

Fiona K. Naeem
Pamiri Lifeworlds

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Fiona K. Naeem

Pamiri Lifeworlds

Memory and Rupture in Gorno-Badakhshon
Autonomous Oblast, Tajikistan

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Glossary of Shughni Terms

<i>-en</i>	Gram., plural ending
<i>afghon</i>	Afghan, meaning from the more southernly areas of Afghanistan
<i>Aqloq wa marifat</i>	Wisdom and Ethics, former name of Ismaili Muslim religious education subject taught by STEP teachers
<i>ar</i>	Gram., in a far away place
<i>asl</i>	Red coral typically used in Pamiri jewellery
<i>chashme bad</i>	Evil eye
<i>chid</i>	Pamiri house, roof
<i>chorkhona</i>	Roof of Pamiri house
<i>choynak</i>	Teapot
<i>Didor</i>	Audience with <i>Hazar Imom</i> , Ismaili Muslim religious experience of utmost value
<i>da'wa</i>	Ismaili Muslim religious message distributed by missionaries
<i>doi</i>	Ismaili Muslim missionary
<i>farmon</i>	Regular message from <i>Hazar Imom</i> to Jamat
<i>gulduze</i>	Floral embroidery, typical of Ishkoshim district
<i>Hazar Imom</i>	Current Imam and religious leader of the Nizari-Ismaili Shia Muslim Jamat. At the time of research, this title was held by Aga Khan IV who has since passed away. The title is now held by His son and heir, Aga Khan V.
<i>ispand</i>	Herb used to ward off <i>chasme bad</i>
<i>jamoatkhona</i>	Jamatkhana, Ismaili house of prayer and gathering
<i>jerib</i>	Pamiri socks
<i>kavsh</i>	Wooden sandals, clogs
<i>khalifa</i>	Ismaili Muslim religious layman
<i>lazurit</i>	Lapis lazuli, blue gemstones mined in Pamir
<i>lef</i>	Thick blanket made of synthetic fibres
<i>lojvar</i>	See <i>lazurit</i>
<i>Maram bolwo</i>	Mahram's Rebellion, an armed resistance movement against the Emirate of Afghānistān in Afghan Shughnān and Rushān, 1925
<i>meruya</i>	This side, bank of the river
<i>mir</i>	Ruler of Mirdom, territory
<i>murid</i>	Followers of <i>pir</i>
<i>ofat</i>	Curse
<i>palau</i>	Also <i>plov</i> , national rice dish
<i>panj</i>	River Panj
<i>panjtani</i>	Five members of the Prophet's family, i.e. Muhammad, Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn
<i>pari</i>	Ghost, spirit
<i>pe</i>	Gram., in, upstream, up the mountain

Note: Several terms are taken from Tajik-Persian language and therefore are still written according to the latinised orthography commonly used in Tajik digital communication (see Gregg forthcoming). This phenomena appears to be almost exclusively relating to religious vocabulary.

<i>pindz sitan</i>	Five pillars of the Pamiri house
<i>pir</i>	(Ismaili) religious cleric, leader
<i>pomere</i>	Pamiri person Pamir language, usually Shughni/Rushani Adj. Pamiri
<i>pomir</i>	Pamir
<i>pund</i>	Road, used for Dushanbe-Khorog-Kulma Road and Pamir Highway
<i>rehun</i>	Rushan
<i>rizq</i>	Provision from God, sustenance
<i>said(zoda)</i>	Descendants of the Prophet's family
<i>sheroze</i>	Embroidered ribbons worn on Pamiri clothing The pattern woven into the ribbon
<i>shirchoy</i>	Savoury milk tea, often eaten with bread, cream, and butter
<i>shoh</i>	See <i>mir</i>
<i>shuravi</i>	Soviet
<i>taliqa</i>	Message from <i>Hazar Imom</i> delivered on special occasions to Jamat or specific Jamatkhanas
<i>tar</i>	Gram., in the immediate vicinity
<i>tcemak</i>	Pamiri beaded necklace, worn by brides
<i>toqe</i>	Pamiri cap
<i>tuth piht</i>	Flour made from dried mulberries
<i>weruya</i>	That side, bank of the river
<i>xughne</i>	Shughni
<i>xughnun</i>	Shughnan
<i>Xutho</i>	God/Allah

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
AKL	Aga Khan Lycée
Engl.	English
GBAO	Gorno-Badakhshon Autonomous Oblast
GPISH	Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities
ICD	Ismaili Centre Dushanbe
IIS	Institute of Ismaili Studies
ITREB	Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board
PECTA	Pamiri-Eco Cultural Tourism Association
Pers.	Persian
Rus.	Russian
Shugh.	Shughni
STEP	Secondary Teacher Education Programme
Taj.	Tajik
Tajik ASSR	Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
Tajik SSR	Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic
TJS	Tajik Somoni, currency of Tajikistan. Roughly 0.9 EUR at time of research
UCA	University of Central Asia
UzSSR	Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic

Note on Transliterations

Terms from non-English languages appear in *italics*, followed by the translation into English in brackets. Place names are written according to official transliteration in Tajikistan. Tajik and Russian terms are transliterated according to the Library of Congress transliteration systems (ALA-LC 1997), with the exception of words taken from the Ismaili Imamat’s official orthography. As Shughni and other Pamir languages are written according to various writing systems, i.e. Latin, Cyrillic, and Perso-arabic, this poses an issue when selecting an effective system of transliteration into Latin. While there is a well-established Shughni writing system based on the Latin, used primarily in print media, this remains inaccessible for many Shughni speakers who are not familiar with some of the additional graphemes. Therefore, this book utilises the Latin writing system used in digital communication, based entirely on the ASCII keyboard, and is laid out here in contrast to the printed Latin writing system as laid out by Alamshoev (2021). That being said, it is common for Shughni-speakers to switch between writing systems, even in the same sentence, depending on keyboard varieties available.

IPA ¹	Grapheme Printed	Grapheme Unofficial
[a~æ]	A a	A a
[ɑ:~ɔ:]	Ā ā	A a
[b]	B b	B b
[ts]	C c	C c
[tʃ]	Č č	Ch ch
[d]	D d	D d
[ð]	Δ δ	Th th
[e~e]	E e	E e
[ə:]	Ê ê	E e
[f]	F f	F f
[g]	G g	G g
[ʁ]	Ÿ ŷ	Gh gh
[ɣ]	Ÿ ŷ	Gh gh
[ɪ~i]	I i	I i
[i:]	Ī ī	I i
[dʒ]	J j	J j
[k]	K k	K k
[l]	L l	L l

¹ These IPA transcriptions were adapted from the Omniglot entry on Shughni, with some corrections, available here: *Omniglot*. “Shughni (Хуғънуон зив / Xuḡnūni ziv)”. Last accessed 19 July, 2024, <https://www.omniglot.com/writing/shughni.htm>.

[m]	M m	M m
[n/ŋ]	N n	N n
[o~ɔ]	O o	O o
[p]	P p	P p
[q]	Q q	Q q
[r]	R r	R r
[s]	S s	S s
[ʃ]	Š š	Sh sh
[t]	T t	T t
[θ]	θ ð	Th th
[ʊ~u]	U u	U u
[u:]	Ū ū	U u
[ø]	Ů ů	U u
[v]	V v	V v
[w]	W w	W w
[χ]	X x	Kh kh ²
[x]	Ĭ ĭ	H h / X x ³
[j]	Y y	Y y
[z]	Z z	Z z
[ʒ]	Ž ž	Zh zh
[dz]	Ʒ ʒ	Dz dz
[aj]	Ay ay	Ay ay
[ej]	Ey ey	Ey ey
[oj]	Oy oy	Oy oy
[au]	Au au	Av av

² This sound is also often written as X x in GBAO.

³ This sound is almost exclusively written as X x in GBAO when at the beginning of a word, otherwise h, e.g. Xughnun but Rehun.

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 Jamat² 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-

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 Imamate 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

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 photographs 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 Zarusin, 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-

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 Qurbon-muhammadzoda and Shohfitur in *Ta'rikhi 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'rikhi 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 populations. 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 heightened risk of natural disasters in the region such as avalanches and rock-falls. 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; Iloiev 2022; Aksakolov 2014; Emadi 1998), and the end of mirdom as political authority (Beben 2023; Iloiev 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; Iloiev 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-

⁶ The dissertation of Mélanie Sadozai (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-

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 recentring 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 retellings 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 histories (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 tenacious and something which can withstand lapses in continuity. They can, like trauma, be passed down from generation to generation through cultural and communicative memory, and can seem just as alive as they were in their original manifestation. In this way, language plays a great role in the communication of memory and emotion as a *mode of experiencing the lifeworld*, joining language and experience together by way of indexicality (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 ruptures. 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 completely 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 important to stress here that Pamiri (re)unification should not be equated with a notion of Pamiri separatism: while GBAO has seen much political repression in recent 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 oblast, 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 ruptures. 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 history. 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 repertoires 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 Nāširi 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 Muhammad'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

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 Chorshanбиеv, was arrested in Moscow and deported to his home country of Tajikistan. Chorshanбиеv, 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, Chorshanбиеv 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). Chorshanбиеv’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 understanding 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, becoming increasingly marginalised from discourses of national belonging, while experiencing 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 Tajikistan 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 District. GBAO is composed of several other administrative districts (Taj.: *jamā'at*), namely Darvoz, Vanj, Rushon, Roshtqa'la (previously part of Shughnon), Ishkoshim, 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 differentiated 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 (Kholikzod 2011), Ismaili Islamic education in the form of *Aqloq va marifat* (Engl.: Ethics 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; Jonboboiev 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-

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 Bolsheviks 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, Mostowlansky 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 Nāşiri 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 *ja-moatkhona* 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 limitations 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 interlocutors 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 narratives of Badakhshān, due to the fact that these studies deal

mainly with religious and political authorities who are all men. While Ismaili Imam 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 wit, 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 question. 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 Chorshanбиеv 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, Mari-fat, 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, owing 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 Nāširi 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 Nāširi 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.

