Borders, Citizenship, and the Local: Everyday Life in Three Districts of West Bengal

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Borders have been considered essential to understanding the self and the other, with identities on either side established through functions of exclusion and inclusion. These processes, initially considered to be the preserve of the state as exercised through its policies of border management, also exist in tandem or in an asynchronous manner at the local level. Constituted of processes of identification and networks of interdependences, localized construals of the borderland and subsequently positioned engagements, comes to shape notions of accessibility and restriction as well as perceptions of the "other". These engagements are not always reflective of statist positions on the border which are often uniform in the conceptualization of its capacity to contain. They subsequently come to reflect the variations of divergent historical and locational realities. There is a need to further extend the analysis of borderlands beyond statist framings as passive recipients of policy as well as recognize the critical positioning of local adaptive processes as antithetical to state demarcations of territoriality and sovereign authority. Based on a survey of three districts in the state of West Bengal, India, this study posits an analysis of the multiple perceptions both within and outside of statist framings of borderland identity and territoriality, which color its inhabitants' understanding of the border and perceptions surrounding and interactions with the communities that lie beyond it.

Introduction

The article argues that for long, studies on borders and borderland issues have prioritized a statist perspective where "local"[1] perception and narratives of borders and borderlands have been relegated to footnotes of analysis. Such an exercise which prioritizes a statist perspective is incomplete as a purely nationalist outlook fails to account for the lived experiences of the local people at the border and the local actions and interests that shape borders and borderland practices.

In the case of South Asia, reorienting academic attention towards local perspectives is important for two reasons. First, the artificial demarcations and categories that were superimposed on the region suspended fluid boundaries, multiple identities and easy transborder movements, and established the state as central to all socio-cultural, economic and political exchanges (Uddin 2019; Canefe 2019). Now as every transborder interaction has come to be moderated through the state, it is important to understand how the

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local responds and negotiates with the state's schema of citizenship and territoriality in its regular cross-border socio-cultural, economic and political interactions. Second, to assume the "local" as passive recipients of state policies is a serious misjudgment (Chaturvedi 2000). While the state has established itself as the primary source of community identification and affiliation, there operates informally at the local level various other forms of belonging which predate the establishment of international borders and also circumvent the rigid norms of inclusion and exclusion instituted by the state. Therefore, in a way the local through its own adaptation and modification of legal conditionalities not only strives to assert its agency vis-à-vis the state but also acts as an important stakeholder in the state's territorializing projects.

It is in this context that this article seeks to enunciate how the ideas about border and borderland issues take shape in the imaginations of the "local" and how these relate to the quotidian references of the nation-state. To that end, a study was conducted to record local perception in the Indian state of West Bengal. Considering the enormity of the task involved and the authors' familiarity with vernacular audiences, the study presented in the following section will be focused on three districts of the province of West Bengal—Bankura, Darjeeling and Murshidabad.

The study employs a mixed-method approach, with data collected through a survey on participants' perceptions, presented alongside a contextual engagement with field narratives derived from focused group discussions and individual interactions with local inhabitants from the specified field sites.[2] The study aims to understand the local meanings of the terms border, citizenship, alien and the nation-state in three different settings, among people who are not part of the regular discourse on foreign policy or national and international security issues. Our premise is that the statist perspective on borders and its associated processes and dynamics which shape the state's securitizing ideologies do not take into consideration local aspirations and concerns. However, these notions impact the daily life activities and livelihood prospects of the local in a way that national elites are hardly able to perceive. Does this therefore mean that these people hold on to some alternative spatial imagination as suggested by much of the critical scholarship in IR (Ruggie 1993; Agnew 2005; Kratochwil 2011; Sassen 2015)? Or, are they routinely socialized into the ideas imposed by the policy elites as the mainstream discourses, particularly the realist ones, claim? We argue that these answers have been predominantly sought deductively by offering broad generalizations and moving from there towards engagements with particular cases through these pre-formed interpretive leitmotifs. In contrast, we prefer the inductive route of moving from the cases to arrive at generalizations, if any.

The article is divided into three sections. The first section lays out the conceptual framework of the study rooted in the idea of borders and borderlands as representative of multiple ideas and meanings that simultaneously co-exist and compete with each other to shape life in these liminal zones of existence. Accordingly, a singular understanding of these spaces inhibits a responsive approach towards borders and borderland issues. This line of thought is continued in the second section that presents the survey data collected from the three districts of West Bengal. Here, through tabular representation of the opinions voiced in the interviews we put together an analysis of the diversity of the local perception encountered. In the final section, we discuss how far the insights derived from the study confirm our initial hypothesis.

Borders, State and the Local

The relevance of borders in contemporary times has come to be defined by notions of access and restrictions against mobility, which in turn subsequently define ideas of belonging and alienation. At the state level, such exclusions are further reinforced by the presence and operation of laws and regulations which define the conditions of belongingness, affiliation and participation. The heightened sense of security that prevails in the borders is often the outcome of the state's processes of securitizing the same against incursions. These barriers, manifesting in the form of physical impediments and identificatory requirements, are often impediments upon the mutuality and interdependence upon which the constitutive dynamics and processes of the borderland are situated. More often than not, these interactions are beyond the containment of the state's rendering of spatiality and its scope of permissible interactions and mobilities (Chatterjee & Sen 2019).

Similarly, the measures undertaken towards the management of borders are predicated on the centrality of the state as the foremost organizer of social, political and economic relations. Such interpretations often fail to account for local dynamics of interactions and identifications as they often do not exist in a manner that is commensurate with statist conceptualizations of territoriality or its constituent relationships. However, the dichotomies that exist between the rigid territorialization of the border and its regulation by the state on one hand and the ever-changing demands for mobility and transactions of people on the other have often manifested in reconfigurations of local perceptions surrounding the state as well as changes in their interactions with its various institutions and processes. These local adaptations in responding to the exigencies of their own geographical context vis-à-vis the state's immiscible categories of identity and permissible mobilities are representative of the mutability of the border—a reality often obscured in statist frameworks whereby the position of borderland inhabitants in responding to these changes is subordinated to the state's priority of security and regulation.

The borderland, therefore, becomes an important site for studying the interactions between the state and the local, as opposed to unqualified acceptance within statist discourses of the borderland as the territorialized limits of state powers.

The dynamics of interactions and contestations underlining the continuum of state–local engagements at the border are revealing of the perpetuity of such processes (Grassiani & Swinkels 2014). The spatial variegations underlying such processes also become a relevant point of engagement in understanding the different ways in which the state's power as manifested in the borders competes with, as well as accommodates, more localized processes operational at disaggregated levels of the local. These processes, comprised of both cooperative and conflictual interrelations amongst state and non-state actors, representing a struggle between change and constancy, constitute an integral constituent of the spatial category of the modern borderland (Chatterjee & Sen 2019).

However, the representation of borders as limits of state power inextricably links it to understandings of state territoriality. By viewing borders as limits established by modern state-making practices there is a risk of obscuring the divergent socialities these sites contain for the subsuming category of the borderland. The seeming immutability of state borders often presuppose their correspondence with historical and social boundaries that pre-date its existence, thereby precluding the possibility of its denial by those who engage with the tangible and intangible impacts of its materiality. Therefore, it would be prudent in this context to view borders as dynamic spaces tied to particular locales and characterized by varying interpretations of the miscibility of different cross-border spatialities and identities. A relevant point of corroboration of this perspective would be David Newman's argument about how territory and borders travel together in different planes and scales (2011).[3] Therefore, to position the border as the marker of territoriality often detaches analyses from localized framings of the border through uniform and eternalized conceptualization of the same that do not account for the polyvalent nature of these lines.

