cosmopolitan logic that questions the absolute sovereignty of the nation-state. Sudan provides us with a weak state scenario, in which the so-

called international community is intervening all the time, while China is moving into a leadership position in the global economic life and commands the respect and attention of other nations. Still I will argue that we can compare the two borderland processes, and try to isolate some of the driving forces behind them. One key factor is what Aihwa Ong calls “graduated sovereignty ... whereby citizens in zones that are differently articulated to global production and financial circuits are subjected to different kinds of surveillance and in practice enjoy different sets of civil, political and economic rights” (2000). Graduated sovereignty, she suggests, can strengthen state power and protections in certain areas, but not in others.

Systemic dynamics today take place within many fields. Access to and control over various forms of strategic resources, such as oil, minerals and timber represent an important entry point to increased profits, generating “the new wars” (Kaldor 1999), as is the case in Sudan. So-called “global commodity chains” generate surplus value, with China as a key player. But even though the chains may be “global,” the distribution of surplus value is uneven among the states in the system, reflecting the different degrees of monopolisation within the system. Relative monopoly can be established, or competition may emerge among the involved actors. Common to all are the above-mentioned linkages between government authorities and global capitalist interests, with effects on the borderland populations. Such linkages may imply new modes of governmentality within special zones of particular importance to these games, informed by the norms of corporate rationality and deployed in managing violence and social conflict. The same rationality enables the polity-economy nexus to penetrate civil society and the public sphere in more comprehensive ways, resulting in technocratic imperatives. Through the dynamics of discursive and institutional power, this market-state system positions itself “above” society and its competing social forces while obscuring its key role in the accumulation process.

This is the starting point for my paper. I want to focus on the interaction of nation-states and their margins, with a broader view of how they fit into the global capitalist system. I believe that by studying such interactions we can arrive at a more complex understanding of the so-called margins. They are not only isolated peripheries, but active actors in larger contexts, most of which are not of their own making.

## The Nuba

The Nuba Mountain area, in the South Kordofan Province, used to be at the centre of the geographical area of former Sudan. After the cessation of South Sudan, the area became a national border zone. However, socially and culturally, it stayed at the margins in its relationship to a dominant Arab and Muslim state elite in the Nile Valley. Because of its role, the area took part in the civil war in Sudan, from 1983 to 2005, with groups in the Nuba Mountains fighting alongside the southern forces. Other areas and some groups, it should be said, remained with the government. With the secession of the South, the Nuba were left between a rock and a hard place. Geographically marginal, with no chance of obtaining independence, the Nuba were constricted within a new national border to the south, while marginalised in their relationship to the state centre in Khartoum. The sections of the Nuba Mountains that used to fight alongside the southerners have now taken up arms again, and as we speak, continue to be engaged in the war.

Sadly, the current situation of unrest is not a new experience for the people in the region. A quick glance into the history of the Nuba Mountains shows that the contemporary struggle in a general way

can be said to represent a violent phase of a development that has always characterised the region's history. Two basic themes stand out: the one of territory, and the one of identity. Both combine the constant struggle of the regional population for their sovereignty and for their right to deal with their own development. The history of this "zone of exception" saw Nuba groups living in their hills, with Arabs on the plains, not as a result of any natural condition but rather because of the unequal strength of the groups during periods of slavery. The British colonial rulers then moved the Nuba down to the plains, pacified the areas, and started economic developments, the plains being exploited to grow cash crops, first through traditional technology, later through mechanised farming. These processes have continued through the decades of Sudanese independence, promoted by independent governments backed by foreign development aid, the aim being to make Sudan a "breadbasket" for the Middle East. Throughout these periods, the competition over territory and resources was couched in ethnic, religious, and racial terms, with the Nuba history as an enslaved population being a central part of how the relationship between groups has been conceptualised. This marginalisation has resulted in the erosion of pastoralist rights and customary rights to land, and in the creation of a large force of agricultural wage labourers, workers who were displaced in the wars of the 1990s. Hence, a root cause of the conflict is lack of secure land tenure, legal protection, and political entitlements. The re-emergence of tribal militias has re-introduced tensions and conflicts into areas where earlier mechanisms existed to overcome tribal disputes.

The Nuba case appears to be a good example of a zone in which regular citizen rights have been suspended, for the elites and international capitalist forces to exploit land for agriculture, for the state dominating elites to benefit from revenue from the oil production, and for the same elites, now turned nationalists, to defend the integrity of the national territory against traitors who collaborate with foreign enemies.