2 Dwelling with *Piren*, *Miren*, and *Parien*: Material Articulations of Memory in the Pamiri House

“Fion, have you ever been to Porshnev?” Suhrob called to me from the driver’s seat, not taking his eyes off of the bumpy, winding road. I was sitting in the back, behind his childhood friend Nekruz, whom he was driving home after work. In Khorog, it was always a pleasure to have friends like Suhrob who were spontaneous and never said no to the opportunity to get out of the small city. Still being relatively new, I had never, in fact, been to Porshnev and asked what was there. “There is a holy place there. The water from the Spring is so cold and refreshing, and it’s really good to drink it. Let’s go, we’ll show you. But be prepared, the road is a little bumpy.” As what proved to be a leitmotif throughout my stay in Pamir, when a Pamiri says that the road is a little bumpy, it means it is extremely bumpy. What I had not appreciated was that the Spring was a little up the mountainside and, to get there, we had to climb a steep slope with numerous potholes, exacerbated by the low suspension of Suhrob’s car. As I flew about in the backseat, Suhrob and Nekruz laughed with great joy and recounted how they had visited a funeral earlier that day with the same car which was up an even steeper slope. Miraculously, the car made it up the mountain side and we reached a neatly asphalted spot to park.

It was early evening and the sun had already disappeared behind the mountain, turning the sky to a pinkish hue. The snow on the higher mountains over in Afghanistan still remained, creating a stronger contrast to the lime-coloured *arar* trees which had already bloomed on the side of Tajikistan. As we got out of the car, I heard the loud gush of water and could even feel a slight rumble on the ground. A large grey stone structure, with steps on either side leading up to a terrace, bore the rectangular pool which the Spring water poured into. Calling me over, Suhrob and Nekruz were standing by a second, smaller pool to the right of the Spring. Handing me a weighty silver bowl, the pair proceeded to bend down and fill their bowls with the Spring water before drinking its contents. Bending down, I joined them in drinking the Spring water from the bowl they had given me. The freezing cold water rushed down my gullet, leaving a slightly sweet taste in my mouth.

Taking another sip, Suhrob pointed to the water and exclaimed:

It’s so tasty and refreshing. Do you feel how cold it is? Look, I was feeling tired and now I drank this, I have my energy back. How do you feel in this place, Fion? It feels special, no? It’s so peaceful, quiet. There is a legend attached to this place: you know Nāširi Khusraw,



Fig. 1: Drinking from the Spring of Nāşiri Khusraw. Smith (2022).

right? So he came a long time – hundreds of years – ago to Pamir. He arrived here in Porshnev and he was thirsty, so he asked a local woman to go down to the river and fetch him some water. For some reason, she said no and so he just grabs a big stick from that tree over there [points to a big, twisted tree] and drives it into the ground, then water appears and this is where the Spring comes from.¹

It struck me how Suhrob emphasised the feelings attached to this place. From the cold, refreshing water, to the peace and quiet, this Spring was clearly an important place to Suhrob and Nekruz as both Pamiris and Ismaili Muslims. I felt Suhrob's enthusiasm for this holy place and his eagerness to show it to me.

As Suhrob and Nekruz stood for a moment's rest, admiring the view from the mountain side, I noticed there was a small building further up the stone steps, past the terrace. Holding the crest of the Ministry for Culture, the museum was still open, though there was no one to be found inside. A large timeline covered the wall to my right, detailing the lifetime of Nāşiri Khusraw, an 11th century Is-

¹ Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in English with Suhrob and Nekruz in Porshnev.



Fig. 2: A silver bowl used to drink from the Spring of Nāširi Khusraw. Smith (2022).

maili missionary (Shugh.: *doi*). Originally from Khurāsān, Khusraw made a pilgrimage to Mecca and settled for some time in Egypt which was at this time under the Fatimid Caliphate. There, Khusraw converted to Ismaili Islam and studied to eventually become a *doi*, returning to his homeland to spread the message of Ismaili Islam. As a *doi*, Nāširi Khusraw was one of many agents of Nizari-Ismaili Shia Islam who trained in the Fatimid Caliphate to spread the *da'wa* or message, before Ismaili Muslims eventually hid due to repressions (Iloliev 2008, 62–3). After being cast out of Khurāsān, Khusraw fled to Pamir, settling in Wakhān where he eventually died. Khusraw is credited for the spread of Ismaili Islam in Pamir and, as such, the Ismaili practices in this region are heavily influenced by his esoteric writings and discussions of Ismaili mysticism (Elnazarov and Aksakolov 2011; Goibnazarov 2017; 2025a, Iloliev 2008; van den Berg 2016). Many traditions associated with Nāširi Khusraw, such as the musical religious rite *qasidakhānī*, distinguish Pamiri-Ismaili Islam from other Jamatkhana (Ismaili congregations) whose conversion is attributed to different figures, for example Pir Said of South Asia (Goibnazarov 2017, 2025a; Smith 2024). For Pamiris, therefore, Nāširi Khusraw is perhaps the most important Ismaili figure who was not one of the Imams.

In addition to this timeline, a collection of books lined the walls. Browsing through, I noticed some familiar titles from Nāṣiri Khusraw, such as his famous *Safarnāma* which detailed his pilgrimage and missionary work throughout the region and greater Islamic world. This assortment of books, the majority of which were in Tajik with some exceptions, formed the majority of the exhibition within this room. In the centre of one bookshelf, above a series of Arabic books bearing the title *Tarīkh al-Ismāʿīliyya* (Engl.: The History of the Ismailis) by Araf Tamar, sat two photographs of the President, Emomali Rahmon, meeting Aga Khan IV, engaged in discussion. Accompanying these two photographs was a book about the inauguration of the President which felt somewhat out of place in the room full of esoteric Ismaili Islamic literature. In all honesty I was a little surprised to see this collection of books here, not because the small library did not fit in with the rest of the museum, but rather that topics relating to religion, I would argue especially Ismaili Islam, had become quite sensitive in Tajikistan.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan fell into a civil war in 1992 which lasted for five years and cost thousands of lives. While the government retained power, oppositional forces, represented by chairman of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) Sayid Abdullo Nuri, disarmed following the signing of the Peace Accord in 1997. Many key figures from the civil war then took up political positions in the new parliament, with the IRPT being one of the largest opposition parties. Nonetheless, in 2015 the IRPT was banned and labeled a terrorist organisation, after which several of its members were imprisoned or fled the country (Najibullah 2020). Since 2015, there has been an increased crackdown on Islamic practices and other forms of religious expression, including restrictions on performing pilgrimage to Mecca, Islamic education, or observing hijab for women (RFE/RL 2015; Synovitz 2017). These measures, by differentiating between a secular “state” Islam and a “non-normative” Islam which encompasses everything else which does not belong to the State’s political imagination of Islam (Thibault 2013; Epkenhans 2011), lead to citizens self-regulating their own religiosity to avoid possible repercussions (Lemon and Thibault 2018; Thibault 2018). With all this in mind, I was surprised to see several books on Ismaili Studies and the theology of Nāṣiri Khusraw on display in this small museum as they were representative of a non-normative Islam, i.e. Ismaili Islam, and therefore alluding to a sensitive topic which could evoke possible repercussions.

Moving right, I crossed the threshold of an open door into a sight I was not expecting to see: a Pamiri house. Built around five pillars and a *chorkhona* (quadratic skylight), the room was lined with a felt rug and many handmade tapestries in various patterns. Every corner of the room was filled with different types of artefacts which were once used in daily life: an apparatus for making Pamiri socks from yak’s wool, a large stone to grind flour, and several wooden plates

in various sizes were among the items I caught a glimpse of. This Pamiri house, which was presumably the original structure onto which the first room had been added later, had clearly been renovated and impeccably maintained compared with older Pamiri houses I had seen in the region with stained black walls from the smoke of the fire. It was, after all, a museum and was meant to be inviting and colourful.

As a piece of cultural heritage, Pamiri houses (Shugh.: *chid*) are presented to the rest of the world as a symbol of Pamir for their unique architecture and ancient history. Yet, the house is also a home. In Khorog, for example, I was often asked if I lived either in an apartment or in a Pamiri house; the two options were always presented together. While Pamiri houses have been around for far longer than apartments, many families continue to build their homes in this way, and so many Pamiri houses are much newer than the Soviet-built apartments, and the same age as recent private construction projects. The architecture of Pamiri houses is still being used; homes are still being built in this way.

