1 Introduction: Experiencing Pamiri Lifeworlds

In all honesty, my PhD research began somewhat haphazardly. With the COVID-19 pandemic still lingering in the air, and travel restrictions remaining very much in place, I was unsure when (or even if) I could embark on fieldwork. I had accepted the task to research matters relating to Pamir, a transborder region in the heights of Central Asia, but I had little opportunity to travel there. Weighing-up my options, I contacted my dear friend and colleague, Fatima, who put me in touch with her brother, Nazar, residing in London.[1] While the travel restrictions sadly threw any hope of reimbursement out of the window, I could at the very least travel to my home country, of which London is (still) the capital. With very little preparation, I set-out on an early-morning British Airways flight to London City and was at the door of the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) within the day.

Not far from Kings Cross, IIS is a key knowledge centre for the global Ismaili Muslim Jamat[2] housed in the Aga Khan Centre. The Jamat, a multilingual, supranational community spanning more than 25 countries across the world, looks towards IIS for current scholarship on matters pertaining to Ismaili and Shia Islam, mainly using theological, historical methodologies. In addition to the publication of countless edited volumes, articles, and monographs, IIS offers graduate programs in religious education for secondary teachers (STEP) and Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH). It is, in short, an academic institution which facilitates not only the scholarship of Ismaili Studies, but also the coming together of Ismaili Muslims from all reaches of the Jamat. It was for this reason that I had come to the IIS: there are many students and staff members coming from Pamir.

Walking past the ornate, mesh metal grating which covered the clear glass windows, I entered the automatic doors to a cool, stylish lobby with low lighting. Nazar, who I had never met before, was waiting there for me patiently. In his mid-40s, Nazar originated from Khorog, the administrative capital of Gorno-Badakhshon Autonomous Oblast (GBAO), where I would later spend close to a year. Having left Tajikistan many years ago, Nazar works at IIS and was kind enough to show me around. While the building was very empty due to most people working from home, Nazar gave me a quick tour of the vacant offices and classrooms and I was reminded that, in addition to the pandemic, there were no students there cur-

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1 The names of all interlocutors have been changed in this book to provide anonymity.

2 Jamat is the term used in English in official correspondence of the Ismaili Imamat to denote the global congregation of Nizari-Ismaili Shia Muslims. While similar in pronunciation, *jamoat* is the translation of Jamat in Tajik, the state language of Tajikistan, and is reproduced in Shughni language.

rently because the term had not yet started. Despite the lack of life, the lofty ceilings and chic glass doors gave IIS the sense of grandeur it so rightly deserved.

After walking around several floors and inspecting the library, study rooms, and social areas, we settled in one of the meeting rooms, which could be reserved through a touch screen beside the door. With mugs of coffee in hand, Nazar and I sat and chatted about life in Khorog. Having left his hometown many years ago, eventually landing in IIS in the early 2000s, Nazar was quick to offer a critical, at times cutting perspective on his own Pamiri community. One point Nazar made stuck out and was to become pivotal, not only to my PhD research, but my whole understanding of history:

> In GBAO, there is no past. Writing was not part of our tradition, most people were illiterate. Therefore, history only goes back maybe 100 years max.. It's all about today, the present.[3]

Nazar's argument, as I understood it, was that because there were no written historical sources, at least in Pamir languages, the history of the region was not preserved and gradually eroded over time. While it appears on the surface that Nazar is criticising the illiteracy of generations before him, favouring written, material documentation over oral historical practices, Nazar highlights the importance of language in the preservation of history. With his words hanging in the air, some questions first came into my head: how was this history preserved in spite of a limited written tradition in Pamir languages? Who preserved this history? What role do local languages play in the drafting of a history of Pamir? What are other localised perspectives on the history of Pamir? As I will go on to discuss in the chapters to follow, while Nazar's statement articulates the difficulty of piecing together a history of Pamir due to the lack of written manuscripts in Pamir languages, it points towards the importance of oral sources in lieu of written sources, which I argue is accompanied by material objects which not only contextualise oral narrations, but also preserve memory when it is not always possible to speak.

Nazar's statement followed me throughout my fieldwork, as I, months later, made the arduous journey to the so-called Roof of the World. My first sight of Pamir was from the window of a dusty Landcruiser, tired from the long drive from Dushanbe to Kulob.[4] Sitting on the right-hand side in the middle of the

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3 Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of interview in English with Nazar in London.

4 Place names in Tajikistan and Afghanistan follow official translations into English respectively. Historical place names and names of historical figures are written according to the ALA-LC transliteration system for Persian.

car, thankfully not the very back as this was considered to be the most unpleasant spot, I caught my first glimpse of the River Panj and Afghanistan on the other side as we headed to the centre of Darvoz, having just passed the checkpoint to GBAO. It was October 2021 and the Taliban had recently seized power, leading to tightened controls along the border. As we drove further, my attention was often drawn away from the striking autumnal colours and mudbrick houses on the Afghan side, to the young border patrol soldiers walking along the dusty, aged road. I thought about the things these young soldiers must have seen, being perhaps the closest people in Tajikistan to the events happening over there.

While this road, connecting GBAO to the capital of Dushanbe, is often credited to the Soviets in their extensive campaign of infrastructural development, the route itself stretches along the River Panj and connects many villages and small settlements, pre-dating the nation states and borders which exist today on its path. While the Soviets drilled into the stone of the mountains and smoothed the way, the Pamir Highway was not necessarily a Soviet invention but was rather a series of smaller routes which the Soviets connected and materialised comprehensively into one very, very long road. Pathways (Saxer 2016), etched into the mountains by the feet of those who trod and continue to tread them, represent the experiences of life in this harsh mountainous environment, born out of necessity for connection despite tricky terrain. The Dushanbe-Khorog Road and its continuation to the Kyrgyz border, often referred to simply as *pund* (Engl.: the road) in Shughni, represents adaptation and development, literally built upon by the Soviets who brought their knowledge of engineering and construction, but also a foreign political ideology, all sold as a concept of *"sovremennost'"* (Engl.: modernity). Even today, the road is being rejuvenated by Chinese investment (and Chinese workers), again bringing a new knowledge of infrastructure, but also representing a different repertoire of development and how life should be lived. Building on McBrien (2008, 2009) who stresses the multiple modernities at play in post-Soviet Central Asia, Mostowlanksy (2017a) takes this road as an example of how such multiple modernities in addition to the Soviet *sovremennost*, for example the ideology of Aga Khan IV, the late religious leader of the Nizari-Ismaili Shia Muslims, are entangled in the materiality and connectivity which the road makes possible.

As the night drew in and we slowly approached Khorog, we passed through one last settlement, Yomj. The passenger beside me leant over and pointed out of the window, towards the dim lights in the pitch-black night:

> Here, the river is very narrow and there are many rocks. Before, we could talk to people on the other side. You would have to shout a little because of the noise of the water, but it was

no problem to have a conversation. Now, our government says we are not allowed to even fish in the river anymore.[5]

While the border had been closed in 2020 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the re-emergence of the Taliban in Autumn 2021 resulted in a sharp influx of refugees and a tightened border regime. It reminded me of the times before the border held any significance, in contrast to the separation and segmentation which the families and communities were now faced with once again. The young soldiers of the border patrol, the closed iron gates, and the newly-installed white flags of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan were the material reminders of the rupture which had just taken place in Pamir, but was by no means the first.

1.1 Literature Review

The roots of contemporary Pamir Studies as an academic field can be found in Russian imperial expeditions to the region around the time of the border demarcation of 1895. Some of the first researchers to approach Khorog are still remembered in the Khorog City Museum, such as Aleksei Aleksandrovich Bobrinsky (1852–1927), a Russian noble and ethnologist who organised several expeditions to Pamir, collecting photograhs and studying embroidery patterns. The ethnographies produced during this time served Russian imperial interests of exerting control over the newly-acquired communities, and gave way to the Pamir Studies as a subfield of Oriental Studies in Soviet academia. This field of study focused heavily on language, attracting scholars of Iranian Studies including Ivan Ivanovich Zarubin, and the German linguist Wolfgang Lentz who participated on the German-Soviet Alai Expedition of 1928 under the leadership of alpinist Willi Rickmer Rickmers. German interest in Pamir, attracting funding from the German Research Foundation (DFG), can be viewed as an extension of German Iranian Studies which found favour during the national socialist regime (1933–45) due to ideas, developing out of European linguistic studies, of racial superiority and a shared Aryan origin (Hebauf 2024). The early Pamir Studies holds a close connection to the term 'Pamiri'. Early linguistic studies grouped all languages indigenous to the area together as Pamir languages, despite clear differences between subgroups upon closer inspection (Dodykhudoeva 2023). Furthermore, these ethnographies set the pre-text for Pamiris to be categorised as an ethnic minority in Soviet po-

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[5] Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in Tajik with a passenger on the road.

lices of national delimitation and therefore not finding the same support for cultural development that the titular nations found (Dagiev 2019). Instead, Pamiris were situated far at the periphery of the Russian Empire and later Soviet Union.

From a non-elite perspective, however, pre-Soviet sources are difficult to find and exist more so in oral histories, for example those compiled by Qurbonmuhammadzoda and Shohfitur in *Ta'rīkhi Badakhshān* (eds. Niyozbekov and Dorghabekov 2021), a key text for understanding the region's history up until the early Soviet period, forming the basis of the region's written heritage, alongside Mirza Sang's own *Ta'rīkhi Badakhshān*, and Badakhshi's *Armaghān Badakhshān* (Bezhan 2008). Throughout the Soviet period, increasing interest in Pamir Studies came from scholars from the region. Perhaps the most comprehensive work which deals with the history of the region is that of Bahodur Iskandarov (1960, 1996) which provides a detailed historical overview of the advent of foreign imperialism in Pamir and the devastating effects this had for local poppulations. During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (1979–1989), many Ismaili Muslims from Afghanistan came to study in Tajikistan and helped to develop their home communities (Emadi 1998). During the Soviet period, Pamir Studies therefore blossomed into an academic discipline which was heavily influenced by Pamiris themselves. Pamiri participation in Soviet intellectual circles is attributed by Herbers (2001) to the lack of agricultural opportunities in GBAO, with governmental work and teaching providing an alternative career path.

Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Pamiris wishing to pursue higher education were required to travel to Dushanbe or another city in the Soviet Union. After independence and the outbreak of the civil war, however, many Pamiris who had been living in other parts of the country fled to GBAO and, in 1992, Khorog State University was founded to offer higher education in the region taught by teachers and professors who had also fled Dushanbe. Pamir Studies here was a part of the Oriental Studies/Folklore department, which offered the acquisition of Persian script and, following independence, many scholars later won scholarships to the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London where they continued their research to graduate level. This shift in knowledge centres, from Dushanbe to Khorog to London or further field, protected the maintained contribution of Pamiri scholars to the field of Pamir Studies, navigating the violence of the civil war to the economic hardship and political instability which lasted well into the 2000s in Tajikistan.

Today, Pamir Studies is represented by Pamiri and international scholars at knowledge centres all over the world. This multidisciplinary field is increasingly focused on questions of resilience and sustainability in light of climate change and heighted risk of natural disasters in the region such as avalanches and rockfalls. Recent research has highlighted the high level of resilience and adaptability

of communities in Pamir to rupture. The effects of the initial border demarcation have been examined in terms of pastoralism and economic ties (Kreutzmann 2020, 2022, 2023), religious authority and subsequent religious reform (Mastibekov 2014; Iloliev 2022; Aksakolov 2014; Emadi 1998), and the end of mirdom as political authority (Beben 2023; Iloliev 2021). Furthermore, resilience and adaptability to environmental ruptures can be seen in the mobility practices (Blondin 2020, 2021; Blondin and Aksakolov 2023), which are also made possible by multilingualism (Bahry 2016; Bolander 2016, 2017, 2021) and religious networks (Mostowlanksy 2023), and resilience in spite of religious marginalisation has been examined in terms of religious songs and music (van den Berg 2004, 2016; Goibnazarov 2017, 2025a), religious practice (Emadi 1998), and shrine veneration (Oshurbekov 2014; Iloliev 2008, 62-3). Recent linguistic research has also approached Pamir languages as repositories, preserving local knowledge (Dodykhudoeva 2004, Dodykhudoeva and Ivanov 2009) and written heritage (Elnazarov 2009, 2023).

Spatially, recent scholarship has placed the region at a pivotal, geopolitical nexus between Chinese, Russian, and Western infrastructural development, military dominance, and cultural diplomacy.[6] Perhaps most recently, Levi-Sanchez's *Bridging State and Civil Society: Informal Organizations in Tajik/Afghan Badakhshan* (2021) discusses the relationships and power dynamics which existed in the early 2010s in civil society circles on both sides of the River Panj, highlighting the role foreign political interference in the region has on such constellations. Levi-Sanchez's work is one of few political analyses to view Badakhshan in its entirety, approaching the region from a localised perspective, rather than top-down yet placing this within the greater context of geopolitical discourses. While focused largely on GBAO and its northernly limits, Mostowlanksy's *Azan on the Moon: Entangling Modernity along Tajikistan's Pamir Highway* (2017a) also takes a subject-centred approach to processes of transformation, highlighting how those living in GBAO have experienced various repertoires of development coming from foreign investment, paying particular attention to the role materiality plays in everyday life, and using terminologies from locally-spoken languages to articulate key concepts. Similarly, though moving away from geopolitical discourses, geographer Blondin (2020, 2021), including Blondin and Aksakolov (2023), approaches connectivity in Pamir from the perspective of (im)mobility, highlighting the ways in which Pamiris live in constant connection with the environment and are deeply affected by environmental ruptures. In contrast, Saxer (2019) has ap-

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6 The dissertation of Mélanie Sadozaï (2022), "La frontière comme ressource : contacts, ruptures et pouvoirs à la frontière entre le Tadjikistan et l'Afghanistan dans le Haut-Badakhchan", Paris INALCO, is currently under embargo and was therefore not included in this literature review.

proached Pamir not in terms of connectivity but rather remoteness, questioning how remoteness is produced through connectivity in Tajik Pamir. Meanwhile, Kreutzmann (2020, 2022, 2023) has conceptualised Pamir as a crossroads of varying trajectories of development, all the product of colonial border-making. These works therefore present Pamir in terms of (inter)connectivity, be it between communities and the physical environment, geopolitical powers, or international development organisations.

With this book, I offer rupture as an extension to the study of connectivity. Specifically, it deals with how people experience, react to, and remember ruptures. In this way, this book contributes not only to the conceptualisation of Pamir as a region in its own right, challenging the prevalence of nation state borders and colonial spheres of influence and highlighting the importance of New Area Studies as a subject-centred, inside-outward approach to understanding space and region (Houben 2017), but in doing so aids in the extensive existing research portraying Pamiri communities as heavily resilient to rupture. That is to say, the ruptures laid out in the pages to come are not only remembered, they are responsible for the way that Pamir is understood in current scholarship, i.e. as a region which continues to survive economic, environmental, political, and religious rupture. From the origins of Pamir Studies, itself shaped by imperialism and geopolitics, the academic discourse surrounding Pamir has shifted greatly over the past century from a foreign land on the periphery of cartographies of power to a resilient region strongly integrated into international academic networks, thanks also to the continued contribution of Pamiri scholars and their own mobility.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

1.2.1 Pamiri Narratives of Rupture

Defining ruptures as a "radical and often forceful form of discontinuity", Holbraad et al (2019, 1), building on Spinoza, argue that ruptures have a "dual aspect" in that they, though perhaps negative in their initial occurrence due to violence or brutality, give way to redirection and innovation. In short, ruptures, through their innate violence, be it metaphorical or physical, force a movement away from life as is, and signal the dawn of a new era. This abrupt break from what has been before therefore represents a fixed point in time and can be useful when ordering histories. Ruptures, therefore, can be viewed, with regard to history, as temporal points, or moments, bringing about new directions. In many studies, ruptures have become near-synonymous with trauma which signals an overwhelmingly

negative evaluation of ruptures. Ruptures are predominantly violent, but they represent a change of direction, which can nevertheless be traumatic. While both terms appear in medicine, trauma has a much stronger connotation with pathology, originating from a physical ailment into a psychiatric condition (Traverso and Broderick 2010). In a sense, trauma is one possible lasting effect of rupture. The nexus between trauma, memory, and identity has been examined anthropologically (e.g. Eyerman 2019, Hashimoto 2015, Lacapra 2016), namely for the mutually-emerging nature of trauma and memory, and the role this plays in the consolidation of collective identities, whereby trauma and memory studies (e.g. Casper and Wertheimer 2016, Traverso and Broderick 2010, Castillo 2022, Kennedy 2020), largely focusing on post-conflict contexts and marginalised communities, approach trauma as a way of articulating the lasting consequences of injustice and giving agency back to its victims. While many themes in this book would suggest trauma, for example Stalin's Great Terror (1936–8), the term was not articulated directly by interlocutors and thus this book focuses on rupture, viewing trauma as one of many responses to rupture. In this way, this book deals with the emotional experiences of rupture and how these affect the body, causing redirection and repositioning, but also innovation and creativity.

This book aims to collect Pamiri perspectives on rupture, examining how people remember and respond to times of redirection, uncertainty, and instability. In doing so, this book aims to strengthen the growing focus in historical studies on non-elite, marginalised perspectives, for example in the fields of Oral History (e.g. de Langis 2018, Ben-Ze'ev 2011), Salvage Ethnography (e.g. Childs 2005), as well as the larger historical debates in the field of Subaltern Studies (e.g. Chakrabarty 2000), ultimately drafting a history of Pamir from a regional perspective. The regional is understood here both spatially and temporally as an overarching perspective, whereby, in contrast to global approaches to space and time, the regional represents part of an inward-outward approach (Houben 2017) which is distinctive of the New Area Studies (e.g. Mielke and Hornidge 2017; Houben 2017, 2021; Houben et al. 2020; Derichs 2017, van Schendel 2002, 2015). As an evolving approach, New Area Studies aims to move away from national borders and (neo)colonial cartographies, instead viewing area as flexible and dynamic, both temporally and spatially. In this sense, I would not define this book as a microhistory per se, although it does indeed zoom in on the "little facts" of human experiences (Szijártó 2002), but rather an attempt to challenge perceptions of time and space altogether, whereby shifting scale not only applies to understandings of location, but also temporality. In this sense, I draw inspiration from Houben's (2021) *Histories of Scale* in which he asserts that the effects of temporal events transcend scale, stressing the multidirectionality of temporal ruptures in colonial contexts.

In one sense, the way Pamir is imagined historically, geographically, and politically is defined by rupture. Before the creation of political borders, Pamir could be understood rather like a mandala (see van Schendel 2002) with clear centres and vaguely-defined peripheries which were subject to much contestation. While Badakhshān existed in various formations, due in part to shifting alliances with its neighbouring territories of Darvāz, Kāshghar and Wakhān, and attempted invasions from the Emirates of Afghānistān, Bukhārā, and the Khanate of Qundūz (Beben 2023; Jonboboev 2019), the demarcation of Russian and British imperialist spheres of influence in the Pamir Boundary Commission of 1895 introduced a new cartography of Pamir which largely built on previous cartographies of the area produced by foreign geographers. The progress of Pamir cartography is charted by Postnikov (1998) who, providing an overview of British, Russian, and Chinese commissions tasked with mapping Pamir, highlights the differing approaches of foreign cartographers in defining Pamir, for example historically, culturally, or orologically, all with the aim of determining authority over Pamir and its subregions. Such endeavours were not immune to rupture, as highlighted in the example of the Russian Great Pamir Expedition of 1883 which found that the Emirate of Afghānistān had annexed the right bank of the River, posing an issue to how British and Russian powers had envisioned the region with the river acting as a boundary (Postnikov 1998, 85–6). Despite the incompatibility of the River as a border due to the fact that the territories of Darvāz, Rushān, Shughnān, and Wakhān were all situated on both banks, this geographical feature was selected as basis for the division of both spheres of influence, and the communities and families living along its banks. In reality, these areas had mandala-like clear centres of power and contested edges, contrary to the British-Russian creation of the hard, fixed boundary of the border.