Agnew (1994, 1998, 2008) posited that the border must be understood from a dual perspective. First, it must be considered from the perspective of its physical reality in regulating the movements of people and commodities; and second, as a notional category that prompts societal or inter-personal engagement along territorial terms in conditioning "the exercise of intellect, imagination, and political will" (Agnew 2008, 176). Therefore, in order to understand the functions of the physical border, or the state's qualificatory schemes of belonging, one must account for the impacts of the same on our interactions and perceptions with the different categories of territory and citizenship established as such. Therefore, it becomes necessary for us to consider borders not only as material realities constituted of differential accesses and recognitions but also the impacts of bordering, ordering and othering, which often manifest themselves in interactions and contestations between categories of the naturalized insider and the alien outsider. The existences of such meanings are variable across different borderland locales, as mentioned previously, as are the extents of the limitations they embody. However, the border in its etymological and experiential forms exists as limits; what we need to acknowledge are the varying intensities of the constraints they exercise across different subjects. The variability of the impacts of its existence is itself an outcome and a contributor to its polyvalent nature. This is observable in the border's existence as a source of security for some, whereby for others its existence may constitute an adverse threat to their material or cultural interests. It is, therefore, futile to view borders as set functions; instead, it is important to analyze their inherent fluidity and variability as essential to the functions they perform.

At this point it becomes necessary to acknowledge this disjuncture between state borders and the borders in our minds. The different originations of these two variants often manifest as distinctive, unrelated and conflicting existences. Often, these two borders come together and interact at the local level, manifesting in its own unique replications of limitations or qualifications for collaboration and participations. In certain cases, territorial reconfigurations by the state may not result in a corresponding shift in the borders of our mind at all. The salience of the border in statist perspectives in this regard presents itself as a fundamentally normative and political question. Its prioritization of a geopolitical interpretation over the many other readings of borders and territoriality privileges state centrality in the construction of regional territorial history, disregarding more localized anthropological, historical and cultural discernments of the borderland. Agnew, in this regard, posited the relevant distinction between borders as national spaces and as sites of dwelling which constituted the cornerstone of the normative presuppositions underlying critical geopolitical thinking which seeks to go beyond given borders in the interest of creating a more democratic and humane world.[4]

Additionally, the meaning of borders varies according to the subjects constituting the space. Considerations underlying the engagement of specific collectives with the border are determined by their own position within the state's structuration of its territory. Statist proclivities towards the management of its territories are often founded upon principles of regulations and checks, manifesting in policies of security and surveillance and more tangibly in the form of border fences, check-posts and other security installations. In contrast to this, borderland inhabitants view these spaces as permeable and negotiable, as is evident from the presence of illicit cross-border economies, border crossings prompted by economic considerations or even for the sustenance of kinship ties.

Similarly, there exist other categories which fit in between the two aforementioned perspectives. It is not that they dispute the lines, but they do not necessarily give in to the bordering processes of the state and negotiate with the geopolitical meaning privileged by the state. The transborder economies of trade and tourism are relevant examples of this particular positionality. Even states are not always universally committed towards viewing borders in rigid geopolitical framings. European borders in the era of

the European Union were after all the natural laboratories of border studies that sought to highlight the multiple meanings of borders and their consequences. However, postcolonial states have leaned towards a higher sensitivity towards political borders in their attempts to establish a territorialized identity that is distinctive from a somewhat shared, colonial past. This has also helped establish limits against conflicting claims over regional territory. Similar patterns have been resurgent in developed parts of the world as well, whereby in recent years waves of migration have posed major challenges to their underlying demographic contours, resulting in a resurgence of issues of border regulation in politics (Balibar 1998, 1999; Bauder 2011; Carens 1987; Kearney 1991; Eder 2006). Similar dynamics can be observed with regard to the US–Mexico border. Its existence as a conduit for unregulated flows of both people and commodities which have impacted the local economies and socialities of proximate American states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California has positioned it as a site of inquiry for studying the intertwining of all these aforementioned perspectives (Nevins 2000; Andreas 1998, 1999; Andreas & Biersteker 2003; Jones 2012).

Scholars have countered the prioritization of national security readings of borders through the introduction of anthropological and living accounts of flows, dreams, passions and livelihoods, as a contrapuntal plane of engagement that goes beyond the statist cast iron frames (Das 2003, 2004; Samaddar 1998, 2002; van Schendel 2005; Banerjee 2010). These marginalized metrics and histories of belonging point towards the polysemic and heterogeneous nature of borders as elucidated by the work of Balibar in situating the many affinities and divergences of the national and social connotations underlying these lines of separation. Critical scholarship on borderland process, therefore, positions borderlands not as passive margins but receptacles of social and cultural space constituting a no-man's land between and among national, local and international boundaries (Banerjee 2010, xiv-xvi).

Globalization prompted a shift in scholarship on borders, harping upon their recession and porosity in responding to the growing quantum of tangible and intangible cross-border flows. These shifts coincided succinctly with the rise of poststructural and postmodern perspectives on identities whereby new definitions of the political privileged identities and mobilities, which existed in opposition to the perceived centrality of the state as the sole order-producing institution of life. While scholars have differed on the scope of the impact of globalizing processes on borders and territoriality, there are broadly two perspectives that may be gleaned from such engagements. The first is perhaps most astutely represented by Claude Raffestin, who problematizes the notion of space as an absolute unit in conventional geography. He alternatively posits a conceptualization of space that is deeply embedded in human subjectivity.[5] The translation of abstract notions of belonging into the materiality of territorialization through the projection of human labour qua energy and information therefore becomes relevant towards understanding the

position of the identities of inhabitant, encroacher, alien and resident in transforming, conserving and maintaining this complex latticework of interactions and interdependences that stand altered by globalization (Raffestin 2012, 139).

However, even within such new categorizations of border transcendence, the role of the state in conditioning the same appears as significant. The institutional crumbling of borders and the subsequent compaction of cross-border relationships and growing interdependences across borders prompted a shift in perspective on borders, whereby scholars attempted to look beyond categorizations of separation to that of connections (Paasi 2003, 480). However, it did not result in corresponding shifts in scalar representations of identity and citizenship which remain anchored in notions of state territoriality, national space and national identity and therefore continue to remain exclusive of the impacts of such growing interdependences in both theoretical and popular renderings (Laine 2016, 468). This positions the work of scholars like Paasi and Laine, among others, at a significant juncture of criticality. Instead of expediting a perspectival shift from the state to the local in the referent of understanding itself, it situates borders as "complex, multiscalar, multidimensional" spaces; their adaptability and existence in both "symbolic and material forms" are determined by the interactions of both the state and local actors at these sites (Laine 2016, 468-9).

Scholarship that positions itself within the paradigm of critical geopolitics (Ó'Tuathail & Dalby 1998) has drawn upon poststructuralist thinking in order to bring about a perspectival shift in "boundary-producing practices rather than to borders per se" (Paasi 2013).[6] Their work extended the scope of a territorialized conceptualization of the border by engaging with the impacts of its existence on proximate socialities, and how it was itself transformed through such interactions. The precepts of identity and perception assumed primacy with explorations into how borderland communities perceived the state and responded to its measures in compelling them to recognize and accept limitations to their mobilities and livelihoods that did not exist in the past. In equipping us with a framework of analysis that is discerning of specificities of experience and interpretation, critical geopolitics has given us new tools to interrogate borders, boundaries, orders and identities. Scholarship under its banner has grown in an organic manner whereby they are not bounded by considerations of disciplinary limitations. This growing interdisciplinary repository of border studies draws upon the works of anthropologists, geographers, international relations experts, historians and practitioners of humanities. In doing so, it bridges the anthropological, multi-scalar symbolic and cultural meanings of borders (Wilson & Donnan 1998) with its political readings. These explorations were pivotal in bridging these two divergent approaches which proved instrumental in explaining the cultural permeability of borders—the way people living at borders adjusted to the narratives of political differences that political borders create, and the rigidity of some states to resist, if not prevent, the processes that sought to escape

these lines, often through novel, discursive methodologies and sources that were overlooked in statist considerations of hard politics at its borders (Dittmer & Gray 2010).