Pamiri houses are a cultural heritage artefact with integral use of religious symbolism. Firstly, the *chorkhona* (also *xugnune chid*), a construction of concentric squares around a skylight, is thought to symbolise humanity's harmony with the four elements: air, earth, fire, and water (Bliss 2006, Blondin 2021). The *chorkhona* is an instantly recognisable symbol all over Pamir, often used as a visual symbol of Pamiri cultural identity in diaspora (Alekseeva 2015). Essentially, a Pamiri house without a *chorkhona* is just a house. Just as important to the architecture of the Pamiri house are the *pindz sitan*, five pillars which, in current times, symbolise the five members of the Prophet's family (Shugh.: *panjtani*). As the architecture of the Pamiri house predates the conversion of the region to Islam, it is believed that the pillars have Zoroastrian roots, giving way to a discourse of Aryanism stemming from early Russian ethnography which still prevails in Pamir (Oshurbekov 2014). Two of the pillars, which usually form the entrance to the Pamiri house, are joined together with a decorated wooden beam, symbolising the partnership of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, the two grandsons of the Prophet, but also served a practical function in previous times, for example for hanging slaughtered animals. There is therefore a great degree of religious symbolism at play in the architecture of the Pamiri house, which is itself a symbol of Pamiri cultural identity.

Hearing Suhrob call for me to come and get back in the car, I turned to leave the room and was met, much to my surprise, by the plastic mannequin of Nāṣiri Khusraw which I had somehow missed when I entered the room. Dressed in mediaeval clothing with a tree branch in hand, Khusraw was accompanied by a female mannequin dressed in traditional Pamiri white clothing with red patterned embroidery (Shugh.: *sheroze*). Suhrob, emerging from the doorway and, still laugh-

ing that I had been frightened by the mannequins, looked the pair up and down and, seeing my confusion, explained that these must be to represent the story of the Spring's creation. While the female mannequin was dressed in the typical style of Pamiri brides these days, she was presumably the woman who was unable to go to the river to collect water, and the tree branch in Khusraw's hand was the staff he plunged into the ground, causing the Spring to gush forth. With these two mannequins, the connection between the Spring and this Pamiri house became clearer, almost as if the pair had wandered in for shelter after drinking the water. The plastic Pamiri woman, standing in the colourful Pamiri house, certainly reminded one that this was Pamir.

With the hour pressing on, Suhrob and I exited the museum to join Nekruz, who had already received multiple phone calls from his mother asking when he would be home. Climbing back into the car, we left the holy place and drove off, once again, up the bumpy road and ascended the mountain further en route to Nekruz's house. The sound of the gushing Spring soon faded into the distance, replaced by the chatter of Suhrob and Nekruz, and the eclectic playlist Suhrob had on loop. The evening was approaching and the pinkish hue of the sky was becoming an increasingly deeper shade of violet. Visiting the holy place had, indeed, been a refreshing experience. The coldness of the water brought a newfound energy on this day drawing slowly to a close.

2.1 Pamiri House: A Dwelling Perspective

In this chapter, I aim to examine the role Pamiri houses play in the edification of Pamiri cultural identity. As material objects, Pamiri houses represent a time before the division of Pamir and subsequent separation of countless families, giving Pamiris a connection to their heritage through the materiality of the house and thus keeping the memory of pre-rupture Pamir alive, i.e. a time when Ismaili Islam was freely practised and Pamir enjoyed autonomy. Moreover, as a home, Pamiri houses also represent the lived experience of being Pamiri, being the setting for one's own life story. Based on ethnographic observations of three Pamiri houses, namely the above house on the site of Nāširi Khusraw's spring, the remaining Pamiri houses in the Fortress of Roshtqā'la, and a residential Pamiri house in Khorog, this chapter argues that Pamiri houses are ultimately key parts of Pamiri lifeworlds through their interconnection between Pamiris and the environment, bound together through Pamiri cultural identity which is strongly informed by the memory of rupture.

Pamiri houses have been thus far approached by Sodatsayrova (2019, 215) in her study of educational and ethical stories in GBAO, which highlights the role Pa-

miri houses play in the edification of core values and beliefs, being the setting for educational stories shared by elders where the Pamiri house articulates belonging to a Pamiri-Ismaili community and represents a “living space” rather than a physical dwelling. Furthermore, the role Pamiri houses play as the location of religious musical expressions and other ceremonies has also been investigated by Gobinazarov (2017, 2025a), stressing the centrality of Pamiri houses to articulations of cultural and religious identity, an idea which Oshurbekov (2014) has also developed with regard to the religious symbolism of its architecture. Elsewhere I have argued that this symbolism aids in Pamiri cultural resilience and the architecture of the Pamiri house is adapted into an ornament used by Pamiri designers (Smith 2025). Building on these approaches, I would argue that the Pamiri house, as the setting for oral histories, becomes part of the narration and, closely tied to the historical figures in question, edifies a Pamiri cultural identity. Not only is the Pamiri house a widely-recognised symbol of Pamiri cultural identity, but it is also a home and, as such, is an integral part of Pamiri lifeworlds.

Ingold (2022b), in his semi-autobiographical discussion of human building and dwelling, argues for what he calls a dwelling perspective, as opposed to the building perspective he had formerly supported (e.g. Ingold 1987). Building on Heidegger’s assumption that “the forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings.” Ingold (2022b, 230–31) sees building, i.e. constructing, cultivating, as inspired by one’s environment, from which ideas, plans, etc. originate. To Ingold (2022b, 230–31), therefore, building is part of dwelling for, as humans exist in relation, culturally, historically, to the environment as both are part of the lifeworld, they are influenced by their surroundings and their desire or need to build is a direct result of this, i.e. “a dwelling perspective ascribes the generation of form to those very processes whose creativity is denied by that perspective which sees in every form the concrete realisation of an intellectual solution to a design problem.” A dwelling perspective thus differs greatly from a building perspective which claims that “worlds are made before they are lived in” (Ingold 2022b, 222), approaching dwelling as the result of worldmaking. Conversely, a dwelling perspective lessens the role of humans and takes building as a product of the interrelation of humans and the environment in which they dwell. In this way, Ingold (2022b, 191) places greater importance on the role the environment plays in human existence, and as such emphasises the responsibility of inhabitant communities in matters of ecology and environmental care.

In this way, Ingold (2022b, 233) approaches the house as an organism, growing from the connections between humans and the environment, adding, “We may indeed describe the forms in our environment as instances of architecture, but for

the most part we are not architects.” This implies that the way a house is constructed, i.e. its shape, facilities, etc., as well as the skill which goes into the building process, all stems from the lifeworld, something which Ingold (2022b, 231) attributes to the human experience of growing up “in environments furnished by the work of previous generations”. I would like to further develop Ingold’s dwelling perspective, focusing on the role heritage plays in the interconnectedness of the lifeworld.

As argued in the introduction, memory ties communities together through affective discourses of heritage. Here emotion, i.e. love for the community, creates an idealisation of the historical narrative which, in turn, legitimises the group’s existence. This historical narrative which, in the case of Pamiri cultural identity, is based on the pre-demarcation, pre-Soviet past in which Ismaili Islam was freely practised and Russian imperialism had not yet taken root, is edified in the form of material objects, such as Pamiri houses. It is a love for the Pamiri community which is attached to the *chorkhona* and *pindz sitan*, and it is with these symbols that Pamiris grow up, surrounded by representations of their cultural heritage and reminders of their shared past. I would like to apply Ingold’s approach to the analysis of Pamiri houses, placing focus on the role heritage plays in the act of dwelling as a lived experience. In my analysis which follows, I first argue that Pamiri houses are material reminders of pre-Soviet Ismaili Islam, before discussing how Pamiri houses are connected to historical figures, be they well-renowned, or familiar. Finally, I place Pamiri houses in the context of Pamiri lifeworlds, highlighting how their interconnection ultimately edifies a Pamiri cultural identity.

2.1.1 Being *Tar Chid* in GBAO

In Shughni, house is called *chid* which, like the Tajik *khāna* and related languages, can refer to the structure of the house, the roof, or the place of dwelling. Being at home, or *tar chid* (occasionally expressed with the Russian *doma*), can mean a variety of things in Pamir. Firstly, I would contend that dwelling in Pamir means that you are never alone. While single-parenthood has become increasingly common due to labour migration and the sweeping arrests and exile which followed the events of 2021 and 2022, it remains relatively uncommon to live completely alone in Pamir as the presence of extended family and a general sense of community prevails. Especially for families who live in Pamiri houses, most aspects of daily life are done communally. Sleeping, for example, is a communal experience and it remains very common for multiple family members to sleep in the large room of the Pamiri house on rolled-out *kurpacha* mats.

Secondly, dwelling depends very much on the season. In the winter months, when the sun disappears already at 3pm in some neighbourhoods, and does not shine at all in places like UPD which sit at the foot of the mountain, temperatures are extremely cold and, outside of the working times, the majority of people stay at home. In the spring and summer, men construct their homes. While Sundays are a day off, most men will either construct their own houses, or assist their friends or relatives in construction. Assisting in *remont*, which is the Russian term used in GBAO for any DIY construction work, can be an enjoyable experience, accompanied by *palau* and occasionally beer. As construction is therefore only done in freetime and in good weather, some men work for several years on their houses before finishing construction. Building, just like dwelling, is therefore a communal activity in which Pamiris interact with other Pamiris and the materiality of the environment around them.

Not only bad weather, but also growing costs can lead to delayed construction, even bringing complications to family planning. As Nekruz once remarked:

A few years ago, I wanted to get married so I sat down and calculated how much it would take to build a house. I had the number in my head and so I started to save. But each year, the cost of materials kept increasing and the number kept getting higher. So now, I'm getting married in a few months and we are only just finishing the construction of my parents' house, but it could be that the guests have to walk on tarpaulin as we might not have floors by then.²

Part of the expense in home construction is the shortage of wood in Pamir, which was not always the case. Traditionally, several *arar* trees would be planted upon the birth of a son, with the intention that, around 20–25 years later, the trees would have reached full height and be ready to use for the construction of the son's own house. While this practice seems to have waned, Pamiri houses continue to be constructed using the symbols of the *chorkhona* and *pindz sitan*, which are made entirely of wood.³ The construction of Pamiri houses highlights, not only the communal experience of building a home, but also the necessity of materials and thus Pamiri houses offer an interesting case study for examining the materiality of dwelling.

