5 Making Heritage: Imaginaries of Pamir Past, Present, and Future

During my visits to Tajikistan, I was lucky enough to experience Navruz, the Persian New Year, twice: once in Dushanbe in 2022, and once in Khorog in 2023. While the latter was a calmer affair, many still in mourning for the unspeakable events of May 2022 and the governmental measures which are still following, the Navruz celebrations in Dushanbe were a completely different matter. It was March 2022 and I accompanied my friend Fatima and her family to the ICD. The Ismaili Centre Dushanbe, an impressive structure made from yellowish baked bricks and turquoise tiles inspired by Samanid mausoleums, is the central meeting point of Dushanbe's Pamiri community, though in current times this is heavily restricted (Eurasianet 2022). This Navruz was only at the very beginning of such restrictions and so it was a huge, post-COVID-19 celebration.

As we entered past the security gate, the way up the driveway to the Centre's main entrance was dotted with volunteers, all dressed in their traditional clothing. While the vast majority, all young women, were wearing the typical red and white dress, embroidered with *sheroze* pattern and topped with a floral shawl and Pamiri *toqe*, several of the volunteers evidently came from Afghanistan. The traditional Afghanistani[1] clothes, a colourful flared dress with embroidered vest, trousers, and accented with metal discs and jewellery, stood in strong contrast to the sea of red and white. Fatima paused to take a photo of one of the volunteers who kindly agreed. "It's so interesting. I have never seen anything like this before. The jewellery is amazing. So many little coins. And the colours; so many colours. I'm not sure if they are also Pamiris, they could be Hazara as there are many members of the Ismaili community here coming from that area too." To Fatima, the Afghanistani clothes were something completely new and exciting, standing in contrast to the Pamiri clothing she knew so well.

5.1 Making and Creativity

This chapter deals with making cultural heritage in Pamir. It follows how two young makers from either side of the river interact with the materials at their dis-

1 While the terms "Afghanistani" and "Afghan" are often used interchangeably, "Afghan" is increasingly associated with Pashtun ethnicity, especially following the Taliban takeover in 2021. This chapter uses "Afghanistani" to avoid ethnicised connotations and approach Afghanistan as a culturally and linguistically diverse country.

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posal and bring into existence pieces of cultural heritage, namely clothing and jewellery. It highlights, among other points, the varied responses to discourses of Pamiri cultural identity, and shows how these two makers from *meruya* and *weruya* use their differing experiences to make cultural heritage objects, evoking varied creative regimes of cultural production (Meyer and Svašek 2016) which are subject to various scales and temporalities. Ultimately, we will see that making is a response to dwelling in Pamiri lifeworlds, being a way for both makers to make sense of the world around them and the rupture they experience.

In Chapter Two we discussed Ingold (2022b)'s approach to dwelling which positions the subject in an environment which grows just as the subject grows; both in correspondence with each other. Ingold (2022b) sees dwelling as a result of the human being's reponse to the environment around him, for example his need for shelter or desire for privacy, i. e. dwelling is caused by living. The house, while constructed by the human, is just as much the result of the environment as the human himself, both being like organisms in the lifeworld and sharing in the same ecology. We then used this dwelling approach to analyse the role Pamiri houses play in the edification of Pamiri cultural identity, focusing on the experience of dwelling and the symbolism of the house, viewing both as integral to Pamiri lifeworlds. This only partly appreciated what Pamiri houses actually are: made. Pamiri houses are constructed, meaning that (largely) men select tools and materials from their environment and build the house in which they and their family will live. This act of making will be our focus in this chapter.

Making, as defined by Ingold (2013), is an active process between the maker and the materials, whereby something new is brought into being. Ingold (2013, 21) sees the maker as "a participant in amongst a world of active materials", challenging the Aristotelian model of hylomorphism which approaches material culture as an idea, born in the human mind and given physical form and meaning. Conversely, Ingold (2007) does not go as far as to say that materials have agency on their own, common to the anthropocene, rather they are active and can therefore change and are susceptible to changes within the environment. Therefore, Ingold (2013, 20–1) sees making as a morphogenetic "process of growth" in which the maker and the materials work together and with one another, with the produced material *thing* being a "correspondence" between the flow of materials and the flow of consciousness, whereby the form which is produced is given meaning by the maker.

In making, it is not the maker's idea which takes centrestage, but rather the process which leads to the correspondence between flows. For the flow of materials, this is connected to the generative nature of materials (Ingold 2007, 2011). Materials gain their properties from existence in their surroundings, gradually generating texture, density, etc over time. Such "histories" (Ingold 2011, 40) reflect

the path the materials have taken to reach this state. This growth is also applicable to the maker. Ingold (2013, 69) sees making largely as improvisation: while the maker can have an idea of the end-product in their head, it is their task to bring parts into correspondence with one another. In this sense, things are not designed, but are rather the product of their environment and the intervention of the maker (Ingold 2013, 66–9). The skill involved in this intervention requires not only patience, but a submission to the materials which is only acquired through experience (Ingold 2018, 161).

Meyer and Svašek (2016), building on Ingold's framework, approach making in terms of creativity and seeing improvisation, adaption, and appropriation as regimes of cultural production, with which the maker interacts. Such regimes order systems of value-giving and define what is acceptable, and what falls outside of the canon. I would propose to view these regimes in terms of knowledge(s) which guide the acts of improvisation. Especially in the case of Pamiri making in GBAO, this speaks to a wider interconnection with past regimes of creativity, namely a Soviet heritage which placed great value on the production and development of national identities, but also a contemporary regional desire for the reconstruction of an even farther pre-rupture past, itself inspired by global fashion trends. In this way, it is useful to approach making from the perspective of creativity as, while I contend that Pamiri makers are strongly connected to the landscape of this mountainous region, they are nonetheless interconnected with multiple temporalities and the regimes of creativity which these hold.

As discussed previously in this book, Pamiris are strongly connected to the landscapes in which they live. The rivers, springs, mountains, and valleys, and the materials which they are made of, are all important parts of Pamiri lifeworlds and affect the lived experience of being Pamiri. While some attention has thus far been given to the River Panj, the Spring of Nāṣiri Khusraw, and several natural disasters, representing either fixed points in the landscape, or points of rupture in a collective timeline, this chapter deals, in part, with how the landscape is used in the making process. For its strong focus on natural materials, making fits well to the context of Pamiri cultural heritage for, while natural fibres are not always used these days, the objects made out of wool, wood, and corals which are presented in this chapter tell the histories not only of the materials, but of the people who made them.

In this sense, I have purposefully avoided using the term material histories (Stahl 2010), which denotes a material connection to past lifeworlds and has a predominantly archeological tone, for two reasons. Firstly, while the artefacts which are studied in this chapter do indeed represent a connection to the past, i. e. the times before the demarcation of Pamir, the existence of past lifeworlds would imply that there was a clear beginning and end to the lifeworld. Instead, I see life-

worlds as flexible and able to traverse temporalities, with connection to the past being part of the lifeworld itself. Secondly, the materials used in the making of these artefacts are histories themselves as they tell the story of the landscape of Pamir. In contrast to the family stories which tell of separation and rupture, these materials represent continuity, highlighting the resilience of materiality in times of rupture.

As argued below, materiality traverses temporality. While materials themselves are constantly changing, growing, etc., their very existence realises a connection to the past, just as objects in museums offer visitors the opportunity to experience the past through the material turn (Bräunlein 2012). One example offered in this chapter is that of a coral necklace. Red corals (Shugh.: *asl*), growing in deep caverns in Pamir over thousands of years, are collected and used to make jewellery. In this act of making, the *asl* are given a new form by the maker, but remain of coral material which has grown over thousands of years. The history the *asl* tells is that of the landscape and changing environment, far before it is collected and made into jewellery. In this sense, the material turn which takes place grows from the materiality of the coral, offering a connection not only to the environment of Pamir, but to a formative, prehistoric time.

