Soviet Practices Of (B)Ordering: Mapping Blur Borders And Identity Crisis In Post-Soviet Fergana Valley, Central Asia

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Abstract

Fergana Valley, inter-twined among Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, is an identity tinderbox wherein complex territorial (b)ordering have been igniting ethnic unrest, humanitarian crises, and marginalities for more than three decades. Historically, the valley was known for its openness. The research, therefore, investigates how did the conventional habitat of inclusiveness and identity harmony of the Fergana valley turned into ethnic intolerance in the post-independence period? The paper critically evaluates a century-long colonial process and identity policies of the Soviet Union towards its 'near-abroad' -Central Asia- with special reference to politics of (b)ordering in Fergana Valley and finds its snowball effects on the politico-economic and socio-cultural milieu of indigenous identities. The study contributes snowball modelling of Fergana conundrum under qualitative research design with hybrid-thematic analysis and concludes that the dynamics of the Fergana region cannot be fully explained by the traditional Westphalian model of nation-state bordering, which was (in-)advertently applied by Soviet political elites and contributed to prolonged identity crises among the Fergana valley states in the post-Soviet era.

Keywords: Sovietization, colonial (b)ordering, blur borders, marginality, identity crises, Fergana Valley

Introduction

"Frontiers are indeed the razor's edge on which hang suspended the modern issues of war or peace, of life or death to nations."

(Lord Curzon 1908)[1]

The debate of 'territorial borders' is still significant in the age of globalization as their functionality is beyond the conventional role of geographic barriers. Today, borders are more permeable and their nature determines the dynamics of cooperation or a conflict (see e.g., Rudolph 2005; Vasquez and Valeriano 2009, 192-209; Newman 2013a, 123-137; Diehl and Goertz 1992, 1-30). The settled border areas define the legitimate domain of one's identity and open vistas of trans-border cooperation to overcome economic, political, and security

complexities. On the contrary, the unsettled borders are mostly viewed as infernos in regional politics and the major factor of socio-economic marginalities that sometimes further fan the flames of full-scale inter-state armed conflict.

The correlation, therefore, between border demarcation and identity is sensitive and prone to conflict if in case not synched with local realities. The scholastic arena of social sciences mainly theorizes "identity discourse" with a "defined territorial boundary" and asserts that any blur delimitation could lead to perennial border tension as well as the local, national, or regional identity discourse is difficult to comprehend without studying its relation with the definite territory. In particular, inter-state identity conflict could easily be analyzed under the broader 'territorial-identity' framework but debate arises when an identity conflict erupts within a defined territorial boundary (Walter 2003; Toft 2003; Starr and Thomas 2005). The phenomenon of 'identity within an identity' becomes more intractable and vulnerable in the absence of an inclusive approach.

This phenomenon is generally the outcome of power fixation of colonial masters in their respective colonies. Central Asia, like other regions of the world, also passed through the stark shades of colonialism. Its cross-roads nature was shattered by the gradual control of Tsarist Russia. Throughout the twentieth-century the region experienced massive political reconfigurations, territorial delimitations, economic exploitation as well as socio-cultural and religious transformations under Soviet rule. Particularly, the Fergana Valley, an ethnic inferno, is a living epitome of mismatch between territorial boundaries and group identities because Soviet framework of (b)ordering was alien to local identity environment. The valley was indiscriminately divided into three interwoven former soviet republics i.e., Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Soviet's demarcation of the valley's border created so many enclaves that sowed the seeds of identity crises and forcing hundreds of local people to cross-border migration. The Fergana conundrum also raise questions to colonial policies of Sovietism where locals have been facing existential challenges and striving to lead a conflict-free life since their independence 1991.

It is pertinent to note that the politics of colonial masters was quite identical either we take the case of Central Asia or South Asia. Both regions in twenty-first century are bearing the burdens of colonial (b)ordering drawn by their colonial masters in twentieth-century. The alien policies, arbitrary (b)ordering, inhumane behavior, and oppression tactics were the dominant themes. Specifically, the notorious draconian policy of 'divide and rule' disturbed the local identity politics of the both regions not merely on communal grounds but also on ethnic lines[2]. For instance, Fergana Valley was irrationally demarcated to disturbed the ethnic order and on the other hand Kashmir Valley is still experiencing the communal hatred.

In addition, the Durand line demarcation between the Afghan territory and British India in 1893 is also colonial (b)ordering an inferno (Mahmud 2011; Mishra 2016). Though the colonial legacy of border tension between the successors- Pakistan and Afghanistan- has been mollified, the flames of pashtoonistan issue could be fanned any time. Likewise, the present-day African continent is also passing through the 'unhappy legacy of colonialism'. The arbitrarily (b)ordering of the African continent did not correspond with ethnic order. The alien attitude of colonial powers relegated the indigenous discourse of Pan-Africanism on the pretext of nation-state system. (Aghemelo and Ibhasebhor 2006)

The article is structured into three parts. The first part raises the problem statement and discusses the methodology to investigate the

research question. The second part presents epistemic context of triangular connection between border, identity, and conflict regarding Fergana valley. The third part encompasses research findings and builds themes to analyse the snowball effects of Fergana Conundrum (FC) and concludes the discussion.