The ensuing humanitarian crisis has been left to the international aid agencies. Since 1989 the present Sudanese government has used international relief to further its aims in the war, and also used agencies to transform relief into development-oriented programs. Hence, agencies may be seen as patching up the negative consequences of the government's policies, without having any chance to influence it. The Peace and Development Foundation established by the government in 1992, now the National Development Foundation, has been the main instrument for this. Nimeiry's Breadbasket Strategy created a debt burden and dislocated people in the areas of the schemes. The shift from subsistence cultivation towards cash cropping and export-oriented production set in motion dynamics and processes that are still present in the so-called Transition Zone, in South Kordofan, South Darfur, and the Blue Nile. Institutional chaos and eroded legitimisation fuel the same situation. In the resulting war, the aid agencies are left to deal with the effects of the disaster-producing activities. And through its relationship with the government, aid becomes complicit in various forms of conflicts. One argument is for instance that through IDPs they contribute to the creation of de-ethnicised individuals, resonating with policies of de-culturation (Duffield 2002), thus indirectly also assisting the government policies of Arabisation and Islamisation of the population. Social policies were also part of a war tactic. The Nuba were made the target of a comprehensive *dawa* or efforts at proselytizing, with components such as religious indoctrination and the imposition of Islam on non-Muslims, *jihad*, resettlement of Nuba in "peace villages" (*dar al-salaam*), and crackdown on all who opposed the campaign (Mohamed Salih 1995, 75). The national TV showed in recurrent incidences the vice president destroying piles of idols and asking the Nuba to come together into big villages so as to enable the state to deliver better services for them. In line with the Islamic drive was the introduction of Islamic financial policies, such as *zakat*, and other Islamic taxes. Some of the taxes went into

financing the war itself. Similarly, the *dawa* organisations supported the *jihād* and gave food and equipment to the *jihādists*. The president of the state was called *Amir el-Mumineen* (the leader of the believers). Likewise, the governor of Southern Kordofan was portrayed as a “saint.” Furthermore, through developmental ideas of self-sufficiency the regime met the commercial needs for cheap agricultural labour. In the past, development was combined with notions of modernisation, driven by investments in technology and trade. In today’s liberal discourse, development belongs to those who can help themselves through the market. Those below represent at best cheap labour power, and may be left with humanitarian aid only. Such aid dropped during the 1990s, as a consequence of the belief that dependency on aid would be a negative factor, which further added to the humanitarian crisis. People ceased being people and became “IDP”s or “households” (HH), thus, abstracted into categories that furthered homogenisation and dehumanisation. People became statistical categories characterised by economic disparities that can be redressed through development inputs. But as we have seen, the problems addressed are political in the first place.

A particular expression of these problems is found in the issue of land. The land question is very important to all people in Sudan, including groups living in the Nuba Mountains. It is a basic source of survival, a source of individual and tribal pride, and it is a constant source of possible conflict. Any indication that established rights will be tampered with has always brought unrest and conflict. The developments relating to the land issue in the Nuba Mountains show a somewhat special history. The Nuba have experienced loss of access to cultivable land through several types of processes. One is the outright land grabbing that is the result of the expanding public and private schemes in the region, a process that has been promoted through direct government interventions. More recently the government has allowed foreign investors to come in and operate in more or less complete freedom, for instance by using their own security apparatus. But land also constitutes a problem in a more local arena. The Nuba have systematically lost territory to Arab groups in the region, thus giving conflicts an ethnic dimension. Attempts at protesting have only shown how marginal the Nuba people are in the political set up of their region and of their country. Efforts at arguing their case in political assemblies have failed, as have many attempts at making use of public courts to challenge this process. Public courts have not been able to deal with the situation, on the contrary, Arabs have had their ownership confirmed over the Nuba. Conflicts with migrating pastoralists (Hawazma, Messeriyya) have also added to the problem. Since the days of Sudanese independence, there has been an increasing economic and political marginalisation of the Nuba, a process that has significantly contributed to the land problems now facing the group.

As we know, these realities have led groups of Nuba into a civil war. In periods of conflict more rigid identities tend to emerge and the walls between groups grow taller. In such situations, identities may themselves be strategically tied to the conflict through active “we” and “them” codifications in which the “other” is seen as a threat to the preservation of the “we” element. This may lead to a reassertion of cultural values as part of the violent opposition, stressing common ancestry and sharing of common insult and suffering. This does not mean that cultures are actually made more different, but that people’s imagination of differences may lead to more violence. Good examples are those that call themselves “pure Nuba” fighting alongside the southerners, refusing to recognise the groups on the government’s side. The fight, then, provides a basis for a new understanding of what a Nuba ethnic identity should entail.

On a wider scale we see that the Sudanese regime is not in full control of all its territory, nor in control of the means of violence. There are pockets of competing legitimacy and sovereignty. South Sudan

became an independent country, there is an ongoing war in the Nuba and Blue Nile areas, and Darfur oscillates between war and unstable peace periods. We need to understand those acting within political and economic constraints, as well as the “ontological underpinnings of moral personhood” (Taylor 2009, 165) of these societies. In the so-called “transition zones” in the Sudan—i.e., the Blue Nile, the Nuba Mountains and southern Darfur—the result is the move from peaceful co-existence, in which Arabs and non-Arabs, pastoralists and farmers, acknowledge that various sorts of political and moral ambiguities, ambivalences, and uncertainties are a normal state of affairs to a dichotomisation based on claims to cultural authenticity. In such a process, mutual respect and ethical rules constraining aggression may turn into violent inter-ethnic conflicts. The political dynamics represented by the earlier civil war as well as the current violence, and the wider destabilising effect of oil in the areas, help introduce new boundaries between people. Thus, we see that the politics of subjectivity are also about processes of territorialisation and defining power over socio-economic life (Kapferer and Bertelsen 2009).