5.2 Cultural Heritage and Pamiri Identity

The objects included in this chapter are read as belonging to a Pamiri cultural heritage. This meaning, which is given to them by the maker and greater Pamiri community in GBAO who purchase and wear them, is common knowledge and represents the consensus of community members as to what their heritage looks like. In terms of cultural identity (Hall 2003), the objects curated here are, in one sense, articulations of Pamiri cultural identity and thus represent a positioning of the makers. They are embedded in discourses of national identity and belonging, and selected for their essential "Pamiriness". However, in another sense, the clothes and jewellery produced by Siawash and Pari are the makers' own imaginaries of past Pamiri cultural artefacts, speaking to their own interpretations of Pamiri heritage.

As a minority, Pamiri cultural heritage can be understood in this sense in contrast to Tajik cultural heritage, i. e. the national cultural heritage. In post-conflict, post-Soviet Tajikistan, the current discourse surrounding national identity traces the Tajik nation's roots back to the Samanid Dynasty (9th to 10th Century CE), with its unifier Ismāili Sāmānī being held-up as the historic national hero. President Emomali Rahmon has written extensively about the roots of the Tajik nation in his work *Tājīkān dar āynay ta'rīkh: az Ārīyān tā Sāmāniyān* (Engl.: Tajiks in the

Mirror of History: From the Aryans to the Samanids), published in 2009. In this book, Rahmon traces the roots of the Tajik nation as far back as 2000 BCE to ancient Sogdiana and Bactria, two civilisations covering areas of present-day Tajikistan. The height of the Tajik nation in *Tājīkān dar āynay ta'rīkh* is placed in the 9th Century ACE during the reign of the Samanid Dynasty, holding-up the patriarch Ismāili Sāmānī as the national hero. During the Samanid period, Rahmon argues, the Tajik nation grew strong and conquered much of the region, which he then places in stark contrast to the Soviet period and subsequent loss of Tajik identity and national pride. In short, President Rahmon argues that the Tajik nation is an ancient nation, bound to a specific geography, and has suffered humiliation due to Russian imperialism and Sovietisation. In Rahmon's discourse, the Tajik nation is to be understood as an overarching identity which blurs the previous regionalist divisions and situates all people of Tajikistan within the heritage of Sāmānī (Yountchi 2011, 228; Epkenhans 2016a).

Rahmon's thesis is mirrored in the way Tajik cultural heritage is presented in Tajikistan. As Blakkisrud and Kuziev (2019) demonstrate in their case study of the National Museum of Tajikistan, the chronology and territory which is claimed as Tajik is mirrored in the curation of the museum's objects, which are, in turn, placed in the grand narrative of the Tajik nation, given a meaning which complements the official discourse surrounding Tajik national identity. In this way, objects in the museum become embedded in nation-building discourses and are given not only an identity, but a positionality. By placing these objects within the narrative of the Tajik nation, they are essentially claimed as Tajik, an ethno-national identity which is based not only on Tajik-Persian language, but also a specific geographical origin and mutual ancestry.

Post-independence Tajik national identity is effectively a generalisation of the multi-ethnic cultural landscape of Tajikistan. As discussed by Goibnazarov (2017, 192), cultural heritage objects such as song texts are, at times, placed within the general category of "Folklore" and thus, through a process of homogenisation, become part of the "national culture". In this way, Goibnazarov stresses the flexibility of cultural heritage, arguing that songs gain a political meaning when performed together with the semiotics of national costumes, meaning that the objects themselves are flexible and can be given meaning depending on the context in which they are situated. In the same way, Pamiri cultural heritage objects can, at times, be seen as expressions of a Pamiri cultural identity, but at other times viewed as representative of a larger Tajik national identity, for example when viewed internationally (Goibnazarov 2017, 2025a). The items presented in this chapter are, therefore, not by essence Pamiri cultural heritage objects, but can rather be given this meaning depending on the context in which they appear.

In this way, even the intention of the maker to articulate a Pamiri cultural identity through materiality is subject to context.

5.2.1 (Post-)Soviet Heritage

Heritage-making in post-Soviet Central Asia has been viewed from many perspectives, for example female national dress has been approached as an articulation of competing identities (e.g. Suyarkulova 2016, Nasritdinov and Esenamanova 2018, Nozimova 2016, Miles 2015), all within the greater context of retraditionalisation in post-Soviet Central Asia (Laruelle 2018), while the heritagisation of minority cultural identities has been viewed as a response to marginalisation (Harris and Kamalov 2020), and cultural heritage within the scope of China's BRI (Sciorati 2022) and nation-building discourses (Levin 2017) are discussed in terms of contestation. Cultural heritage debates in Central Asia therefore highlight the many varying imaginaries of how the region should look like, and speak to the interplay of contested identities, intertwined in shifting discourses of belonging.

The roots of the post-Soviet narrative on Central Asian cultural heritage can be drawn back to Soviet cultural policies. Within the policies of National Delimitation (Rus.: *razmezhevanie*) and Indigenisation (Rus.: *korenizat͡siia*) of the 1920s and 1930s, communities living in Central Asia were allocated to newly-formed republics and assigned geographical territories. Organising communities into "nationalities" (Rus.: *nat͡sional'nosti*) based on conceptualisations of ethnicities (Bergne 2007), the early Soviet regime drew a line between nationalities living in their assigned territory and other groups who were either not considered as indigenous to the republic in which they lived or belonged to an ethnic minority, all in an effort to hinder possible Russian dominance (Freni 2013). While this policy ended in the mid-1930s and was replaced by Stalin's process of Russification, it set the basis in the Soviet Union for understanding nationalities in terms of space and territory.

One challenge to this conceptualisation of national delimitation were large areas to the west of the UzSSR, including the cities of Bukhara and Samarkand. These ancient cities continue to boast magnificent examples of Timurid and Samanid Islamic architecture, including the three Mudaras of the Registan built in the 13th and 17th centuries, the Samanid Mausoleum of the 10th century, and Ulugh Beg's (1394–1449) Observatory, and are also home to a large Tajik-speaking majority. The post-Revolution restoration of these and other heritage sites in Turkestan has been discussed by Gorshenina and Tolz (2016, 113) who place these endeavours within the greater historical context of national delimitation, challenging the idea that such restoration projects were apolitical and arguing instead that they repre-

sented a shift, "replacing the transnational and multiethnic understanding of cultural production, as articulated in the last decades of the tsarist era, with the ethnocentric understanding of national cultural." Gorshenina and Tolz's (2016) argument would suggest that, thinking back to Meyer and Svašek (2016), the process of national delimitation represented not only a re-imaging of territory, but also the advent of a new regime of cultural production. In this way, the production of cultural heritage in the post-Soviet space, even today, is informed by such regimes and strongly connected to Soviet imaginaries of nation and culture.

For the cases of Samarkand and Bukhara, the cultural connotations of Soviet nationalities were in conflict with territorial borders. As large Tajik-speaking cities, Samarkand, Bukhara, and several areas in present-day Sugd region were, and still are, inhabited by large Tajik communities, i. e. Persian-speaking Muslims. With the creation of the UzSSR, Tajiks lived as a minority within this republic, and therefore as a nomenclature nation. Even following the re-drafting of Soviet cartography in 1929, in which areas around Khujand were given to the new Tajik SSR, Samarkand and Bukhara remained within the UzSSR, much to the continued dismay of many Tajiks (Ubaidulloev 2014). The cases of Samarkand and Bukhara highlight how the Soviet process of national delimitation created nationalities determined along cultural lines, and territories which were spatially defined. In this way, cultural heritage in the post-Soviet space is difficult to separate from these regimes of cultural production as they are so closely connected to the very way space is imagined in Central Asia.