In a traditional sense, Pamiri houses are made from locally-grown wood which has been purpose-grown for this specific use. They are also made by the

2 Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in English with Nekruz in Yomj.

3 There is also a trend to construct the symbol of a *chorkhona* using plasterwork and a flat light fitting, creating the shape but without the incorporation of natural light and using very little, if any, wood.

hands of the son and his friends and relatives, all helping out in their spare time. The construction is therefore dependent on the availability of the hands, materials, and good weather. This reliance on materials and labour highlights the interrelation between Pamiris and the environment, be it in an ecological or social sense. If all these conditions are met, the house is constructed, with the *chorkhona* and *pindz sitan* taking their predestined positions within the walls of the house. The architecture of the house is therefore deeply influenced by generations of houses before it, with the requirements of form, materials, and skills all being passed down over centuries as key to the edification of Pamiri cultural identity. The son and his helpers therefore construct these symbols within the house itself, making both a home, and a symbol of Pamiri cultural identity. It is within these walls that the son's family will live, and this will be the setting of family stories and other tales of Pamir and their heritage. The son and his helpers are therefore creating a home for the family, with walls for privacy and shelter from the cold, which exists in relation to the community, environment, and Pamiri heritage.

2.1.2 Religious Sensations in the Pamiri House

While Pamiri houses can be approached as material objects, manifesting symbols of cultural identity which help to edify a sense of being-in-the-world, the very symbols themselves present a challenge to this materialistic approach as they point to a sense of religiosity. Borrowing from Meyer and Houtman's (2012) differentiation between spiritual and religious, spiritual, traditionally, denotes an immaterial connection to a 'transcendental "beyond"', whereas religious points to a "sphere of possibilities", to which belongs materiality. In terms of religious aesthetics, Meyer (2006) argues for a sensational reading of religion, stressing the role senses play in religious experiences. To experience the transcendental fully with all senses is to see and hear, but also taste, smell, touch, and be touched in what Meyer calls "sensational forms": proscribed modes of inducing religious feelings and how to 'feel' the divine. Through such sensational forms, feelings are given a religious meaning and become reproducible; connecting religious subjects with the transcendental, and also with each other by way of a collective religious identity. Religious aesthetics, according to Meyer, fine-tune such sensitivity to sensational forms, creating style in modes of aesthetics and teaching religious subjects how to see, touch, hear, etc, thus proscribing how the subject should experience and feel the transcendental. By dealing in sensational forms and proscribed experiences and feelings, the subject's senses are more susceptible to such grammars and sensory regimes, meaning that a heightened sense of self and being-in-the-world are produced in such structured processes. In this way, collective reli-

gious identity is also formed and strengthened as other religious subjects become identically versed in grammars. Therefore, the sensory experience of the Pamiri house is a grammar which is reproduced in the building process, edifying a Pamiri cultural identity which is strongly linked to an Ismaili Muslim religious identity.

Nonetheless, Pamiri houses not only evoke religious sensations through their use of heritage symbols, but also through their interconnection with the lifeworld. To hold a religious belief is to live in connection to the beyond or hereafter, something which is not of this world. This place, which is often understood as outside of this world, i.e. another realm, represents an area outside of human comprehension occupied by *Xutho* (Engl.: God/Allāh). In contemporary Ismaili Islamic theology, which is greatly influenced by Nāṣiri Khusraw's metaphysical texts, this place is considered to be a whole realm which *Xutho*, as the "Universal Intellect", occupies completely and is separate from the universe in which we live (Nanji 1987). In Pamiri lifeworlds, therefore, the lifeworld itself does not halt at the physical but can transcend the material realm, existing in interconnection with not only this environment, but also the spiritual world. Mittermeier (2010) approaches the spiritual through the lens of dream interpretation, viewing spirits and other (Islamic) characters featuring in dreams, visions, etc, as an extension of the social interconnection of this world. To connect this to a dwelling perspective, which I argue fully encapsulates the lived experience of Pamiri houses, means that we need to view the lifeworld not simply in physical terms, but also with the possibility of interconnection to a higher spiritual plane. Only then can we gain a closer understanding, not only of Pamiri lifeworlds, but also of Ismaili Islam as a lived experience throughout the global Jamat. Therefore, Pamiri houses edify Pamiri cultural identity, not only through their use of heritage symbols which preserve the memory of rupture, but also by the way they transcend the temporal and physical through their connection with the past and the spiritual realm.

2.2 Nāṣiri Khusraw and Pamiri Cultural Identity

In its essence, the Spring of Nāṣiri Khusraw represents a connection between Pamiris and the ecological environment. While the climate of Pamir is quite dry, with glacial melt being a greater water source than precipitation (MSRI 2020), there are mountain Springs all over the region, all put to some kind of use. Along the Dushanbe-Khorog road, for example, there is a large waterfall which drivers often jokingly refer to as a *moyka* (Russ.: car wash), driving their cars down a small ditch beside it to clean-off the dust from the journey, and another Spring over which a vendor has built his stall to keep the drinks cool in hot weather. Furthermore, many Springs and other natural pieces of the environment such

as trees are associated with miraculous stories of religious figures (Oshurbekov 2014), just like the Spring in Porshnev.

Perhaps most striking about the excursion to the Spring of Nāṣiri Khusraw was the feeling of being in a sacred place. As Suhrob commented, the place felt peaceful and quiet, while the act of drinking the water brought a new energy and vitality. There was a specific experience attached to the place, and certain feelings which accompanied this. For Suhrob and Nekruz as Pamiris, those feelings pertained to a religious experience, i.e. the experience of visiting a sacred place. It is such feelings, I argue, which make the place a sacred place. The experience of interacting with a religious object, in this case the Spring, is meant to edify the idea of being Ismaili, which is in turn connected strongly to being Pamiri.

The story of the Spring was known to everyone I asked: it is a legend which is deeply ingrained in the history of Pamir. The Spring is therefore a good example of how closely oral histories and materiality are connected. It would be one thing to have the story of Nāṣiri Khusraw's arrival in Pamir, but the existence of the Spring which is freely accessible adds an extra layer to the narration, offering the opportunity to share in the experience of Nāṣiri Khusraw. By drinking the water, one can quench one's thirst just as Nāṣiri Khusraw did many centuries ago. This act, which is accompanied by taking the heavy metal bowls and dunking them into the water, allows visitors to interact with the materiality of the site, creating a type of experience which, for many, is religious as a physical act.

This brings us to the next point: there are conflicting plans at work in the Spring. The small museum on-site is, as a state museum, part of the larger Tajik national historical narrative. Nāṣiri Khusraw, as an 11th century Persian-speaking historical figure, is held-up by Tajikistan as a literary hero and celebrated for his contribution to wisdom and knowledge. According to the official state narrative in Tajik, Nāṣiri Khusraw is described as a "*shāir va mutafakkiri buzurg*" (Engl.: poet and great thinker) (MFA Tajikistan 2020). In such instances, no mention is made of Nāṣiri Khusraw's status as a *doi* or his missionary duties, but rather the focus is placed on his literary works. In this way, the figure of Nāṣiri Khusraw fits well into a national narrative which bases the nation's existence on a strong literary and scientific tradition (Shozimov 2004; Epkenhans 2016a). Just like other Persian-speaking poets such as Ferdowsī and Rūdakī, Nāṣiri Khusraw is placed within the Tajik national historical narrative which traces the nation's roots back to what is often referred to as the Islamic Golden Age. However, this period, at least in official discourse in Tajikistan, is void of references to Islam and the focus is rather placed on a perceived Tajik ethnogenesis (Epkenhans 2016a).

As a national figure, it is no surprise that Nāṣiri Khusraw would have a museum dedicated to his memory. Museums, as a piece of cultural infrastructure, are

commonly used to edify a national identity (Hall 1999), utilising material objects which aim to convey the cultural memory selected (Assmann 2008, 2011, 2013), and thus the museum's purpose here is clear: to tell and teach the Tajik national narrative on Nāşiri Khusraw. However, the Tajik narrative is not the only narrative present in this site. The Spring, after all, is a site of great religious significance to Pamiri-Ismailis and evokes feelings which are much deeper than the connection felt to the Tajik nation. Instead, the feelings remind the visitor of their connection to Ismaili Islam, i.e. their belief in the miracle of the Spring's origin and the legitimacy of Nāşiri Khusraw as an Ismaili *doi*. As Iloliev (2008) points out, shrines and other sacred sites in Pamir, stemming from the grave or site of a miracle associated with a revered Ismaili figure, were constructed both to allow visitors to receive blessings or *barakat*, and to pay their respects to the saint. Furthermore, the museumisation of such sites was done specifically to preserve such religious beliefs, protecting Ismaili Islam from rising Sunni Islam in post-Soviet Tajikistan (Iloliev 2008). Therefore, the very presence of the Spring speaks to the religious feelings attached to it, i.e. that this site was felt to be of religious significance.