Problem Statement and Methodological Considerations

In the valley, a minor ethnic incident can ignite a full-scale border war. The recent Tajik-Kyrgyz recurrent pogroms[3] are raising eyebrows of the international community and human rights organizations that even after the passing of three decades, the Fergana Conundrum (FC) is still posing challenges to human security in the region.

The underline inquiry is that Fergana valley was once known for its 'culture of inclusiveness' where mixed identity groups had been living together for centuries; then why the valley has been passing through recurrent triangular ethnic vendetta among Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Tajik identities since 1991? Scholars have explored multiple plausible reasons for such identity clashes but diminutive research is being traced that discusses scientific grounds of conflict in the valley. The research, therefore, aims to investigate the prevailing ethnic conundrum and intends to analyse this phenomenon under a broader framework of 'border and identity'.

The study applies qualitative research paradigm with case study method and hybrid-thematic analysis technique to examine; how the conventional habitat of ethnic-harmony has turned into ethnic-intolerance in the post-independence period? And also argues that ethnicism or identity honour is not only a leading variable of identity crisis in the valley.

The concept hybrid-thematic analysis is mainly credited to Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) to bring into light scientific knowledge by defining new thematic patterns based upon both philosophical premises of research i.e., inductive and deductive reasoning (see also e.g., Swain 2018; Xu and Zammit 2020). Thus, the study corresponds with both "top-down" and "bottom-up" research paradigms and begins with positivist epistemology (deduction) encompassing existing scholastic debate on border, identity and conflict and blends it with constructivist epistemic context (induction) to develop new data patterns. The rationale, therefore, to apply such holistic research approach is to do intensive research to identify the snowball effects of perennial ethnic tension resulting in humanitarian crises and marginalities in the region.

Under this broader framework, the research delves into primary and specific secondary data sources that have empirical and theoretical contributions to the raised research question. The academia of Fergana Valley States has also been consulted based on purposive sampling to get the local academic perspective on the core cause of the identity fiasco. The study does not reveal the real names of discussants to ensure the anonymity. In addition, the scientific literature of subject experts, policy-makers, researchers and academia has also been systematically reviewed. The official archives of bureaus of statistics of the concerned states are accessed to comparatively analyse the ethnic composition in the respective region.

Fergana Valley: Heart of Central Asia

Fergana valley's position in the Central Asian history is as significant as Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa in Indus valley civilization and Nile valley in Egyptian civilization. The valley endows with the unique feature that its accessible landscape, crossroads mobility, and local trade market are making it an 'economic heartland' of Central Asia. Its 22,000 km^2 area is surrounded by mountains and deserts. The steppe of the valley is fertile, arable, and known as an 'agricultural hub'. The cotton crop famous as

'white gold' is the region's largest export. The valley is irrigated by the Naryan and the Kara tributaries of Syr Darya, which originate from the Tian Shan and drop into the Aral Sea. It is the most densely populated area of the region because of its enchanting fertility and agricultural output.

It is pertinent to mention here that the valley always served as a single geographic unit throughout history till the control of the Soviets in the twentieth-century. It remained under, Transoxiana, a province of the Persian Empire and used as a conduit of cross-border mobility from China to Europe and the Middle East. Its geographic centrality was the linchpin of the ancient Silk Road. Since it had been ruled by different dynasties. For instance, in the thirteenth-century, the Chugtai Khanate of the Mongol dynasty took the control of the valley, Later, Islam was spread in the valley with the growing influence of the Turkic group. It was also governed by the Khanate of Kokand in the eighteenth-century which encompassed areas of contemporary eastern Uzbekistan, southern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The nineteenth-century Anglo-Russian rivalry resulted in the colonization of Khanates and eventually, the valley came under the Tsarist control in 1876. Its name was changed to 'Fergana Valley oblast' a province of Russian Turkestan (Morrison 2020, 374-380; Levi 2007; Koparkar 2019).