The same issue is presented in GBAO. Although Gorno-Badakhshon existed as an Autonomous Republic in the early years of the Soviet Union, it was given the status of Autonomous Oblast in 1929 which remained throughout the Soviet period. GBAO was not to be understood as a territory of a nationality, but rather a part of the larger Tajik SSR and, while autonomous in name, since its foundation has had little independence from the rest of the republic (Jonboboev 2019, 21). While linguistic and religious differences led to Shughni, Rushani, and Wakhi being offered as separate nationalities in the 1926 Census (Dagiev 2019), from the 1937 Census until the present-day, Pamiris have been categorised as Tajiks, and as such treated as an ethnic minority. Although officially listed as Tajiks, a name which had been used by Pamiris to describe themselves prior to the Soviet period (Dagiev 2019), Pamiri cultural identity as it is understood today developed on the periphery of the Tajik SSR and grew stronger during the Brezhnev era and late Soviet period, thanks in part to concessions given to local elites (Davlatshoev 2006). As a Soviet ethnic minority, Pamiris were not subject to the same promotion of culture and language that other national identities enjoyed (Dagiev 2019), and the Soviet development of Pamir languages largely came from the research interests of Pamiri scholars themselves (Parker 2023). While consensus of a Pamir lan-

guage group had existed for some time (Dodykhudoeva 2023), other markers of Pamiri cultural identity came to be materialised during the later Soviet period, for example in Khudonazarov's classic film *Nisso* (1979) which presents several symbols of Pamiri cultural heritage such as *jerib* (socks) and *toqe* (hats). Today, there is a clear consensus in GBAO about what Pamiri cultural heritage is and looks like, stemming from Soviet policies of national identities and coupled with contrasting political imaginaries in post-Soviet Tajikistan.

Due to the political nature of cultural heritage, embedded in discourses of nation-building, ownership, and belonging (Hall 1998; Meijer-van Mensch and van Mensch 2012; Tolia-Kelly et al 2017), this chapter consciously aims to move the academic discourse surrounding cultural heritage away from such debates of legitimisation and authorisation, choosing to focus solely on what the making of cultural heritage does with the people who make it. In this sense, attention is paid to the biographies and experiences of the makers as they work with materials. This materialist, anthropological approach to cultural heritage presents the possibility to loosen the highly politicised frames surrounding Pamiri cultural heritage, instead letting the makers, and to a certain extent the objects, speak for themselves. Already beginning towards the end of my time in GBAO, the situation of public expressions of Pamiri cultural identity has worsened in Tajikistan, with many symbols such as Pamiri national dress and Pamir languages coming under heavy scrutiny within the on-going state repression (Amnesty International 2024).

This chapter follows two makers, Pari and Siawash, both young Pamiris making cultural heritage artefacts. Pari, in her mid-30s, comes from Rushon, Tajikistan, and runs a small business making and selling handicrafts mainly to tourists. Also in his mid-30s, Siawash originates from Shighnan, Afghanistan, and works as a tailor making Afghanistani dresses for women. While the pair never met, their approaches to their work were very similar. Both enjoyed experimenting with new styles, transforming traditional pieces and recycling materials in their products. This creativity and innovation was evident when hearing each discuss their craft. Taking inspiration from the landscapes in which they live, both makers articulate their identity in different ways. For Pari, as we will see, she regularly refers to her Pamiri heritage and sees the goods in her shop as directly related to the history of Pamir. For Siawash, on the other hand, the dresses he stitches reference an Afghan identity which is not exclusive but rather exists alongside his Shughnani-Pamiri identity.[2] For both makers, they are engaging in discourses of belonging

2 As discussed in more detail in the Introduction, the term "Pamiri" is less common in Afghanistan and interlocutors from Afghanistan instead used the terms "Shughni" and "Shughnani". Nonetheless, "Pamiri" was also used by interlocutors from Afghanistan when referencing a transborder, shared cultural identity.

and identity through their products, positioning themselves in relation to what it means to be Pamiri, Afghan, Tajik, etc. While both Pari and Siawash, at times, refer to themselves as Pamiri, they allude to very different experiences which derive from growing up on different sides of the river and being subject to different ruptures.

5.3 Afghanistani Making in Siawash's Atelier

I first met Siawash around Navruz 2022 through a mutual friend in Dushanbe. Siawash had grown up in a refugee camp in Pakistan and, having worked in the international sector in Kabul, had fled to Tajikistan together with his brother and sister around 6 years before we met. Throughout my fieldwork, they were still waiting on their application to join their parents and other siblings in Canada, which was thankfully approved shortly after I left. Siawash had been stitching for about two years and recently taken over a small sewing shop from his friend who had already left for Canada. One day, at the beginning of my final visit to Tajikistan, I went to visit him in his shop and brought my camera along.

The shop sits in Vahdat, a small city about 20 minutes from Dushanbe by taxi where most refugees from Afghanistan are required to live. Often called 'Little Kabul', Vahdat was until very recently one of a handful of places in Dushanbe where Afghanistan was audibly and visually present. Headscarves worn more loosely in the way typical in Afghanistan, a restaurant serving *sheeryakh*, *qabeli* and *uzbeki*, and several tailors and seamstresses selling waistcoats were all sights set to the *Kabuli* accent I would see while walking to Siawash's shop. On this occasion, however, I was surprised to see the street empty. The tailor's had closed, the restaurant had been liquidated, and the street was simply void of life. As Canada had recently stepped-up its processing of family reunification applications, many people were leaving Vahdat with increasing speed, often on chartered flights to Toronto or Montreal. Siawash and his family, however, were still in Vahdat. Although this was not the first time I had been to the shop, I successfully got lost and ended up in an unfamiliar *mahalla.* Siawash, who had been watching me out of the window while smoking a cigarette, laughed as I realised my mistake and doubled-back, eventually climbing the stairs to the second-floor shop. Siawash has a sharp tongue and would relish in teasing me, but I could give as good as I got. It was this openness and disregard for social norms which made visits to Siawash's shop so enjoyable.

In the corner of the shop, some finished orders were hanging waiting to be collected. One red sequined dress stood out.

> That motherfucking dress. The lady sends me this photo and asks me to recreate it. You know, this dress is couture. Look around, does it look like I make couture here? And look at the neckline, her boobs would be hanging out. So I changed the neckline a bit to make it more flattering. It's like with the Afghan dress I showed you, I raised the waistline to make it more flattering; your body looks longer and you have more of a shape. [He paused, taking a drag from his cigarette,] You're laughing your ass off at this sequined dress over there. Honey, I'm gonna introduce you to the sequin universe.[3]

Ducking under the worktable, Siawash produced a large black bin bag and spread its contents out for me to see. The skirt, flared in the typical style, was made of a patchwork of practically every colour imaginable, almost all from sequined material.

Fig. 11: Part of the sequin universe. Smith (2023).

> I use the scraps from other dresses. It's going to be a gift for the woman who is sponsoring our application to Canada. But wait, there's more. [Pulling out a second plastic bag, Siawash

3 Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in English with Siawash in Vahdat.

> revealed a yellow beaded vest, intended to go against a dark blue sleeve] Like I said, Afghans like to go big.