The Russian-British imperialist cartography determined the national borders which divide Tajikistan, Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan to this day, all with only partial assistance by the people who lived there.[7] In this way, they defined the boundaries according to space and using geographical points as markers, while largely ignoring its inhabitants and the implications such national borders would have on their lives. Part of the issue lies in the rupture which created these borders, i.e. growing tensions between the British and Russian Empires, which is largely viewed in geopolitical terms and thus placed on the global scale. In this way, Pamir became an arena for imperial power games and, ulti-

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7 According to Postnikov (1998, 78), there were several British-trained Muslim Indians who assisted British cartographers in mapping India's Northern Frontier. It is unclear where exactly they originated from, but their knowledge of local languages would suggest they were also from this region. Other expeditions surveyed inhabitants to check the flow of the River Panj.

mately, the border between colonial giants (Kreutzmann 2023), causing it to be viewed on the global scale. Mazlish (1998) stresses the role rupture plays in approaches to historical chronology, viewing what he calls the current "global epoch" as the result of a rupture: the Second World War (1939 – 45). With the importance of battles far on the other side of the world, coupled with the atrocities of Hiroshima demonstrating the irrelevance of territorial borders, the Second World War brought our understanding of the world into a new era, defined by "increased interconnection and interdependence" (Mazlish 1998, 395). In his discussion of global versus world history, Mazlish (1998, 393) defines global history as the examination of "processes that transcend the nation-state framework", moving away from viewing the world as civilised vs. uncivilised. In contrast to world history, which focuses on historical events and their impact on a world scale, Mazlish (1998, 392) sees global history as a shift in scale to view history in terms of globalisation, i. e. "a global process in which numerous participants are creating a new 'civilization'". While in the past, civilisations were upheld by empires, the global epoch is organised by nation states, each in close interplay on a global scale. In short, global history is to be understood as a shift in scale, moving away from a more closed view of the world and its centre and peripheries, and into a transnational era which demands new approaches to boundary-crossing issues such as climate change (Mazlish 1998, 396). Ruptures, therefore, can bring about not only temporal shifts, but also a re-imagining or re-drafting of the world as one knows it.

The events of the 19th century leading to the border demarcation, in which the British and Russian Empires contested the edges of their spheres of influence and, ultimately, dissected vast areas of Central and South Asia, continues to be a geopolitical lens through which Central Asia is viewed (e. g. Menon 2003, Cooley 2012), which places this rupture on the global scale and stresses the geopolitical significance of the rivalry between colonial powers. This practice is criticised by Kreutzmann (2020, 2022, 2023) in his studies of Wakhan and Hunza, arguing that the colonial borders which were established led to inhabitants living at a "Pamirian Crossroads" of various development trajectories and thus questions how Pamir is imagined spatially through the lens of ecology and pastoralism. Following Kreutzmann's approach, in an attempt to move past imperial cartographies and incorporate the perspectives of people who had to live with these decisions made far away in the imperial centres of power, this book calls for a shift in scale from the global to the regional. While Mazlish's definition of the global epoch holds some truth, with global ruptures affecting countless people and communities, I argue against viewing history on a global scale such as this. To view history on a global scale means to assume there is a global continuity, i. e. that the interconnection etc. of which Mazlish writes is experienced in the same

way all across the world. From an Area Studies perspective, I would instead place Pamir on the regional scale.

Van Schendel (2002) discusses the historical roots of the conceptualisation of regions, taking Southeast Asia as an example, highlighting the role knowledge and administrative centres play in present-day understandings of space, and how these have led to places far from the centre being largely ignored in scholarship. Nonetheless, van Schendel's argument, which calls for a new though vaguely defined approach to understanding area, is based on the existence of networks and connections, be they cultural, linguistic, economic, social, etc., which transcend national borders. Taking his self-coined example of *Zomia*, which he deems as "an area of no concern" sitting at the peripheries of Central, South, East, and Southeast Asia, van Schendel (2002, 651) highlights how this area is not treated as an area in academia, due to its peripheral and distant location from the centres of interest. Similarly, Pamir has often been overlooked due to its perceived "remoteness" (Saxer 2016) caused by its distance from political centres, thus being the subject of the imperial gaze. Pamir therefore sits at the margins, not only of nation states and spheres of imperial power, but also of academia.

Pamir presents a challenge to conceptualisations of Central Asia which define the region along political borders which sprung up in quick succession during the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Stemming from the Soviet Socialist Republics, these nation states like many others were defined along former Soviet lines, leading to long-lasting complications such as the case of the Ferghana Valley (see Reeves 2007, 2014, 2022). While the newly formed nation states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan drafted their constitutions and entered into varying processes of retraditionalisation (Laruelle 2018), de-Sovietisation, and de-Russification (Fierman 2022), similarly to other post-Soviet republics such as Ukraine (e.g. Schenk 2023), the area of Central Asia came to be defined as the post-Soviet countries with Muslim majorities and treated with exceptionalism with regard to the rest of the post-Soviet space. This conceptualisation of Central Asia along the borders of nation states and the former influence of the Soviet Union led to areas which, not even a century before, had existed in more or less unity with their future Soviet counterparts, becoming areas of no concern, often ignored by Central Asian Studies due to their lack of Soviet heritage. Regions such as Badakhshan Province in Afghanistan, Gilgit-Baltistan in Northern Pakistan, and Xinjiang Province of China, while having earlier been integral to the Pamiri lifeworld through trade connections, familiar relations, and shared languages, religion, and cultural heritage, are to this day included only symbolically in the larger field of Central Asian Studies. Pamir, therefore, highlights the fragility of Area Studies as a whole, as it is not immune to rupture and is indeed forced to redirect and adapt to changes in political borders,

which are themselves fragile, exemplified by the way Central Asia as a spatial concept has been shaped by the historical rupture of the foundation and collapse of the Soviet Union (Kirmse 2020). By moving away from national borders and approaching Pamir from a New Area Studies perspective, the imperial gaze (see Saxer 2016) which rendered Pamir on the periphery of Central Asia is deconstructed and its focalisation recentred. Therefore, this book attempts to view Pamir as a region in its own right, shifting scale from geopolitical approaches to history and recentering focus to this mountainous region and the academic field of Pamir Studies. While the influence of the political imaginaries of Sovietisation in Tajikistan is still present in Pamiri lifeworlds in GBAO, Pamir is not defined solely in relation to these discourses, but rather by the experiences of the people who dwell in it. For this reason, Pamir also challenges the notion of a "post-Soviet space" and this study can provide us with a framework to look beyond temporal distinctions of space, highlighting the continuity of materiality through rupture.

In this way, I view the regional as a perspective which, while existing in relation but not necessarily tied to the geography of Pamir, for example Pamiris living in diaspora in Russia or North America, is in this case a Pamiri experience of being-in-the-world. Drawing from the experiences of Pamiri people articulated using Pamir languages, I locate such shifts in temporality on a community level, examining how rupture has affected interconnection and understandings of space and time. By shifting to a regional scale, experiences from preconceived peripheries like Pamir are brought to the forefront, highlighting at times the subjectivity of rupture and challenging the concept of the global epoch for the fact that, when you live far from the political centres of nation states or at the vague edges of the mandala, their ruptures lose the relevance a global epoch demands.

1.2.2 Experiencing the Lifeworld

Building on how Pamir has thus far been conceptualised, I propose to view Pamir regionally as the interconnection between individuals of the Pamiri community and the environment in which they live. While this is sufficient for studying social aspects of rupture, it is limited when approaching cultural topics, for example cultural heritage, as it neglects the materiality of human existence. Therefore, I would propose to extend this perspective to the smallest possible instance and use an existential anthropological approach, centred on the body. Jackson (2012) understands the lifeworld as the existential experience of being; interacting with and reacting to one's environment or surroundings. In short, the lifeworld encapsulates all objects and beings outside of the subject and with which the subject shares space and interacts. Space can be understood in the broadest sense;

these people, places, animals, and things do not need to be physically there. This is of particular importance when approaching ruptures through an existential anthropological lens as, due to the (in)mobility caused by rupture, for example forced displacement or heightened border regimes, the interconnectedness of existence remains in spite of restricted movement. Furthermore, the lifeworld encompasses the scales which have been discussed thus far, but approaches them from the perspective of the individual. This subject-centred approach presents a challenge to the global epoch and other temporalities seen as all-encompassing, and assists in re-drafting history on an interpersonal level.

In the case of Pamiri lifeworlds and many others which are experienced by religious communities, the lifeworld extends beyond the physical realm to the imagination. As Mittermaier (2010, 18 – 9) has discussed, the imagination has often been viewed as the 'unreal' by Western philosophy. However, in Islamic thought, for example, the imagination can give way to prophecies, divine contact, and out-of-body experiences, i.e. they are the "real imagined". That is to say, the lifeworld for the interlocutors we will meet in the chapters to follow also has a divine element which is entangled in the mental and physical. As Mittermaier (2010, 91 – 3) highlights with the Arabic example of 'ru'ya' (the outer vision) and 'ru'yā' (the inner vision), a prophetic experience can traverse both realms in a waking vision. With this further religious element of the lifeworld, the term imaginary can also be further expanded to include human relations with God (Shugh.: *Xutho*) and otherworldly beings which are perceived by interlocutors to be outside of time and space.

Materiality is central to understanding the religious sphere of the lifeworld. To experience the religious means to experience certain feelings and sensations. Meyer and Houtman (2012) challenge the idea of the spiritual as being immaterial and instead argue in favour of a material approach to religion. Questioning the distinction between the immaterial spiritual and the material religious, Meyer and Houtman (2012, 7– 8) argue against the "dematerialization" of religion, instead approaching the subject matter not only in terms of religious material culture, but also from an experiential perspective which sees the body feel connection with the transcendental by way of shared semiotics. Such sensations, which Meyer (2006, 9) sees as "feeling *and* the inducement of a particular kind of excitement", are evoked by sensational forms which are authorised forms of inducing a religious experience. In this way, religious sensations highlight the role materiality plays in experiencing the religious sphere of the lifeworld. These modes of experiences are, according to Meyer (2006, 2010), grammars which teach the believer reactions to certain religious aesthetics, thus determining how the transcendental is experienced. Therefore, this religious sphere of the lifeworld is experienced through materiality by way of sensations and feelings.

Following an existential, material approach to being alive, which views the human experience in terms of knowledge transfer and growth, Ingold (2007, 2022a, 2022b) challenges terms such as local or indigenous knowledge as these treat the location as a container and are essentially built on the notion that knowledge stays in one place, being passed down linearly from generation to generation. Instead, Ingold stresses the mobility and interwovenness of the human experience, highlighting the movement of ideas in the learning process. This approach is built on the idea that life is like a series of lines, occasionally meeting in places and interconnecting with other lines (Ingold 2000). To imagine the lifeworld as a collection of lines opens up the possibility to better understand the movements involved in the human experience. How humans learn can be imagined in such a way, as lines cross at places and inhabitants share the stories of their experiences, gaining knowledge from one another (Ingold 2018). For Ingold, the interconnection of the lifeworld is forged by movement and is conceptualised here as knowledge, i.e. knowledge of being alive. In this sense, skill is gained through experience, regardless of how a person learns, as learning is a product of experience (Ingold 2018). The skills the individuals acquire can then be used productively, for example in the making process in which the maker interacts with the materiality of the lifeworld to bring about an agreement between the materials and the intended product (Ingold 2013). By approaching the lifeworld in an existential, material way, the agency of the inhabitant perhaps loses significance and the focus is placed on the experience itself as one interacts and reacts to the lifeworld. It is therefore not that the lifeworld is productive, but rather it is dynamic and flexible, open to change and redirection.

