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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Sammelwerksbeitrag / collection article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

Verlag Barbara Budrich

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Rytövuori-Apunen, H., & Marlin-Bennett, R. (2016). Epilogue: Charting border studies beyond North American grounds. In H. Rytövuori-Apunen (Ed.), *The regional security puzzle around Afghanistan: bordering practices in Central Asia and beyond* (pp. 285-296). Opladen: B. Budrich. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-47178-8>

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Epilogue: Charting Border Studies Beyond North American Grounds

Helena Rytövuori-Apunen and Renée Marlin-Bennett

In the present book, the authors have sought to deepen our understanding of Central and South-Central Asia, of the complexities of life amidst multiple borders, of the varieties of states' bordering practices, and of the challenges arising from both changes wrought by 9/11 as well as by the anticipated changes leading up to and following further reductions in the U.S. forces in Afghanistan after 2016. We have done so by drawing on a pragmatist sensibility which explores reality as practice and approaches the "what"-question about things (the threat posed by Afghanistan, for example) by looking at the practical implications these things have, or may have, in the action of agents and the lives of people. It is like this that we are able to attain more nuanced understandings than if we had initiated our research with pre-defined concepts and theoretical frameworks. In this Epilogue, we reflect on how our efforts here are situated within and beyond Border Studies, an interdisciplinary field of study that is especially well suited to benefit from the richness of a pragmatist approach. We begin with a review of the phases in which Border Studies has unfolded, and we comment on Central and South Central Asia's uneasy fit with the earlier problematique of Border Studies. We then return to explore how a pragmatist approach to Border Studies serves to generate fruitful insight.

The Association of Borderlands Studies was founded in 1976, at a time when political issues of the U.S.-Mexican border, in particular migration, were of especial concern within the United States.¹ Initially, "borderland" studies referred specifically to the study of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, a place where differences of language, ethnicity, wealth, and political systems

¹ Anthony Marro, "Illegal Aliens Stir Competing Power Blocs," *New York Times*, December 24, 1978; William H. Newell, "The Intertwined History of Interdisciplinary Undergraduate Education and the Association for Integrative Studies: An Insider's View," *Issues in Integrative Studies* 26 (2008): 1–59, [http://wwwp.oakland.edu/Assets/upload/docs/AIS/Issues-in-Interdisciplinary-Studies/2008-Volume26/03_Vol_26_pp_1_59_The_Intertwined_History_of_Interdisciplinary_Undergraduate_Education_and_the_Association_for_Integrative_Studies_An_Insider's_View_\(William_Newell\).pdf](http://wwwp.oakland.edu/Assets/upload/docs/AIS/Issues-in-Interdisciplinary-Studies/2008-Volume26/03_Vol_26_pp_1_59_The_Intertwined_History_of_Interdisciplinary_Undergraduate_Education_and_the_Association_for_Integrative_Studies_An_Insider's_View_(William_Newell).pdf).

made interaction complex. Stoddard's (1986) retrospective of what was then an emerging area of study refers to these years as the culmination of the six-decade-long period of "Interpretive Research" which, according to his measure, followed the "Early Empiricism" before World War I and persisted until the 1980s.² Motivated by the study of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands—a zone on the Northern American map seen to evince "pathologies" in need of scholarly inquiry—the research of this period privileged themes of difference and penetration (migration, disease) and of conflict (interstate and intergroup).³ Such a focus on interpreting the pathologies of border relations evolved into two distinct yet related themes during the 1970s and early 1980s. In the first theme, which Stoddard calls "Border Issues and Diplomatic Solutions," border relations were studied by focusing on the processes, conditions and consequences of violence, criminality and other socially problematic forms of behavior. The main idea was that the "border [is understood as the] dividing line between nations" and the border itself allows researchers to look at two cultures comparatively and to examine the "pathological and undesirable behavior patterns" that remain "unresolved by international diplomacy." "Border Division" perhaps is a better title than the one used by Stoddard to describe the idea. The second theme, "Border Integration," moved away from the assumption that borders divide and, as a consequence, evince pathological behavior. Attention turned to the question of how the

² Ellwyn R. Stoddard, "Border studies as an emergent field of scientific inquiry: Scholarly contributions of U.S.-Mexico borderlands studies," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 1, no. 1 (1986): 1–33.