Turning to the international situation we see the country is flooded by foreign NGOs, peacekeeping troops and international diplomats, all showing the extent to which the international community is an actor in its own right in the country. New configurations seem to appear and to affect the nature of citizenship in the Sudan in profound ways. Many rights that are tied to the status of citizen are now no longer under the control of the nation-state. The international society intervenes through defining “states of exception” because of which the nation-state is pushed aside for a greater cause, for instance through humanitarian interventions, but also through market mechanisms allowing international capital to operate. Populations are not targeted on the basis of their rights as national citizens, but on the basis of global principles of a general humanity and a list of human rights. People are not treated on the basis of a fan of citizen rights, but as victims of an extraordinary situation, thus eligible for international protection, which often is translated into a legitimising principle for interventions, in the process of which the victims are transformed. In general we see a major change from the Cold War era, in which Western states supported allied states against “hostile states,” to a contemporary pattern in which the same Western states protect and assist “victim populations” against “failing states.” Civil wars and warlords represent one paradigmatic case of this threat. HIV and AIDS another. Both create humanitarian emergencies that call for interventions, turning the zones of emergencies into zones of exception.

Such a complex variation indicates that many issues may arise as the border between Sudan and South Sudan is being defined. How will these elements be used in furthering nationalist aspirations on both sides? From other areas, we see that national ambitions evolving in such border-making processes lead to problems such as corrupt bureaucracies, the rise of vigilantes and militias that open for a continuation of political struggles in the centre but also bring with them a market of illegal weapons. Add issues of land, ownership rights, pastoral rights, oil, infrastructure and general economic development, and we see that there is every reason to be proactive in terms of working on sound analyses about the real processes unfolding in the area. In the end, it is the two nation-states that must take matters in their own hands. One earlier attempt in this direction was to promote the so-called *tamazuj*.

Before the last fighting broke out, political leaders were meeting in the regional capital under the banner “First Reflections Forum for Tamazuj States.” *Tamazuj* is officially translated as “intermingling” but there is no consensus on the exact meaning of the term. In any case, the *Tamazuj states* are the ten regional states/provinces on either side of the north-south boundary. At the time of

the forum, political leaders tried to introduce the slogan “Peace, Tamazuj and Development.” The concerns were obvious. On the northern side of the border, there were worries that some Arab pastoral communities would be divided or cut off from their dry season pastures. There was also the concern that disarmament had proceeded faster in the southern states than in the northern ones, so that northern pastoralists would cross well-armed into the south, facing southern communities that were no longer armed. The focus of it all was on what could be done to bring the people of these states together in the long term, building contacts across the north-south boundary and finding means of settling disputes. The issues discussed were about building roads, rehabilitating the railway, expanding electricity, developing agriculture and veterinary services, establishing inter-tribal conferences, and a host of other mechanisms. As it turned out, however, opposing forces on the Sudan side of the border started to kill each other over how to carry out an election, starting a new version of the civil war. Later, the South collapsed into its own violent fight between factions in the regime. The result: no election, no peace, no *tamazuj*.

## A Chinese case

Moving onto southwestern China, more specifically the border areas between southern Yunnan and the Southeast Asian region, notably Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand, a country with no direct border with China, but certainly of great importance for border dynamics in the region. What we see in this region is the emergence of various kinds of zones, producing new futures for people. In its contemporary form the areas are certainly more peaceful than what we saw in Sudan, but still, many of the developments are based on similar types of processes, linking global, national, regional and local dynamics, and producing economic and market oriented effects, as well as social and cultural ones.

The history of these areas is complicated, with the evolving control of the Chinese state over territories in this region. Just to mention the headlines: earlier forms of territorialisation and control (Han migrations and *tusi* system); resistances to attempts of territorial control; historical linkages in the areas, such as trade caravans moving in the region (the southern Silk Road, the Tea-Horse Road, the Burma Road), movement for religious purposes or pilgrimages; the emergence of the chaotic “Golden triangle” during and after the civil war; the change from the experiences of Maoist rule to the current capitalist-oriented focus; the development of a focus on ethnic minorities and tourism as a basis for economic development. These periods were characterised not only by processes of assimilation but also by processes of resistance and general violence. A major incident in Yunnan is the so-called “Panthay Rebellion,” which was a Hui Muslim-led rebellion, both against the imperial Qing court and the Han domination. A political unit, the Dali Sultanate, was established between 1857 and 1873, giving the rebellion an Islamic touch. But it is also possible to argue that it was a general rebellion of minority groups living in the frontier regions of China, against the imperial centre as well as against the Han dominance, particularly if looking at the violence of Han militias in the region (Atwill 2006).