Here, the feelings attached to the Spring are of utmost importance. For Suhrob and Nekruz, the Spring is a sacred place and is connected to their own belief in Ismaili Islam. Both actively practising, Nekruz was heavily involved in jamoat-khona activities, while Suhrob never missed his night prayers before sleeping and took great pleasure in discussing the philosophies of Nāşiri Khusraw and other Ismaili theologians. By being in this sacred place and drinking the water of the Spring, the pair and many Pamiris like them were involved in a religious experience which was strongly connected to their Pamiri heritage. While Nāşiri Khusraw was a *doi*, his importance is perhaps less so in other parts of the Jamat who attribute their Ismaili heritage to other figures. Though not a Pamiri himself, the relatively young age of the term notwithstanding, Nāşiri Khusraw spent the rest of his life in Pamir and endeavoured to spread Ismaili Islam in the region. For Pamiri-Ismailis like Suhrob and Nekruz, therefore, Nāşiri Khusraw is a much-revered figure and, by extension, his Spring.

While the Spring has been museumised by the state, and placed within a discourse of nation-building and belonging, the planned intention of the museum from the side of the Ministry for Culture cannot stop the feelings which the Spring evokes. As a historical figure, Nāşiri Khusraw fits into the Tajik national narrative and the Pamiri-Ismaili historical narrative simultaneously. The architecture of the museum intends to legitimise Nāşiri Khusraw as a Tajik national figure by way of his contributions to science and knowledge, i.e. with the small library and the addition of the photos of the President to show a Tajik national belonging. However,

feelings are more difficult to regulate and the religious significance of the Spring is far more palpable for Pamiri-Ismailis.

And this is where the Pamiri house fits in: perhaps at one point intended to be a touristic example of Tajikistan's cultural diversity, as was common with various international events and campaigns (Goibnazarov 2017, 2025a), in current times, the Pamiri house's symbolism is stronger than ever. To a Pamiri-Ismaili visitor, the presence of the Pamiri house on this site ties Nāširi Khusraw even more closely into the narrative of Pamiri cultural heritage and the times before the ruptures of the past centuries. By having a mannequin representing him, standing next to a female mannequin in Pamiri traditional costume, inside of a Pamiri house, the role of Nāširi Khusraw in the pre-rupture history of Pamir, i.e. a time before foreign imperialism when Pamiris lived under the authority of Ismaili leaders, is conveyed to visitors who have just drank the fresh, clean water and felt some kind of religious feelings.

As a result of Nāširi Khusraw's missionary work in Pamir, a system of leadership grew which lasted until the eventual creation of the Soviet Union in the 1920s. The *piren*, religious authorities versed in the theology of Nāširi Khusraw and tasked with all religious matters, now worked alongside the political leaders of Badakhshān, *miren*, who held great importance within the region, conducting their own international relations and governing over the land. These figures, just like Ismaili Muslim religious figures, are strongly connected to Pamiri cultural identity and reminiscent of the times before the ruptures of the 20th century. The second Pamiri house which we will deal with is connected to one of the last leaders of the region before the Bolshevik Revolution: Azizkhān.

2.3 Roshtqa'la Fortress and the Legacy of Azizkhān

My phone buzzed on the floor beside my bed. Still half asleep, I fumbled for the mobile and answered it, trying to suppress my yawn. It was Alimamad, whom I had arranged to have *palau* with later at the popular place, Uzbekiston. "Fion, I'm sorry but I need to rearrange. We have to go to Roshtqa'la for a meeting. Can we see each other when I return?...Unless, of course, you'd like to join me." Looking at the time and making a quick decision between getting up or staying in bed, the wish to leave the confinements of Khorog outweighed any desire for comfort. I quickly showered, dressed, and was on the street waiting 20 minutes later, in time for Alimamad and his two neighbourhood friends to pick me up.

Leaving Khorog by way of the road passing the Botsad (botanical gardens), we drove slowly along the Shohdara, following the amble of the river and passing the first signs of Spring after a long winter. I had been to Roshtqa'la once before, in

summer, but had not appreciated just how beautiful this district is. “Roshtqa’la is not as heavily visited as the other parts of Pamir. There are a few trekking routes but they are quite challenging so not many people go there. Which is a shame because Roshtqa’la is just as beautiful as other areas, and it has some interesting things to see,” commented Alimamad as he drove slowly along the bumpy road, trying not to damage his tires. One such sight was right beside our destination. As our car climbed up the steep mountain side on the outskirts of the town, following the narrow dirt track, Alimamad and his friends discussed their meeting briefly. It was decided that Rustam, the younger of the pair, would keep me company while Alimamad and Khushruz talked business with a local farmer. After parking the car, Rustam and I walked back down part of the road, searching for a route to the Fortress and greeting a friendly, elderly woman along the way who offered us milk.

The Fortress, sitting atop of the hill overlooking the town, was partially fenced with a small gate entrance, giving the impression that we were walking into someone’s property rather than an ancient heritage site. As we climbed up the rocky hillside, no small feat considering I was not wearing practical shoes nor used to such terrain, we approached the Fortress which appeared to be a collection of very, very old Pamiri houses. The *pindz sitan* were still supporting the *chorkhona* roof, covered with dust, after all this time. Rustam had managed to climb down the assortment of rocks to get a better view of the house from the inside. I slowly made my way down, grabbing at the rocks and the side of other ancient houses to keep my balance, much to Rustam’s amusement. “We’re used to it,” he said with a grin. I, however, was not.

After descending the rockpile, I joined Rustam at the entrance to the house and peered into the dark stone structure. While the interior of the house has been eroded over time, the jet-black pillars still stood strong. Jet black pillars are a common sight in Pamiri houses of this age: the reason being the smoke which would have been produced by the fire. Typically, Pamiri houses had no windows to keep the heat of the fire in during the winter months, which meant that the only exit for the smoke was the *chorkhona* right above the fireplace. There is even a popular saying in Pamir derived from this arrangement: “*dud beh az sar-mo*” (Engl.: smoke is better than the cold). The traces of the smoke were, just like the pillars, still there after all these years. It was almost like a small reminder of the life which had once occupied this empty house.

While this house had a high wall which I did not wish to climb over for fear of destroying something, there was another house adjacent to it which was easily accessible. Although I was admittedly irritated when people assumed I was a tourist, because fieldwork is no holiday and actually quite stressful in a place like Khorog, I felt very much like a tourist at that moment, walking into this ruined house and

photographing what I saw. From the perspective of a tourist, it was an exciting experience to be able to walk around a building which was hundreds of years old. It was an immersive experience, to interact with a historical object so closely. But as an anthropologist, I felt uneasy to freely walk around such a precious object, scared that I would damage something. By interacting with the object I was researching in such close proximity, I ran the risk of destroying a piece of cultural heritage which was already so greatly endangered. The weight of this risk controlled my movements and made me tread lightly, not touching anything.

Looking out of a hole in the wall, I saw a radio mast not far from this site and was caught by the juxtaposition of the ancient and modern. An aeroplane passed overhead and the sound of the jet engine contrasted starkly to the cows mooing in the background or the eagle squawking somewhere up the valley. Outside, Rustam's mobile phone rang and I could hear him trying to convince Alimamad to drive back down the mountain to collect us, saving us the steep climb back up. Thus ended my short journey into mediaeval Shughnān and it was time to return to the present.



Fig. 3: View from Roshtqa'la Fortress towards a telecom mast. Smith (2023).

2.3.1 Memory and the Destruction of Cultural Heritage

On the drive back we discussed the Fortress in more detail. Time and time again, I was impressed by just how much Alimamad knew about his region. Not only was he a great storyteller but he had an encyclopaedic knowledge of Pamir.

You know why it's called Roshtqa'la? So qala is Fortress and rosht means red in Shughni. So this was the capital of Shughnān and there was a battle between an Afghan invader. They say that the Afghans threw the people onto the rocks and the blood ran down the mountain, colouring everything red. And so it was called Roshtqa'la. What you saw today is only a very small part of the Fortress, from the 9th century. The walls of the Fortress are completely gone and there are just a few houses left. This is because it was destroyed by the Soviets. They wanted to destroy the memory of the person, in this case Azizkhān, who was one of the last kings of Shughnān. They tied the castle to a person, but in reality they destroyed our heritage. I really can't find the words to describe the destruction they caused.⁴

As Alimamad sees it, the Soviets, by destroying the Fortress of Azizkhān, tried to eradicate not only his memory but the very Pamiri heritage he as a historical figure represents. Alimamad's statement would suggest that a collective memory surrounds the story of Azizkhān, closely connected to the materiality of the Fortress.

This was not the first time I had heard of the figure Azizkhān. Initially, it had been difficult for me to place him in my own historical understanding of Pamir, until I came to the realisation that there were multiple Azizkhāns and often it was not articulated which Azizkhān was being referred to. According to Middleton's (2011, 31–2) retelling of the Pamiri legends, the former Azizkhān was a much respected leader, earning the title of *mingbāshī*, meaning leader of thousands, who was then replaced by “Azizkhan Abodillokhon”, his nephew “who was also much loved by his people because he sent messages to the Russian Tsar, asking for help against the Afghans who were still making people's lives miserable and also against the Bukharans who had just taken over other parts of Badakhshan.” This favourable representation of the latter Azizkhān, derived from oral histories collected by Toji Kurbonkhonova and Muboraksho and adapted for an English-speaking readership, appears to be based on his pivotal role in warding off Afghan offensives to the region.⁵ As these oral accounts would suggest, Azizkhān was something of a saviour.

⁴ Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in English with Alimamad in Roshtqa'la.