Table 1: Post-Soviet Taxonomy of Fergana Valley

Demography	14 million out of 70 million population of Central Asia lives in the valley.	
Population Density	1600 people per sq mi. live in the valley, whereas the density of other areas of Central Asia is 40.8 people per sq mi.	
Valley States	Uzbekistan (60% territorial and 27 % population share in the valley).	Andijan Fergana Namangan
	Kyrgyzstan (15% territorial and 51% population share in the valley)	Osh Jalalabad Batkan
	Tajikistan (25% territorial and 31 % population share in the valley)	Sughd (Leninabad)
Identity Enclaves	**Uzbek Enclaves**: Sokh, Shohimardon, Chon-Qora, and Jani-Ayil surrounded by Kyrgyzstan	
	Kyrgyz Enclaves: Barak surrounded by Uzbekistan	
	Tajiks Enclaves: Vorukh and Kairagach surrounded by Kyrgyzstan, and Sarvan located within Uzbekistan.	
Border Dispute	Kyrgyz-Uzbek border is 1,378 km, with 371 km in dispute	
	Kyrgyz-Tajik border is 970 km, with 403 km in dispute	
	Tajik-Uzbek border is 1,333 km, with 187 km in dispute	

Sources: see for details, Lubin and Rubin 1999, 33-35; Startfor. 2013; Tashtemkhanova, Medeubayeva, Serikbayeva and Igimbayeva 2015; Korparkar 2019, 38-45; and, Kurbanov 2021, 6.

Epistemic Context: Triangulating Identity, Border and Conflict

This part reviews the existing literature and contextualizes the triangular connection between border, identity, and conflict to understand the Fergana conundrum. The discourse of identity under the realist paradigm corresponds with the territorial dimension. John Herz argued that group identity is highly dependent upon border security and the concerned state provides a 'hard-shell' against the foreign aggressor to keep that identity secure and alive (Star 2006). The realist realm propagates that the geographic boundaries define the identity outlook and usually culture of majority group becomes the national identity of that state. In such cases, sub-identities start to feel marginalized at the hands of the majority people. The majority-minority syndrome, thus, becomes an inevitable cause of conflict in the age of nation-state system.

Likewise, Harvey Starr's empirical model of the 'nature of borders' explains the relationship between border nature and likely chances of conflict eruption. His studies conceptualize the link between international borders and conflict based on two variables, "ease of interaction (opportunity)" and "salience (willingness)" by applying the Geographic Information System (GIS) and concludes that a border with the highest level of opportunities in terms of accessible road-railway infrastructure and willingness of trans-border elites to cooperate has minimum chances of conflict and can be titled as 'Vital border'(Starr 2001; Starr and Thomas 2005).

Additionally, Weiner (1996) constructed a discourse of "Bad Neighbors, Bad Neighborhoods" in 1996. He chalked out the categories of conflicts that bring about refugees i.e., "inter-state wars, anti-colonial wars, ethnic conflicts, non-ethnic conflicts". His study concludes that conflict-induced displacement usually erupts from neighboring countries and mentions that: "conflicts within countries often spill across borders, sometimes because the conflicts themselves are rooted in the division of ethnic communities by international boundaries, sometimes because the weaker party in a conflict successfully finds allies in a neighboring country, and sometimes because the refugees themselves become the source of conflict within or between countries."

In the search of effects of conflict-induced displacement, Saleyhan and Gleditsch hypothesized that "the presence of refugees from neighboring countries increases the probability that a country will experience civil war" (Qasmiyeh, Loescher, Long, and Sigona 2014, 321). They believe that refugee-hosting states are more vulnerable to internal ethnic disorder and political marginality than the states that denounce sanctuary to refugees. This could further lead to identity-centric civil war and displacements in the host countries.

Edward Azar propounds 'protracted social conflict theory' and elucidates reasons for perennial stability crises in developing countries. His discourse of 'group-identity' stipulates that the end of the twentieth-century witnesses a novel pattern of conflicts beyond the conventional nation-state system. The politics of identity group - religious, ethnic, cultural- is the leading factor of the contemporary regional conflicts. In brief, he elucidates that "protracted social conflicts occur when communities are deprived of their basic needs on the grounds of distinctive communal identity… Furthermore, initial conditions (colonial legacy, domestic historical setting, and the multi-communal nature of the society) play important roles in shaping the genesis of protracted social conflict" (Azar and Chung 1986; Azar 1990).

Diehl and Goertz (1992, 1-30) accentuate the significance of territory under two main dimensions i.e., "the intrinsic" and "the relational". The former explores its tangible

aspects whereas the latter talks about its intangible dimension. They debated, in terms of relational importance, territory defines the identity nature and states are not only conscious to protect their identity by maintaining their sovereign claim over particular land rather sometimes transborder ethnic-homogeneousness may also entice a state's claim over the proximate region(s) because of strong linguistic, cultural, religious and ethnic affinities. Newman (2003b, 3-34) also extends the discourse of 'relational importance of territory' and maintains that territories are "demographic container" of a distinct identity where the practice of norms, culture, and historical association are considered as an 'exclusive entity'.

Furthermore, in terms of intrinsic importance, the territory also determines the fate of state identity by its value addition strategic assets like oil, natural gas, minerals, rare-earth metals, arable land, water resources, accessibility to the international trade market, etc. For example, if the area of the Suez Canal is being separated from Egypt, then its economy would face a drastic downfall. Likewise, if Saudi oil-basins are re-demarcated among the proximate states then it would have adverse effects on the Saudi political economy. Therefore, defined territorial boundaries are inevitable to ensure the legitimate claim over territorial assets and to avoid any possible conflict between geographical contiguous states.