What all this shows is a historical process based on which the Chinese state has gradually expanded its control in these areas through war-making, demographic movements, the institutionalisation of forms of political legitimisation, and the development of the economy. These processes were not of the “once and for all” kind but rather were part of an evolving history, with constant attempts by states to define the geographies of political-economic activities. We can also see how the Chinese state has defined territory through processes of ownership, definition of distinct political jurisdictions, thus, also affecting the shaping and reshaping of subjectivities and spatial horizons of people in their everyday life. Policies of collectivisation, campaigns against religion, or, at the opposite end of the spectrum,

policies of privatisation and rehabilitation of the religious way of life, are all examples of processes that lead to social and political struggles as new configurations become available.

Moving to the contemporary period, the provincial government of Yunnan launched a grand scheme in the 1990s to “build up a great province of ethnic cultures,” aiming to turn the province’s ethnic minority cultures into development capital, of which tourism was to become a pillar. In order to further visualise their ethnic characterisation, they started to underline the links and affinities to Southeast Asian cultures across their southern borders, aiming to become a “gateway” to Southeast Asia. The strategy succeeded, and Yunnan was made a province with special revenue sharing, special support for poverty alleviation, and special access to funds for local development. Possessing fewer advantages on the domestic market, Yunnan started looking outside China in search of economic opportunities. These strategies were successful in involving the central government in local development processes in the region, also for reasons of foreign policy. The two major schemes are the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) development scheme (launched in 1992), and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) regional economic cooperation (from 1999), which have driven much of the economic development in the province and across the border. But many smaller zones are also found. And communication is improving. Now, there are highways from Kunming to Mandalay in Myanmar (Kunming-Baoshan-Mangshi-Ruili-Muse-Lashio-Mandalay) and towards Thailand (Kunming-Pu’er-Jinghong-Daluo-Mongla-Kengtung-Tachileik-Ciang Rai). In 2011, the Yunnan Provincial Government launched a special zone of fifty square kilometres for manufacturing in Mengding, which will conveniently connect with the Kunlong-Nati-Hsenwi-Lashio-Mandalay road.

To get a more detailed impression of commercial borderland dynamics, let us move to the Menghai County of Xishuangbanna, in southern Yunnan. The area falls within a “Tea Industrial Zone” established in the 1990s. It is part of a traditional tea-growing zone in southwestern Yunnan. The communities in the area were thus used to seeing long-distance traders pass through. The so-called “Southern Silk Roads,” also known as “the Horse-Tea Trail,” linked southwestern Yunnan to India and, through northern Laos, to Siam/Thailand. Today, the villages within this zone have lost the land on which they used to cultivate rice (for subsistence) and tea (as cash crop) to big tea companies, leaving the villagers with the choice between working as specialised tea cultivators, in the shape of wage labourers employed by the companies, or finding something else to do. Obviously, given China’s new openness, labour migration is also an option that many can choose, but in this particular case we see that most people stay, or return after periods away from home.

The case is an example of how the state has brought development to the people in their home villages with the emergence of a new economic niche in the new and more intensified tea production. The new niche opens for the hiring of the former tea cultivators in these villages as *middlemen* in the tea-processing field. The role of the middlemen is to act as a link between the producers of tea, who are now wagers for the tea companies, and the tea processing plants in which the tea is further processed and made ready for the export market. The job of the middlemen is to evaluate the quality of the tea and thus decide its price, dry it in a house or small warehouse, and then deliver it to the processing companies. This appears to be a sort of collective entrepreneurship, in which certain people, in certain villages, can take part in the economic liberalisation and individualisation process happening at home, in the village, and not as labour migrants in far-away mega-cities, which is so often the case.

At the same time we see that tea as a market commodity is sold for export, linking people to far away markets. This is a globalising tendency in which the local specificities of the tea disappear as the tea is

marketed under brand names that belong to the export companies, not local communities. What is new, however, is the way tea also is being used locally as an expression of the minority status of these groups. Thus, tea production and consumption now go together with tourism, in a cluster that is typical for the new economy in these villages. They are characterised by an increased commodification, through export, but also through the development of tourism, selling a “culture of tea” to Han tourists, consuming the “minority culture” while sipping tea in restaurants or in the villages themselves. Playing into this market, local people provide their tea with unique touches that express local characteristics. Several types of teas are developed to express the local, for instance a type of “fermented tea” that is typical of the villages we are discussing. Fermented tea is popular in Japan, thus becoming part of an export oriented and globalising process, but it is also part of the movement towards localisation, by which new elements from the market world of export can be linked to the local field of tourism, inviting tourists into “ethnic dimensions” of tea production. Success or failure in such processes will of course feed back into local realities in the villages, realities that are not tied to the commercial but to kin-based and personal relationships, blending the two.