⁵ In such oral narrations, the Afghans were from the more southernly areas of Afghanistan, with the centre of power in Kabul and were represented by the Emir of Afghānistān (Kabul before 1855) who was of the Muḥammadzai/Bārakzai Dynasty. This does not refer to communities living

However, Mastibekov's (2014) comprehensive study of the role of Ismaili leaders in Tajikistan offers a more detailed analysis of Azizkhān's rule and personality. Firstly, Mastibekov (2014, 54) attributes the Tsarist Russian title of *mingbāshī* of Badakhshān exclusively to the elder Azizkhān (ca. 1849–1940) who, with his counterpart Amānbīk in Wakhān and *pir* Yūsuf Alī Shāh was responsible for ending expensive taxation collected by the Emirate of Bukhārā. Nonetheless, Azizkhān has gained notoriety among Russian sources for two letters attributed to him which requested assistance from the Emirates of Bukhārā and Afghānistān asking for protection from Russia, an opinion which Mastibekov (2014, 68–9) does not share, given the struggles Badakhshān had had in freeing themselves from Afghan rule, as well as Azizkhān's own personal vendetta against the Emir for the murder of his relatives. In any case, these letters were used to denounce Azizkhān in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution and he was exiled to China, before later returning to Pamir when he was later exiled to Siberia in Stalin's Great Terror upon accusations of religious activities as a blind elderly man, where he died in 1940 (Mastibekov 2014, 69).

In Mastibekov's (2014, 70) collected oral accounts, Azizkhān is portrayed favourably "as an honest, pious, brave and loyal man." In his discussion of migratory changes to Western Pamir, Mastibekov (2014, 70–1) highlights the increased population of the Ghund and Shohdara valleys is attributed by Pamiris to Azizkhān's leadership. According to accounts collected by Mastibekov from older generations, Azizkhān redistributed land to the needy, and endeavoured to curb the widespread use of opium which had ravaged the region. Similarly, I had also heard positive accounts of Azizkhān and had understood that he was seen as a strong ruler who had protected the Pamiris against various offensives from the Emirate of Afghānistān. Conversely, Afghans were portrayed in such narratives as evil, raping women, pillaging villages, and taking slaves. I had come to understand Azizkhān was revered in Pamir as a kind of pre-Soviet hero.

If Alimamad's claim that the Soviet's destroyed the Fortress to ruin the memory of Azizkhān is true, this would suggest that the leadership was concerned with Azizkhān's status as a historical figure and potential hero of Pamir. It is worth noting here that the Soviet leadership went to great lengths to blacken the name of Azizkhān, even after his death in 1940. As Mastibekov (2014, 107) highlights, in the Russian-language book *Niso*, published in 1953, Azizkhān is portrayed as a cruel Basmachi leader, fighting against Soviet rule, far from the reality of the Ismaili political figure he had been. In his postcolonial historical analysis, Mastibekov (2014,

in Badakhshān, including Shughnis, Wakhis, etc., on the left side of the river. Instead, Afghan in this sense denotes a foreign invader.

107–8) places the example of Azizkhān in the wider discursive landscape of Soviet repression, arguing that he was one of few recognisable *kulaks* and thus represented the ideological Soviet endeavour to dismantle the previous land-owning elites, adding that this Soviet historical fiction was propagated as reality and remains in popular consciousness. The added suffering of Azizkhān's fictional wife Niso, suicidal after being forced to marry a tyrant, no doubt added to the bad reputation that was suggested by the novel. The novel and oral accounts collected by Mastibekov suggest a disparity between official and unofficial historical narratives, which would explain why Azizkhān has come to be a controversial figure in Pamir.

Given the demonstrated efforts to denounce the memory of Azizkhān, it would be fitting for the Soviets to destroy a material object connected to his memory. The destruction of cultural heritage is a well-discussed topic in Central Asia, perhaps most notably with the Taliban's destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan under the leadership of Mullah Omar in 2001. Such iconoclasm, be it performative (Falser 2011), cultural (Flood 2002; Flood and Elsner 2016) or political (Atai 2019), was also practised here in the example of the destruction of the Fortress of Roshtqa'la, but not necessarily because of its relation to the memory of Azizkhān. The Fortress, after all, had existed for hundreds of years until the political career of Azizkhān began in the late 19th century.

Regardless of the circumstances surrounding the destruction of the Fortress of Roshtqa'la, the Fortress is, at least in present times, strongly connected to the memory of Azizkhān and the times before the rupture. Thinking back to Middleton's (2011) adaptation of the story of the Fortress, there appears to be an uncertainty in such oral histories. Just as I was initially confused, trying to place Azizkhān in a vague oral chronology of Pamir, so too does Middleton's adaptation highlight the confusion which the vagueness of oral histories can lead to. For the story of Roshtqa'la, dates and names of invading Afghan rulers often do not survive the oral transmission. Instead, the Fortress itself has stood the test of time. Therefore, I would argue that narrations of Azizkhān have survived particularly for this reason: because of the Fortress's materiality.

2.3.2 Surviving Materiality in Pamiri Houses

Roshtqa'la Fortress is a piece of Pamiri cultural heritage and, as such, an important point in Pamiri lifeworlds. It should be noted here that the importance of this Fortress is relative to Pamiris from Shughnon or neighbouring areas, with similar fortresses being of more importance to Pamiris elsewhere, for example Yamchun in Ishkoshim. Nonetheless, Roshtqa'la belongs to a series of cultural heritage sites

which lie within Pamiri lifeworlds. As a cultural heritage site, Roshtqa'la allows Pamiris to connect with their past. Just as I climbed down the rockpile and peered into the ancient Pamiri house, so too can Pamiris visit the site and get a glimpse of how life was for their ancestors. The materiality of such heritage sites thus invites Pamiris to interact with the materiality of the Fortress, forming their own perception of the collective past of Pamir.

While it is still named a fortress, almost nothing remains of the original structure and the materiality with which visitors interact is actually that of the Pamiri houses on the site. While I could not ascertain how old the Pamiri houses standing on the site actually are, reserving a slight suspicion that they are much more recent than perceived, the fact is that these Pamiri houses are all that remains on the site, and are therefore understood as being part of the Fortress, even if that is not the case. It is fitting, therefore, that the object to survive the periods of rupture is a very symbol of Pamiri cultural identity. On this site, the Pamiri house becomes a timeless object which, though blackened from the smoke and weathered over time, reminds visiting Pamiris of their own Pamiri houses. The symbols of the *chorkhona* and *pindz sitan*, with which they have grown up, have remained unchanged since the time of the Fortress, however long ago the construction of these houses actually was. By experiencing this materiality, Pamiris are not exactly transported back in time, but are rather reminded of their own heritage and perhaps of its resilience in the face of ruptures.

Furthermore, being tied to the memory of Azizkhān, the Fortress in Roshtqa'la represents a time before the rupture which severed Pamir and continues to separate families and communities until the present day. Although negative portrayals of Azizkhān continue to exist, and my interest is not to attach a positive or negative value to his name, his role in brokering protection from the invading Afghan forces is still recalled and thus he is remembered fondly by many. Whether Azizkhān was, ultimately, a hero or villain is still up for debate, but he is attached to the pre-Soviet time, i.e. a time when Shughnān and greater Badakhshān held great political importance. The Fortress therefore serves as a reminder of the many *miren* who ruled the region before they were ousted following the Bolshevik Revolution.

The Fortress's destruction and decades of neglect are also somewhat lachrymose when viewing it as a piece of Pamiri cultural heritage. The Fortress's derelict state, sitting atop a pile of rocks with a simple gate for protection and no visible archeological maintenance, highlights just how far away the time of Azizkhān and the *miren* is, and how much Pamir has changed since then. Just as the materiality of the Fortress can help Pamiris to feel a connection with the past, experiencing their heritage, it can also remind them of the distance between the past and the present. This would fit into Alimamad's disdain at the Fortress's destruction: the

Soviets not only destroyed a piece of cultural heritage, but severely damaged the actual connection to that time that Pamiris feel, pushing the past further and further into the past.

There are therefore many subjective ways to read the Fortress of Roshtqa'la. Ultimately, the way the Fortress is perceived is dependent on the ideas which are attached to it, similarly to how Azizkhān is remembered. For many, like Alimamad, the Fortress is strongly connected to the memory of Azizkhān, thus making the Soviet destruction of this an attempt to erase his memory. For others, the Fortress is reminiscent of the days before the rupture, when Pamiri houses were the norm and apartment blocks would have been inconceivable. In any case, the site's sorry state in the present day highlights just how effective the endeavours of the Soviets were in wiping away traces of Azizkhān and the *miren*.

While the historical figures of Nāşiri Khusraw and Azizkhān are long gone, Pamiri houses continue to exist all over the region. As homes, Pamiri houses are lived in and are the centre of daily life and interconnection of multiple generations. The last case study looks at a Pamiri house which is still lived in, showing in a final step that Pamiri houses, while artefacts of cultural heritage, are the setting of Pamiri life stories and can be just as strongly connected to familiar legacies as tales of *piren* and *miren*.

2.4 Being at Home in Gulbegim's House

Following a muddy, rocky path which led us up the foot of the mountain, we sought a small yellow gate our contact had told us about. This particular area of Khorog, called Novaiy, resembles a maze of snaking pathways, gradually climbing the mountainside. After reaching yet another dead-end and still with no yellow gate in sight, a friendly gentleman from an upper window waved and pointed us in the right direction, correctly assuming that we were in search of the old Pamiri house. Finding the yellow gate, we knocked and an elderly woman appeared and, together with her daughter, welcomed us inside. Crossing the courtyard which was the entrance to the house, I noticed the pale blue paint over white plaster walls, creating the pattern of a *chorkhona* and acting as a backdrop for the wooden pillars holding up the covering from the rain. Quickly, we left the bright spring sun outside and entered into the dark, cool room of the Pamiri house.