In responding to the complexification and diffusion of borders at different scales, the need to traverse its conventional territorialist epistemology has become imperative (Brambilla 2015, 16). These shifts are reflected in the incorporation of varied perspectives and alternative points of reference in understanding the processes and relationships that the existence of these spaces entail, contain and also originate. At this juncture, the concept of the borderscape assumes significance, in defining the space in a manner that not only transcends statist territorial epistemologies and processual renderings in understanding borders as sites where alternative comprehensions of identity, citizenship and otherness are effected through processes of localized reconfigurations in response to the state's presence. In this context, the idea of the local, not only at the borders, but at different existences of spatial disaggregation becomes a relevant point of engagement (Rajaram & Grundy-Warr 2007, x).

The local can therefore be understood as an alternative spatial category that exists within a continuum of adaptation, accommodation and contestation with statist, geopolitical control over space, not only at the borders. In the context of this enquiry, it would be helpful to view the 'local' as a spatially contained cultural and social category which encompasses similar roles and performances to that of the state, but whose existence and functioning are attuned to the specific requirements of a particular sociality which are in constant interaction with existent statist frameworks and categorisations of space, identity and permissible actions and mobilities. In introducing the local as a referent for engagement in analysis of borderland perceptions, it positions the spatial and social category as one that is not static, but determined by the subjectivities underlying the varying degrees and natures of quotidian engagement with the space and the various epistemic systems which undergird its construction. In adopting this framework, the local retains its inherent mutability as represented in a multitude of actorial strategies of those seeking to navigate through its consequent economic, social and political circumstances (Brambilla 2015, 26).

On the Local Sites of Enquiry and their Mutable Realities in the Contemporary Political Frame

In the South Asian context, the significance of borders, in terms of the regulatory and delimiting functions they perform, has been the preserve of their modern, postcolonial variance. Prior to that, borders then were not material realities as they are today. Instead they existed either through the territorialized segregation of communities based upon the socio-cultural mores of its dwellers (Ludden 2003, 50) or as recognition of occupation validated through religious customs and sacrifices. Borders in South Asia therefore emerged as the

adapted remnants of colonisation, reconfigured amongst the newly independent states through varying degrees and forms of interaction ranging from regional conflicts over disputed territories as well as bilateral agreements towards the settlement of outstanding border issues. For the most part, the modern history of the subcontinent's borders has been shaped by the state's response to the crises and opportunities presenting themselves at its limits. The border's functions as gateways may be viewed as either exclusionary or inclusionary depending on the positionality of the subject under consideration. For those residing in the borderlands, as represented in critical explications of the border's function, the border is often viewed as an impediment to the subject's social choices and economic pursuits. The new reality of regulations and impeded mobilities goes on to affect the local imagination as well as the socio-cultural practices and norms which can create a sense of belonging for some and a feeling of alienation for others. A subject's position and identity within the state's framework of belonging also determines the extent of admissible political participation whether locally or through formal channels of participation. As a result, the provision of housing and access to education, healthcare, and judicial protection significantly varies between citizens and immigrants. In the case of India's eastern borders with Bangladesh, these identifications continue to persist across generations and gain added weightage under changing political circumstances that seek to base citizenship upon socially ascribed identifications. For instance, Bangladeshi immigrants who had crossed the border during West Pakistani rule during the mid-1960s and settled in parts of West Bengal and Assam still encounter problems that come with the associative identities of the 'Bangladeshi other' in these Indian states. As a result, they are subjected to an ethos of exclusion that is based on their identification under otherized categories such as the 'Muslims immigrants and encroacher'. The ascription of such exclusionary labels are carried out without any consideration of these individuals' ethnic or religious identities or even the circumstances under which they relocated, or even the duration of their stay (Gillian 2002). Therefore, the border also exists as a space of exclusion based upon the operation of discriminatory cultural tropes and malapropisms surrounding cross-border identities. The identity, which the state seeks to insulate against extraneous influences, therefore comes to be defined singularly as a counterpoise to multiple identities of the *other* which are often reduced to particularistic typecasts, the assigning of which are determined by the planes of contention amongst states sharing a border. This effectively reifies this sense of otherness in the local imagination, on the basis of an essentialized and reductionist representation of what constitutes the *other*.

The resultant territorialisation of state authority, along with the identity of its citizens came to inform the nature of dissonances as well as interactions between states and people separated by borders (Hardwick & Mansfield 2009, 387). These rigid conceptualisations of

the border fail to recognize how the 'local' adapts and reacts to these changing conditions. The disjuncture between the state's conceptualisation of territory and the space as constituted through quotidian interactions of its inhabitants often manifests in various forms; ranging from revisionist assertions for secession and autonomy, to more everyday circumventions in collaboration with other local and cross border actors; as well as state actors at lower levels of disaggregation (Jones 2012, 144). To extend the understanding of the border beyond statist apperceptions require it to be viewed as a dynamic space, textured by interactions between the state and the inhabitants of these spaces. The component of the local, encompassing the relationships and perceptions of its actors therefore becomes a necessary inclusion in analyses of spatiality.

The study bases its understanding of the borderland "local" on an analysis of the mechanisms and processes underlying its constitution. It considers the prevalence of security frameworks in statist borderland discourses which overrides local spatialities and interactions in its approximations in lieu of a regulatory stance towards its management (Banerjee 2001). Therefore, to bridge this gap in situating local history within state borderland historiography, this study will extend its analyses towards understanding the changes in local adaptations towards modern statist categorizations of the borderland in order to situate the entry of the state as a phase in local history, which predates the history of the state or the borders they established. Such an analysis views the "local" not only as the object of state action, but as an ever-changing category constituted of individuals and processes borne out of reiterated practices, adapting to the changing circumstances brought forth by the state's interpolation.

The first aspect that the survey explores is "local" perceptions of what constitutes the national, international and the state. The second aspect that the survey explores is the impact of varied geographies and locational circumstance on producing possible differences or convergences in local perceptions.

The first participant group comprised hinterland residents of the district of Bankura. Situated far away from any border, their ontological horizons have been shaped accordingly by this distance away from the primary referents of this particular inquiry. This area is more or less a geographically enclosed space, with little to no dialogue and exchange with the "outside" or "outsiders". The rationale behind this selection was to account for perceptions of the border in local spatialities that do not necessarily interact with the frontier or any of its associated epistemic systems that define appellations of the self and other, which also delimits the permissibility of select mobilities and life processes. Therefore, it can be assumed that ideas regarding the state, the national and the international held by the inhabitants do not converse with regulatory frameworks of the state operational at its borders, and public engagement has for the most part remained confined to local issues.