The results from economic prosperity are visible everywhere. New houses have replaced the traditional Dai bamboo houses. But the new houses are not only arenas of traditional family life; they also express new relationships within the market. In the houses of the new middlemen, tea is dried and tea leaves can be sold directly to tourists. Most houses have equipment for serving tea to tourists who pass by or for selling ready-made tea. In addition to being a site of private family life, the new houses are open to the world, inviting anybody into their new commercialised aspects. Luxurious cars add to the same impression of economic improvement. And good roads show government investments in the area. As these processes evolve, new impressive temples and mosques also appear, indicating a concern with religion. These religious places become arenas for displaying wealth. People can contribute to the construction of these sites and can show off their wealth during the various religious festivals that characterise local Buddhist and Muslim lives. But the same places can also become sites of reflection and lead local people to understand the new types of economic processes in new ways. On the one hand, the religious field and the local religious arenas are expressions of a return to something traditional, the re-vitalisation of religions that not long ago were illegal, indicating to people that they have left Maoist oppression, and are returning to their traditional lives with greater freedom. On the other hand, religions are today linked to very different dynamics, they are also arenas that bring new understandings. The Muslim Dai have changed in two general ways. There is a change towards a global Islamic trend of fundamentalism, but also internal changes towards a Chineseness and “Chinese Muslims,” Hui. Thus, we observe what we see in many Muslim communities around the world – fundamentalist purists vs. local syncretists. For the Dai Buddhist majority, there may have been an opening to Thai people in the region, through trade and migration to Thailand, with a revival of Buddhism, of Thai food, and Thai clothing.

But all of them can also turn inwards, towards the Chinese model of socio-cultural difference. The many minority groups in regions such as Yunnan are seen as “backwards” and in need of “civilization.” The Chinese authorities encourage such groups to leave their local cultures and participate more fully in “the market.” It is through the market (not through the earlier Maoist notion of class struggle) that one can realize the full citizenship, by embracing state defined values of mobility, adaptability, and capital accumulation. This thinking is formulated in the State Council’s 2005 White Paper on “China’s Peaceful Development Road,” a document that focuses on economic development thus demonstrating how the language of development shapes the citizenship regime in China (Government of China, 2005). The Han (about 92% of the national population) majority is the

national model, while the other fifty-five official groups (8%) are ethnic minorities, some of which live within so-called “Ethnic Autonomous Regions” (*zizhiqu*), a policy instrument for bringing such areas into national control as well as establishing geographical division between ethnicities, lifestyles, social conditions, and ultimately between Han and non-Han. The economic zones in these areas are Chinese efforts to bring the population into the mainstream development processes.

The economic field is thus the most important field for the expression of minority status, also defining citizenship itself. This situation started with the well-known policies initiated at the end of the 1970s in which China’s modernisation was to occur through processes of economic development. This became the main nation-shaping principle for the “new China” and all domestic and foreign-oriented policies are now carried out with “modernisation” as a major aim. Citizenship for the minority is thus defined as membership in various institutions and participation in practices and discourses of the home community that may lead to economic development. And this is linked to wider Chinese discourses on the quality of the population (*suzhi*), which in this context means that the citizens should do all they can to realize China’s broader aims towards modernisation by trying to gain greater access to social rights and cultural belonging. Thus, we can see these economic, social and cultural practices come together as a form of citizenship practice, in the sense that citizenship norms and duties are mediated not only by wider national concerns but also by local concerns, local institutions, and local cultural identities. As in the Sudan, we are moving towards a citizenship concept that is based on cultural and multicultural components, rather than the legal-political aspects alone. But while the Sudan case shows us a civil war, with ethnic boundaries and cultures being defined through the process of violence, Arabs versus non-Arabs, Muslims versus non-Muslims, “pure” Nuba versus “impure” Nuba, the neoliberal projects that we see in China show us a more peaceful development. As processes of Arabisation and Islamisation go on violently in Sudan, in China the government seeks to combine economic growth and processes of “improvement” (*suzhi*) of the population. In these borderlands we also see social forces that may draw on and articulate with socio-economic processes that are transnational in scope. Such processes will take groups and regions in different directions. New social forces are generating new political actors, living in new forms of “zones,” engaging in new forms of struggle and pursuing new socioeconomic objectives. In the process new understandings of the term “citizen” might appear as well as new understandings of local realities, through the emergence of new forms of subjectivities. Rather than a singular, national citizenship, we might be looking at a multi-layered and relational construction process through which citizenship is being shaped. This opens up for ethnic, class, and gender differences becoming part of the citizenship formation, processes that are initiated in the economic zones, but that will generate wider implications over time.

## The Pamir Mountain Region in Tajikistan

I am interested in the Pamir mountain areas of Tajikistan as I believe that they will provide us with factors that are empirically different from what we have discussed, but at the same time represent a comparative meta-story that certainly is moving in the same direction as the Nuba and the Dai.

First, this region represents, as pointed out by Marsden, a “non-space,” a “chaotic buffer zone,” “a place in between” (2011, 1). I think we should put particular emphasis on filling the “non-space” with ethnographic knowledge and anthropological analysis and thus contribute to our understanding of the great complexities of this space. Again, history is key, with people having experienced different regimes, the most recent ones related to changing historical circumstances represented by the Soviet

Communist past and a contemporary process of an independent Tajik nation-state. But let me start with some descriptive details.