The elderly woman, introducing herself as Gulbegim, ushered us to a table she had prepared of bread, homemade jam, and green tea. The room was sparsely decorated with a few rugs for warmth and a pile of neatly folded *kurpacha* in the corner nearest the door. The *chorkhona* let limited light into the otherwise dimly lit room, assisted by two or three electric light bulbs hanging from the ceiling. The

pindz sitan stood proudly in their predestined positions, with a small calendar hanging from Ҳусайн's pillar which we had just walked past upon entering the room. As I looked around, I failed to find a photograph of *Hazar Imom*, with a large clock hanging on the pillar which typically held his photo in a Pamiri house. Taking our seats, her daughter, a woman of around 40 years old wearing thick Pamiri socks, poured the tea while her mother began to tell her story:

This house is more than 200 years old and belonged to my husband's family. Today, I live here with my 44-year-old son who is not married. My husband died several years ago and our four daughters are all married and live with their families. I came from the other side of Khorog, from UPD, but when I got married, I left my father's house and came to live with my husband's family. [...] Two families used to live in this house, and the animals lived here too. Over there, [pointing to a small door under a countertop] the sheep would sleep, and in this corner we had a cow. [...] We also had some chickens too. [...] Everyone would sleep here together with the animals. [...] We used this room for everything: eating, sleeping, we would even slaughter the animals and hang their carcasses from the beam [she points to the beam connecting the pillars of Ҳасан and Ҳусайн]. We did everything here in this house.⁶

Our host had clearly told this story many times before. Having heard about her house from a contact, it was understood that she regularly accepted tourists into her home and shared her little piece of history with them.

2.4.1 Dwelling with the *Parien*

Looking around the room, which was probably the largest Pamiri house I had ever been in, it was hard to imagine there would be space for two families, let alone a small herd of farm animals. In fact, it was difficult to imagine such a time at all as the inside of the house had changed a little. While the *pindz sitan* and *chorkhona* were visible, the walls had been covered with hard plaster several decades ago and painted with thick, shiny white and brown lacquer so the original wooden frame of the house was no longer exposed. Perhaps noticing my attention to the walls, Gulbegim explained:

As you can see, the house has not been renovated much. The only change we made was the water used to be under this step here [she kicked her heel against the step she was perched on], but now we are building a shower and bathroom in a separate room in the garden. Many years ago, after my husband passed away, we wanted to renovate the house but

⁶ Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Tour in Russian, Tajik, and Shughni by Gulbegim in Khorog.

one night I had a dream. In my dream, a person came to me, dressed in white. I don't know who he was. He came to me and took my hand, saying, 'do not change my house.' When I woke-up, I told my mother-in-law about the dream and we decided not to renovate the house. This is a very special house, you see. I believe it is a spiritual place. There are spirits here; I hear them sometimes. I like that the spirits are here and I believe they were protecting me and my mother-in-law. It was like they were saying, 'we will protect you, but please do not disturb our house.'

Gulbegim's eerie story sent a shiver down my spine and I can still feel the goosebumps rising on my arms and legs as I write. Perhaps it was the dim light of the Pamiri house, or maybe the relatively cool temperature, but I could see why one would feel a presence of some kind.

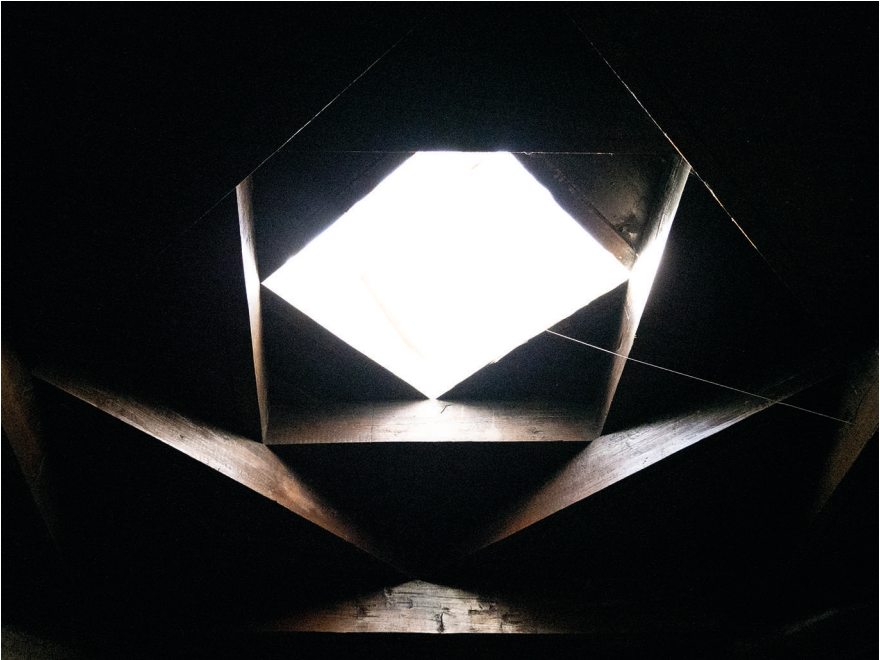


Fig. 4: A Chorkhona in Shughnon. Smith (2022).

Parien, as Gulbegim called them, are spirits which play a big role in Persianate literature, folklore, and popular culture in Pamir. Stemming from the Avestan name for “a class of female demonic being”, a *pari* is a supernatural being which often appears alongside the Islamic spirit *jinn* and has lost much of its negative connotations, portraying a more benevolent character since Middle Iranian (Adhami 2010). This process of de-demonisation (Asmussen 1982), has led to *pari*

and their counterparts of *div* and *jinn* being understood as independent beings capable of free thinking and moral complexity, which Lasman (2021, 37) sees as rooted in the shift from polytheism to monotheism as these beings were adapted for Persian literature, appearing thereafter in close proximity to the Islamic *jinn* which appear in the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. In Pamiri folklore, a *pari* is often a female spirit,⁷ but the terms are often interchangeable and I did not get the impression that the *parien* Gulbegim referred to were necessarily female, but rather a kind, welcoming spirit. Perhaps this is why Gulbegim used the term *pari*, to denote that the spirits were not to be feared, but rather welcomed.

While I am indeed open to the possibility of the existence of *parien*, what interested me more in this moment was the feeling which the house triggered in me. This eerie, creepy feeling I felt when Gulbegim was speaking reminded me of the ghost stories I had heard as a child. The idea that a spirit of some kind could be in that very space but remain invisible, only revealing itself audibly or in dreams to its tenants, was admittedly somewhat scary. This fear that I felt, though quite mild, was clearly not experienced by Gulbegim who had become accustomed to the spirits and viewed them more as co-inhabitants of the house, or even as landlords, if not family. In fact, Gulbegim believed that the spirits had been protecting her and her family all this time. The feeling I felt in this moment was material as it affected my body by giving me goosebumps, creating a cold chill which went up my spine to the back of my neck. In this way, the spiritual briefly became tangible. The imagination, or the actual existence perhaps, of the *parien* had a physical affect on my body and, I assume, the bodies of my companions. But not Gulbegim, she was perfectly at ease in this house, surrounded by spirits. Perhaps she associated the spirits with other physical sensations. After all, she was used to living with them in the same house, dwelling together. Perhaps, still, she was more connected to the spiritual realm, the not-of-this-world.

2.4.2 The Museumisation of the *Chid*

While this should be quite clear, given that Gulbegim was at home and I was a guest in her house, the point of how this Pamiri house is experienced from different perspectives deserves a closer look. To Gulbegim, this house is her home, i.e. a familiar, safe space offering a relative level of intimacy. While we were guests in her home, she tried to make us share this feeling of home by offering us tea and bread in an act of hospitality. This hospitality extended to us sitting for perhaps an

⁷ See Middleton 2011.

hour in the room where her and her family eat, sleep, and live. By welcoming us into her home, Gulbegim had opened her private space to us and allowed us to experience the house from her perspective, i.e. as a home.

However, the moment we began the tour, the private house became a museum and Gulbegim was our guide. The site of dwelling for her and her family was suddenly open to us very curious strangers. This was all unofficial, Gulbegim's house was not a museum in the eyes of the Ministry for Culture or any other organisation or public body. While there are many unofficial, grassroots museums throughout GBAO, stemming from similar houses or interesting personal archives,⁸ these rarely appear in tourist information brochures etc. Rather, Gulbegim had taken the opportunity presented by tourism to earn a little extra money on the side by giving visitors a tour of her home. We had come to know about the house through a friend of a friend, but presumably others knew about Gulbegim's house as it is considered to be one of the oldest houses in Khorog, and therefore word of her house was largely shared to tourists through unofficial channels such as word-of-mouth, possibly with the Pamir Eco-Cultural Tourism Association (PECTA), a non-profit tourism group in Khorog which offers information and guidance to tourists, facilitating visits. From the perspective of us visitors, we saw the house as an object and received much information about its age, preservation, and structure. The objectification of the house meant that, had it not been for Gulbegim's narrative, we would have viewed the house as perhaps a piece of architecture, or cultural heritage, connecting us to past times and informing us about life before the ruptures of the 20th century. In this sense, the house embodied a cultural memory, being represented as an example of Pamiri cultural heritage. This was, of course, what had brought us all the way to the heights of Novaiy; we wanted to see an old Pamiri house. We sought a connection with the past, but on a very superficial, touristic level.