The dress did, indeed, go big. The shimmering sequins coupled with the neon beads of the vest lit-up the otherwise dim atelier. Taking fabrics scraps from other orders, Siawash had pieced together the materials to make something incredibly unique and unconventional, all the while maintaining the traditional style of an Afghanistani dress.

To me, this skirt exemplifies the improvisation of making. The materials, each greatly varying in texture, density, etc, tell differing histories. Most of the fabrics Siawash used were purchased at Korvon, a large textile bazaar in Dushanbe. As he told me during one visit together, Uzbeks were the main sellers in Korvon, sourcing fabrics from Turkey and China. Fabrics from Turkey are considered to have better quality and are more expensive, whereas Chinese produced materials are cheaper but of a lower quality. The skirt was therefore constructed out of fabrics with different origins, all brought together to make a new piece of clothing. Through the skills Siawash had learned, he was able to not only delicately piece the fabrics together, but he engaged with his creativity in the very idea of taking scrap pieces of fabric and sewing a skirt. Just like the design sought for the couture dress, Siawash adapted to varying fashions, drawing inspiration from other designers and social media platforms like Instagram. Through these means, Siawash was therefore greatly immersed in varying regimes of cultural production.

5.3.1 Making Home through Materiality

As we sat in his shop, eating a tasty *qabeli* (Afghanistani national rice dish) his sister had prepared, I asked him how he acquired such skills:.

> I started to sew about two years ago. I largely taught myself. It's a good way to make money but you know, I earn money and then it's gone straight away. When I go to Korvon to buy the material, often I'm in debt and I pay it the next time I go there. [...] There are a few other [tailor's] shops here in Vahdat but there is enough demand so I'm kept super busy. There is a flight leaving for Canada on Wednesday so I need to work round the clock to make the orders in time. No joke, I literally worked more than 24 hours yesterday, but then there was a fucking power cut so I had to stop.

As Siawash explained, the demand for traditional and Western clothes alike was very high. And these dresses were not to be underestimated: when I was returning to Germany, Siawash wanted to send a traditional Afghanistani dress with me to give to his friend but decided against it because of the sheer weight of the fabric,

Fig. 12*:* The maker sewing a Tajik national dress. Smith (2023).

around 10 kg. Instead, he made a Tajik dress and trousers, a men's waistcoat, and a little dress for a baby which were all under 3 kg. However, the flights leaving to Canada and the US must have been full of such dresses, all crammed into black bin bags.

I asked him if he brought any of these tools with him from Afghanistan, to which he laughed:

> No, all these tools I got here. When you live your whole life in migration, you get used to carrying very little with you. You know, when I was a child we didn't even have a wardrobe for a long time. We had a TV but no wardrobe. [...] My father, when he was leaving Afghanistan to go to Canada, he took photos of lots of things he knew he couldn't get in Canada. He even flew to Shighnan just to get a pair of the wooden sandals and take photos of how they are made. He wanted to get a pair made in Canada. Can you imagine? This guy goes all the way to Canada and wants that?

Siawash was referring to *kavsh*, shoes carved out of wood which were traditionally used as outer wear when working in the fields. These, as well as countless other wooden artefacts, are often presented in museums in Khorog and the greater GBAO region alongside Pamiri socks, dresses, and hats; there were even pairs of

such shoes in the two Pamiri house museums in Chapter Two. For Siawash, the wooden shoes held no real significance, seeing these as impractical and irrelevant to life in Canada. But to his father, the wooden sandals were a piece of home, just like the dresses packed into the black bin bags.

I had heard already from Siawash that his father was very passionate about their Shughni roots, having been a researcher for many years working on the arabo-persian-based Shughni writing system used in Afghanistan. Although Siawash and his siblings had never lived in Shighnan, having grown up in Kabul and spending several years in a refugee camp in Pakistan, their father had tried to instil in them a sense of cultural identity:

> I don't know so much about these symbols and everything: the *chorkhona* and what not, but my father knows all about that stuff. If you ask him, he'll say that we're Aryans and these symbols come from that. He knows everything about Shighnan: the history, the language, everything. My brother and I, when we were little in Kabul, my father would get so pissed at us if we spoke in Persian. He insisted we speak Shughni at home. But then when we went to Pakistan, we picked up Urdu, English, whatever.

The symbols Siawash was speaking about were nowhere to be found in his atelier, but he assured me that he is quite renowned for making Pamiri dresses. Siawash had therefore grown up with the lessons his father had taught him, not only Shughni language, but also the symbols of the Pamiri house and other aspects of cultural identity. In contrast to other interlocutors featured in other chapters, however, Siawash's experiences and connection to Pamir was situated on the Afghanistani side of the river, rather than in GBAO.

5.3.2 Traversing *Meruya* and *Weruya*

It was getting late and I needed to return to Dushanbe soon as I was going to travel to Pamir the next day. Siawash laughed, brushing-off my plans and implying there was no point in going there. I was a little confused, especially since he was technically from *there*, so I asked him what exactly he meant:

> I don't know what to say about Pamir because I've never been there but I kind of feel I will never connect with that place. It's been like this childhood thing that on the other side of the river people have been dying to be on this side of the river, calling it weruya. We've been taught, the Shughnis, that this side of the river is like heaven because it has roads, bungalows, cars, light, electricity…fun, alcohol, everything. And the girls were more beautiful, obviously. You see? And we've been thinking that because we are the same people, this side of the river would be very warm to us, fine to meet us. But in reality it's not the same. That's not a complaint, that this side of the river doesn't like us or anything. I mean, it's not like

> they are our cousins and they should die for us, but that's what we thought. But with that perception I faced the Pamiris here and they were not the people that I expected.

What Siawash described was perhaps the result of almost a century of separation. The infrastructural development in GBAO was by far stronger than in Shighnan, Afghanistan. This was a common topic when looking out of the window on the long drive to Khorog. While GBAO underwent a process of Sovietisation, which brought a Socialist idea of development which encompassed almost every aspect of life, the situation was very different in Shighnan.

Following the demarcation of Pamir in 1895, the Emir of Afghānistān, Abd al-Rahmān, attempted to consolidate his power in Badakhshān, suppressing Ismaili religion and forcing religious minorities to embrace Sunni Islam, which was continued by his son, Ḥabibullāh (Emadi 1998, 110). Upon Ḥabibullāh's assassination in 1919, he was succeeded by Amānullāh who, accompanying his declaration of independence from the British, adopted a more tolerant stance towards Ismailis and other religious minorities (Emadi 1998, 110), but the Ismaili *piren* did not enjoy the same political power as they had in Tsarist Russia. In the years that followed, while large areas of Afghanistan underwent development, the communities of Shighnan continued to live in poverty.

Throughout the internal ruptures Afghanistan underwent during the 20th and 21st centuries, Ismaili communities, largely in Badakhshan and Baghlan Provinces, continued to be discriminated against for their lack of a masjid, azan, or ulema (Emadi 1998, 111).[4] With growing access to education and mass media, the *piren* gradually lost influence and, in the prelude to the ousting of ruling President Mohammad Daoud Khan in 1978, many Ismailis supported socialism and joined pro-Soviet political parties, inspired by the improved conditions of Ismaili communities in GBAO and Xinjiang, China (Emadi 1998, 114). During the years of Soviet occupation (1979–89), many Ismailis benefitted from Afghanistan's close relations with the Soviet Union, winning scholarships to study in the USSR and seeing power lines extended from Khorog to Shighnan (Emadi 1998, 115). Following the fall of the Soviet regime and subsequent rise of Islamist groups, Ismailis in Badakhshan Province remained loyal to Dr. Burhanuddin Rabbani, signalling a split as Ismailis in Baghlan supported General Abdul Rashid Dostum (Emadi 1998, 115–116). During these years, Ismailis suffered greatly due to their religious beliefs and, taking up arms under the command of Bahrambig Adeli, achieved a period of self-rule in Shighnan within the greater territory of Rabbani (Emadi

4 As Emadi rightly notes, it is not that Ismailis lack these three things, but rather they are articulated differently with regard to Sunni Islam.