³ Works in the genre include William H. Form and William V. D'Antonio, "Integration and Cleavage among Community Influentials in Two Border Cities," *American Sociological Review* 24, no. 6 (1959): 804–14; Orrin E. Klapp and L. Vincent Padgett, "Power Structure and Decision-Making in a Mexican Border City," *American Journal of Sociology* 65, no. 4 (1960): 400–406. The U.S.-Canada border, in contrast, did not attract similar interdisciplinary scholarly attention, and the attraction of policy-focused research was not paralleled by research institutions until 9/11 transformed all U.S. borders. A search for research articles about the U.S.-Canada border appearing in 1965 or earlier reveals little that can be called "borderland studies"; the closest we find is a collection of documents published in 1960 on the Windsor, Canada border crossing to the United States (Ernest J. Lajeunesse, *The Windsor Border Region, Canada's Southernmost Frontier; A Collection of Documents* [Toronto: The Champlain Society for the Government of Ontario and University of Toronto Press, 1960; repr. as e-book, Delhi: Vendeur Gyan Books, 2013]). The events of 9/11 provided a rationale for establishing the Border Policy Research Institute at the Western Washington University in 2005. This institute focuses on studying the U.S.-Canada border.

border can join together rather than separate. “Borderlands [are understood] as [a] single symbiotic system separated by an arbitrary political line.”⁴

Are Stoddard’s themes of pathologies of border division and border integration useful for grasping the complexity of life in the borderlands of Central and South-Central Asia? The reference to pathology reveals thematic negativity. In its Greek etymology, pathology is derived from *pathos*, a noun that denotes suffering and feeling, but also refers to the feelings aroused by such a condition (pity, sorrow, sympathy, compassion).⁵ The “pathologies” of border relations emerged as the new focus of research because U.S. researchers approached the conditions on the U.S.-Mexico borderland as problems. The situation there was abnormal; it deviated from what was taken by them as being sound or proper. This assumption of pathology was applied in order to provide insight and perspectives for borderlands studies. In the present day, at a time when border(lands) studies are expanding to become more global while researchers hope to retain a body that distinguishes it from other research areas and traditional disciplines, it is relevant to ask how this focus on pathology, an idea that was important at a formative moment in interdisciplinary borderlands research, can be applied to the study of other geographic areas such as Central and South-Central Asia—regions which so far have featured very little in border(lands) studies.

First we turn to pathologies of border divisions. Although we do indeed see divisions along borders that evince suffering, the way these borders exist and are divided in Central and South-Central Asia is different from what we witness along the U.S.-Mexico border. The pathologies of rich-versus-poor along the U.S.-Mexico border and the situation in Central and South-Central Asia are a case in point. In contrast to the U.S.-Mexico border, the state borders between the former Soviet republics in Central Asia as well as the complex zone between Afghanistan and Pakistan do not evince many of the pathologies of the border that stem from sharp differences of development and culture between the regional states. Instead, the entire region is a wide zone where urban elites share the lifestyles of the transnational elites, and where the lives of these urban elites are distanced from those of the poor, and particularly from those of the rural poor. The gap within national economies, which also spills across borders here, marks the existence of a “developed”

⁴ Stoddard, “Border studies as an emergent field of scientific inquiry,” 5.

⁵ *Pathein*, to suffer, to feel (Webster’s New World Dictionary, Third College Edition, Cleveland: Simon & Schuster, 1988).

and an “underdeveloped” world. While Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan (according to the criteria of the World Bank IDA) are “upper-middle-income” economies and Afghanistan and Tajikistan “low-income” economies,⁶ this gap persists nevertheless. Institutional facts—the labels applied by the World Bank to countries because of statistical medians—have significance for future prospects (e.g., attractiveness to investment) and sentiments of national pride rather than marking difference between entire populations. The borders between segments of populations are instead to be found between the elite-urban-developed and the poor-underdeveloped. In essence, what might be called “development-culture borders” in the Central and South-Central Asia regions are not congruent with state borders. This is an important difference to characteristics identified along the U.S.-Mexico border. Unlike at the U.S.-Mexico state border, the global development difference is not symbolized by any particular line on the map or by fences at the border; it is ubiquitous throughout the region and surfaces at multiple junctions in the flexible networks of illegal economic activity.