The second group consisted of participants from the hilly regions of Naxalbari and Kharibari under the Siliguri subdivision, located within the district of Darjeeling in north Bengal. The proximity of these areas to the states of Nepal and Bhutan is often reflected in similarities in their demographic composition and sociocultural milieu reflected
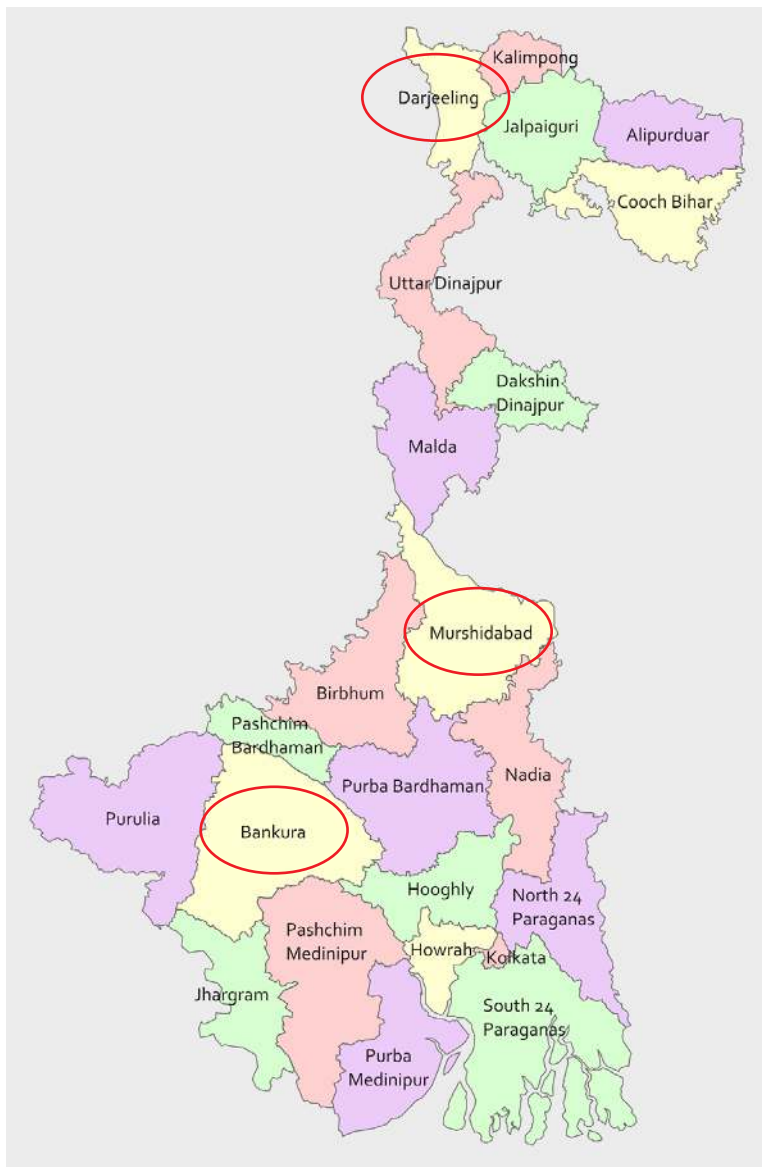

Figure 1. District Map of West Bengal State, India, highlighting districts of Darjeeling, Murshidabad, and Bankura. Source: Antorjal at English Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 2.5, via Wikimedia Commons, modified (red ellipses added).

in ethnic, cultural and linguistic similarities, manifesting in interactions and exchanges in shared spaces of economic and cultural significance such as border markets and sites of worship. The topography of the district flows between small towns and sparsely inhabited stretches of mountainous grasslands. Located on the Eastern Himalayan region, the district lies in close proximity with neighboring hamlets of Nepal which are often connected through linkages straddling economies of tourism and social capital networks of familial ties traversing state borders.

The third constituency consisted of settlers from borderlands of Charaudaynagar, Charparashpara and Pharajipara, under Jalangi police station of Murshidabad, whose political economy of daily existence interrogates borders and territoriality all the time. This site has been a conduit for illegal migration and trade through villages proximate to its borders with Bangladesh. These attempts to evade economic barriers instituted by the states are further expedited by local demands to bypass the inadequacies of public distribution systems at the states' periphery. The site has been a frequent stage of confrontation between the state and livelihoods and life processes that exist in contradistinction with its ambit of permissible mobilities and legitimized identities.

As is evident from their relative distances away from the border, these areas represent three distinct configurations of localized perceptions and practices that have emerged in consonance with the same. These interactions have experienced fluctuations in response to historical, cultural and political transformations, whereby actors and groups negotiating the border in the pursuit of livelihood practices and the maintenance of kinship ties have had to navigate its subsequent impacts on the larger borderscape. Often, these changes have spawned corresponding and conflicting emplacements and temporalities at the local level, in response to statist framings of these limits (Rajaram & Grundy-Warr 2007, xxx). The processes that such changes have given rise to have allowed for these lines to be both reinforced and traversed, thereby establishing a more contextual and fluid rendering of these limits textured by local interactions and experiences. Similarly it has spawned a process of contextual appellations of the self and other as well.

The dichotomies present between the rigid legalistic frameworks for regulation of the state and the ever-changing demands for mobility and transactions of people on either side of the border, and the manner in which the same have been reconfigured in the context of the changing times is a testament to the adaptability of the borderland in the face of the resilience of state power. Similarly, perceptions of the borderland held by groupings that are situated at a distance from these sites also become relevant in understanding the proliferation of statist configurations of spatiality and identity, which constitutes the grounds for its operationalization beyond the formal implementation processes of the state. Given the position of the border as a space that has held relevance in understandings of the

ideas of the self and the nation, these proliferations dictate the manner in which issues and identities emanating from these spaces are perceived and engaged with. Whether it is in determining who constitutes the other, or what is considered legal, explorations into the same must consider the existence of localized replications and enforcements of these processes that are often not confined by the accountability extendable by the state. The tendency that becomes evident from these contestations is that the universalist pretenses of citizenship that underlie constitutionally mandated projects of governance are often overshadowed by populist, majoritarian construals in political discourses on belonging (Yuval-Davis et al 2019, 163). This always leaves open the possibility of violence, oppression and otherization in localized processes as well as collaborative adaptations that do not account for the intricacies of such formal exclusions.

Everyday bordering practices have integrated within forms of governance that manifest in processes and discourses, both formal and social, aimed at controlling diversity and establishing hierarchies of exclusion and exploitation within populations. The proliferation of such processes and perceptions affects migrants and racialized minorities; not only those who are crossing borders through legitimate channels but also for those residing in these border spaces. (Yuval-Davis et al 2019, 162). The creation of these new discourses has impacted upon prevalent social and communal solidarities in India as well.

These processes may be viewed as a reaction towards the states' exclusive control over immigration and integration, which are the lynchpins of its policies on citizenship. In India, the idea of who is a citizen has witnessed transformations in recent years. The term has come to be defined along lines of a shared cultural telos of the demographic majority, the Hindus, which has been bulwarked in ambiguous categorizations of a national community based on the ideals of a 'Hindu Rashtra' (Hindu State) as enunciated by state political projects. The politico-legal expressions of citizenship have also undergone transformations to encompass its applications to particular cultural and religious communities that are separated by borders (Hämäläinen & Truett 2011, 348), even at the cost of alienating those who have resided within state borders since their establishment. The proposed nationwide implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Bill in tandem with the National Register of Citizens (2019) which seeks to enumerate qualifications for citizenship on the basis of an individual's time of entry into the Indian state with added safeguards and relaxations for those who are Hindus has resulted in the spread of anxiety of uprooting and violence in the West Bengal borderlands whose history has been shaped by different waves of migration since 1947. These changes have been exacerbated by the proliferation of a political ideology of exceptionalism based upon religious identities. This has resulted in localized reversals of interdependences that pre-date the border, which originate from a shared history that was fractured upon the establishment of the state border and its epistemic systems

of authoritative regulations and control. The following study was conducted in 2016; however inklings of such changing perceptions and shifts in older patterns of appellations were already noted during the surveys. These changes in the context of the selected borderscapes, subsequent to the ratification of these policies and their impacts upon local perceptions demand a further exploration which the authors seek to conduct subsequent to the normalisation of extenuating circumstances of travel restrictions since 2020.