1998, 116). In 1996, when the Taliban gained control of Kabul, Badakhshan remained under Rabbani's control but an onslaught of sectarian violence ensued and many Ismailis fled, either from Kabul to Pakistan, GBAO (Emadi 1998, 117).

Towards the end of the 1990s, the AKDN increased activities in the region, with Aga Khan IV visiting GBAO for the first time in 1995, at the height of the civil war in Tajikistan. This signalled a brief moment of reunion between the two banks of the River Panj, initially during the *Didor* in May 1995 when Ismaili Muslims in Afghanistan listened to Aga Khan IV's speech from across the river, and then with the construction of a series of bridges by the AKDN, boosting the local economy and re-vitalising cultural ties (Aksakolov 2006). The border bazaars, created by the AKDN, offered meeting points for separated families, as well as opportunities for (mainly) Afghanistani vendors to sell their goods for the stronger Tajik Somoni. This was, sadly, on pause during my stay in Tajikistan as, following the closure of the border upon the COVID-19 pandemic and the re-emergence of the Taliban in August 2021, the border remained closed and tightly monitored. Shortly after my last visit to Tajikistan in 2023, the border bazaar at Tem bridge, just outside of Khorog, finally re-opened.

Siawash's experience, feeling far different from the Pamiris in GBAO, speaks to the decades of separation caused by the demarcation of Pamir. While Pamiris in Tajikistan and Afghanistan alike share the same symbols of the *chorkhona* etc. which act as reminders of pre-rupture times and ancient heritage, the separation caused by the border demarcation created a shift in Pamiri cultural identities. While there is a shared heritage which connects Pamiris across the River Panj, the experiences of being Pamiri *meruya* and *weruya* differ greatly.

This difference in Pamiri cultural identities is articulated in the clothes that Siawash makes. Due also to popular demand, Siawash makes traditional Afghanistani dresses, consisting of flared skirts, beaded vests, and ballooned trousers. In this instance, Siawash is not necessarily a Pamiri tailor, but rather an Afghanistani tailor. Siawash has learned the skills needed to construct such dresses and this is how he supports himself. The styles Siawash makes speak to the regimes of cultural production he is subject to, having learnt to make Afghanistani dresses following a specific style, while combining this with upcycled materials according to popular sustainable fashion trends. As we will see from Pari, being Pamiri in GBAO means that she is versed in other regimes of cultural production, approaching her heritage making very much according to Soviet understandings of nationality and space.

5.4 Working with Pamiri Heritage in Pari's Shop

Siawash's words travelled with me along the Pamir Highway to Khorog, where I met Pari. In her mid-30s, Pari is a business woman who runs a small gift shop in Khorog. The shop, located directly beside a popular café in Khorog, is filled with colourful items of clothing and decorations, all sourced locally. On one wall, next to a wicker basket full of dried *ispand*, a herb used traditionally for a variety of ailments and warding-off the Evil Eye (Shugh. *chashme bad*), Pari had arranged a display of *tcemaken*. These long, beaded necklaces, traditionally white and red and worn by Pamiri brides, have become more fashionable outside of the wedding day and are now available in various colours, patterns, and sizes.

Fig. 13*:* Tcemaken. Smith (2023).

> The tcemaken are made by local women at home. We sell many pieces produced by local women. They are all handmade. The original designs are red and white, but it is starting to change. See, this one is yellow and green, and this one is purple and white. These days, the girls want something unique, not just the traditional red and white. They see these other colours and want to have something in these colours instead. It is how we adapt to modernity I think. We have new influences and we change, but we keep our roots. You see it here: the thing is the same, there is a string of beads woven in a certain way, but

> the patterns, the colours can be different. It's something new and it keeps young people interested in our heritage.[5]

To Pari, preserving heritage meant adapting to changing times and staying relevant. During my fieldwork, I discussed different ways to preserve cultural heritage, exchanging ideas with Khorog-based actors and drawing inspiration from other projects around the world. Pari's stance was quite clear; it is all to do with modernity:

> Change is good, we need to be adaptable. We need to mix with modernity to survive. If we do this, we can make young people interested in our history and then they will see it as something worth preserving. Just like the tcemaken over there, making them in new colours and designs. We make something new out of something old.

Similar to Siawash, Pari had a desire to update traditional styles, creating something new but still recognisable. In Pari's case, this was strongly connected to keeping younger generations interested in their cultural heritage.

When I asked Pari what exactly she meant by modernity, she defined it as this modern time, i. e. the time in which we currently live. With regard to the materiality of the *tcemaken*, this is very interesting as they are made with plastic beads. While traditionally such necklaces were made from precious stones, the plastic beads are largely imported from China. Hence, the materials which local women work with are representative of the growing dominance of Chinese productions. Meeting the demand for updated fashions indirectly means that makers interact with imported materials, rather than locally-sourced materials of past times. As Mostowlanksy (2017a) has discussed, perceptions of modernities are entangeled in the materiality of GBAO. Made-in-China products, therefore, represent a point of interconnection of Pamiri lifeworlds with large-scale geopolitics, in this case the BRI.

This issue of imported materials was exemplified in other objects in Pari's shop. Hanging adjacent to the display of *tcemaken*, a collection of tote bags adorned with the image of a woman wearing a Pamiri *toqe* and *sheroze* patterns filled the corner of the room. In the glass cabinet which acted as a counter, a variety of carved wooden pendants with a *chorkhona* design lay beside earrings painted with *atlas* patterns and piles of *sheroze* ribbons. Pari took the ribbons out of the cabinet:

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5 Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in English, Tajik, and Shughni with Pari in Khorog.

> We take clothes orders sometimes. Once we made 40 Pamiri dresses for a dance troupe somewhere. The ribbons are difficult to come by because there are fewer and fewer women who are making them. It's tough work and you can't sell them for such a high price unfortunately. Look, this is the handmade ribbon. This one is the pattern from here, and that one is an Ishkashimi pattern, it's called *gulduze*. Our pattern is made with two threads, but the *gulduze* is made in a different way, in a square. But this ribbon here, this is from China. My cousin lives in China and I got her to order it because we just don't have enough handmade ribbons.

The two types of ribbons, one handmade, local, and the other factory-made and imported, lay side by side on the countertop. A few months before, I had visited my friend Swetta in the studio she was working in above a similar giftshop. There was a young girl, a student, kneeling on the floor and stitching the *sheroze* ribbon by hand. Using a double-pronged needle, the girl's hands moved so quickly I could barely keep track. As Swetta explained, the girl had learnt the technique from her mother and made the ribbons here to earn a bit of cash to support her studies, like several other young girls in Khorog. As I watched her hands move so skillfully, I noticed several scars on her left hand, presumably from where the needle had caught her hand by mistake. There is quite literally blood and sweat going into the *sheroze*, which is not present in the machine-made ribbons.