Moreover, the discourse of post-soviet conflict studies 'konfliktologii'[4] connects three significant factors of conflict in Fergana valley i.e., territory, ethnicity, and citizenship, and argues that inadequate demarcation of boundaries and presence of minority groups across the valley states are fanning the flames of ethnic antagonism. In addition, resource competition, water shortage, and unemployment are further exacerbating the identity clashes in the region. The discursive conflict analysis under the paradigm of konfliktologii expresses that the Fergana area was mere a geographic mass for Soviets, in fact, the region was an inclusive metropolitan center of diverse but interwoven ethnic-web where identities were sharing common markets, water resources, agricultural land, and burial sites (Reeves 2005).

The abovementioned triangular correlation between border, identity, and conflict provides the epistemic foundation to analyse the case of Fergana valley and how blur borders are fanning the flames of identity conflict in the region.
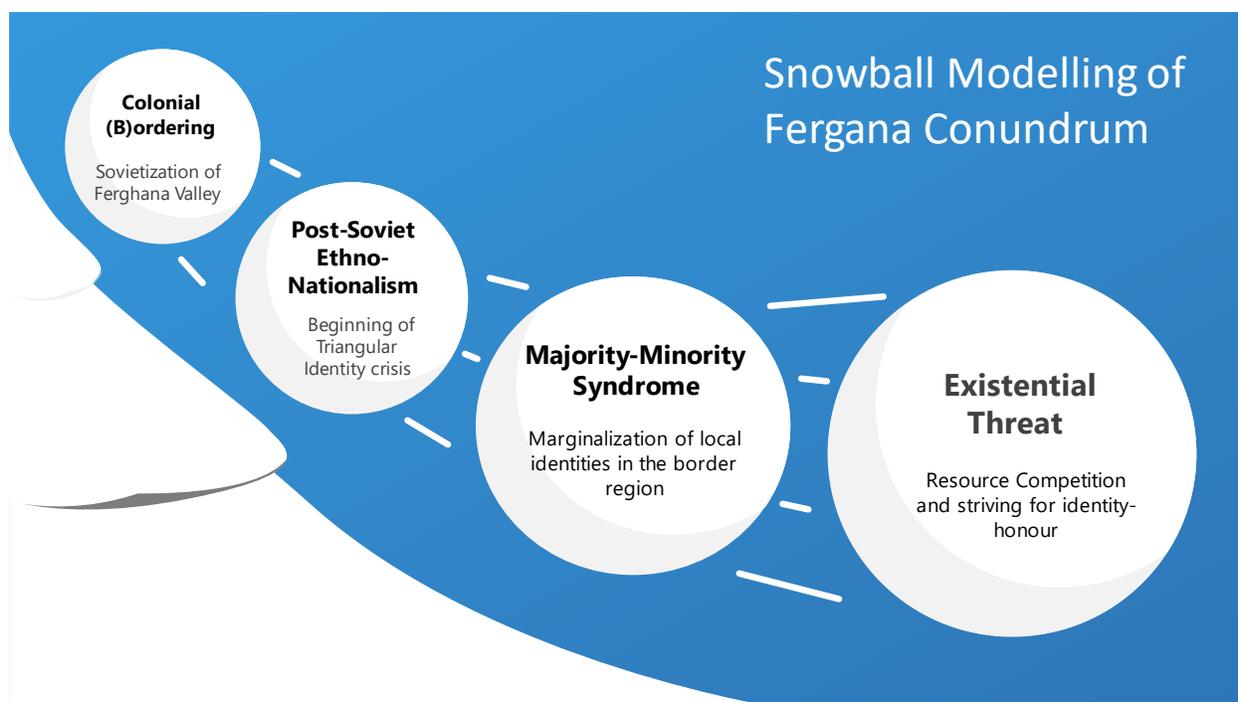
Findings and Discussion:

This part encompasses findings and discussion on the process of Sovietization of Central Asia concerning the boundary demarcation of Fergana Valley and its snowball effects on its identities in the post-Soviet era. Five themes and twenty-eight codes are derived from primary and secondary data that explain the leading factors of the Fergana conundrum in the following discussion.