To Ingold, the experience of being alive gives way to knowledge of being alive, gained as the individual moves through the lifeworld. I would further develop this understanding of being alive to include its emotional experiences, viewing these as material. Rupture, as highlighted by the academic focus on trauma, gives way to emotional experiences which are material as the body succumbs to sensations and feelings caused by a physical response to rupture. Ahmed (2014), in her study of the affective economies and cultural meaning of emotion, sees emotions as socially and culturally informed, creating closeness and distance between bodies. Ahmed (2014, 64–6) sees fear as being directed at an approaching object and causing a bodily reaction to its intensity. Creating an affective economy (Ahmed 2014, 64), the more fear moves around, the stronger the affect it has on the body. In its attachment to objects, fear creates borders (Ahmed 2014, 67) which establish a limit from which the body can flee, seeking refuge and a perceived sense of stability (Ahmed 2014, 68). In this way, fear creates a level of (im)mobility as the body is restricted to where it can and cannot go. This spatial element to fear has been discussed by Tuan (2013), who views fear as a human constant and ar-

gues that fear forms landscapes in its cause of movement within the human body, while Levine-Hampton (2022) has stressed the importance of emotion in oral re-tellings of intimate histories and how these are spatially positioned. In a temporal sense, fear is future-oriented as it is attached to the threat of future pain, which in turn affects the body in the present (Ahmed 2014, 65). In this way, fear has the ability to traverse temporalities, and is indeed informed by social and cultural his-tories (Ahmed 2014, 66), meaning that it has the potential to withstand ruptures by way of its materiality, i.e. the bodily reaction to emotion.

Therefore, I build on Ahmed's understanding of emotion, viewing them as te-nacious and something which can withstand lapses in continuity. They can, like trauma, be passed down from generation to generation through cultural and com-municative memory, and can seem just as alive as they were in their original man-ifestation. In this way, language plays a great role in the communication of mem-ory and emotion as a *mode of experiencing the lifeworld*, joining language and experience together by way of indexicology (Ochs 2012). As we will see in the chapters to come, family stories such as those shared by Nekruz, Abdulloh, and Azizkhon, as well as the Shughni popular songs of Lidush Habib, Temursho, and Zafar Band, are emotional transmissions of narratives of rupture, in this sense being the meeting points of lines of experience which share knowledge not only of the history of rupture, but also of Pamiri perspectives of these rup-tures. It is these moments of connection with the past that help Pamiris to make sense of the world around them, ultimately further developing a sense of Pamiri cultural identity through a shared heritage.

The ruptures, which will be given more detailed attention in the chapters to follow, while dividing the region politically, have not succeeded thus far in com-pletely destroying any other forms of connection. In essence, the people of the communities living in Pamir, along these fault lines which were created in the last century, maintain connection in various ways, be it a conscious effort for (re)unification, or simply a shared understanding of *being-in-the-world*. It is im-portant to stress here that Pamiri (re)unification should not be equated with a no-tion of Pamiri separatism: while GBAO has seen much political repression in re-cent years, comments on social media suggest that Pamiri public opinion is based on securing the rights of autonomy promised by its status as an autonomous ob-last, rather than separating from the rest of Tajikistan. This book argues that, while networks and connections can be used to define regions, so too can rup-tures. If ruptures represent a break in continuity, that suggests that there has to have been a continuity previously, nor does it rule out a return to continuity. In short, ruptures, or rather the effects of ruptures, traverse temporalities in his-tory. In doing so, this book offers a practical way to conduct research in rupture,

offering an existential, material approach as a way to navigate the precarity and constant flux caused by rupture.

1.2.3 Memory as Experience

In his discussion of the development of cultural identity, Hall (1990) views identity in terms of discourse, being the position one takes, or is put in, with regard to narratives of belonging. In this way, cultural identity is grown in contrast to other communities, developing a sense of "we" and "they" as the individual attempts to make sense of the world they find themselves in. Following Hall, Pamiri cultural identity is therefore defined in contrast to other groups and communities, being the points of similarity and difference which create connection or distance between people. To Hall (1999), this is exemplified in heritage discourses which aim to justify claims to artefacts etc. through the instilment of an overarching, homogenised cultural identity fitting to the normative narrative of the dominant group. In this way, heritage becomes part of the discourses which the individual is required to interact with, positioning themselves in relation to questions of ownership and belonging. Due to this politicised nature of heritage, this book aims to shift focus away from the large-scale discourses surrounding articulations of heritage, instead focusing on material markers of heritage, exploring how these can be used as tools in the edification of a collective cultural identity.

The edification of cultural identity, as a way of not only making sense of the word, but creating and strengthening connection between people, relies strongly on the articulation of memory, as evident from Hall's discussion of heritage. Approaching memory as "knowledge with an identity index", Assmann (2013, 36) argues that memory encapsulates knowledge of the self and surroundings, representing connections between people and societies in what he calls a connective structure. With reference to Luckmann's concept of diachronic identity, that being a synthesis of time and identity in which individuals and collectives alike can position themselves in relation to the past, present, and future, all based on the existence of multiple times, i.e. that of the personal inner, the shared social, and the historical, Assmann expands on Halbwachs's concept of collective memory, i.e. a memory which goes beyond the individual and is realised by a group or society, to distinguish between what he calls cultural and communicative memory. While cultural memory is the memory triggered by material objects curated in museums, archives, etc, existing "also in disembodied form and requir[ing] institutions of preservation and reembodiment," (Assmann 2008, 111), communicative memory "lives in everyday interaction and communication" between generations. Following Assmann's (2008, 2013) argument, because material objects do not

have a mind, something which is reserved for the self, the memory exists in a disembodied state as the object reminds the self, and in turn groups create shared memories through interaction with material objects and each other.

With the aid of Vasina's floating gap, the vague, undefined break in memory from the distant past to the recent past, Assmann (2008, 2013) differentiates his two forms of memory in terms of institutionalisation. Cultural memory, due to its strong connection to material objects, is institutionalised in the form of museums, archives, etc, where the distant past can be laid out in a comprehensive, collectively agreed upon way to as far back as "the past can be reclaimed as 'ours', (Assmann 2013, 38), emphasising the group's connection to the past and therefore the understanding of selfhood tied to this memory. In contrast, communicative memory represents the field of oral history, i.e. the re-telling of events from the past 80 years max., which, rather than being organised along fixed points in time, are not formalised by material objects. Communicative memory, therefore, deals with the connection between the self and personal memory, in lieu of material symbols etc. While Assmann does not go as far as to draw a distinction between the oral and the material, the general perception is that cultural memory is connected to material objects, places, etc, whereas communicative memory deals with the oral. Although agreeing in part, this book argues that oral and material histories cannot be separated so easily as one cannot exist without the other. It is through communication of the memory itself, be it through oral or written means, that the historical event is claimed by the group and therefore tied to its identity.

Such memory is transmitted in the form of narrations of the past, for example but not limited to family stories. In such narrations, the memory of rupture is communicated to younger generations of Pamiris through the creation of imaginaries which paint the pre-Soviet period favourably and idyllically. Following Taylor's (2004) definition of a social imaginary as "the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings," imaginaries are based on communal "background understanding", i.e. the shared sense of legitimacy given to repertories of social practice agreed on as the "ideal." This "sense-giving" encapsulates the perception of "our whole predicament in time and space, among others and in history" (Taylor 2004, 28), suggesting that the idealisation of such practices is dependent on the multiplicity of situation. As Taylor (2004, 29) notes, this idealisation (a theory of the ideal) can be transformed into an imaginary when it is taken on by people and remoulded and/or transformed through associations with existing social practices, giving way to revolutionary thought and actions. As Said (1983) argues, travelling theories are shaped by the act of travel itself; reacting to resistance and acceptance as they move through time and space. This highlights the importance of mobility in the anthropological study of imaginaries, as Salazar (2011) has also not-

ed, as theories are often carried by mobile people, be they academics, lorry drivers, or aid workers; each holding their own imaginaries for how life should ideally be. Pamiris grow up with such imaginaries of the past, envisioning a pleasant heritage which was unfortunately cut short by the advent of borders and foreign imperialism. Therefore, narrations can be understood not exactly as a transmission of knowledge of the past, but rather of imaginaries of the past, the imaginaries which form the basis for the edification of Pamiri cultural identity.

Such narrations, as demonstrated in this book, are not to be limited to the intangible but also present in material objects and therefore represent a material experience with memory. In this sense, Bräunlein's (2012, 16) argument that material objects offer, through their connection to the past, a sense of continuity by way of the material turn with which the individual can position themselves within the present and imagine a future, rings true when viewing ruptures through an existential anthropological lens. Following Bräunlein's example of objects in museums in which he sees the act of collecting and curating material objects as an interactive process between the individual and the objects, the material objects in connection to which the individual exists act as physical anchors in times of rupture and thereafter. In this way, the material turn presents a challenge to Holbraad et al's understanding of ruptures as a break in continuity. While rupture, through its innate violence, causes upheaval and the need for new directions and imaginaries of the future, which give way to cultural production, it does not break all continuity. For example, material objects withstand ruptures, providing there is no physical destruction. While some of the interconnections of the lifeworld may be severed through rupture, others will remain as before, bringing a sense of continuity to the otherwise chaotic surrounding in which the individual finds themselves. The same can be said for the materiality of emotion which forms a tenacious connection to the past, the affective ties of which can be passed down in communicative memory. Therefore, as materiality can withstand rupture, it is limited to define ruptures as a complete break in continuity. Rather, I would view rupture in terms of redirection, being the moments which demand reaction.