Another major difference in Central and South-Central Asia is the “pathology” generated by the emergence of a border that divides proponents of political Islam from proponents of secular ideas of social organization. Neither the U.S.-Mexico state border nor the North American region provides an equivalent example of this type of highly politicized religious-secular border. Differences in culture and religion do not make dividing lines in the way that political (and politicized) Islam does in Central and South-Central Asia. In the former Soviet republics political tensions frequently build up with the frustrations created by unsuccessful or absent power-sharing in the central government and on different administrative levels. Cultural and religious differences are fomented by the fear of violence and political takeover by insurgent groups, and these local threats are amplified by the global discourse on terrorism and political and religious extremism. While political Islam (in the form of social organization that includes suppressed political parties) is part of everyday life in a largely Muslim region, the radical forms of an Islamic state and society based on the religious law of prophetic religion (*Sharia*) is more of a threatening image than rooted in the heterogeneous terrain of an insurgency which has developed in country-specific and

⁶ The Kyrgyz Republic, Uzbekistan and Pakistan are “lower middle-income” economies. The data pertain to the fiscal year 2015, see <http://data.worldbank.org/country>.

regional conditions. However, the “pathology” is that militant radicalization can be accelerated and the threat be made more real by the mechanisms of power, which distribute human security unequally. The uncertainty over Afghanistan nourishes these states’ competition for external resources in building statehood and strengthening the power of the central governments against their internal opposition. This increases political polarization and induces local and regional insurgents to join forces under the umbrella of a radicalized Islam with overseas connections and support. Local insurgency is “regionalized” when groups seek shelter across state borders by using their transboundary networks and affiliations and adapt to the conditions which support them. With its external nourishment from the capitals of world powers and the *madrassas* (religious schools) in several Arab countries, it is this mechanism of power and security that is the main “pathology” characterizing the region. Local *madrassas* operate underground, and states accuse their neighbors of supporting the radicalization of their youth. Although the historical root causes vary throughout post-Soviet Central Asia and South-Central Asia, the general mechanism of deepening the conflict to a regrettable circle of “pathological” developments is similar in all these cases.

Nevertheless, there are notable similarities regarding the state borders of the Central and South-Central Asian region and the state border between the U.S. and Mexico. Of special concern are the pathologies related to labor-related migration and illegal economic activity—the trafficking of human beings, the colossal trade in drugs and other common forms of contraband, and the corruption in administrative and law enforcement structures that sustains these activities. Illegal activities have effects across the borders between the Central and South-Central Asian states that are similar to what we observe in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. While on the one hand such practices disrupt the functioning of what can be considered a sound society, they also provide the livelihoods of some local people, albeit livelihoods with simultaneously more risk and greater potential for large profits than do ordinary forms of livelihood.

In Central and South-Central Asia, state borders—the lines on the map—cannot be considered the only, or even the most important, borders that exist. Consequentially, it is sharply problematic to approach them as the dividing lines for comparisons between “two cultures.” Although states and borderland populations often hold hostile (i.e., “pathological”) attitudes toward their neighbors, hostility is mainly the consequence of competing state-

building projects among cultures otherwise not easily differentiated. Cultures on both sides of the formal border are intermingled and fused in the multi-ethnic societies of these states. Hostilities tend to flare up when historical sensitivities and conflicts among the titular nations of former Soviet republics are reactivated in connection with contemporary controversies. The relations between the “Ferghana Three” (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) offer ample examples. Nevertheless, it also must be noted that Stoddard’s starting point of “two cultures” can be analytically fruitful in studying the encounters between extra-regional agents and agents within the region. Examples include social tensions over the region-wide energy development projects supported by the international community and between foreign military staff and local communities.⁷