Table 2: Hybrid-Thematic Analysis: Mapping Fergana Conundrum

Base Theme	Themes	Codes	Types of Codes
Fergana Conundrum	Colonial Practices of (B)ordering/ Sovietization of Fergana Valley	• Blur-border demarcation • Application of Eurocentric 'Westphalian nation-state' system • Collective farming • Economic integrated system • The Soviet discourse of political control • Arbitrary territorial delimitation to restrict the rise of any potential Muslim and Pan-Turkic groups	• DC • IC • DC • DC • DC • DC
	Fall of USSR and the Rise of Ethno-nationalism	• Absence of centralized authority • Former SSRs are not ready to get independence • Blur-borders triggered triangular ethnic conflict • Ethnicity is used as an integrative force because of the absence of any state ideology. • Institutionalization of Ethnicity • The blame game and demonizing the image of other's identity • Hurting national feelings on media and social networks	• IC • IC • DC • IC • IC • IC • IC
	Majority-Minority Syndrome	• Identity within identity • Socio-economic Marginalization • Fear of suppression and oppression • Mis-trust and lack of confidence • Cross-border ethnic affinities • Political and cultural manoeuvering • Issues in cross-border mobility • Uzbek policy of 'border sealing' and mining of border • Militarization of border	• DC • IC+DC • DC • IC+DC • DC • IC+DC • IC • DC • DC
	Resource Competition and Existential Threat	• Economic hardships • Vying for arable land • Water-management and Energy crises • Challenges to self-survival • Protection of one's identity and the phenomenon of 'identity honor'.	• DC • DC • DC • DC • IC

Note: DC= Deductive Codes; IC= Inductive Codes

Figure 1: Snowball Modelling of Fergana Conundrum

The snowball modelling of Fergana conundrum elucidates the snowball effect of colonial politics of b(ordering) that has become an existential threat to the valley inhabitants by the passing of time.

Colonial Practices of (B)ordering: Sovietization of Fergana Valley

Sovietization of Central Asia imprints two epochs of soviet influence in the region. The first epoch revolves around the direct control of Soviet leaders over Central Asia wherein they transformed the local central Asian identity into 'soviet-man' through their multiple politico-economic, socio-cultural, geographic, and religious initiatives. The second epoch presents the stark shades of soviet policies on post-soviet Central Asian Republics (CARs). The Fergana conundrum is one of the notable issues.

Pre-Soviet identities of Central Asia were grouped by religion, clannism, and language in such a way that was always changing and never clearly defined (see e.g., Saidov, Anarbaev, and Goriyacheva {2011, 3-28} for more details) There was no sense of nationhood. Soviet elites gerrymandered the geographic boundaries of Fergana Valley under the Eurocentric 'Westphalian' nation-state scheme without considering the integrity of local order of 'ethnicities, cultures, and geographies.' Fergana conundrum is the outcome of such a linear approach which "Soviets simply realized".[5]

The soviet politics of (b)ordering in Fergana region is still matter of academic debate that why soviet elites made a bizarre border? The valley's strategic prevalence and economic potentials were among the main reasons that urged Communist leadership to redefine the region's cartography. Belfatti (2014) is of the viewpoint that usually Soviet's policy of border delimitation is considered arbitrary and malicious; which is not true. He asserts that soviet planners were determined to balance the economic resources for local identities so that every identity would have its adequate economic holdings, hence Fergana was not placed under the control of a single identity (see also Borthakur 2017). Megoran (2006; 2012) mentions that the National Territorial Delimitation (NTD) was chalked out in line with Stalin's conception of the

nation as "a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed based on a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture". Abashin (2011, 105-110) uncovers the Soviet original scheme of the 1920s that whole of Central Asia was planned to delimit under a single powerful unit of USSR as the Republic of Uzbekistan with the integrated urban scheme of road infrastructure, water management, and irrigation system in the valley.

However, the actual delimitation didn't chalk out as per the plans. Lenin's death envisaged Sovietization of the valley under Stalin's administration in the 1920s and 1950s gradually. The valley was divided among Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (1924), Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic (1929), and Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic (1936), thus creating a geographic jigsaw puzzle with many 'exclaves' and 'enclaves'.(Kamludin and Ravashan 2011, 199-230). The demarcation gave birth to the eight enclaves listed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). As per the new demarcation, four Uzbek enclaves Sokh, Shahimardan, Jani-Ayil as well as Chong-Kara, and two Tajik enclaves Vorukh and Kairagach are surrounded by the Kyrgyz republic. The Kyrgyz enclave of Barak and Tajik enclave of Sarvan are surrounded by Uzbekistan. (Rashid 1994, 161-164; OCHA 2013; Koparkar 2019, 37-47) (Please see Table 1).

Furthermore, the Soviet collectivization of farms (koklkhozes) in Central Asia took out the local identities from their socio-economic milieus and grabbed them into economic and political power game against other ethnic groups which led to marginality. In addition, the soviet steered policies of relocation on the pretext of 'Special Settler Regimes' and 'Virgin Land Schemes' further exacerbated the local ethnic

order and triggered an existential race. (Jha 1994, 30-33; Eddings 2003)

The new colonial (b)order scheme ignited a triangular identity vendetta among Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and Tajiks that turned the 'land of co-existence into an 'ethnic inferno'. Megoran (2004) aptly mentions that it was never in the minds of cartographers that one-day nascent ethnic identities would become independent states. Kazikhanov, an editor of the Russian newspaper told National Geographic Society, "It wasn't just divided and conquer. It was divided, conquer and tie up in trouble." (cited in Meier 2005).