Rupture evokes varying responses, which I argue lie in the subjectivity of emotional experiences. Thinking back to interactions with memory in the material turn, Gamberi (2021) stresses the subjectivity in interpretations or perceptions of materiality. While material objects may be static, in one sense, their relation to the individual remains dynamic due to the existential nature of the lifeworld. An object which would have been attached with one meaning yesterday, may be viewed differently today, and again tomorrow. It is this experiential element of materiality and memory which Gamberi (2021) emphasises in her discussion of the curation of religiosity, taking as a case study sacred Hindu scrolls in

South Asia. As Gamberi observes, the divine significance attributed to these objects varies among individuals, making the experience of their materiality subjective and meaning there is no singular way to perceive these objects. In this sense, the curation and museumification which we will meet in the Spring of Nāṣiri Khusraw, Roshtqa'la Fortress, and Gulbegim's house, while at times having a scripted intention, cannot fully plan the experience the visitor is meant to feel as, made evident by my visits to these sites, emotional experiences are difficult to manipulate, due in part to their subjectivity and spontaneity. Memory, be it cultural or communicative, tangible or intangible, is therefore a subjective experience and evokes varying responses.

As previously discussed, rupture can give way to trauma or (im)mobility as a result of fear as an emotional response to rupture. In another sense, rupture can also be productive as it gives way to creativity and innovation. Creativity, as a (re) productive form of improvisation (Meyer 2016; Hallam and Ingold 2007), encompasses the moments of imitation and appropriation practised by producers of culture in their work. In the chapters to follow, we will meet two makers, Pari and Siawash, working with upcycled materials to create their own versions of cultural heritage. The creativity and innovation required to make such creations are the product of rupture, as it is in these moments of chaos that the individual seeks for a way to deal with the instability and upheaval around them. For Siawash, this is exemplified in his own biography as a refugee from Afghanistan; for Pari, her work is a way of adapting to modernity and staying relevant in changing times. I would therefore propose that cultural production can be viewed as a way of making sense of the world shaped by a multitude of rupture. Through acts of imitation, interpretation etc. the individual interacts with the discourses in which they find themselves, producing culture as a way of carving out their place in the lifeworld. Therefore, the imaginaries evoked in Siawash's Afghan dresses and Pari's necklaces can be viewed as a response to rupture, guided by the various regimes of cultural production they move within.

The interconnection of community, memory, and materiality are central to Pamiri lifeworlds. The ruptures of the 20th century brought with them not only a re-drafting of national boundaries but also redirections of connections within the community and with the materialities in which such memory is embedded. Individuals, in constant interconnection with their community and their experience of being in the world, (re)examine their surroundings on a daily basis, (re) positioning themselves within an ever-expanding understanding of community and the environment around them, due to heightened mobility within the group. Material objects, as fixed anchors, help individuals to feel a sense of continuity through the familiarity of connection, while interacting with the memory of the very ruptures which caused these shifts.

1.2.4 Why Pamiri Lifeworlds?

The regional, as argued above, is more than just a spatial category but rather forged by human experience, as is exemplified in the case of Pamir. If Pamir were to be understood purely in terms of space, then everyone dwelling in Pamir would be considered Pamiri, which is not the case. While there are many communities dwelling together in GBAO, those considered to be Pamiri both by themselves and the larger population are predominantly Nizari-Ismaili Shia Muslims who speak one of several Pamir languages and follow the teachings of *Hazar Imom* who is believed to be the living Imam following hereditary succession through the Prophet Muḥammad's family. Kyrgyz, Tajik, and other communities, while dwelling within the same space, are subject to different interconnections and therefore experience the lifeworld in other ways.[8] For example, the AKDN has been present in GBAO since 1993 when the first aid shipments were sent to the region during the civil war, but the role the AKDN plays in Pamiri lifeworlds differs from its role in the lifeworlds of non-Ismaili groups living in the region. For Ismaili-Pamiris, *Hazar Imom* is seen not only as the person who saved them from starvation, but as a saviour in a religious sense who watches over them and guides them through every aspect of life. While non-Ismailis living in GBAO were also saved by this aid and often hold the Aga Khan and AKDN in high regard, they do not view him as a figure of religious importance and therefore are connected to him only through the infrastructural development projects of the AKDN. Similarly, as I noticed during fieldwork, non-Ismailis are rarely found in Pamiri social circles in GBAO, dwelling more so as neighbours on the periphery of places like Khorog within their own groups.

While my own research is limited to Pamiri interlocutors, due to my dwelling in the Shughni-speaking, Ismaili-majority city of Khorog, Mostowlansky's (2017a) work places more emphasis on the diversity of GBAO and the interconnection of Pamiri, Kyrgyz, and Tajik peoples, stressing the shared experiences with entangled modernities along the Pamir Highway. I would, however, further develop Mostowlansky's entanglements approach and argue that Pamiris, in contrast to Tajik and Kyrgyz communities, dwell additionally in interconnection to the Ismaili Muslim religious sphere of the lifeworld. As a religioscape (Seise 2020), Pamiri lifeworlds are defined through interactions Ismaili Muslims have with the imaginaries of *Hazar Imom*, the materiality of Ismaili religious symbols and objects, fellow

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8 As will be discussed later, the case in Afghanistan is very different, where "Pamiri" is defined spatially as those who dwell in the heights of the Pamir mountains, namely Kyrgyz communities.

Ismailis through the global Jamat, and the invisible, intangible elements of the spiritual realm.

Furthermore, Pamiris are part of a linguistic landscape (Blommaert 2012) and experience connections with other speakers through their knowledge and use of Pamir languages and English. While Russian has largely retained its pre-independence status as the (now de facto) language of interethnic communication, Shughni is spoken throughout GBAO, with non-Pamiri inhabitants often possessing some basic knowledge of Shughni. Here it is important to mention the communities of Ishkoshim who are linguistically extremely diverse, with native speakers of Tajik, Shughni, Ishkashimi, Wakhi, and most possessing knowledge of several other languages spoken in the area. Additionally, English is a widely-spoken second language among Pamiris due to their religious connection to *Hazar Imom* and the global Jamat (Bolander 2016, 2017, 2021). In this way, being Pamiri cannot be defined purely linguistically as, the diversity of Pamir languages notwithstanding, Pamir was never defined in terms of language communities and where they dwell. Rather, the linguistic landscape was defined with regard to the geography of the mountains themselves, with Pamir languages being the languages deemed to be indigenous to Pamir (Dodykhudoeva 2023). Out of this vaguely-defined *Sprachraum*, the name Pamiri was attached to the speakers of these languages, who previously had understood themselves as Tajiks and Tajik-speakers as *"farsiwan"* (Dagiev 2019, 24). Similar to the many top-down definitions of Pamir by foreign cartographers within the Pamir Boundary Commission, Pamir was understood as a linguistic space and the speakers dwelling in it as Pamiri.

The term "Pamiri" (Shughni: *pomere*), which is often used by people from Pamir to identify themselves, and to be identified by others, is a geographical identity marker with an interesting background, defined by rupture. Pamir, often referred to as the "Roof of the World" due to its high altitude, sits at the roots of several mountain ranges, including the Hindu Kush and Karakoum. Geographically, this refers largely to the easternly portions of the mountains which cover the Wakhan Corridor, divided into the Little and Great Pamirs. While "Pamiri" in Afghanistan can be used to refer to the many Kyrgyz communities who inhabit these areas, they are often not included in the "Pamiri" community when approaching the subject matter from GBAO, where "Pamiri" is used to refer to people from the Western limits of Pamir, settled along the Rivers Panj, Ghund, and Shohdara. Typically, being "Pamiri" is characterised by speaking a Pamir language, belonging to the Nizari-Ismaili Shia Muslim faith, and observing certain traditions which are also defined as "Pamiri". It has therefore come to be the case in GBAO that "Pamiri" refers to the remnants of the historical princely state of Badakhshān, whereby communities in Darvoz and Vanj are often excluded from this conceptualisation of the Pamiri community, not only because in the

present day they generally practise Sunni Islam and do not speak a Pamir language, but because of the historical boundaries of Badakhshān itself. Two notable exceptions to this, however, are the small region of Yazghulam in Vanj where a language closely related to Shughni is spoken, and a small Ismaili Muslim community in Yoged, Darvoz. Unfortunately, this study does not cover these two exceptions. For referring to the greater Badakhshan region, "Badakhshani" is used, but is interchangeable for many. "Pamiri", by comparison, has developed religious and cultural undertones which differentiates it from "Badakhshani" in certain cases (Goibnazarov 2017, 2025a). In turn, "Pamiri" has grown in popularity in recent years due to the growing Pamiri diaspora and a unifying online presence (Qurboniev 2019). Due to this complex situation, this book uses the term "Pamiri" as this was the main term used by interlocutors in GBAO to describe themselves and their lifeworld. Furthermore, this term was selected as a conscious effort to resist growing trends in Tajikistan to erase the existence of Pamiris.

The following discussion of Pamiri identity focuses on the edification of Pamiri identity localised to the right bank of the River Panj, i. e. present-day Tajikistan, due to the scarcity of sources and research. In Afghanistan the reality is very different and the term "Pamiri" remains a geographical marker used to distinguish people and communities settled in the higher reaches of the Wakhan Corridor. This encompasses many perceived ethnicities such as Wakhi and Kyrgyz people, suggesting that the use of "Pamiri" in Afghanistan is purely functional, though not immune to the tropes of remoteness discussed here. As I have observed, however, the term "Pamiri" can also be used by people in Afghanistan when expressing solidarity with communities in GBAO who are facing ongoing repression, pointing to "Pamiri" shifting towards a political identity marker in Afghanistan's Badakhshan Province.

Prior to the creation of the four nation states which Pamir were divided into during the 20th century, Pamiris, as they have come to be known as, referred to themselves as Tajiks, and Persian-speakers as *"farsiwan"* (Dagiev 2019, 24). However, due to the expansion of Russian imperialism into the region of Badakhshān, which had existed since at least the 7th century, cumulating in the creation of Gorno-Badakhshon Autonomous Oblast in 1925 (Autonomous Republic until 1929) following the foundation of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic, the term "Pamiri" emerged as a categorisation for the Tajiks who spoke Pamir languages (Dagiev 2019, 24 – 5). Therefore, at least from the perspective of Russian and Soviet ethnographers, "Pamiri" was characterised by language, which was itself characterised by geography. It is important to note here that, throughout the entire history of Tajikistan since the arrival of Russian and Soviet ethnographers, "Pamiri" has never held an official administrative status and Pamiris are given Tajik national identity, though at times referred to as "Mountain Tajiks", for example in

censes, due in part to the vague definition of "Tajikness" which also encompassed the large areas of GBAO (Bergne 2007). In this way, Tajik language also became a marker of nationality and its rich textual tradition simplified to a speech community (Rzehak 2023). During the Soviet period, Pamiri was understood as an ethnic minority and was therefore not allowed the same cultural promotion as Tajik and other titular nationalities (Dagiev 2019, 35).