Explorations into Local Perceptions of the Borderland

The first question (Table 1) of the study focused on local perceptions of the international border. The majority of the participants across the three districts defined the international border as a line separating two states. As an outcome of Murshidabad's proximity to the international border separating India and Bangladesh, all participants from the site compared the international border to a line separating two states, with one respondent likening the international border to an *aal*, that is a bund or raised pathways enclosing individual agricultural landholdings that are often used as signifiers of the limits of individual possessions over land at the local level. Respondents from Darjeeling evinced similar perceptions of territorial demarcation. However, 65 percent of them described the international border in terms of natural and man-made features which either demarcated the limits of state territoriality such as border pillars, wire-fences or noticeboards stating jurisdictional limits, or acted as natural barriers against local, cross-border mobilities such as rivers or forests. The perceptions of the international border for a significant portion of the respondents from the interiors of the Bankura district were confined to its existence as a line separating two states, commonly alluding in their responses to the international borders separating India and Pakistan or India and China.

While the broader imagination of the international border remained relatively similar, the particularities of localized perceptions as stated above is indicative of the different ways in which the subaltern experiences the frontier and the spatialities it originates. For instance, perceptions of the

border held by respondents from Bankura mirrored their distance from them. Their mentions of the international borders between India and its neighbors, primarily those with which it shares a history of conflict, indicate that in absence of direct access to borders, their perceptions have largely been textured by prevalent political narratives on border conflicts and regional bilateralism accessed through news media. In contrast, the general perceptions of the border drawn from participants from Darjeeling and Murshidabad demonstrate that physical objects located at the borderline become central to their experience of its materiality.

The proliferation of statist, security-centric perspectives on the border were discernible in a majority of responses drawn from the sites of study. The impacts of the territorialization of South Asian identities by its many partitions have left an indelible impact on Indian politics and statecraft. The necessity of regulation and control of movements and identifications have for long been the mainstay of Indian parliamentary politics and correspondingly reflected in the state's securitization of its frontiers. This idea of regulation and control of state frontiers has had a considerable impact upon local interactions with the border and how border residents view the issue.

In the context of this survey, the respondents were asked about their opinions regarding the regulation of international borders shared with neighboring states, and a majority of responses across all three study sites were in support of such a regulation, stating it as a necessity to ensure their protection from 'external threats' (Table 2). However, the percentage of interviewees acknowledging the necessity for border control measures fluctuated from Bankura (53 percent) to Darjeeling (40 percent) and Murshidabad (97 percent). The responses created a recurring participant narrative articulating the need to secure national territories against any form of intrusion or circumvention. A majority of respondents associated socially disruptive or illegal activities with the border space, and sometimes such perceptions were extended in their otherization of those who resided on the other side. These localized perceptions ranged from generalized associations of border spaces with cross-border tensions, illicit economies and by extension considering the external other as terrorists, infiltrators or thieves.

Table 1. "What does the international boundary represent?"

Responses / Districts	Border between states	Line separating two states	Boundary as denoted by objects	No idea	Total
Bankura	18 (60%)	3 (10%)	4 (13%)	5 (17%)	30 (100)
Darjeeling	0	12 (32%)	24 (65%)	1 (3%)	37 (100)
Murshidabad	0	70 (100%)	0	0	70 (100)
Total	18	85	28	6	137

However, underlying the assumptions of national security, unease over adverse impacts of border control was also reflected in the responses of the participants. In fact, every respondent who took part in the study agreed that the state's surveilling and regulatory mechanisms were anathema to borderland residents and that the human costs of border control have disproportionately affected their livelihoods and life processes. Around 37 percent of the total respondents from Bankura and 60

percent from Darjeeling were of the opinion that stringent border controls have negatively impacted cross-border interactions, communications as well as economic exchanges that its residents have been reliant on. For instance, respondents from Darjeeling stated that the state's control over borders have impacted and to an extent limited familial networks and cultural bonds between communities that came to be separated and bounded by the modern state. This has similarly impacted networks of dependence, both social and economic that have historically undergirded borderland relationships and their quotidian interactions.

The respondents from the study site in Murshidabad were more vociferous about the human costs of border control and recounted personal experiences and local accounts of harassment, punishment and even loss of life often justified as necessary by assigned authorities in preserving the sanctity of state limits. These perceptions are indicative of their own personal and shared anxieties in having to regularly encounter situations whereby their identities and intentions are often scrutinized by the state as a consequence of the liminality of their socio-spatial existence. Respondents from this site of study recognized the need for a heightened state presence at the border given its significance as one of the primary referents of national security. But they considered the burden of repeated validation of identity equally problematic. Responses across all districts were, however, restricted with regard to explorations of possible reformations and relaxations in border control that could balance statist considerations of security with individual desires for privacy. In the few responses that explored possible changes, the articulation of grievances appears to be framed along lines of localized practicalities that prompted engagement with issues or conflicts of the local borderland based on their quotidian demands of existence, which often came across as obvious adaptations that hardly warrant any conscious articulation.

Interactions and opportunities assume centrality in under-standings of borderland dynamics. The state's borders are often the facilitator and equal parts disruptor of institutions and practices that shape interactions between spaces on either side. The study explored notions and practices of dependence existent at the study sites with regard to their perceptions regarding borders and their interactions with the other side (Table 3). The participants were asked whether their neighboring countries impacted their daily lives in any way. Similar to the pattern of the previous response, the survey recorded a greater number of respondents who answered in the affirmative as one

Table 2. "Is regulation of the international border important?"

Responses Districts	Essential	Necessary but should not be stringent	No Idea	Total
Bankura	16 (53%)	11 (37%)	3 (10%)	30 (100)
Darjeeling	15 (40%)	22 (60%)	0	37 (100)
Murshidabad	68 (97%)	2 (3%)	0	70 (100)
Total	99	35	3	137

Table 3. "Do neighboring countries impact upon quotidian life cycles?"

Responses Districts	Plays an important role	Does not play any role	Not Sure/ Maybe	No idea	Total
Bankura	8 (27%)	17 (57%)	4 (13%)	1 (3%)	30 (100)
Darjeeling	20 (54%)	17 (46%)	0	0	37 (100)
Murshidabad	53 (76%)	17 (24%)	0	0	70 (100)
Total	81	34	21	1	137

moves closer to the borders. The percentage of positive responses increased from 27 percent in Bankura to over 54 percent in Darjeeling, reaching the highest (76 percent) in Murshidabad.

It was noteworthy that respondents from all three districts who answered in the affirmative articulated interactions that were confined mostly to the economic role of the neighboring state and international markets, which locally manifests in the form of trade and import of inexpensive foreign goods. However, the variations of such affirmations were revealing of the differential impacts of proximity on respondents' perceptions of the border and its associated processes. Respondents from Bankura remained vague in their articulations of the perceivable economic impacts of the neighboring state. However, responses registered from Darjeeling and Murshidabad were revealing of a more layered apperception of the same. For instance, respondents from Darjeeling referred to the economic impacts of their proximity to the border, presenting itself in the form of local border markets and also their shared cultural and linguistic affinities with Nepal. Similarly, respondents from Murshidabad identified Bangladeshi markets as cheap sources of raw materials and agricultural labour accessible through land entry points lining the border between the two countries. The responses gathered from Darjeeling and Murshidabad on the influence of neighboring states on their immediate local socialities and economies interestingly stated that its derivative benefits were an outcome of a secure border and not its absence.