The other theme identified by Stoddard, the pathologies of border integration, focuses on problems that arise from seeing borders as sites of joining rather than separating. In relation to Central and South-Central Asia, examining border integration leads to questioning, for example, how social habitats that have developed in the past are operative across the state borders and have meaning in borderland populations’ life-contexts. In post-Soviet Central Asia, where integration across administrative borderlines was a given before independence, new state architecture on borders has prompted negative and, as demonstrated by the communal conflicts in the Ferghana area, violent reactions from the population when previously routine mobility is prevented. Ferghana also illustrates how little the establishment of borders with flow-regulating border crossing points can do to ease tensions when formal state boundaries do not coincide with people’s lives. Efforts to set up legal frames for the interaction of transborder communities also easily stumble into interstate conflict and rivalry fueled by history. The long-lasting disputes between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan over energy-supply arrangements during the Soviet era is one such example. The strife over Tajikistan’s need for electricity from Uzbekistan and the Rogun hydropower plant cannot be explained without considering its background in the structurally integrated Soviet economy. When the post-Soviet borders came to separate state authority, the joint use of resources became a source of conflict. Weak in their newly established national economies, states were unable to resolve the problems left by the

⁷ The events in connection with the Manas base in Kyrgyzstan are an example. See Bruce Pannier, “Good-Bye, Manas,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 2, 2014, www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyzstan-manas-base-us-afghanistan/25318711.html.

Soviet division of economic resources across the then-administrative borders. Personalized relations between leaders and the reactivation of historical grievances over the “ownership” of sites and places for identity purposes served to accelerate mutual conflict and spurred hostilities which, due to their repetitive appearance, began to look “pathological.” The bitter disputes over Samarkand and Bukhara in Tajik-Uzbek relations are additional examples of this dynamic. Tajikistan “lost” these two ancient cities to Uzbekistan when it attained the status of full Soviet republic in 1929, yet continues to regard them as paramount symbols of its own historical Persian culture and pre-Russian independence.⁸

This brief review demonstrates, we suggest, that an analysis will remain limited if we approach this analysis by looking for pathologies of border division and border integration. On the one hand, investigating the pathologies of borders and power is arguably a research task by which academic research can provide systematic knowledge for the design and assessment of policies. It can contribute to building border architecture which, in its efforts to direct transborder flows and interaction into legal and controlled formats (such as cross-border markets and free trade zones), needs to both restrict and facilitate cross-border mobility and interaction. On the other hand, however, when identifying mechanisms of the “pathologies” of borders and power typical for different regions, we also must remain aware of the discursive boundaries of the concept as it is used in border(lands) studies. The limitations of discourse become discernible when we pause to reflect on the idea of the “sound” condition, and in particular how this condition reveals morally dissatisfactory, “pathological” features in the behavior and states of affairs that we observe. If we start with a functionalist assumption, the discursive effect of such a choice is to consider borders as arbitrary obstacles to the natural interaction and mobility of borderland populations. Such an assumption predisposes us to think of social development in terms of an idea of nature according to which there is a predefined form to every living thing, like the seed to a flower, that outlines its full potentiality and range of possible existence. The notion of borderlands as symbiotic systems in which transborder communities complement each other’s “natural” development conveys such a biological metaphor of social development.

⁸ The defeat of the Amir of Bukhara by the tsar’s army in 1867 marks the subordination of southern Tajikistan to Russian rule.

Seeing “nature” (in the sense of the “natural” and therefore “sound”) as an ideal for society has a long and intricate lineage with numerous branches in Western culture. It is manifest in the belief in self-generating modernization (functional differentiation on an ever larger scale) as well as in ideas about “alternative development” and “greening” as becoming closer to (the idea of) nature. It is also expressed by the modern idea of science as a means to disclose the “secrets” of nature. These ontological assumptions can be traced back to the question of *esse/posse* (actual being and potentiality, centered on God) in Western Christianity and the conception of nature which, in the pre-given “natural process,” claims a moral authority derived from divine *telos*.⁹ Whilst omnipresent in Western culture, the idea has specifically been cultivated as the ideational background against which the “New World” has built its identity vis-à-vis the “burden of history” and an imposed (corrupt, decaying) culture in the “Old World.” Arguments about healthy markets and self-correcting democracy are sustained by the discursive power of “nature.” The idea that we trace here is more specific and shows its contours against the Romanticist elevation of ordinary life as the moral value vis-à-vis other values (such as religious and theoretical contemplation and the citizen’s participation in a polity). The development of modern identity, including what Charles Taylor calls “the affirmation of ordinary life,” is a crucial discursive condition for the emergence of the “social problem” as a concern over sub-standard living environments in Western societies.¹⁰ In Central Asia, historical conditions are entirely different, and the closest equivalent, perhaps, is the Soviet affirmation of the power of the state made explicit through the raised standards of living in ordinary life.¹¹ Our point in touching upon this immensely wide and culturally weighty field is limited to the argument that it valorizes the background practices of the deep-seated historical, and thus

⁹ John Passmore notes that the Latin etymology of “nature” is *nascere*: to be born, to come into being. He emphasizes that while the signification of nature in the Old Testament is that nature exists to glorify God (“Life”), the New Testament expresses the conception that nature is God’s creation for man’s uses and stewardship. See John Passmore, *Man’s Responsibility for Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions* (London: Duckworth, 1974), 32.