However, this presents an interesting issue as, just as there is no consensus of the definition of a Pamiri identity, so too is the definition of Pamir language as a linguistic category vague and ill-defined. As Dodykhudoeva (2023, 278) explains, Pamir languages are a "geographical construct, since genetically they are not a separate branch of the Eastern Iranian subgroup," meaning that, just as the people of this region were grouped together, so too were the languages they spoke. While there are several languages belonging to the Pamir languages group, some of which such as Shughn(an)i and Rushani are mutually intelligible while others, such as Wakhi, differ greatly in terms of grammar and lexicon from their sister languages, non-speakers often perceive there to be one single Pamir language, thus externally aiding in the consolidation of Pamiri as a perceived ethnic identity (Davlatshoev 2006, 51).

"Pamiri" does not merely appear as an external identity marker, despite its colonial history, but rather has come to be used by members of this group as an expression of collective identity. One example which was extremely present during my fieldwork comes to mind. In December 2021, a prominent MMA fighter, Chorshanbe Chorshanbiev, was arrested in Moscow and deported to his home country of Tajikistan. Chorshanbiev, who had lived in Russia for many years, though reportedly deported for traffic violations, had become a person of interest to the Tajik authorities after he had denounced any suggestion of him being Tajik. In response to being called a Tajik fighter by rival Russian fighter Nikita Solonin, intended as a derogatory reference, Chorshanbiev famously said "What do you mean Tajik? I'm not Tajik. You want to see a Tajik, look in the mirror, [...] I am a Pamiri," (Ibragimova 2022). Chorshanbiev's subsequent deportation and arrest in Tajikistan, seen by many as politically motivated in the context of an ongoing repression of Pamiri communities (Asia Plus 2022a), highlights the extent to which the term "Pamiri" has become politicised in recent decades.

While there are many ways to define "Pamiri", this book approaches the topic through an existential anthropological lens, that is, through the interconnections and relations of the individual and others who and things which share a common understanding of Pamiri identity. One way this is articulated is in terms of language. Speakers of one or more Pamir language, whether mutually intelligible or not, experience interconnection through conversations and linguistic interactions. This can be extended to material objects such as books, documents, or dig-

ital media, etc. which connect speakers of the language through a common under-standing of modes, grammars, lexicon, etc. Therefore, this book defines "Pamiri Lifeworlds in GBAO" as the material, linguistic, cultural, and religious connections experienced by people dwelling on the banks of the River Panj or in its vicinity. Being Pamiri in GBAO therefore means to be on the periphery of the country, be-coming increasingly marginalised from discourses of national belonging, while ex-periencing a close connection to the Ismaili global Jamat, materialised in the work of the AKDN and Jamati institutions such as the Ismaili Tariqah and Education Board (ITREB). It also demonstrates a connection to the physical landscape of Pamir, being reliant on the River Panj and glacial melt for water and hydropower from the company Pamir Energy, while also having to move house due to threats of avalanches in winter or stopping on the road due to rockfalls. Being Pamiri in GBAO, as this book highlights, also means living in connection to a past shaped by rupture whose memory continues to evoke pain, fear, and sadness.

1.3 Ruptures in GBAO

Gorno-Badakhshon Autonomous Oblast is an autonomous region in the east of Ta-jikistan and represents one part of the mountainous transborder Pamir region. Khorog is the administrative capital of GBAO and is situated at the convergence of the Rivers Panj, Ghund, and Shohdara, placing it in the heart of Shughnon Dis-trict. GBAO is composed of several other administrative districts (Taj.: *jamā'at*), namely Darvoz, Vanj, Rushon, Roshtqa'la (previously part of Shughnon), Ishkosh-im, and Murghob, which all sit along the right bank of the River Panj, with the exception of Murghob which is located to the east of GBAO on a highland plateau. As an autonomous oblast, GBAO enjoyed many decision-making powers which dif-ferentiated it from the other provinces of Tajikistan. For example, while the rest of the country was faced with strict controls of religious education for children (Kho-likzod 2011), Ismaili Islamic education in the form of *Aqloq va marifat* (Engl.: Eth-ics and Wisdom) was taught by teachers trained through the Institute of Ismaili Studies's STEP program, first in schools then gradually moving to private homes due to growing restrictions. During my stay in Khorog, *Aqloq va marifat*, which had since changed its name, was paused by ITREB under state instruction and its teachers left without employment. The case of Ismaili Islamic education highlights how the administrative structures which once gave GBAO a level of freedom, have gradually been phased out and stripped away, leaving GBAO as an autonomous oblast largely by name only (Levi-Sanchez 2021; Jonboboev 2019).

Long before the name GBAO, the princely state of Badakhshān encompassed a large area of what is now loosely defined as Pamir: a transborder mountainous

region sitting between Tajikistan, Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan. As a mirdom (Iloliev 2021) which was previously ruled by families of *miren*[9] or *shohen* (Engl.: landed gentry), Badakhshān was a key point on ancient trading routes, with traders stopping for rest and recuperation along the difficult terrain. These *miren*, as land-ruling elites, practised at times shifting alliances with one another, leading to re-draftings of Badakhshān throughout the region's pre-imperial period (Iloliev 2021; Nourmamadchoev 2015; Beben 2023; Jonboboev 2019). It was in this context that the Ismaili *doi* (Engl.: missionary) and theologian, Nāṣiri Khusraw, arrived in Pamir in the 11th century after having studied Ismaili Islam in the Fatimid Caliphate in North Africa. Part of Khusraw's work was the repurposing of Zoroastrian cultural elements found in Pamir, such as the musical practice of *qasidakhoni* and the architecture of the Pamiri house, which were then adapted to hold Islamic meanings (see Goibnazarov 2017, 2025a, Oshurbekov 2014, Smith 2025). Preserving the tradition of Nāṣiri Khusraw, Ismaili *piren* (Engl.: clerics) took-up positions as religious authorities in the region, often passing the title down from generation to generation. The *piren*, who were the few people in Pamir who could read and write, were not only tasked with preserving religious knowledge, but also held de facto political positions in cooperation with the *miren*, often having their *murid* (Engl.: followers) spread across large areas of Pamir (Mastibekov 2014). The pre-imperialist period of Pamir is therefore characterised in Pamiri narratives as a time before rupture when Pamiris lived spiritually fulfilling lives and enjoyed a level of autonomy, albeit under constant threat of invasion, for example from the Emirates of Afghānistān (Kābul before 1855) and Bukhārā.

With the arrival of Russian, British, and Qing imperial powers in the 19th century, the map of Badakhshān was soon re-drafted, first with its annexation by the Emirate of Afghānistān in 1873 (Beben 2023), then into two completely different imperial spheres of influence, until finally the recognisable present-day nation states were founded. For communities living along the River Panj, the ruptures in current memory begin in 1895 with the conclusion of the Joint Anglo-Russian Boundary Commission, demarcating the border between Russian and British spheres of influence and thereby placing, albeit somewhat vaguely, the theoretical separation of countless communities and families. With the right side of the River Panj now under the control of the Emirate of Bukhārā, and the left side being drawn closer to the Emirate of Afghānistān, Badakhshān had now fallen to its two greatest threats previously. With growing pressure, local leaders began to reposition themselves within the new spheres which suddenly surrounded them (Mastibekov 2014), with many representing a final stand against impending colo-

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9 Shughni words appear with the appropriate plural ending, *-en.*

nialisation (Iloliev 2021). Following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, however, the Russian empire, to which the right bank had belonged since 1905 (Mastibekov 2014), gradually fell under control of the Bolsheviki and many *miren* and *piren* fled to neighbouring Afghanistan. With the subsequent creation of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (UzSSR) in 1924, the border which had until this point been a line drawn along the river was now the site of increasing military presence, building on the Russian outpost which had existed in Khorog for some time. On the other side of the river, communities living along the now visible border, led by a man named Maḥram, revolted against the Emirate of Afghānistān and attempted to unify with the right bank, trying to prevent a lasting separation and escape religious persecution from the Emirate of Afghānistān, albeit to no avail (Emadi 1998). While most men remained on the left bank of the river to fight, women and children fled to the right bank where many of their descendants remain to this day.

And so life continued in this way throughout the reign of Stalin. By the late 1930s, little to no connection remained with the other side of the river. While faces of loved ones turned into foggy memories, the line drawn along the River Panj represented a growing division between both sides, with the *afghonien* [Engl.: Afghans] on one side, and the *shuravien* [Engl.: Soviets] on the other. In GBAO, any desire to maintain connection with the other side of the river was greatly discouraged with many facing repercussions from the KGB, resulting in much forced displacement among Pamiri communities, as is described for example by Azizkhon in his family story.

With growing political tensions in Tajikistan, the foundation of the new independent republic in 1991 was quickly followed by conflict and violence. The civil war (1992–7) split the newly formed republic down the middle and led to a blockade of GBAO which represented a stronghold for oppositional forces. As a result of this blockade, many Pamiris looked to their past severed connections across the river for supplies. In this flow of supplies, the connection which had been broken in the 1930s was reinstated and both sides of the river were brought closer. The arrival of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), a subsidiary of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), saving the inhabitants of GBAO from starvation through humanitarian aid facilitated via the Osh border crossing (AKF 1993), signified the reestablishment of a connection to the Ismaili Jamat and *Hazar Imom* (the late Aga Khan IV), a further connection which had been greatly discouraged under the Soviet regime. The later post-War initiatives of the AKDN materialised the connections between communities in Pamir into physical infrastructure with the construction of several bridges across the River Panj (Aksakolov 2006, Mostowlanksy 2017b). Further facilitating social and economic encounters, two of these bridges housed a border bazaar which not only enabled trade and the op-

portunity for donations, but gave families the opportunity to reconnect after almost 80 years of separation. It appeared that the ruptures of the 20th century had been mended.