As stated earlier, the border both permits and restricts certain mobilities and interactions. Understanding cross-border dependencies in the light of their subversion of the state's regulatory and qualificatory frameworks also runs the risk of obscuring an analysis of their adaptations to these changes as well. The study explored the localized perceptions of the economic benefits of a borderless existence (Table 4). The survey questioned whether the border had been a facilitator or an inhibitor to local economic processes and access to cross-border economic prospects. The responses on this particular aspect of the study revealed that some respondents across the three districts viewed the international border as a necessary buffer against the uncertainties of the market, depending on their relation to the border. Respondents from both Bankura and Darjeeling (50 percent and 54 percent respectively) were in support of a secure and sanitized border as a mitigating measure against the unregulated movement of illegal commodities, inequality of trade, human trafficking and border violence that bear a direct impact upon the mobilities and interactions their livelihoods depend upon. A majority of the respondents from Murshidabad (60 percent) stated that the absence or presence of international border would have no impact on their income or livelihood in any way whatsoever. The apperceptions of the respondents in regard to this part of the survey were measured largely upon pecuniary considerations and therefore these figures cannot be extended to an argument for the presence of a moral economy of cross-border dependences.

Nevertheless, two important narratives emerged from the survey. First, the prospects of a borderless economy were not necessarily welcome as respondents were unable to calculate gains or losses in concrete terms. Similarly, in Murshidabad, where a majority of the respondents claimed they would be unaffected by the presence or absence of a border, they found it difficult to state the configurations of a balance that would be equitable to prospects of both economic and border security. The nature of responses brings under scrutiny the uniformity of the impacts of globalization on the recession of borders. These local narratives are revealing of the state's continuing regulatory presence as the sole organizer of economic and social relations. Its recession has, therefore, remained obscured from these spaces, as the absence of the state remains an unthinkable condition, whether in terms of the cognizable implications of the same on local security or in terms of an alternative schema of socioeconomic organization at the local level.

Opinions on the neighboring country varied across the different study sites (Table 5). The survey's explorations into local opinions of people from their neighboring countries show that 37 percent of the respondents from Bankura and 54 percent from Darjeeling specified that they perceived people from the neighboring state as friendly if they were culturally congruent whether through shared beliefs or languages. In contrast, all the interviewees from Murshidabad articulated their differentiation along state identifications of legal and illegal immigrants in the context of this question. They stated that while legal immigrants were socially acceptable, illegal immigrants if encountered were to be shunned for their likely involvement in anti-social activities

Table 4. "Does the international border impact upon economic pursuits?"

Responses / Districts	Earn Profit	Incur Loss	Both Profit and Loss	Would not affect	Don't know	Total
Bankura	6 (20%)	15 (50%)	3 (10%)	4 (13%)	2 (7%)	30 (100)
Darjeeling	0	20 (54%)	17 (46%)	0	0	37 (100)
Murshidabad	28 (40%)	0	0	42 (60%)	0	70 (100)
Total	34	35	20	46	2	137

Table 5. "How is the identity of the cross-border inhabitant perceived?"

Responses / Districts	Friendly	Non-Friendly	Not Sure	No Idea	Total
Bankura	11 (37%)	2 (6%)	6 (20%)	11 (37%)	30 (100)
Darjeeling	20 (54%)	17 (46%)	0	0	37 (100)
Murshidabad	0	0	70 (100)	0	70 (100)
Total	101	19	6	11	137

The perception of the outsider as a threat was found to be expressed commonly in responses from all the three districts surveyed (similar to the perception encountered in the first question). Although cultural assimilation and legal identity were acknowledged as prerequisites for the extension of local acceptance, their perceptions of immigrants in general remained underlined by notions of distrust and suspicion. In Bankura and Darjeeling, a margin of 5 percent and 10 percent respectively was recorded in responses varying between conditional acceptance and absolute rejection of the presence of immigrants in their immediate locale. And as stated above, respondents from Murshidabad consistently rejected illegal immigrants and considered them a threat to national security.

Elaborating on the response patterns elicited by the survey, it may be argued that these local

perspectives in some aspects confirm the impact of international boundaries in defining identities. However, the magnitude of such impacts on the perceptions of the border is dependent upon proximity to the border itself. As the findings of this study have shown, in areas categorized as 'borderlands', the international boundary determines upon the validity of identities central to residence and livelihood practices of its local inhabitants. However, in spaces situated at a distance away from the border these identifications serve as the foundations of socio-cultural differentiations between residents and outsiders, citizens and encroachers, etc. Borders, therefore, invariably impact notions of citizenship.

The opinions the survey gathered can be summed up into a list of attributes of citizenship as expressed by interviewees. While respondents from Bankura specified permanent residence and the ability to vote as characteristic features of citizenship, those from Darjeeling and Murshidabad districts considered a sense of patriotism, alongside the possession of necessary documentation, citizenship by birth, long-term residence and participation in law and administration as important qualifiers for identity as a citizen of the country. Quite different from the traditional definition that sees citizenship as a congregation of status and role in society, a legal and formal understanding of citizenship seems to have taken root among the respondents across three districts as most participants described citizenship in terms of legal identity validated by the state's provision of certain documents. And within this broader category of responses the emphasis of local narratives on possession of legal documents came across as a fundamental requirement. Since possession of voter identity cards or ration cards formed the standard identification mark of citizenship in most responses, it was not difficult to ascertain the significance of the possession of these documents for the local populations in securing accesses to rights and privileges accruing to citizenship.

On whether the status of citizenship required explicit differentiation from the status of alien, a striking uniformity of opinion was noted across three districts (Table 6). A substantial proportion of the respondents rather than making any differentiation between the terms "citizenship" and "citizen" went on to define the word

"alien" in terms of the absence of their state's recognition. In Murshidabad, where the highest number of responses was recorded, the participants frequently stated that they considered people from India as citizens while people from other countries were aliens. Some even clarified that anyone who was located outside national borders ought to be considered an alien. However, variations also need to be noted. It was surprising to see that in Bankura where many had earlier said that they considered permanent residence to be the prime marker of citizenship, a small percentage reflected these aforementioned trends in responses from Murshidabad. Similarly, in Darjeeling, the participants stated that it was difficult to distinguish between citizens and aliens because of the relatively frequent cross-border travel to neighboring countries of Nepal and Bhutan as well as their cultural and linguistic similarities which often obscure such territorialized differentiations of identity.

The larger picture that came to fore was that for these respondents living on the edges of society or community, differentiation from the alien was not merely an intuitive differentiation but existed as a practical tool of legitimation of their demands on the state. References to permanent residence or preferential treatment of citizens in allocation of privileges and benefits allude to the fact that their access to rights and protection from the state is highly conditional upon their recognition as full members of society and even that recognition has to be secured through constant negotiations with the state as well as one's immediate locale. As mentioned in the preceding section, the relative ease of cross-border travel in areas within the district of Darjeeling, owing to vast stretches of high altitude, forested and unguarded sectors of its borders with Nepal and Bhutan complicated the demarcation between citizen and alien, indicating that they tend to take international boundary and place of residence as central to determination of identity as citizen or alien.

The study in its attempts to map the significance of citizenship in determining the outcome of their lives asked its participants about its impacts on their lived experiences and interactions with state. A majority of the respondents from Bankura (70 percent) and all respondents from Darjeeling (100 percent) and Murshidabad (100 percent) claimed citizenship to be a significant facet of their lives, primarily alluding to the accesses to institutions, benefits and rights it allows them to secure from the state. The interviewees from Murshidabad and Darjeeling added that citizenship was of utmost importance because of the identification documents required during cross-border travel to Nepal and Bangladesh respectively whether as a part of their livelihood practices or for the maintenance of kinship ties across the border. Also, for respondents from Murshidabad, proof of citizenship constituted a significant aspect of their lives whereby they were insulated from the state's regulatory mechanisms as well as local processes of othering.