China's growing presence in Tajikistan is arguably another rupture currently taking place in GBAO. The issue of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its political, economic, and social impact on Tajikistan has been extensively researched in recent years. To many analysts, the presence of Chinese investment in Tajikistan and the greater Central Asian region poses the threat of falling into an already burgeoning 'debt-trap' (Liu 2020; Bawa and Ashish 2023), while also leading to a shift in existing political structures and processes (Karrar and Mostowlanksy 2020, Hoffman et al 2020). Made-in-China products, like in most other reaches of the world, are extremely present in Tajikistan, ever since Tajikistan and China signed their first trade agreement in 1993. Joining the BRI in 2017, Tajikistan has since amassed around 2.7 billion USD (2.5 billion EUR) of Chinese investment (CABAR 2023) which has gone towards funding infrastructural development including the rehabilitation of the Dushanbe-Khorog-Kulma highway, a key part of the Tajik-China trade route stretching 1,008 km (Asia Plus 2023).

I am hesitant to politicise such an act as making, with the knowledge that Pamiris are a politicised minority. I do not believe that makers such as this young girl actively make these handicrafts entirely in resistance to made-in-China productions. I feel it important to mention this as Pamiris are often placed in this geopolitical nexus point between Russia, China, and the West, despite geopolitics being of little concern in day-to-day life. Instead, I argue that making, like the Pamiri house, both symbolises and edifies Pamiri cultural identity but to varying de-

Fig. 14*:* A student sewing sheroze ribbons. Smith (2022).

grees. Pari, for example, actively sees making Pamiri cultural heritage goods as an articulation of her Pamiri identity.

According to Pari, the increasing dominance of the People's Republic of China is posing a threat to the production of local handicrafts. Locally-produced ribbons and other materials are being pushed aside in favour of machine-made products which are easy to mass produce and are far cheaper. Nonetheless, made-in-China products offer an affordable way to mass-produce *sheroze* and other products. I have discussed this issue in terms of cultural resilience (Smith 2025), arguing that Chinese-produced textiles are one way in which Pamiri cultural heritage can adapt to times of rupture when it is becoming more difficult to source certain pieces. With regard to the making process, machine-made products endanger both the skill required to make such items, and the role of natural materials. As I witnessed in the young girl making the *sheroze* ribbon, making does something to the body. For the female student, she had many scars on her hands from times she had caught it with the crochet hook. These scars, also material, told the story of her acquiring the skill of making the ribbons, learning from past mistakes and gradually improving. Her learning how to make also highlights her connection with her mother, a fellow maker who passed on her skill to her, taking the time

to teach her daughter this handicraft. The young girl was not born a maker, she had become one over time.

5.4.1 Materials from *Xutho*

With regard to the materials, Pari's heightened sense of smell, which she is well-known for, directly influences which materials she makes with. To her, these items represented a connection to nature:

> Sometimes I go to Dushanbe, to Korvon [the textile bazaar] and shop for fabrics etc. But really I can't stand it there. It's the smell. Everything smells so strongly of plastic. Really, I get headaches in Korvon and I can't stay there for too long. I miss the smell in the shop: the wool, the wood. These are natural materials. It's like we're working with a piece of history, of natural history.

Pari's heightened sense of smell once again became apparent here as she described her disgust at the plastic smell in the bazaar. It reminded me of something Swetta had told me regarding the sale of an old woollen coat in the shop she was working in. The coat was second-hand, having come somehow from Afghanistan. Swetta had the coat cleaned but it still smelt very strongly of yak, so strongly in fact that Swetta had to keep it in a plastic bag because the smell was just too overpowering for her. As she came to realise, however, the smell was associated as a sign of authenticity by the French tourist who eventually bought the coat: "I don't understand it. They just really love the smell of yak, apparently." The contrasting scents of which Pari spoke brought with them connotations of the natural and the manufactured respectively. Authenticity could be found in the smell of wool or wood, but not of plastic. Ribbons could be imitated by machinery, but the smell of natural fibres could not. This connection to nature signified a legitimacy in the sphere of cultural heritage. To the tourist, the natural smells were exactly what they were looking for; they wanted to experience Pamir with all senses.

Pari's connection to natural materials was a recurring theme throughout my visit to her shop. Passionate about food culture, as a part of cultural heritage, Pari took great delight in telling me about the different local foods found in the region. As we discussed the different ways to make *shirchoy*, and I tried desperately to remember the names of all the Pamiri foods I had tasted a few days prior at a celebration, Pari paused for a moment of thought, before lamenting on the state of Pamiri food culture:

> *Xutho* has provided man with everything he needs. He can survive from everything directly around him. Our people have been surviving here in the mountains for centuries by eating

> the local foods. It's our *rizq*. You know, our men used to be taller and stronger because they ate the local foods. Cherries, apricots, mullberries. They have so many vitamins. We should use our local resources, first for ourselves, but then share it with the world. We have to learn from our history and appreciate the lives our grandfathers lived. […] I tell you, a few weeks ago my daughter was in the hospital. She was so sick, I was so scared. And the doctors said it is something with her stomach so she should now only eat local foods, like this bread here.

Pari unwrapped some tissues, revealing a piece of dark sourdough bread. Breaking off a piece and offering it to me, she explained that it was made from *tuth pihtt* (Engl.: mulberry flour). Biting into the thick piece, I discovered the bread was extremely chewy and dense, somewhat like the *xleb* (Soviet-style bread) sold in most bakeries in Khorog, but had a richer, more sour taste to it. According to Mubalieva (2015), *tuth* (Engl.: mullberies) are not only remnants of the Ancient Silk Road and remind of a time when silkworms were harvested to create fabrics involved in trade, but also sustained communities in GBAO during the civil war as the region was under blockade. To Pari, this fruit was evident of the way that *Xutho* continued to protect Pamiris, sustaining them in this harsh environment.

Pari's words echoed several points I had heard during my fieldwork. Firstly, the idea that *Xutho* has provided for the people of Pamir and greater Ismaili Muslim community. Often, when there is a crisis in Khorog and the community suffers, many people will make reference to other periods of rupture, be it the violence and starvation during the civil war, or the persecution of the Ismailis under the Seljuks and other ancient dynasties. "It is in our history to suffer" is a common idea I had heard many times, but quickly followed by reference to good times coming thereafter. In short, there is a common belief that *Xutho*, working through *Hazar Imom*, has saved the Ismailis before, and He will save them again. For Pari, this even connects to the very fact that Pamiris have lived and survived in this difficult climate for hundreds of years. Indeed, once a friend of mine remarked that it is precisely because of these harsh conditions that Pamiri people survived for so long with such a preserved language, culture, and religion: "It's the mountains. We are protected by the mountains." To Pari, it appears that sustenance is *Xutho* given, denoting it with the Arabic term *rizq* (see Bosworth and McAuliffe), implying that all is provided by *Xutho* and from it Pamiris are able to live. *Rizq* also implies that the fruits etc. which Pari mentions are enough to sustain the communities in Pamir, an argument she backs up with reference to past times when men were taller and healthier.

The time Pari is referring to, i. e. "the lives our grandfathers lived", is not necessarily the time before the demarcation of Pamir, which has been our focus thus far, but rather a time before industrialisation and mass production, i. e. the pre-Soviet times. To Pari, going back to one's roots means utilising natural materials in all aspects of life and working with what is available. Pari's narrative can be

divided into two periods, i. e. "the lives our grandfathers lived" and "modernity". In this case, the past is seen as an idyllic, pre-Soviet time when Pamiris practised self-sustenance, remained unaffected by outside influences and held a closer relationship with *Xutho.* In contrast, the present represents a time when Pamiris have become distant from their roots and are not as strong because of this. This is strikingly similar to the sentiments discussed in the previous chapter's analysis of *Muysafed* by Zafar Band and highlights the popularity of this way of thinking.