But there again in Autumn 2021 were the border patrol, the iron gates, and the white flag serving as a reminder for the series of ruptures which the Afghan side had also faced in recent years. The communities living along the River Panj were once again separated and the affective fear which had existed in the Soviet times of the consequences of approaching the border too closely were very much alive and well. The closed border symbolised not only a loss of physical connection, but shifting cultural identities which had previously been one entity. Before the ruptures of the 20th century, communities had existed as one across the River Panj; the river was just a river. From the existing historical research, we see that Pamir's division was not only physical, limiting the movements of communities along the River Panj, but placed Pamiris on two varied trajectories defined by Sovietisation on the right bank, and the realities of being a Muslim minority in Afghanistan. Divisions, which were drawn by imperial powers with no concern for the lived experiences of these communities, were designed to control populations living along what then became a political border, creating emotional distance through fear. As this book argues, this fear remains in the memories of younger generations of Pamiris and plays an important role in Pamiri lifeworlds.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Doing Ethnography during Rupture

The stories presented in this book, collected through ethnographic semi-structured interviews and observations, were all documented in Gorno-Badakhshon Autonomous Oblast between September 2021 and April 2023. The interlocutors presented here were a tremendous help, both in sharing their at times very intimate perspectives, and also in making me feel somewhat at home in GBAO for the short time I spent there. I formed lasting friendships with many interlocutors as they opened their homes to me, made sure I got home safe, and even in the case of Nekruz invited me to his wedding. All inhabitants of GBAO around the age of 30 years old, these interlocutors had grown up during the civil war, being the first post-independence generation of Pamiris, with the exception of Gulbegim whom I only met once during the tour of her house, and the tailor Siawash from Afghanistan. They shared similar memories of the AKDN aid arriving in GBAO, *Hazar Imom*'s visits to Khorog and the *didor*, and understanding from a young age the economic hardship endured throughout the 1990s. It is their perspectives which

have shaped the structure of this book, as I allowed myself to be led by them around Khorog, greater GBAO, and Dushanbe. As Suhrob and Nekruz shared their religious experience with me at the Spring of Nāṣiri Khusraw, and Alimamad and Rustam showed me around Roshtqa'la Fortress and told me the story of Azizkhān, the many car journeys they took me on introduced me to artists such as Lidush Habib and Zafar Band. While Pari helped me to pick out gifts to bring back to my family, and Siawash regularly invited me to eat with him and his brother Shahriyor in their friend's Afghan restaurant, I would sit in the cafe near the *jamoatkhona* and converse with Davood and Abdulloh, occasionally exchanging messages with Azizkhon. In this way, the interlocutors included in this book shared their experiences not only through conversation, but by including me in many aspects of daily life, creating a connection between us which largely remains to this day in spite of the great geographical distance.

This study uses an interdisciplinary approach by combining oral historical, (auto)ethnographic, textual, and visual methods. Sitting at the intersection of varied disciplines, something which has become typical of the New Area Studies as it transcends the limitatons of classical academic disciplines (Dreichs et al. 2020), my research was guided by the narratives of interlocutors as I attempted to understand better the chronology of ruptures in Pamir. That being said, there are some limitations to my approach which need to be addressed. Firstly, as has been discussed by others in the field of oral history (e.g. Okpewho 2003, Polishuk 1998, Tahreem et al. 2017), oral narrations are not to be taken as pure factual information. Oral histories, in this case family stories passed down from generation to generation, are emotional retellings of rupture and offer intimate perspectives of what it means to be Pamiri in GBAO, highlighting the embeddedness of memory in Pamiri lifeworlds. In this way, the 'authenticity' of the historical data itself is irrelevant here and our focus is the senses of emotional connectedness with the past and the role these play in shaping perceptions of being-in-the-world. Secondly, there are large sections of autoethnography in this study as I tried to make sense of the ruptures which were too sensitive to discuss. This sensory approach, at times focusing on scents, sounds, sight, and feelings, can be understood as an embodied experience as I interacted with the materiality of the lifeworld and discovered relationships with objects (Payne 2022). Nonetheless, this also means that the conclusions I draw in these moments are my own interpretations, rather than those of the inerlocutors I shared them with. As is discussed below, this was the only way I saw available for completing the ethnography during what turned out to be a major rupture in Pamiri lifeworlds in GBAO.

Moreover, another point of criticism is that the majority of interlocutors featured in this book are male. This does not assist the already overwhelming male focus in historical narraives of Badakhshān, due to the fact that these studies deal

mainly with religious and political authorities who are all men. While Ismaili Imamat follows a patrilineal hereditary system of authority, and the role of *khalifa* in GBAO has always been held by men, this does not mean to say that women are not represented in Jamati institutions of the present day. Several female interlocutors who are not featured in this book due to thematic selection of data regularly perform religious duties in the *jamoatkhona* such as reading out and translating *farmon*, and one interlocutor was responsible for reciting prayers during *namoz.* Furthermore, in GBAO women are especially active in charitable organisations and several community figures are well-known in Khorog due to their volunteer work and leadership. During the arrests of 2022, one woman, a prominent journalist named Ulfatkhonim Mamadshoeva, was detained and imprisoned without fair trial. Mamadshoeva was perhaps one of the most highly respected community figures in GBAO, not only for her journalistic career which spanned several decades in radio and print media, but also for her whit, intelligence, and shrewd analysis and criticism of government measures. Dating back already to her involvement in the civil war as a reporter for Radio Badakhshan, Mamadshoeva actively drafted large parts of Pamir's recent history through her journalism and community work with disenfranchised women, the later of which was used as grounds for her arrest. This is to say: although the majority of interlocutors in this book are men and therefore offer gendered perspectives, women are very present in all scales of Pamiri lifeworlds, and their plight in the face of rupture has not been discussed enough.

I began my research in April 2021 during the latter days of the COVID-19 Pandemic. At the start, I thought the main issue posing my research would be the ongoing travel restrictions and potential health risks. Unaware at the time, my research would be marked by a series of ruptures which shook the very bedrock of Pamiri Lifeworlds. The first rupture came in August 2021, as I was preparing to return to Tajikistan after several years away. News was coming that the US military was withdrawing from Afghanistan at a hurried rate, while the Taliban seized power across the whole country. In the weeks that followed, refugees fled to neighbouring Tajikistan, risking their lives by crossing the River Panj in small boats or by swimming. Stories quickly circulated of women and children being stranded on the small sand banks between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and it was unclear if the events taking place in Afghanistan would remain there, or if the Taliban had further aspirations north of the border.

When I arrived in Tajikistan the following month, just a few weeks after the Taliban had declared power in Kabul, Afghanistan was the topic on everyone's mind. Many who had been in Afghanistan previously for work or research expressed their sadness at the turn of events, and many Pamiris expressed in casual conversation their solidarity with their brothers and sisters on the other side of

the border who now had to live under the Taliban, an organisation known for targeting Shia communities. In addition to this, the raised security concerns were distinctly visible. While in Dushanbe the occasional passing of an army convoy was nothing particularly noteworthy, leaving Dushanbe and embarking on the road to Khorog, it became apparent the perceived threat level which the state was preparing for. Passing countless jeeps and covered wagons filled with soldiers, occasionally spotting a Russian flag, the increased military presence was unavoidable and lasted, in various reincarnations, throughout my numerous stays in the region.

The second rupture I experienced came just after I left in November 2021. Admittedly, it is very difficult to write about the events surrounding this time as it has become quite apparent that these events are intended by some to be forgotten. There exists in myself a fear of repercussions, not for myself but for my friends, colleagues, and interlocutors, if I choose to speak frankly about the events in questions. In any case, I am referring to the shooting of the young man, Gulbiddin Ziyobekov, in Roshtqa'la District on 25th November 2021 and the demonstrations and further violence which followed. This was in no case the first rupture of this kind which had taken place in GBAO: during this time, the violent events of 2012, 2014, and 2018 were still in recent memory, the ramifications of which have been outlined by Mostowlansky (2017a), Levi-Sanchezz (2021, 2022), and RePLITO (2022). To myself and many others, these events remain unspeakable in the sense that, while there is a great need to deal with rupture, sometimes it is not possible in that moment to articulate one's own thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Sadly, it was also not the last rupture to befall GBAO. After several months of an internet blackout and growing frustration with state security forces, the third rupture came. Once again, demonstrators were being shot at by soldiers and news was coming that the military had been mobilised and was en route to Khorog. As I sat in Dushanbe, preparing for my flight back to Germany, reports circulated on social media that people were blocking the road in Vomar, a small city about two hours from Khorog, and refusing to let the army pass. What then happened to these people in Vomar on 17th and 18th May 2022 has yet to be independently investigated but was so unspeakable that it caused international outrage from several Human Rights organisations, including the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders (2022) and Amnesty International (2024).

The fourth and final rupture during my fieldwork came in February 2023 while I was in Dushanbe trying to find a car to Khorog. On 18th February, following a heavy snow storm, there was a series of deadly avalanches in GBAO, the largest of which destroyed several homes in Shosh, a neighbourhood of Khorog where many of my friends lived. Many people were killed in this avalanche including several students who had been renting an apartment at the foot of the mountain. Due to the inaccessibility caused by the avalanches, it was extremely difficult for

aid to reach the region and residents formed search and rescue operations to pull people out of the snow. Through social media, funds were collected internationally for victims who had lost their homes, and many donated clothing and other supplies locally. By some miracle, my friends from Shosh were all in Dushanbe at this time and were not affected by the avalanches, with the snowline meeting the fence of their families' gardens but no further.

It is mentally and emotionally draining to do research during times of rupture. Sleepless nights worrying about friends and colleagues, being tied to one's phone waiting for any kind of update, and feelings of guilt at leaving the region and returning to a comfortable life in Europe posed great difficulties to the process of writing this book. To be honest, I am still processing some things I saw or experienced personally during those days. However, my own feelings do not compare with the gravity of the experiences shared by many Pamiris during these times. While I am able to process everything from the comfort and safety of my desk in Berlin, there are many Pamiris who sadly will never get this luxury: the imprisoned, the murdered, and the many young victims of suicide.

In any case, researching in times of rupture requires the utmost sensitivity and caution. In many ways, I too felt the fear shared by my interlocutors for saying the wrong thing or taking the wrong step. Fear does indeed make one hyper aware of one's movements and causes one to overthink every action. In this sense, I describe these events as unspeakable in an attempt to articulate the experience of not being able to talk about something, be it due to safety concerns or lack of appropriate vocabulary. Rupture causes such unspeakableness through its close connection to feelings of fear and anxiety. This unspeakableness is an example of self-regulation during fieldwork (Yeh 2006), whereby, when faced with a difficult or precarious situation, the researcher needs to adapt in order to survive and not draw too much attention to oneself. For this reason, I did not make recordings of any interviews throughout my fieldwork and therefore the excerpts presented in this book were taken instead from my ethnographic diary. These excerpts are therefore not word-for-word quotations, but rather re-workings of the interviews. In limited instances, narratives were also edited slightly to protect the identity and privacy of the interlocutor: Khorog especially is a relatively small city and, by providing too many details, it would have been possible for other community members to work out who the interlocutor was.