In addition, Olcott (1994, 209-229) and Allworth (2013, 206-210) are of the viewpoint that the episode of border delimitation of the Fergana region was a wicked invention of Soviet elites who chalked out a complex and interwoven identity web without knowing the indigenous identity structure. Whereas, Akiner (1996, 334-347) and Hirsch (1998, 135) denounce the later perspective and construe that contemporary ethnic clashes in the region are the sequel of historic inter-clan clashes which are now be overviewed under a political and spatial context.

However, Slim (2002, 141-142) reveals one of the covert dimensions of the Sovietization process in Central Asia and mentions that Moscow-centered politics divided the local identities into artificial lines of ethnicity intending to sustain its influence. Surprisingly, the post-soviet Central Asia experienced the ethnic-skirmishes in the border areas which were demarcated to quench the imperial thirst. He states, "the borders of the three countries within the Fergana Valley were artificially drawn between 1924 and 1936 by the Soviet authorities in Moscow, with Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Kyrgyz living on all sides. . . This enables the Soviet authorities to continuously be called upon by the people in the region to help them manage

conflicts that were bound to emerge as a result of these artificial divisions".

Fall of USSR and the Rise of Ethno-nationalism

It is pertinent to note that the blur geographical lines were not much enticing for any ethnic uprising during the Soviet reign due to its centralized state policies but the post-soviet phase witnessed the gradual rise of ethnic issues and recurrent border skirmishes among the valley states. Soon after the declaration of independence 'inter-clan identity outlook' turned into 'inter-state border conflicts' on the grounds of ethno-nationalism. Previously, the valley was collectively administered by the Soviet Socialist Republics but independence triggered triangular identity politics as resource competition became evident. The identities who used to live together, walked around the same streets, used the mutual grazing lands, and shopped from the common markets started to demonize the other identities and even today made fun of nationalist feelings on social networks.[6]

Post-Soviet Central Asia was lacking any distinctive nation-state ideology for national integration and state-building. Stalin's heirs, at the time of USSR collapse, were not ready for independence and were determined to remain under the patronage of their Soviet master. (Rashid, 2016, vi-ix; Akbarzadeh 1997). Hence, the sudden forceful sovereign and independent status didn't come with any ideological base for newly independent states. In such circumstances, therefore, the CARs had nothing to present except to adhere to their local identity and strengthen the concept of 'ethnicized-nationalism' to build their national ideology that further exacerbated the issues of border management.

Majority-Minority Syndrome: Identity-within-Identity

The valley covers 40 percent territory and 51 percent population of Kyrgyzstan. The share of the valley in the economic heft of Kyrgyzstan is also very significant, which accounts for more than half of its agricultural products and about 40 percent of industrial goods. On the other hand, the valley encompasses Uzbekistan's 25 percent population, 4 percent territory and 35 percent arable land and is a major source of water (Lubin and Rubin 1999, 33-35).

A comparative analysis in Table 3 of the post-soviet ethnic composition of major identity groups of Fergana Valley States from 1989 to 2019 divulges that Uzbeks remained the second largest ethnic group in Tajikistan even after a drastic decrease of 9.7 percent. It is pertinent to mention that the Uzbek diaspora with a 1.7 percent increase has also become the second-largest ethnic identity in Kyrgyzstan during the last three decades. The Tajiks are the fourth largest ethnic reality with a diminutive share of 0.8 percent of Kyrgyzstan's population whereas, its strength has been increased in Uzbekistan and accounts for the second largest ethnic group. Kyrgyz diaspora in FVS is rarely noted particularly Kyrgyz are the third-highest inhabitant of Tajikistan with a very minute share of 0.8 percent.

Therefore, the post-soviet ethnic matrix and majority-minority syndrome in the valley is engendering the marginalization of identities. For instance, Kyrgyz in Osh are feeling belittled in their own country to work under Uzbeks. The Osh ethnic conflict in 1990 was the first in a series of perennial ethnic tensions between Uzbek and Kyrgyz identities at Osh, Kyrgyz part of Fergana Valley. The abrupt cause of conflict was the re-allocation of land between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz which was previously farmed collectively. Initially, Uzbekistan initiated limited military incursion but later withdrew. The clashes killed 426 persons, 276 Uzbeks and 105 Kyrgyz, and another 80,000 were displaced but according to the local sources 1526 people were killed in the pogroms and 1170 out of figures were Uzbeks.

(Yanovskaya 2010; Megoran 2017; also see Jamestown Foundations 2011).