The Pamir Mountain areas are inhabited by settled “mountain Pamiris,” an Indo-European population that speaks an eastern Iranian language. Some of them are Isma’ili Muslims and some Sunni Muslims. The ethnic groups of the West Pamir, Shughni, Rushani, Bartangi, Roshorvi, Khufi, Ishkashimi and Wakhi, are communities of the Ismaili Shia Islam faith. There are also some semi-nomadic Kyrgyz people (a Turkish people speaking Kyrgyz language and adhering to Sunni Islam). The Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region has a complex cultural history that not only includes the Pamir of Tajikistan but also the Tashkorgan area in China (Rudelson 1997), the so-called “Wakhan Corridor” in Afghanistan (Shahrani 1979/2002) as well as north-western Pakistan, in the Chitral (Marsden 2005) and the Gilgit (Aase 1999) areas. This area was always important to outside powers due to its strategic position. During the so-called “Great Game,” in the second half of the nineteenth century, in which Russia and England competed for influence in the areas that were organised within the Bukhara Khanate, travelers and agents from both empires were traversing the areas bringing back information that allowed for the current borders to be drawn. With the emergence of the Soviet Union it turned into a closed border region of the Soviet empire, being among the areas most heavily subsidised, both as a border area towards China, but also, after 1979, as a key military area bordering Afghanistan. The closing of borders has isolated people, and as result different groups might see each other as citizens of different nation-states.

Central Asia’s history has involved complex patterns of contending territorial control through warfare and alliances, shifting populations involving successive influxes of Turco-Mongol pastoralists mixing with long-time oasis-dwelling Iranian people, flows of goods along what has been dubbed the Silk Road, and a complex mix of religions including Buddhism and Zoroastrianism partially displaced by Islam, beginning in the eighth century, and Russian Orthodoxy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a result of Russian and British imperial competition in the nineteenth century, the territorial boundaries became more fixed. In the twentieth century, these boundaries were given an ethnic character, as both the Soviet Union and China introduced administrative divisions based on ethno-national categorisations. Seven decades of Soviet rule brought with them the hallmarks of the Soviet system: rapid urbanisation and industrialisation, a system of collective farms, and mass education, to name a few. But reforms were mainly focused on the Russian-speaking urban citizens, leaving rural Tajiks with a low standard of living. The post-Soviet situation was made even worse by the civil war that erupted in the early 1990s. Various forms of resentment against the national centre of Dushanbe were expressed in the violent war, and remote areas such as the Rasht Valley and the Pamirs, became places of opposition. Geographical isolation and political opposition towards the centre have always fuelled a strong sense of regional identity, linked to the various valleys, similar to the Swiss situation, as well as to a strengthening of patronage networks, which in turn have dominated local politics and economy.

The area was among those hit the hardest by the collapse of the Soviet system. This collapse, combined with the civil war in Tajikistan during the 1990s, left the area isolated and in poverty. The employment opportunities and market dynamics that existed during the Soviet times suffered from the leaving of the Soviet military, and a local population of relatively well educated people was thrown back into an existence based on subsistence-oriented grain cultivation and animal-rearing practices. After the war, several changes occurred. In part, such changes are connected to recent geopolitical developments where new borderlines have been drawn as part of national and ethnic mobilisation, and

associated with varying degrees of integration of borderlands in relation to political centres (Dushanbe), and globalised flows of goods, people, and ideas. Also, religion and language differences play a central role in new regional dynamics, particularly between different forms of Islam. The Pamir area, as so many other border areas, is characterised by a messy mix of openness and closure, of passages and barriers affecting not only political life but also economic as well as religious issues.

The contemporary position of the area is a marginal one within the nation state of Tajikistan. It is part of the Tajik politico-administrative system of course, and gets influenced by national politics, with some forms of economic development and growing markets. Tourists travel through the area, promising income options in local handicrafts and in tourist accommodation. But the area is still depending on support from humanitarian and development aid, provided by the Aga Khan Foundation and the two NGOs in the area, MSDSP (Mountain Societies Development Support Program) and ACTED (Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development). One effect of the collapse of the Tajik state in the area is that the social and economic system has been “traditionalised,” which has led to new interpretations of old religious and social institutions that were formally forbidden during Soviet times (Bliss 2006). One example is the way the “Khalifa” and the “Council of Elders” have once again become central institutions in administering daily life in the villages, also effecting the organisation of development processes. But there are not only localising processes. Processes relating to concepts such as “Global Islam,” Islamisation and “transnationalism,” indicating that local communities get entangled in wider processes, are also evident. The Aga Khan Development Network, for instance, is one of the most influential organisations actively promoting “regional integration” across the frontiers of the region, bringing Muslims together to see how their local practices may have changed. The Isma’ili Institute is also involved in debates of such local practices. Dynamics in the politico-economic and religious fields evolve together, and the opening or closing of borders, for instance, affects the direction of such processes.