Table 6. "How significant is citizenship?"

Responses Districts	Very Important	Not Important	No Idea	Total
Bankura	21 (70%)	5 (17%)	4 (13%)	30 (100)
Darjeeling	37 (100%)	0	0	37 (100)
Murshidabad	70 (100%)	0	0	70 (100)
Total	128	5	4	137

For the interviewees from Bankura and Murshidabad district, the legal identity of citizenship was important for securing state welfare as a majority of the respondents were dependent upon state rations and other benefits (most of them were dependent on state facilities). Additionally, the right to vote was often employed as a bargaining chip in interactions with elected representatives of the state in securing employment, monetary rewards and other fringe benefits. Citizens who were dependent on regular border crossings as a part of their livelihoods stated the significance of having state identification in legalizing their identity while traversing borders, thereby limiting the possibilities of any form of injury or persecution.

The final inquiries of the study were centered on people's perceptions of the state, that is, how the state is viewed in popular renderings drawn forth through experiences of their interactions with the same in both direct and indirect manner (Table 7). In the study's preceding inquires the respondents had indirectly referred to the state as a provider of security, protection, welfare benefits and other services. These inquiries also identified points of friction, especially in activities involving permissible cross-border travel, cross-border economic exchanges or even encounters with bureaucratic hurdles in the procurement of official documents necessary for securing basic securities and welfare from the state.

Therefore, when respondents were asked their opinion in this regard, two contrasting perspectives emerged. Across the districts of Bankura (67 percent) and Darjeeling (43 percent) the state was viewed as a corrupt establishment

and as an instrument of coercion characterized by a structural apathy towards the economically marginalized in their functioning. In addition, only 10 percent of the total respondents from Murshidabad mentioned political corruption as one of the defining characteristics of the state. The remaining majority viewed the state in a positive light, with 90 percent of the total respondents claiming that they viewed the state as a benevolent institution. Only 43 percent and 20 percent of the total respondents from Darjeeling and Bankura respectively viewed the state as a 'useful' institution.

This deep divide in perception of the state can be attributed to the impacts of geographical variation and subsequently divergent experiences in interactions with the state, factors which have figured in previous responses as well. While in interiors of Bankura, local grievances were directed at the state's unequal distribution schemes and the high-handedness of government officials, grievances of local respondents from Darjeeling appeared to be centered on the prevalence of intrusive border patrolling methods which have disrupted familial ties as well as informal cross-border economies that a significant proportion of the local populace depends upon. At the same time, respondents from the same district who viewed the state as a useful establishment referred to a more utilitarian understanding of the state in its performance of certain integral security, economic and social functions. On the other hand, given that respondents from Murshidabad reside in a space which has been frequently reported as a conduit for illegal entry into the state, it must be considered that their expressed opinions are to an extent impressed upon by an underlying fear of being reported to the local administration.

The final point of inquiry of the study was to engage with the role of the state in the construction of self-identity (Table 8). A majority of respondents from Murshidabad (86 percent) claimed that the state played an important role in shaping their identities. On the contrary, only 59 percent of the respondents from Darjeeling and 43 percent from Bankura acknowledged the state's role in constructing their identities.

These contrasting views across three districts on the state's perceived role in the construction of the identity of its inhabitants was interesting to note, especially in the context of the previously explored local articulations of what constituted citizenship. In the borderland areas of Murshidabad, identity documents issued by the state were necessary for availing of legal and administrative facilities and protection against local persecution. Whereas for respondents from Darjeeling, the denial of certain services for many employed in foreign countries like Nepal strengthened previously held perceptions of their own identities in line with the state's ascription of citizenship, which was a shift from localized identifications and appellations

Table 7. "How do you view the state?"

Responses Districts	Positive	Negative	No Idea	Total
Bankura	6 (20%)	20 (67%)	4 (13%)	30 (100)
Darjeeling	16 (43%)	16 (43%)	5 (14%)	37 (100)
Murshidabad	63 (90%)	7 (10%)	0	70 (100)
Total	85	43	9	137

Table 8. "What is the state's role in the construction of identity?"

Responses Districts	Important role	No role	No Idea	Total
Bankura	13 (43%)	7 (23%)	10 (34%)	30 (100)
Darjeeling	22 (59%)	14 (38%)	1 (3%)	37 (100)
Murshidabad	60 (86%)	10 (14%)	0	70 (100)
Total	95	31	11	137

based on a shared cultural or linguistic identity. In Bankura, a majority of the respondents identified the provision of government services and jobs as the most common way in which the state shaped their identity as citizens.

The emphasis that local articulations of belonging are based on legal categorizations of state citizenship was discernible in the responses gathered across the three districts. Respondents often stated that accesses to government welfare and to legal, administrative and financial institutions were benefits reserved only for citizens. In their responses, respondents viewed access to the same, which often falters at the borders, as a decisive factor between those who belong and those who do not.

These local perceptions of the border are borne out of quotidian necessities of its inhabitants to navigate through the changing conditions of life, brought forth by the state's implementation of new policies and categorizations towards the management of such liminal zones. The lives of its inhabitants and their perceptions of the spatial limits of their mobilities, interactions and relationships across the border are continually reconfigured in the state's attempts in ironing out the historicity of their interactions and inter-dependences with communities across the frontier under the neat re-conceptualisations of national territory.

Conclusion

As is evident from the results of this study, this disjuncture between the state's conceptualisation of territory and the space as constituted through quotidian interactions of its inhabitants often manifests in various forms. It is contingent upon their geographical location as well as how their material circumstances condition their understanding and interactions with both local and state categories of belonging. Therefore, there arises a necessity to view the relationality between statist conceptualizations and localized framings of border spatiality and identities as one that undergoes frequent reconfigurations depending on the location of the respondents. The balance between these two dissonant frameworks is one that is continually renegotiated through interactions between the state and the inhabitants of these spaces. The interactions of these two dissonant framings of spaces are not always defined by the power differential that rests in advantage with the state, but also in the local's ability to negotiate these modulations to the circumstances and necessities underlying its existence.

The study shows how ordinary citizens constitute their own imaginations of the social categories that make their lives intelligible. One crucial objective was to understand how individuals and communities proximate to the border engage with these identifications; and how those distant from it form their perceptions of these existences. In fact, the study found neither a wholesale questioning of the realist ontology nor an intrinsic rejection of national

security in local narratives drawn from the survey. However, unlike the state's rigid formulations of the doxa and coda of national security, people were often circumstantially compelled to attend to their own compulsions and anxieties. If there is enough evidence of the need to live orderly lives, there is also the acknowledgement of risk, since the perspective of the state and the people would not necessarily coincide.

Even those who live on borders both accept and transgress the line. The border has become a part of their sociality and an unmistakable element of their collective identity. Is there any principled position to define identity and relate to others across borders? Again, there is no abiding evidence to substantiate an argument with any compulsive move to define identity in relations to the other across the border and no specific conclusion can be drawn in this regard. The "other" is not a fixed category. It varies across space and time. With some, ties of ethnicity or kinship take precedence, whereas for others the exigencies of economic competition underwrite considerations for interactions or otherization. The 'other' can be as much a political construct as social and popular perceptions emanating from the respondents in West Bengal betray no principled consistency in their understanding. In such a complex situation, should a pattern guide us in our efforts to map attitudes on the meanings of the international and the national? We are making the argument that for this present study at least, a deductive theorization is unhelpful.