Table 3: Ethnic Dynamics in the Fergana Valley States (FVS): A Comparative Analysis

FVS	1st		2nd		3rd		4th	
	1989	2019	1989	2019	1989	2019	1989	2019
Kyrgyzstan	Kyrgyz 52.4%	**Kyrgyz 73.3 %**	Russians 21.5%	**Uzbeks 14.6 %**	Uzbeks 12.9%	**Russians 5.6%**	Tajiks 0.9%	**Tajiks 0.8%**
Tajikistan	Tajiks 62.3 %	**Tajiks 84.3 %**	Uzbeks 23.5%	**Uzbeks 13.8 %**	Russians 7.6%	**Kyrgyz 0.8%**	Kyrgyz 1.3%	**Russians 0.5%**
Uzbekistan	Uzbeks 71.4%	**Uzbeks 83.7%**	Russians 8.4%	**Tajiks 4.8%**	Tajiks 4.7%	**Kazakh 2.5%**	Kazakh 2.5%	**Russians 2.3 %**

Source: Data is retrieved from Bureau of Statistics of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, officially known as the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics, The National Statistics Board of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan and The State Statistics Board of the Republic of Tajikistan

Osh riots of 1990 sowed the seeds of 2010 ethnic clashes in Osh and Jalal-Abad in Kyrgyzstan as well as Sokh and Sohment, Uzbek enclaves in Kyrgyzstan. The clashes escalated on 10 June, thousands of homes were destroyed, and the city was in a complete state of pandemonium just because of the prevailing perception that the Uzbek minority is significantly controlling the local economy, services and trade of Osh and Jalal-Abad. (Sari 2013; Rezvani, 2013; Matveeva 2017)

In addition, ethnic factions also have cross-border repercussions. It has become quite common that an ethnic group on the other side is mobilized to guard brethren in case of any fight or ethnic clash, such an incident had been reported in 2011 in Andarak village of Kyrgyzstan between Tajiks and Kyrgyz groups. Some clashes were also reported between Tajiks and Kyrgyz in the Tajik enclave of 'Vorukh' in January 2014 over a disagreement about grazing fields as Kyrgyz felt insecure while herding their livestock in Vorukh for grazing because of growing cases of livestock theft by the local Tajiks (Matveeva 2017).

The worst effect of colonial (b)ordering is recorded on the border regions of the valley and manipulated by the political elites to legitimized their authoritarian policies. For instance, in Uzbekistan, border politics was being used as a tool to strengthen Islam Karimov's regime, the then president of Uzbekistan. Particularly, the Tashkent bombings in 1999 brought about a strict border policy. Karimov initiated the policy of 'border sealing' on the pretext that Uzbekistan is a land of peace and our responsibility is to protect it from any external aggression. Some Tajik and Kyrgyz border areas were mined to restrict the

free border movement but it resulted in the loss of innocent lives as many minefields were not clearly marked and locals inadvertently became the victim of this inhumane policy (Belfatti 2014; Megoran 2006; Toktomushev 2018).

Likewise, Dushanbe also followed the suit of Tashkent and maneuvered the border issues to strengthen Tajik national ideology. The historic discourse of 'Aryan-ness' (Persian speaking) against non-Aryans (Turkic speaking) is considerably propagated in the Tajik nation-building process. The policy of President Emomali Rahmonov to rename the ten geographic areas also contributed to the fear of marginalized ethnic groups. For instance, Qairaqqum (an Uzbek name of a town near the border) was replaced with 'Gulistan' (a Tajik word) and Jillikul district (Kyrgyz word) was renamed with 'Dusti' (a Tajik word) in 2016 (Najibullah 2016). Such trends in the Fergana valley are further deteriorating the triangular identity order and raising tension among local people.

In the two decades between 1989 and 2009, some 20 conflicts took place in the valley. A recent academic study speaks of 164 border incidents between 2010 and 2013, while throughout 2014 alone, the Kyrgyzstan Border Troops Information Department registered a total of 37 border incidents in the region (Mamatova 2018).

Resource Competition and Existential Threat

In Fergana Valley, identities are vying for economic resources for their self-survival. The topographic characteristics of the valley are one of the major factors of triangular identity web as the valley is the 'crown of Central Asia's jewel'. It is an economic heartland and endows with comparative advantage in the region where 22,000 km^2 of flat plains distinguishes it from peripheral mountainous ranges, deserts, and treeless steppes. Fertile arable land is a

production hub of major crops like wheat, cotton, rice, vegetables, and fruits for the whole region. The valley covers a 0.5 percent territorial share of Central Asia and is surprisingly home to 20 percent total region's population. Its density is extremely high as 1600 people are living per square mile in comparison to 40 people in rest of the region. (Kurbanov 2021)