Dealing with this unspeakableness gave me a new perspective on materiality as I experienced the at times indescribable feelings which accompany rupture. This incapability to articulate one's own thoughts and emotions is found throughout Oral History studies in post-violence contexts (e.g. Caswell 2014, de Langis 2018, Gigliotti 2003) and is responsible for much lost knowledge and erosion of narratives. It becomes the task of the researcher, therefore, to trace these silences

(Dragojlovic and Samuels 2023), viewing them not as obstacles but rather moments of possibility. My approach nonetheless resulted in large sections of auto-ethnography, meaning that my interpretations are to a certain extent unchallenged. Nonetheless, just because I did not include quotations from interlocutors at these points does not mean that these moments indeed remained unspoken. Rather, when the unspoken was said out loud, it was always under the agreement that I would not include this person's words in my study, themselves fearing for their own safety or out of a shared respect for the sensitivity of the situation. The material experience of dwelling in rupture, which I could partially share, poses the further issue of how to make sense of and deal with what is happening around you. It was in this moment that I realised that, while the spoken is at times restricted, the material can speak when the mouth cannot. I witnessed how others around me wrote songs, knitted Pamiri socks, or simply made a really really good *shirchoy* instead of saying what they were not able to say. For me, my way of dealing with the unspeakable events was to get creative and take photographs.

1.4.2 A Note on Issues with Visual Anthropology in GBAO

Rupture also causes a need for creativity and innovation when in the field. What was meant to be one long stay in the field transformed into several shorter trips in which I stayed relatively mobile. While I had intended to attempt a journey to Afghan Shighnan, the border remained closed the whole length of my time in Tajikistan, and the famous border markets opened only after I had returned to Berlin. My original plans of a visual anthropological study had to be abandoned due to the sensitivity of walking around with a camera, and hesitation of interlocutors to be photographed. Nonetheless, I adopted a very flexible approach and left myself open for any opportunity vaguely related to my research that came. This led me to experiment with other photography styles, shifting focus from faces captured in portraiture to the material objects around them and the hands that made them. This dissociation of the maker from the object, I believe, serves as a reminder for the tenacity of material objects in times of rupture.

Doing photography was my way of dealing with rupture through creativity, but it is not without its complications. Firstly, due to the ongoing rupture which I have already detailed, there was a great fear among interlocutors to have their picture taken. While this was, in my opinion, already an existing issue, concerns grew in 2021 and 2022 after several young men were arrested for making or appearing in videos relating to Pamiri cultural identity and given jail time of several years, for example in the case of Chorshanbe Chorshanbiev outlined above.

Secondly, I did not wish to draw too much attention to myself when in GBAO. I came to the realisation that photography was a sensitive topic when I was asked by a contact to make a photo story of the Pamir Highway for an article on Third Pole (2022). Around Davoz, I got out of the car and took some photographs across the River Panj to Afghanistan, hoping to get a good contrast of the varying conditions of the roads. While I was doing this, a border guard appeared, I swear literally out of nowhere, and firmly but politely requested me to stop taking photographs. I quickly obliged, not wishing to lose my camera or SD card, while Nemat, who was driving, began to argue with the border guard, implying that I was a tourist and he would be putting other tourists off from visiting our beautiful nature if he continued to prohibit photography. Not in the mood for an argument, the border guard then turned to me, requested that I delete the photographs of the border, and went on his way. From then on, I kept my camera relatively hidden. It was this experience which led me to avoid photography in public places in GBAO altogether, taking from it the lesson that a camera brings with it attention. I then decided to use the camera solely indoors, or in clearly touristic situations like Navruz celebrations or at heritage sites.

Moving the camera inside, however, brought with it other issues. For instance, many of the photographs included here were taken in the home. Just like other forms of anthropology, visual anthropology is somewhat of an invasion of privacy (Pink 2007). By entering into such a private setting with a camera, it was as if I was disrupting the intimacy of the home, attempting to leave with something which did not belong to me, an issue posed to ethnography as a whole (Crapanzo 2010). This highlighted another issue which is also relevant to existential anthropological research: I was an outsider. While entering someone's home is perhaps the smallest instance of doing ethnography as an outsider, as a whole it meant that I could not fully appreciate the experiences of the Pamiri lifeworld, no matter how welcomed I was by my interlocutors. In this sense, my approach to this phenomenology will forever be limited as I can only attempt to understand the experience of growing up with narratives of rupture and feeling the affects of these, as I am not Ismaili and therefore most religious feelings and sensations of the lifeworld remain foreign to me (Clifford 1986, Knibbe and Versteeg 2008).

To address this issue, I have tried to use terms in Shughni language wherever possible. Shughni, also referred to as Shughnani or Pamiri, is the most widely-spoken first language in Shughnon province where I conducted my fieldwork. By using Shughni concepts, I am attempting to approach Pamiri Lifeworlds, in part, from a local linguistic perspective, rather than translating concepts into what I deem to be the most suitable English-language term. Nonetheless, I am not fluent in Shughni and therefore requested assistance from a colleague, Marifat, who I could compensate financially through a generous grant from the Wom-

ens and Equal Opportunities Fund of my university. Without Marifat's assistance in checking my correct usage of Shughni concepts, and helping me to draft a suitable writing system to encompass how Latin-based Shughni is actually written, this book would be incomplete.

1.5 Chapter Outline

This book chooses as its case studies four preservations of histories of rupture in Pamir, namely Pamiri houses, family stories, popular Shughni songs, and heritage clothing. Through semi-structured ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and detailed anthropological analysis, the histories of rupture in Pamir come to life in their articulations and (re)tellings. Concretely, the four case studies presented in this book highlight the plurality of modes in which histories of rupture exist in Pamir, namely in architecture, oral narratives, artistic expression, and clothing. The chapters in this book are ordered chronologically according to the events referenced by interlocutors. In this way, the reader is able to learn about the history of Pamir directly from interlocutors themselves, enabling Pamiri perspectives not only on the history of the region, but perceptions of temporality as interlocutors often order their stories in different ways, not necessarily following the major ruptures that can be found in historical textbooks or museum exhibitions. It should be reiterated here that the narrations presented here are not selected for their factual correctness, oweing to the vagueness of oral histories of events decades ago. Instead, our interest in these narrations is the emotional, experiential knowledges which they offer. As will be revealed in the pages which follow, the communities living in Pamir have experienced many ruptures, but these are vaguely defined as simply the *Maram bolwo* or the civil war. One event, however, which can be precisely dated is the *didor*, or Aga Khan IV's first visit to GBAO in 1995, perhaps due to most interlocutors having witnessed it personally, rather than simply hearing about it.

Beginning with the arrival of *Doi* Nāṣiri Khusraw in the region, Chapter 2 situates historical narratives of rupture in the Pamiri house, understanding this as part of the regional, or at times its entirety. In this chapter, we meet Nekruz and Suhrob who show us around the Spring of Nāṣiri Khusraw in Porshnev, Alimamad and Rustam who have a lot to share about Roshtqa'la Fortress, and Gulbegim who welcomes us into her home in Khorog. Through three case studies of museumised Pamiri houses in Shughnon, it is argued that the Pamiri house, as the location of spoken narrations of Pamir's history, edifies a Pamiri cultural identity through the use of heritage symbols within its architecture. Through their materiality, Pamiri houses present structures which have not only withstood the ruptures of the 20th

century, but are understood as symbols of Pamiri cultural identity and represent a key fixed point in Pamiri Lifeworlds. This materiality is extended to the emotional experience of interacting with the Pamiri House, finding that feelings are not possible to regulate, in spite of any prescribed reactions planned in the museumisation process.

Chapter 3 provides historical context of the demarcation of the border and Soviet period in GBAO through the localised lens of three family histories. In his second appearance, we get to know Nekruz more as he shares the story of his grandfather's escape from Afghanistan and his own journey there many years later, Abdulloh who gives us insight into how the Soviet times were for his family of Ismaili elites, and Azizkhon who recounts how his family's life was uprooted by the demarcation of Pamir. These narratives, as examples of communicative memory, all present shared experiences of rupture and detail the varied paths taken by three families following the division of Pamir in the early 20th century. The role of environmental connections as fixed points of orientation in times of rupture, taking the River Panj as an example, is discussed and used to ultimately further develop the working definition of Pamiri lifeworlds laid out in the introduction, arguing that the materiality of the River Panj and greater environment has withstood the ruptures of the 20th century. Here, the two Shughni-language concepts of *meruya* (this side) and *weruya* (that side) are used as a lens to understand the flexible cultural identity which places Pamiris within shifting discourses of nationhood, with *weruya* having become a fearful imaginary of Afghanistan which continues to affect the bodies of younger generations, highlighting the residual nature of emotion.

Through close textual analysis of three popular Shughni songs, Chapter 4 builds on the contextual themes thus far and provides more information about the collapse of the Soviet Union and outbreak of the civil war, viewing these as two further ruptures in the history of Pamir. Beginning at the collapse of the Soviet Union with *Arod nest zindage* by Lidush Habib, we move to the civil war with *Sipinin xaparak* by Temursho Imatshoev, before hearing an elderly man's perspective of the last century in *Muysafed* by Zafar Band. Concretely, this chapter argues that the histories of rupture have been preserved in these songs through the ingenuity of the song-writers who utilise poetic tools to veil their true meaning and therefore share their opinions while simultaneously protecting themselves from backlash. Moreover, these songs are inspired by the ruptures and shared historical experiences, thus the writers interact with discourses of cultural identity and enter into the act of creative cultural production as a response to rupture, offering listeners advice through their lyrics. Through this approach, this chapter contributes to the anthropological study of silences and aims to offer a way of navigating unspeakable histories in ethnographic research. This chapter also provides

translation of the song lyrics into English with the aim of also aiding in the preservation of Shughni language.

The final chapter is based on ethnographic interviews with Siawash, a tailor from Shighnan, Afghanistan, living in Vahdat, and Pari from Rushnan who runs a souvenir shop in Khorog. By hearing of the dresses Siawash produces from upcycled materials, and Pari's desire to update traditional Pamiri jewellery in order to make them more attractive to young women, this chapter argues that the two interlocutors are engaging with materials to position themselves in discourses of identity and cultural politics, guided by trends and styles which are the product of multiple scales and temporalities. In this way, the two makers are responding to rupture by adapting available materials to make something new.