Secondly, Pari highlights the local resources available and argues that they should be utilised before being shared with the rest of the world. This was very much a hot topic in Khorog during my fieldwork, as well as in other parts of the country. The BRI had gained growing visibility in recent months with the increased construction along the Dushanbe-Khorog-Kulma Road and the hours-long delays it brought with it. Even parts of this book were typed-up while waiting 7 hours for the road to re-open in Darvoz. While the rejuvenation of the road is a generally well-received move, there are greater concerns as to China's growing influence in the region. In 2011, Tajikistan ceded a large area of land in GBAO to China and thus ending a long-standing border dispute (BBC 2011). In the aftermath of the military operations in Khorog, a common concern voiced was that the rest of the region would be sold to China as it is rich in mineral resources, some of which are already being mined by Chinese companies (Eurasianet 2019). In this context, the stress Pari places on using local resources, in this case various berries, suggests a way to preserve the way of life in the face of growing transformation.

Thirdly, and perhaps most poignantly, Pari suggests that Pamiris should appreciate their heritage more. Among those I spoke with working in heritage-related fields, be it handicrafts, food, or tourism, there was an overwhelming concern for the preservation of Pamiri cultural heritage. In general, the problem appears to be a lack of interest in traditions, seeing them as outdated or poor. As Shams, a mulberry-enthusiast, put it:

> Apart from shirchoy, no one bothers with our foods. They think it's just peasant food and they don't see the point in preserving it. Our people are doing this to our own food culture. They even don't know the names of some of the foods, they just see it as nothing special.[6]

People like Pari and Shams therefore see it as their responsibility to teach their community about the value of such objects, explaining why it is important and why it deserves to be preserved. One such initiative working to preserve environmental heritage in GBAO is the Pamir Eco-Cultural Tourism Association (PECTA).

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6 Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in English with Shams in Khorog.

In reaction to many requests for hunting trips, which are against the sustainable and environmentally-conscious charter of PECTA, the association decided to offer "photo-hunting" excursions, giving photography and nature enthusiasts the chance to track GBAO's wildlife in order to photograph it, rather than kill it. Other initiatives include the much regionally-celebrated edited volume and cookbook *With Our Own Hands* (Taj.: *Bā Dastāni Khūd*), edited by van Oudenhoven and Haider (2015), which combines contributions from international and Pamiri scholars and other actors to document endangered food culture in transborder Badakhshan.

As Pari went on to comment, any appreciation for Pamiri handicrafts largely comes when one has left:

> Most people don't appreciate what they have until it's gone. Most of my customers in the shop are people who are leaving Khorog, either moving away or they are visiting family who have already left. These are the people who want to take the *toqe* or *jerib* with them. They want to have a piece of home. But they don't appreciate it when they are still in Khorog. They think these things are old and outdated, but their mood changes when they leave.

Immediately, I remembered Siawash's father and his wooden *kavsh.* It appears that an interest for preservation is awoken when an object becomes limited or difficult to come by. Socks and hats which are commonplace in any home, are missed. These objects come to represent a piece of home; they are connected to what was left behind. In the context of growing outside influences and endangerment to Pamiri cultural heritage, the *toqe* and *jerib* could very well come to represent what was, and what was lost.

5.4.2 Materials that Travel

An idea suddenly struck Pari and she reached high up on the shelf and brought down a bust adorned with several necklaces. Carefully taking two of the necklaces away and placing them to the side, Pari showed me a long single-beaded necklace made out of *asl*, leading down to a large metal ornament.

> This is my pride and joy. I collected these corals over several months. They're from Afghanistan, I got them in the Afghan Bazaar. It used to be every Saturday and there you could buy lots of antiques. You can't find these corals here on this side of the river. We must have had them at one point but lost them. But on that side, they have so many of them. So they would come to the bazaar and sell their grandmother's jewellery.

There was something about the symmetry in Pari's words which struck me. The *asl*, which had disappeared on this side of the River Panj, were still available *wer-*

Fig. 15*:* Rescued corals. Smith (2023).

uya but being sold back to *meruya*. The objects, coming from the landscape itself and perhaps having previously crossed the river in the time before the border existed, had been kept safe after all these years and avoided the fate of their Tajikistani counterparts. In turn, Pamiris living on this side of the river were able to regain a connection to a past which had been lost. These coral beads, traversing the very river which separates these people, also connects them and highlights a shared cultural heritage.

The *asl*, as a material, come from the environment of Pamir and tell the history of the region. As a rare gemstone, corals require specific conditions to grow, namely certain levels of moisture and darkness. While Pamir is famous for its great mineral wealth, boasting rubies, emeralds, and other precious stones such as lapis lazuli (Shugh.: *lazurit* or *lojvar*) which are also assosciated with the region, corals came to be iconic in Pamiri jewellery. The history this material tells is therefore one of changing connection to the environment. As Pari explains, such coral jewellery is a rare find in Tajikistan these days as they have fallen out of fashion, while in Afghanistan they are still available. This material connection to the environment is therefore something which has been lost in Tajikistan, having been replaced by alternative imaginaries of cultural heritage and women's

fashion. In this sense, the (post-)Soviet regimes of cultural production left little room for the *asl* and they therefore fell out of fashion, while Afghanistan underwent no such process.

We spoke a little about the bazaar where Pari had collected the *asl*. Time and time again, interlocutors had referenced the cross-border bazaar as the one opportunity they had to connect with their relatives, but few had mentioned the actual goods which were sold there. I asked if Pari had purchased anything else from the bazaar and she showed me a large metal pot, sitting in the corner of her shop next to a collection of Kulobi *suzanis*. As Pari explained, this metal pot was used way back when to store milk, keeping it cool and preserving it for longer. Now sitting in the corner of her shop, it serves as an antique, but for many on *weruya*, it is a pot for storing milk. While on *meruya* this object had become obsolete, replaced eventually by refrigerators and long-life milk imported from Russia, *weruya* such objects still served the same purpose. In many areas in Afghanistan, there was no alternative way to keep milk fresh.

Fig. 16*:* An antique pot used for storing milk. Smith (2023).

Thinking about the *asl*, the metal pot, and the *kavsh*, I noticed the shifting value and perception of these objects depending on the point from which one is looking.

In Pamir, it depended very much from where you were standing: *meruya, weruya*, but also from far away (Shugh.: *ar*). The migration of the object itself is another matter, but the gaze with which the object is perceived transforms the metal pot and corals to antiques, and the wooden sandals to a piece of home. This gaze is both subjective and culturally-informed; it is the same gaze which Pari and Siawash interact with when approaching their work.

The cross-border bazaar was not Pari's first experience with the other side of the river. She told me about her family's experiences during the Soviet times, giving me a closer understanding of her approach to making:

> My grandfather's sister was kidnapped, around 1924 I think. It could be that she was sold in exchange for land. I'm not so sure. She was taken to the other side of the river so my grandfather became a spy for the Soviet Union. It was the only way to cross the river and find her. He couldn't bring her back but I know my uncle still talks to her family, to our relatives over there. They call sometimes. At this time, back then, our women were so afraid they would be taken by the Afghans. They even shaved-off their hair and eyebrows to make themselves look ugly and avoid being taken to Afghanistan. And who could blame them? You see the conditions today over there. The Russians saved us; they brought us to civilisation.

I had heard stories of women being kidnapped and sent to Afghanistan, but these were cases which happened in the late 1990s and early 2000s in relation to drug trafficking. Fatima, for example, had told me of several women she had known from her neighbourhood in Dasht who had been kidnapped by drug traffickers. One woman's mother had eventually managed to track her daughter down. She was living in Afghanistan as the second wife of the drug trafficker she had been sold to. By the time her mother found her, she had had several children and could not leave to return to Tajikistan. Another woman, also a neighbour of Fatima, had been kidnapped but managed to escape while still in GBAO, fleeing to a house close by where a family of strangers hid her for several days.