The water management crisis in the Fergana regions is also the sequel of soviet colonial policies. O'Hara accentuates on Fergana conundrum that cotton-centric water management during the soviet period is one of the biggest leading factors of Uzbek-Kyrgyz ethnic clashes at the border region of Fergana Valley. She asserts, lack of an effective water management system at the time of independence prompted border tensions vis-à-vis water security. (O'Hara 2000; Mariya, Wegerich and Kazbekov 2014)

The Syr Darya is the major source of irrigation of valley states wherein the upstream states Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, enjoy their control over water resources whereas downstream, Uzbekistan, lacks water supply, consequently, it is the most water-stressed republic in Central Asia with 120.5 percent water-stress rating (Peña-Ramos, Bagus and Fursova 2021) In addition, the former states are pursuing the construction of dams to fulfill their energy demand as hydel energy is the only cost-effective source of energy for their economies. But this approach is severely opposed by Uzbekistan because the construction of dams would further restrict the flow of water to its cotton fields, a major source of the Uzbek economy. The stalemate between Tashkent and Dushanbe continues on the construction of Rogun Dam despite recent bilateral talks on June-10-11, 2021 (Hashimova 2021). In April 2021, Bishkek and Dushanbe also experienced a series of deadly pogroms on water issues.

Conclusion

The Fergana conundrum is still unresolved and the legacy of (b)ordering is continued by Stalin's heirs to extend their political interests in their respective states. The Soviet's imposition of an alien Westphalian nation-state system disturbed the ethnic coherence of the valley and have been alarmingly getting momentum since 1991, the fall of the USSR, and triggering existential risks for the densely populated habitat.

The data-driven hybrid-themes divulge that contemporary Fergana Valley is bearing the burden of colonial practices in Central Asia, wherein borders were demarcated irrespective of indigenous clan identities and their geographical associations. The blurred territorial boundaries and the rise of 'enclaves' is creating snow-ball effects of identity crisis in the region which are endangering marginalities, political alienation, social exclusion, and economic deprivation in the Fergana region on the grounds of identity (in-)security.

In addition, the study finds that the soviet colonial practices of (b)ordering did not take any unified demarcation scheme into account. Neither language nor any identity parameter was followed by the soviet elites. For instance, if the new scheme of boundaries delimitation was done on the criterion of language (as Barak village was given to Kyrgyz republic because of its linguistic association irrespective of its geographical locality in Uzbekistan) then the same scheme was not applied to traditionally known Tajik language regions -Samarkand and Bukhara- which were placed under Uzbekistan. Similarly, Osh city, predominantly inhabited by Uzbek ethnicity, allocated to Kyrgyzstan and Sarts, pre-Soviet ethnonym for Fergana Valley natives were merged mostly with Uzbeks and Tajiks. The Sokh area is one of the most bizarre border divisions as its population is Tajik, allocated to Uzbekistan, and geographically located in Kyrgyzstan.

Furthermore, the study mentions, the contemporary humanitarian crisis in the region cannot be justified only on a variable of ethnic antagonism because pre-soviet local identities had been sharing common markets, streets, community centers and grazing fields for centuries. Soviets' institutionalization of ethnicity in the valley overpowered its legacy of inclusiveness, hospitality, and welcoming nature. The seeds of ethnicism erupted in the form of Osh Massacre 1990, Andijan Massacre 2005, Tulip Revolution 2005, Osh Riots 2010, and myriad border skirmishes. These egregious incidents forced each other's minorities to migrate cross-border and internally on a large scale.

It is pertinent to mention that such forced and conflict-induced displacements are further proliferating identity diaspora in the bordering regions of the valley and turning it into one of the most vulnerable regions in twenty-first century. Its porous geographical boundaries could also be served as 'safe heavens' for terrorists and drug traffickers as well as home to religious extremist groups and militants such as Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The natives of the valley were once known for their welcoming culture and coexistence but now have become xenophobic. There is a need to re-think the policy of border management in line with their local identity cultures to see long-awaited peace and cordial ties between sister-states of the valley because in the post-soviet period their nationalism is strongly knitted with their group identities.

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Notes

[1] Lee, Yong Leng. 1980. The Razor's Edge: Boundaries and Boundary Dispute in Southeast Asia. Singapore: ISEAS Publishing. 1-4.

[2] There is a difference between Communalism and Ethnicism. The former defines religion as a source of hatred with other communities whereas the latter's superiority is based upon distinctive racial and culture traits.

[3] Deadly Kyrgyz-Tajik border dispute occurred on April 28, 2021, at Vorukh over water management and claim over more water share caused dozens of deaths on both sides of border.

[4] Konfliktologiia, (Conflictology) as an academic discipline committed to the analysis, prediction and prevention of social conflicts, came into being large since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

[5] Online discussion with an Associate Professor, Samarkand, Uzbekistan and Moscow State University, Russia. July 20, 2021.

[6] Online discussion with a Professor from one of the educational institutes of Dushanbe, Tajikistan, July 15, 2021.

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