Since the Tajik civil war, cross-border relations have changed. Whereas roads and markets once connected this region to regional centres within the former Soviet Union, like the city of Osh in Kyrgyzstan, new communicative infrastructures connect people to areas outside of the former Soviet space, to Afghanistan (the Wakhan Corridor) or, in the case of the district of Murgab, to China (to Tashkorgan, where there are Sirikoli speaking Tajiks). Today such border processes are dependent on the political will of the Tajik, Chinese and Afghan governments to set up border regulations and to develop roads and bridges across borders, for instance, bridges across the Panj river to Afghanistan and roads across the Chinese border, or the important Karakoram Highway linking China and Pakistan. Sino-Tajik negotiations resulted in a final demarcation of the provisional boundary between the two states in 2004, and one item of the agreement was the cession of a territory of about 980 square kilometres to China, with disagreeable effects for the Kyrgyz pastoralists of the sub-district Rang-Kul who used the pastures now handed over to China. The opening to China could have had potentially positive results but the local population rarely participates in this border trade, as the traders are usually businessmen from the central regions of Tajikistan, where most goods end up.

As always, borders produce particular conditions for mobile pastoralists. As mentioned above, this is also the case for the Kyrgyz pastoralists who roam through the Pamirs (e.g. Shahrani 1978). Historically, they did not know boundaries to their mobility, but with increasing political control the pastoralists met new borders when attempting to access markets in different areas in order to exchange livestock for various types of supplies. When in the late nineteenth century, imperial interests culminated in agreements between the Russian, the British, and the Chinese empires, the Pamir

frontier became delimited with boundaries, constraining the mobility of the Kyrgyz pastoralists for herding and trade. They became dependent on the terms of the predominantly Russian traders. The economic benefits of bargaining at the bazaars disappeared.

Despite reopened borders, the trade vital for the population of such a disadvantaged region is determined by inscrutable import/export regulations. This urged traders to avoid customs regulations and tariffs by smuggling or making informal payments to border officials. Only frequent traders gained enough knowledge and connections to perform cross-border trade in a profitable manner under these conditions. Consequently, only traders equipped with resources and connections, for instance with ties to border officials, can use the border as a resource. The majority of the population has to pay the higher prices at the Murghab bazaar.

We are left with a complex picture and several possible future directions. Cross-border situations could be characterised by “difference,” or by a new regional “integration.” Studies from Iskashimi (Remtilla 2012) show that local people underline their differences—“we are Tajik, they are Afghan”—a situation produced by a long period with lack of interaction. In this situation local people expect the present Tajik government to provide them with what they need, and when it does not, for the Aga Khan to take over. But basically, people embrace a national Tajik-oriented attitude, not a regional Ismaili-based attitude. This situation is somewhat in line with what Pelkmans (2006) states, showing that when the Turkish-Georgian border became more porous following the dissolution of the USSR and post-Soviet Georgians came into contact with their cross-border Turkish relatives, the differences they noticed between one another were extremely unsettling. During the years of separation, Georgians had continued to identify with their cross-border relatives and had been excited to rekindle relations once more (ibid., 72-3). Inhabitants of the border village of Sarpi eventually accepted that the Turkish and Georgian parts of the village had become part of different worlds. As Pelkmans explains, “The inhabitants of the other [Turkish] Sarpi were no longer part of their own [Georgian] group. They had become outsiders and needed to stay on the other side of the border” (ibid., 83).

But the situation can also develop in the direction of what Marsden observed from Chitral, that increased regional contacts, labour migration, refugee presence and new cultural links, and here the Agha Khan institutions are important, will produce a new regional awareness. Seen from Chitral, Marsden’s view is the following:

From the 1980s onwards, Chitral was a home, safe haven (*sukoono zharagh* or *joy-e aman*), temporary base, way-station, place of rest, and trading *entrepôt*, for thousands of refugees, migrant laborers, sojourners, *mujahidin* commanders and fighters, travelers and traders from Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Far from provoking the emergence of de-cultural and avowedly religious forms of Muslim identity in the region, these mobile people facilitated a wide range of older and newer forms of interchange and interaction between these spaces and their populations. They also contributed to the re-mapping of Chitral within part of a wider trans-regional space. This space was forged through the lived and intimate coexistence of Afghan and Tajik incomers with *Khovar*-speaking peoples. Chitralis shared their homes, engaged in conversations, and sought out the incomers as their friends” (p. 4) ... “Many Chitralis I know are aware of their families’ trans-regional pasts, and of their kin ties to communities in neighboring regions of both Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Afghans and Tajiks in Chitral, thus, were not merely greeted as refugees or displaced persons in the villages to which they travelled. They were, rather, greeted by Chitralis in relation to social categories that are shared by all of the region’s peoples: they were relations (*rishtadar* or *khesh tabor*), lords

(lal), serfs or peasants (chirmuzh or dehqan), descendents of the prophet (seyyid), followers of particular Islamic men of spirituality (murids), and nobleman (adamzada). Important signs of equivalence or mutually recognizable symbols also exist that assisted people in seeing something of home away from home” (p.5).