For Pari, while in our conversation she stressed the shared cultural heritage and other unifying elements, there was still an air of danger associated with the other side of the river. It is interesting to question who the "Afghans" are, these people seen as a threat to Pamiri women a century ago. While the people living on either side of the river share common languages, culture, and religion, as well as legitimate family ties, the separation through the creation of the Soviet Union and strong border militarisation meant that these communities were split down the middle into *meruya* and *weruya*, or "us" and "them". Standing in Khorog and looking out across the river, "they" were "*afghon*", living under the Taliban and growing up in war and violence, but for the "*afghon*" "they" were "*shuravi*", having lost their culture and language to years of Soviet occupation.

This thought stayed with me when, almost a year later, Pari and I chatted again about her work in preparation for a workshop. Having since grown her skillset, Pari had taken part in several opportunities provided by international donors to safeguard cultural heritage in Central Asia. One such training opportunity which she had visited abroad led her to a conclusion which neither of us had fully appreciated before and is important to add here:

> You know what *tcemaken* means, right? Two little eyes. We say '*tcem to maken*' which means to protect yourself from being jinxed. Like from the Evil Eye, *chashme bad.* A little like *ofat* but that would be stronger; *ofat* is when you suddenly get sick or something serious, like a curse. The two words sound similar, no? *Tcemaken* and *tcem to maken?* I think this is where it comes from. The eyes are for protection, not just for the bride but women wear them on dresses a lot. They also put a little cotton bag with pepper in it on the left side of the dress. When I was in Kazakhstan, I learned the people there wear *tisma*, this is like *sheroze.* You wear it around your neck also for protection. *Sheroze* is also around the neck and on the trousers. I never thought of this before, that the *sheroze* is also for protection.[7]

Hearing Pari's words, I thought of the story she had told me of the fate of her grandfather's sister and many other women from *meruya.* The need for protection stemmed, perhaps in one way, from this period of Pamir's history when the mirdom of Badakhshān was under threat from Afghan invaders. So too could the threat be felt by Ismaili Muslim communities who had inhabited the Pamir mountains for centuries, seeking refuge from persecution in lower lands. In that instant, Pari's making and Pamiri cultural identity fell into place as she drew this historical line between her ancestors and the products she sold in her shop. With that, it became clear that making was not just Pari's profession and passion for preservation, but also her own response to the history of her community.

5.5 (World-)Making

Pari and Siawash provide us with a further way to conceptualise Pamir: through materiality and making. The creativity which both makers evoke are evident of regimes of cultural production from varying contexts. While Siawash's migration story speaks to global fashion trends of upcycling and adaptation, Pari's work with the *asl*, by her own admission, is an interaction with her heritage, manifested in the corals themselves. Read together, their biographies speak to the varied trajec-

7 Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversations in English and Shughni with Pari, online.

tories of Pamiri cultural identity they have experienced as a result of the border demarcation and dwelling *meruya* and *weruya.*

For Siawash, growing up in exile in Pakistan and never having really lived in Shighnan, he approaches his making very much from a supply/demand perspective. Needing to support himself in Vahdat while he waits to be reunited with his family, Siawash puts the skills he has picked-up over the years to use in sewing Afghanistani dresses and other pieces of women's clothing. While Siawash is conscious of his Pamiri identity, with reference to his father's passion for Shughni language, Siawash struggles to identify with Pamiris in Tajikistan. This suggests that, when traversing *meruya* and *weruya*, being Pamiri is not universal and is rather based on the context one finds themselves in. In this way, it is difficult to say if Siawash's clothing belongs to Pamiri cultural heritage as, just because he is Pamiri, does not mean that he produces Pamiri cultural heritage. Rather, his clothing is influenced by different creative regimes of cultural production which he has learnt from Afghanistan and abroad.

By his own admission, Siawash creates Afghan dresses which are very popular throughout the Afghan community in Vahdat, regardless of region. As Afghanistan did not undergo the same Soviet process of national delimitation and the cultural definitions of nationalities inherited from this, it does not fit to view Siawash's clothing in terms of Pamiri cultural identity, as this looks very different in Afghanistan. Instead, Siawash's clothing can be viewed, in one way, as a form of world-making as he himself moves through the various lifeworlds that he is connected with. By sewing together the flared skirts, colourful vests, and bell-shaped sleeves, the maker is adding instead to the Afghanistani lifeworld in Vahdat which, at that time, was beginning to disappear due to the increased resettlements to North America. Just as the people were starting to leave Vahdat, so too were the clothes which Siawash produced and the city was starting to look less Afghanistani every day. For Siawash in this moment, he saw himself as Afghanistani due to his status as a refugee and living within the Afghanistani community. This clothing therefore also belongs to this lifeworld, highlighting also the mobility of Afghanistani lifeworlds in this time of great rupture. Nonetheless, Siawash is also interconnected with Pamiri lifeworlds and his case speaks to the diversity and plurality of Pamiri lifewords in Tajikistan, highlighting how one may identify as Pamiri but not necessarily identify *with* other Pamiris. While Siawash is not alone in this experience, being one of many Pamiris from Afghanistan, the capability of traversing multiple lifeworlds is evidently part of the human existential experience when one lives at multiple peripheries and especially in migratory contexts.

In contrast, Pari is actively making a cultural heritage of Pamir as she produces objects which do not belong to the common repertoire of Pamiri cultural heritage, but are what she sees as rather more authentic representations taken

from the de facto safe-guarded Pamiri heritage in Afghanistan. In this way, Pari reconstructs Pamiri cultural heritage largely outside of Soviet representations which are still today politically laden with regard to Tajik nationalism. By producing such objects, Pari interacts with imaginaries of Pamir's heritage and the times pre-rupture when Pamiris are perceived to have lived closer to *Xutho* and relatively undisturbed by foreign influences, which in turn are guided by a generally-accepted aesthetic as a regime of creativity. Part of Pari's work involves using natural materials and therefore incorporating elements of Pamir's natural history, while upcycling second-hand jewellery and therefore interacting with multiple regimes of cultural production.

For both makers, their biographies play a great role in their approach to making, both formed by rupture. For Pari, the ruptures she is responding to date back to the times of her grandparents and the results of Afghan invasion and border demarcation. In search of her Pamiri cultural identity, Pari prefers to use natural materials in her work, referencing her dislike for the smell of plastic. By combining natural materials and upcycled jewellery or other objects, Pari sees herself as working with heritage, both natural and cultural. Pari's approach therefore stresses the connection of Pamiri lifeworlds with the physical environment, from which many of the materials she works with come. Similarly, Siawash sees his work as an updated take of Afghanistani garments, creating a little piece of past Afghanistan in present-day Vahdat. Thinking back to the Navruz celebration at the ICD, Fatima was uncertain if some of the volunteers were Pamiri as they were wearing Afghanistani dresses as opposed to the Pamiri red and white clothing typical of GBAO. These Afghanistani dresses are also a kind of world-making as they visually display Afghanistan's cultural heritage, in this context articulating a connection to Afghanistani lifeworlds and the place many refugees had fled from. Pari and Siawash are both therefore undertaking acts of world-making which are strongly influenced by regimes of creativity. These regimes highlight Pari and Siawash's interconnection with multiple temporalities and scales, as their improvisation and adaptation is guided by global fashion trends such as upcycling, regional imaginaries of Pamir past, and a Soviet heritage which neatly defined what Pamiri heritage was meant to look like. Therefore, it is not to say that their products are relating to contested identities or China's growing dominance, but rather that making is their own way of articulating the experiences they have faced, using the skills and knowledge they have acquired throughout their lives to create something new.