

Security at Crossroads: Land, Food, Water

Paolo Novak



Bio Note

Paolo Novak teaches in the Department of Developmental Studies, at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. Novak also heads a host of research centers and clusters dedicated to the study of Migration and Forced migration, such as the MSc in Migration, Mobility and Development, the Migration and Development research Cluster as well as the Centre for Migration and Diaspora Studies. Novak has been writing extensively on the Humanitarian Border in the EU, the flexible territoriality of borders, as well as other issues related to borders and borderlands, refugee status and asylum.

Abstract

The presentation sought to broaden our understanding of "security institutions" by a) discussing the ways in which asylum reception facilities are part and parcel of a transcontinental machine aimed at containing migrants, b) broadening the concern with migration controls to foreground how this machine is ultimately concerned with the production and modulation of spaces and the relative position of people and things within them, and c) historicising this process of production and modulation. In so doing, the presentation sought to indicate a common ground for understanding the connections and boundaries that create borderlands in our contemporary world.

Shafqat Munir



Bio Note:

Shafqat Munir is a senior fellow at the Dhaka based Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies as well as the Head of Bangladesh Centre for Terrorism Research. A prolific author and researcher concerned with feminist foreign policy, geopolitics and of course, crisis response and security, Shafqat is a long-time observer and analyst of the Rohingya situation in Bangladesh, in its historical and contemporary complexities.

Abstract:

The Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh presents an intricate blend of security, humanitarian and social challenges. Bangladesh hosts over 1.2 million Rohingya refugees, largely in overcrowded camps along its border with Myanmar. This influx has created economic pressure on local communities, leading to reduced wages, rising food prices, and environmental degradation. Widespread deforestation and water scarcity have affected both local resources and livelihoods. Moreover, tensions have intensified as aid efforts focus primarily on refugee needs, fostering a sense of neglect among local communities. Criminal activities such as human trafficking and violence pose increasing security risks and security within the camps remains a persistent concern, while Myanmar's ongoing conflict near Bangladesh's borders complicates the situation. Frequent cross-border incidents and intensified military actions between Myanmar's armed forces and insurgent groups have led to further refugee inflows and heightened local security concerns. Humanitarian funding remains insufficient, with only 28% of the needed support secured by late 2024. Efforts for the safe and voluntary repatriation of Rohingya refugees are ongoing but face challenges. Bangladesh has appealed for global engagement, encouraging nations such as the United States, European countries, China, and India to pressure Myanmar toward a durable solution. Bangladeshi leaders stress that without decisive international intervention, the crisis could destabilize the region. Strengthening the Joint Response Plan and improving local and refugee relations are essential steps to ease tensions and promote stability in the long term. There is also an urgent need to put the human at the centre of any conversation related to borders. It is also important to desist from the temptation to securitise the discourse regarding refugees and borders.

Anita Sengupta**Bio Note:**

Anita Sengupta is the Director of Asia in Global Affairs, as well as a former Director of CRG. Sengupta was also a Fellow at the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies. A very well known expert in area studies, Anita di specialises in the Central Asian region. She is the author of *India's Eurasian Alternatives in an Era of Connectivity*, *The Heartlands of Eurasia* and the co-editor of well known volumes such as *China in India's Neighbourhood*, *Contiguity*, *Connectivity*, *Access*, among many others.

Abstract:

The absence of a clearly demarcated border rarely poses a problem for those who inhabit the spaces around it and live their lives on both its sides. It is the occasional excess of it which very frequently does. And it is this excess of borders and its impact on the lives of the inhabitants of the borderland spaces that was debated with the aim of understanding what security means at the borderlands and

who it is for. In fact, one should begin with an acceptance of the fact that the border is intrinsically multiple by nature, the border on the map, of the border guards, the officials in state capitals and the local traders are actually different borders. This of course poses an empirical challenge as our understanding of the border is informed by state cartography. It also leads to the inevitable conclusion that more demarcations and fences is not always the most obvious solution as it is impossible to securitize across so many imagined borders. The presentation focused on two questions

How do borderland dwellers define security

And what are their coping mechanisms for dealing with what is very frequently seen as an excess of state control

Fluidity had marked borders in many parts of the world including Central Asia, where they had till recently been of no consequence to those who lived their everyday lives across them. Demarcated borders suddenly assumed meaning when the state intervened and borderland spaces were redefined as nationalised places and securitised with the understanding that an undermarked border is a threat to a culturally united citizenry. One such region is the Ferghana Valley, now shared by Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan with intermixed populations and unmatched modern borders. This is complicated by the fact that the Ferghana is home to both traditionally nomadic and sedentary populations and their proportions in various regions vary greatly. Here, seasonal movement had been a way of life and land, water, mazars, grazing lands and burial grounds were shared accordingly. This region today, is identified as an ideal example of mismatch between ethnicity, territory and citizenship, and it is not surprising that a discourse of danger dominates state narratives in the Valley justifying authoritarian forms of governance as a guarantor of peace. The way in which this discourse of danger is narrated by the state, however, is often different from the way in which it is actually experienced, negotiated and occasionally resisted by those in the borders. For the state, transgressions at the borders are marked as a threat to sovereign security. For borderland dwellers the closing of the borders, across which they live their lives, is a threat to their everyday existence and way of life. The presentation briefly talked about marginalised borderland experiences in two sites in the Ferghana. In the largely rural enclaves like Sokh, Sarvak, and Barak and in the urban space of Osh a frontier city on the Uzbek Kyrgyz border.