¹⁰ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 211–302.

¹¹ While ordinary life is not the high value which it is in the liberal tradition, it takes extreme forms in consumption patterns which emulate the grandeur of the public sphere of power. See Arpad Szakolczai, “Citizenship and Home: Political Allegiance and Its Background,” *International Political Anthropology* 1, no. 1 (2008): 57–75.

existential, experience from which the idea(l) of a sound and proper (borderland) condition emerges and instructs observation of the actual developments in their malfunction and abnormal deviation.

It is here that we arrive at the key point of our research: by drawing our attention to practices, pragmatism leads us to reflect on borders and bordering practices as well as on our own interpretive practices. In contrast to the biological metaphor that privileges its idea of “nature” as the ideal for developing society, reflective attitudes questioning the background practices of interpretations acknowledge the existential tension embedded in the relation of the interpreting subject and the world that is thus experienced. A critical sensitivity about projecting a unifying *logos* onto reality instructs us to adopt a path of inquiry about how borders between states or polities represent symbols of rule and instances of geo-power which have been built, demolished, accumulated and annexed to previous constructs over longer periods of time. This analytical point of departure perhaps can be best illustrated by the iconic representations of constructed history in the architectonic symbols of rule and power in urban landscapes, such as the world’s tallest flagpole rising up 165 meters in Dushanbe (second-tallest at the time of writing) and the colossal National Library that has been erected not far from it; a building which literally awaits the width and depth of a national culture still under construction (rather than bursting out in its already existing potentiality, as the preformist metaphor would argue) and that is to be displayed within its walls. These constructs of political landscape are symbols of the contemporary regime’s ambitions and pieces of historical archeology akin to the Ak Orda Presidential Palace in Astana or the National September 11 Memorial in New York. When an unreflective Western eye leaps to judgments about Asian constructs as being an unnatural, and even a perverted, display of power due to their physical size, these constructs are being viewed from a perspective where the conditions for that which is morally satisfactory are different and have to do with what is considered “organic” in society and argued to have some immediate functionality in the everyday lives of the people. We do not argue that these views are right or wrong; instead, they tell us about qualitative difference in the background practices of interpreting experience. “Two cultures,” then, can be one way of articulating the initial sensation of pragmatist questioning; it is existential and does not impose the coherence of “cultures” upon reality. In other words, the recognition of the situatedness of

Stoddard's "two cultures" of pathologies of border division and border integration is used as a starting point for further reflection.

While the "preformist" logic of development may seek to conquer and settle borders with reasoning and justification by referring to the "nature of things"—such as the argument that ideas and needs do not have borders because the human being is universal—the recognition of segments of historical experience allows us to see many borders, none of which create absolute divisions. In Central and in South-Central Asia the experience of borders as externally imposed rules and administrative lines (set up primarily by British and Russian/Soviet rule) has left borders with two sides: those that are official and rule-related, and those that relate to everyday practices.¹² This recognition of difference does not lead us to apply common theoretical frameworks under which "cases" are subsumed for their mutual comparison in the tradition of comparative research (such as is done in comparative politics). Instead, the recognition of difference is the momentary experience (sensation) which instructs inquiry without assuming difference in the sense of distinct entities such as "two cultures," a point of departure which also risks exoticizing reality by projecting immanent nature.