The 'local', which is constituted of interactive and interpretative frameworks that affect the actions and choices of its constituent actors, is often overlooked as a key element in the states' rendering of the border. The state tends to view the space and all policies towards it through considerations reducible to certain qualifiers contributing to the establishment and determining the preservation of its own authority. In its engagements with the borderland local, the state dissociates local narratives and intentionality of the actors shaping the borderland narrative. The histories of India's Western and Eastern borderscapes have been one mired in narratives of violence and displacements, often interpreted as the natural outcome of the territorial demarcation of cultural borders that the partitions of 1947 and 1971 brought about. The exercise of unqualified authority with regard to the maintenance and regulation of the border and its associated issues or conflicts have been widely accepted as practical corollaries of the state. Such a perspective neglects the existence of the 'local' as an active category in itself, organized out of the experiences and perceptions of its constitutive actors. This obfuscation of local perception in mainstream discourses related to borders and borderlands and possible steps towards initiating a discussion about the same independent of statist considerations are two issues that the study has to address. This study offers limited knowledge about local perspective due to geographical and language constraints. However, two concluding observations can be made with regard to the questions raised at the outset of the study.

First, there is no straight answer as to whether the 'local' holds an alternative spatial imagination as claimed by critical IR scholars. The study did not provide any concrete evidence of valourization of a transborder community or any desire for borderless existence. Instead, there were many interviewees who spoke of the usefulness of the border to their livelihoods, made a distinction between legal and illegal immigrants and demanded preferential treatment over non-citizens.

Similarly, there also exists a considerable disjuncture between the nationalist conceptualization of borders, territory and security and its more localized framings, which range from an elementary understanding of borders to resenting stringent border controls or enlisting cross-border terrorism, illegal immigration, theft and trafficking as foremost security concerns. Also, the local itself is not a homogenous category and their perceptions are molded by geographical realities and professional interests. For instance, while respondents from Darjeeling and Murshidabad (both border regions) differed on the stringency of the border controls largely due to its differential impact on their livelihood practices, both agreed on the acute importance of citizenship and state in their daily lives as opposed to respondents from Bankura. It was also interesting to note that respondents from interiors of Bankura were more articulate with their views of legal and illegal immigrants than respondents from Murshidabad who encounter the border on a daily basis and accord a high importance to their legal identity.

Therefore, it can be argued that unlike national construals, narratives at the local level derived from the lived experiences of its inhabitants are more representative of ground realities. These narratives are a product of local patterns of interactions and exchanges within a conflict environment. Contrasting national construals which are primarily constructed in order to justify policies and validate state intervention, local narratives underlying prevalent issues are neither static nor uniform and keep developing over different time periods. Following on from above, it also needs to be noted that the local is an active and diverse category organized out of the experiences, interactions and perceptions of its constitutive actors and any discussion about local perspectives should acknowledge and attend to the diversity underlying the category.

On the second question of whether locals are routinely socialized into the ideas imposed by policy elites, the study indicated towards an adaptive capacity of the local to state policies and practices. Coercive state policies, intrusive surveillance mechanisms, repeated questioning of identity, combined with deprivation and unequal distribution of rights and privileges, have reinforced the pre-existing sense of other created by sociocultural, economic differences and geographical conditions. The "local" across the three districts pointed out the adverse impact of the above factors on their social and economic life. However, no one sought radical reorganization of the state and on the contrary appeared to adapt to the state-imposed realities by embracing their identity as citizens. Their assertion of legal identity as Indian citizens appeared to be an effective tool to both negotiate and/or evade conditions of dispossession and marginalization. And although the politics of citizenship was not registered in their understanding, differentiating themselves from "aliens" on the basis of residence enabled them to legitimize their claims on the state's valid members of the community.

These findings are representative of the adaptability of the borderland. However, it extends this understanding to not only include conventional framings of the same in terms of subversion of state regulations and physical boundaries but also in terms of acceptance of the state in certain contexts as a necessity even when it stands in negation to their historical and cultural moorings that are beyond the purview of the control of state regulation. The liminality of these zones is, therefore, harnessed by both the state and local borderland actors in their attempts to achieve often antithetical objectives. However, their interactions and perceptions of the other remain rooted within categorizations and modes of action and interaction, informed by their own specific positionality vis-à-vis the border. In most instances, as elucidated in the study above, the state's efforts continue to be motivated by inductive rationalizations of action and intervention, often justified on grounds of development and security. Similarly, the local inhabitants continue to find new ways to navigate through these new limitations or conditions which are enacted by the state on their lives. Often, these framings intersect, leading to conflict or stricter containment, whereas most of the time, they continue to operate on parallel tracks, continually reconfiguring their interactions and perceptions in response to the impositions and changes in the state's qualificatory schematic as a means to sustain this delicately balanced and proximate separation.

Additional Information

Notes:

1. We consider the local not only as a spatially defined demographic category, but also as a set of processes and perceptions constituting a miscible category straddling the social, economic and political paradigms of exchanges and interactions, both within the group and beyond it with other entities, more notably in the context of this study, the state and the border.

2. The respondents were all inhabitants of the localities surveyed and belonged to mostly lower middle to lower income groups. The educational qualifications of the respondents were not taken as a requirement guiding selection for interview, but income was selected as the prime indicator. The survey elicited a sex ratio of sixty males for every forty female respondents interviewed across the three chosen districts. Male respondents were mostly agriculturalists, small traders, mill workers; whereas the women were primarily engaged in the upkeep of the household. All interviews were in either Bengali or Hindi in the districts of Murshidabad and Bankura. In Darjeeling, Nepali and Hindi were the languages of communication. All interviewers were locals and the interpretation of the transcriptions of narratives was conducted in consultation with their understanding of the implications of localized usages. There were interactions whereby the participants refused to consent to the survey due to apprehensions surrounding the recording of their opinions despite the pledged confidentiality of the exercise. Despite such hesitations participants engaged in conversation which flowed unimpeded and constitutes a supplementary source of information for this study.

3. Newman defines borders as "the process of bounding, drawing lines around spaces and groups, is a dynamic phenomenon, of which the boundary line is, more often than not, simply the tangible and visible feature which represents the course and intensity of the bounding process at any particular point in time and space. A deeper understanding of the bounding process requires an integration of the different types and scales of boundaries into a hierarchical system in which the relative impact of these lines on the people, groups and nations can be conceptualized as a single process" (Newman 2003: 134).

4. A similar view comes from Nimmi Kurian. In her words, "A geopolitics of knowledge has closely accompanied the geopolitics of borders, often mimicking reasons of the state. For from offering alternative imaginaries, mainstream IR has largely tended to faithfully mirror the 'cartographic anxiety' of the state. The mimetic nature of formal research has meant that many of these questions have been studied in fractured frames, with scholarship often taking the cue from statist frames. It has been disinterested in the everyday struggles and contestations of the borderlanders, preferring instead the esoteric diversions of systemic battles that structuralism wages. A politicomilitary reading of border landscapes is conspicuous by what it leaves out of its research remit; that there is alongside an anthropology, a history and a sociology of borders to negotiate" (Nimmi Kurian 2014, 146).

5. Raffestin says that the construction of territory is the outcome of territoriality. He defines territoriality as "the ensemble of relations that a society maintains with exteriority and alterity for the satisfaction of its needs, towards the end of attaining the greatest possible autonomy compatible with resources of the system" (Raffestin 2012, 121).

6. Critical geopolitics and border studies have spawned an astonishingly large literature. The works of Agnew, David Newman, Dalby, Toal, Spark, Sassen, Rumford, Paasi and Chaturvedi, among several others, stand out. For further readings, refer to Secor et al (2015); Agnew et al (2007); Sharpe et al (2013).

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