The direction the Pamir region will take depends on many things. Will the inhabitants of that area see economic development and progress, as the Iskashimis have seen across the Panj River into the Wakhan corridor of Afghanistan, where the international community as well as the Aga Khan have been operating in ways that are more constructive than what we saw in Sudan? Or as the Sirikolis have seen across the border into Xinjiang in China, where economic zones of the type we saw in Yunnan, provide local development? Perhaps, most of all, what they see when they look towards Dushambe, to their own capital and their own national regime, will influence them most. Their trajectory will depend on central authorities, as well as on warlords (Nourzhanov 2005), on the developments following the fighting in Khorog of the summer of 2012, on the relationship between the Tajik regime and the Aga Khan institutions, on local developments as well as regional and global developments.

## Conclusions

Through comparative studies of the historical development of borderlines and boundaries of various regions we can elaborate on various cultural-historical backgrounds in different areas. My aim is to enrich understanding of the border situation in the different regions by seeing each region, not in isolation but as a mirror of the others. Hopefully this is not a “cat-dog” or “apple-orange” type of comparison, but one in which we can establish meaningful discussions around the cases. The aim is to map the local political and economic adaptive forms that have emerged under empires and nation-states, or during periods of local tribal independence, in order to document local, regional and long distance exchanges of people, commodities and ideas, and to see such processes during various historical phases of globalisation. Such a broad historical ethnography brings us beyond a “before-and-now” type of historical perspective, and opens up for seeing the border processes along a “mobility-enclosure” continuum, in which the opening and closing processes are ongoing adaptations in the broadest sense of the word, defined within particular historical contexts. Thus, assumptions about the Nuba, Yunnan or the Pamir being traditional “culture areas” seem not to take us very far. The culture areas are divided by modern borders, and the people are involved in processes of identity formation that certainly relate to local processes that make the people distinct from their neighbours, but they are also affected by institutions of modern states, bringing pressure towards a national identity, and by linkages beyond the borders, connecting them to transnational dynamics. This complicates our discussion of “belonging,” of “local-level politics” and the interface of local politics and national and international forces. We need ethnographic detail to sort out the making, unmaking and remaking of the processes at hand and we need a broad concept of ecologically and holistically inspired adaptation to keep our analysis together.

The comparison shows how entangled our cases are, with the dynamic processes involving states, markets, communities and zones working together to produce the process. The point is not that the three cases are entangled with each other, but that we see a similarity in the types of processes discovered in each one. Hence, we see “generalisation” emerging as part of the historical comparison. Empirical differences in political set up, political ideologies, notions of nationhood, or the effects of transnational processes in our cases do not hide the fact that they allow us to make generalisations about the structural ways in which nation-state and local community interactions are embedded in

state-society power games referring to models of development, political control mechanisms, and national thinking about nation-building.

A further generalisation is that the three cases show that border areas of contemporary nation-states take on new meanings and can provide both obstacles and new possibilities for dealing with different types of problems. Such new situations, here called processes of territorialisation, both de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation, all result in new imaginaries being formed, new local organisational forms taking hold and new moral systems emerging. Obviously, this must be documented empirically, but on a general level we see that in the wake of such changes conflicts have also erupted and affected both internal and external sovereignties.

A comparison of the effects of borders on local livelihoods in relation to cross-border economic flows is also important. New markets and new commodities bring new types of moral economic debates, and changing economic realities produce new forms of inequalities, challenges to old winners, bringing new groups to the table of privileges. All embedded in local understandings producing imaginaries charged with new meanings. This might help us challenge current views that problems in regions such as ours are understood according to a narrative of “incomplete transition” to free market economy and so on. Hence, there is no normative assumption here that for instance Yunnan is “ahead” of the Nuba Mountains or the Pamir. What we are witnessing is not any evolutionary “transition” but a battle of many social and political forces represented in the regions, forces being local, regional, national, international, and global.

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The paper is a contribution to the recent debate in social science of border situations and the way borders affect borderland populations. The paper is directly comparative in form, by comparing three borderland situations, in the Nuba Mountains in Sudan, in the south-western Yunnan in China and in the Pamir Mountains in Tajikistan. The point made is that such a comparison can show how border areas understood as violent “zones of exception” as well as more normal zones, like “free trade zones” emerge as historical possibilities in the three cases. We see that the historical developments of the three states involved provide crucial contexts for the ways such zones can develop, from the contemporary violence in the Nuba case to the economic development in Yunnan, in an area or zone that historically was full of violence and war. The state-society interaction is thus not pre-given, but allows for various processes of territorialization and thus also opens for a more hopeful future also in cases of violent conflicts, such as in the Nuba Mountains or the Pamir Mountains. But the balance is a precarious one, and does not have any in-built direction or dynamic. It is only by detailed ethnographic analysis that we might grasp the on-going processes in the meeting between states, markets, communities and zones. Such meetings create new imaginaries, and new moral economies are emerging within new organizational and economic forms. Hence, a conclusion is to criticize notions of “weak states” and “incomplete transitions” as conceptual starting points for understanding the cases. Rather than evolutionary transitions we need to understand the interaction of local, regional, national and international forces, creating new patterns of global power and global assemblages.