In short, the sensibility of the research presented in this book as a whole starts with practices, draws meaning from those practices, and looks for useful understandings that can prevent polarizing and deepening conflicts. This brings us back to the consideration of pragmatism as a productive approach to border studies. In his outline of the thematic development of border studies, Stoddard mentions the early 1980s as a turning point towards a more global perspective, and he sees "Comparative Border Studies" as an opportunity for opening up scholarship to the question of the "communality of border problems and functions throughout the world."¹³ Border studies have since expanded to include approaches from critical geography, postcolonial studies, and other critical and reflexive starting points. The path we would like to propose at such junctions (which are constantly present in research)

¹² This dualism was used by Stalinist state-building policies which made private "happiness" a symbol of state success. In Central Asia Soviet rule did not systematically destroy the fabric of everyday life like it did in Eastern Europe as a result of the failures of its social disciplining. In Central Asia the project of modernization was less sweeping in society and focused on mainly export-oriented agriculture (Szakolczai, "Citizenship and Home").

¹³ It is from within this more global perspective that the *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, the scholarly journal of the Association of Borderlands Studies, began publication in 1986. Stoddard's article on the phases of the research opened the first issue of Volume 1.

begins with an awareness of the difference of experience rather than the conceptual a priori of theoretical frameworks and theory-building that disconnect research from practice. In this way the problem formulation is not universalist (or particularist, in the same vein of logic), and it also does not argue for the “uniqueness” of the subject in focus. Instead, it is relational and, by reflecting on difference, can extend interpretations to cover an ever more global domain while also reproducing the body of research in some respect, such as the thematic notion of “pathologies” of border relations. Thus the difference is not only about the experience of the region but also about study: it makes us aware of how our perspectives are culturally limited, and it turns these limitations into new openings for interpretations of experience.

Because a pragmatist approach to such inquiry calls for modesty and humbleness, some reservations are called for in relation to the epistemic attitudes suggested by Stoddard’s notions on the earliest phases of borderland studies. He traces these to what he terms “archival preservation and impressionism” inspired by the documents and diaries of Columbus’s journey to the Americas (1492) and the subsequent journeys of Cortés, Coronado, and other early European explorers and conquerors. These “proto-borderland studies,” in his measure, lasted until “Early Empiricism” emerged in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Tracing the path of research back to Columbus and the truly paradigmatic changes brought about in the following centuries in conceptions concerning man and nature arguably conveys the powerful metaphor of a bold determination to sail uncharted oceans. Pragmatist research shares such openness, and it does so by leaving behind not only the belief in scientific certainty (which pre-modern explorers also did not have). It also rejects the assumption that the mind-independent world in itself has coherent substance, which was suggested to Columbus and his followers by the divine spirit and the mundane authorities who claimed to be some part of it, and which has contemporary parallels in similar ontological assumptions about power, ethnicity, material determination, etc.

The paradigm-changing proposition of pragmatism vis-à-vis the conventional idea of “the mind as the mirror of nature”¹⁴ is that the reality which human interpreters encounter as signs (interpreted reality) is practice. The idea of anything that “is” lies in its practical implications. The pragmatist

¹⁴ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

explorative endeavor does not claim to conquer new territories, i.e. domains of study and approaches that define schools and disciplines. Instead, it proposes to examine borderless (initially unframed) landscapes from perspectives other than their established conventions. The present book started out by arguing that pragmatism offers a way to steer clear of the closed harbors of convention offered by the traditional concept of inter-national relations and that it, in the same vein of logic, enables us to connect this field with the young multi- and interdisciplinary field of border(lands) studies. This book concludes by articulating the practical meaning of the same critical logic of interpretation in relation to border(lands) studies. This argument, we hope, should find resonance in the places of anchorage which this research community, already past the phase of setting sail, is presently establishing in Europe, Latin America, Africa and, in East Asia, particularly in Japan. Thus, while our goal is to contribute to bringing Central and South-Central Asia onto the global map of border studies, the region is also something more: it is an example of the different experience that forms the ground for attaining more global knowledge in contexts which are inevitably local.

Our goals for this book have thus been two-fold. The studies provided by the contributors promise to contribute to scholarship on the complex bordering practices of Central and South-Central Asia. In this way we hope that this book will provide important empirical analyses of a region that is rife with conflict and potentials for conflict but also filled with opportunities for more peaceful and just outcomes. The pragmatist research to which this book is attuned, we further hope, provides inspiration for reflective research that begins with the consideration of factual events and the multiple practices which can be interpretatively unraveled rather than with conceptual frameworks limited by their definitions. The work is not and cannot be definitive. Instead, we end with a question, which is essentially where we began: What are the borders here and how do they continue to matter in our dynamic world?