As a guide, in turn, Gulbegim would be expected to place the house within the greater history of Pamir, and present any points of interest in its architecture. But that was not the case. Gulbegim's story pointed our attention away from the *pindz sitan* and *chorkhona* to that eerie feeling and a potential presence of spirits. This experience of chilling unease would not have been as strong, had Gulbegim not told us about her dream and the voices she would hear in her house. The story which Gulbegim shared with us totally changed how we experienced the house and opened us up to both the feeling of unease, but also the warmth and comfort of the family setting. Feelings of home mixed with unease were perhaps a strange

8 Such community-based museums are a current research interest of Goibnazarov.

cocktail but it gave us a very full experience of the house, far more than a normal museum visit would.

As she spoke, she ordered her narrative in relation to the house and what happened inside of it, rather than any key historical events outside. For the hour or so that we sat with her, there was no mention of the Soviet times, the civil war, or the *Didor*. None of the key events which feature so heavily in other narratives presented here were referenced in Gulbegim's narrative. Instead, the house was given a central role and she arranged her narrative in relation to the house itself. The time before entering the house and living in UPD, the time of sharing the house with the animals and another family, her daughters leaving the house, the death of her husband, the changes to the house; all these points featured in Gulbegim's history, creating a narrative which very much existed only inside of the house. In her role as our guide, it was as if history outside of these walls was irrelevant from Gulbegim's perspective and the house had a greater significance in her life than any ruptures which had taken place outside. The house, therefore, ordered Gulbegim's narrative as the ruptures in her life which she shared with us were tied only to the house.

The visit to Gulbegim's house highlights the role Pamiri houses play in the edification of Pamiri cultural identity through their materiality. To experience the warmth of the home coupled with the eeriness of spirits allowed us as visitors to get a short glimpse of Gulbegim's lifeworld, situated in the house. By sitting in her home, drinking tea, and listening to the story of her life, we could experience for a short time her connection to the house and the importance it held in her life. Through Gulbegim's narrative and the close reference it held to the house, we were able to briefly live the memories of past times she shared with us by sitting in her home and drinking tea. Just like the houses in Roshtqa'la and Porshnev, Gulbegim's house incorporated the same architectural symbolism but, as a home, offered the lived experience of the Pamiri lifeworld which the others did not.

As the *choynak* ran dry and our time together came to an end, we each gave Gulbegim 10 somoni as our contact had instructed us. As is customary, Gulbegim at first rejected the payment, before accepting it after our persistence. 10 TJS, just under 1 EUR at the time, was half the standard rate of 20 TJS for visiting any museum as a foreigner, reflecting instead the local rate which would lie between 5 and 10 TJS. In this unofficial act of payment, we returned to our role as visitors to the museum and Gulbegim as our guide. This house was not an official museum, but it became a museum in the brief timespan of our visit. Whereas the other two case studies held an official status as heritage sites, this museum was unregulated and came and went with its visitors. The 'pop-up museum' of Gulbegim's

house therefore existed outside of the official history of Pamir and offered visitors an alternative, localised perspective on past times.

Gulbegim's house was by no means in conflict with the official narrative, in fact she did not mention any key events other than those important to her, her family, and the house itself. Instead, Gulbegim offered her life story which was in constant relation to the house. This final case study therefore stresses the importance of Pamiri houses within the lifeworld, being key points of interconnection between Pamiris with the environment. For Gulbegim, the house itself is a character in her story, almost personified by the spirit visiting her in her sleep. The organism of the house is one of Gulbegim's most important points in the lifeworld and it defines her experience of being Pamiri, with little reference of the ruptures happening outside of those walls.

In contrast to the houses in Roshtqa'la and Porshnev, there are no articulated references to a broader Pamiri history. The *chorkhona* and *pindz sitan* are ever-present, but these are simply parts of the structure of the home rather than symbols of Pamiri cultural identity. This is due to Gulbegim's positionality: she is viewing the house from the inside looking out. Her perspective, or rather, the perspective of the house, is not subject to the discourses of nationhood and belonging involved in the heritage sites of Nāširi Khusraw's Spring or the Fortress of Roshtqa'la. Instead, it is Gulbegim's own memories which are attached to the house and, while countless other Pamiris share her experiences, the scale of the lifeworld shrinks for some time upon entering the house. This shift in scale, caused by the intimacy and privacy of the house, is what distinguishes a Pamiri house from a home.

2.5 Embedded Memory in the *Chorkhona* and *Pindz Sitan*

Exiting Gulbegim's house, we made our way back down the steep slope of Novaiy and I returned soon after to my temporary home above a supermarket in Gulaken, a "modern" apartment rather than a Pamiri house, where I was grateful for the peaceful privacy to gather my thoughts. While this apartment was not my home, it had become one through my act of dwelling. Back then, I understood Khorog in relation to that apartment. Later that day, I would call a taxi and describe my location in relation to other points in the apartment's surroundings: the supermarket, Chorbogh park, the car bridge which went over to Shosh. To a taxi driver, my own home existed only in connection with other things around it.

It is therefore not fully accurate to limit a concept of dwelling in Pamir to Pamiri houses as an architectural object, but rather Pamiri houses as a location of dwelling. Just like Pamiri houses, the apartment in which I lived was built by skil-

led hands, deriving from a need for shelter, organically growing out of the environment around it. The wooden beams making up the ceiling were not assembled in a *chorkhona* formation but they still created a roof over my head and shelter from the wind, rain, and snow. While there was no fire burning in the centre of the apartment, there was a central heating system, powered by the River Ghund through Pamir Energy's hydropower plant, which brought me warmth during the cold winter months. The lack of *pindz sitan* was more than compensated for by the numerous memorabilia displaying the face of *Hazar Imom* and portraits of 'Alī. In essence, my apartment was a Pamiri house in the sense that it was the location of a Pamiri form of dwelling which edified a Pamiri cultural identity and way of being-in-the-world, existing in constant interconnection to the Pamiri lifeworld around it.

The interconnection of Pamiri lifeworlds is realised through the materiality of the Pamiri house. In its architecture, references to a far distant past and supposed origin of the Pamiri people are materialised in the physical symbols of the *chorkhona* and *pindz sitan*. Yet, these symbols in current times are read as religious, being the material reminder of *Xutho* and the five members of *panjtani*. These symbols not only simultaneously edify a Pamiri cultural identity which is closely linked to a distant Zoroastrian past and Ismaili religiosity, but are the material memory of rupture, i.e. the conversion to Ismaili Islam and subsequent re-purposing of symbols which took place within the context of Nāširi Khusraw's missionary work. Just like the old Pamiri houses which have withstood countless ruptures in GBAO, the very *chorkhona* and *pindz sitan* have withstood the rupture of religious redirection and remain the most important elements of the architecture of the Pamiri house. The Pamiri house therefore exists not only within the interconnection of the environment, but also with the past and the imaginations of heritage which preserve its memory.

Taking the architecture of the Pamiri house as a symbol of Pamiri cultural identity allows us to question our epistemological approach to rupture. The shift from Zoroastrian to Ismaili is viewed as overwhelmingly positive in Pamir, with Nāširi Khusraw being revered as a saviour to the Pamiri people for bringing them closer to Islam by way of the appropriation of non-Islamic symbols. Rupture, therefore, is not necessarily negative but rather a shift in value systems caused by the sudden need for redirection. The memory of this rupture is embodied in the *chorkhona* and *pindz sitan* which, in turn, exist in interrelation to the house and greater environment. Perhaps these architectural features highlight the position rupture takes in dwelling, i.e. they show that ruptures are ever-present and make up a central part of the Pamiri lifeworld.

As we have seen from the three case studies presented in this chapter, the materiality of the Pamiri house not only edifies a sense of Pamiri cultural identity

and being-in-the-world, but it also has a profound effect on the body. These feelings exist outside of any planned state-level museumisation of the Pamiri house as feelings are essentially unregulatable and, while shared by others, are unique to the individual experiencing them. In this way, the religious feelings evoked by the Spring of Nāşiri Khusraw are not halted by the presence of the shield of the Ministry for Culture and photographs of the President, and the Ismaili beliefs and practices are preserved. So too can the spirits in Gulbegim's house be awakened in oral narrations, their presence felt in fleeting bursts of goosebumps, reminding the visitor of a connection not only to the Pamiri lifeworld as is, but to the here-after or not-of-this-world. For in Pamir, dwelling is not necessarily contained to the physical, human realm.

It is, therefore, materiality which preserves memory, linking the individual with the past through the physical. While ruptures within the Pamiri community are embedded in the materiality of the Pamiri house, so too are memories of deceased loved ones who dwelt, or perhaps continue to dwell, within. Just as the memory of Nāşiri Khusraw and Azizkhān are tied to the materiality of the Spring and Fortress respectively, the memory of Gulbegim's husband and other relatives are ever-present within her house. Pamiri houses therefore offer the potential to shift scale when approaching rupture as, while rupture can be a ground-breaking, catalytic event throughout a community, so too can the passing of a loved one shatter one's own lifeworld.

3 (Im)mobility between *Meruya* and *Weruya*: Locating Emotion in Family Stories of Soviet GBAO

It was a cosy evening in my friend's second-floor apartment on the side of the mountain; above the place I would later live for several weeks. I have fond memories of this place: sitting on the balcony watching the sun rise, viewing the preparations in the stadium for the presidential visit which never took place, hearing the two roosters in the neighbouring yards squawk at each other at 5am. The sun had already set, which was becoming increasingly later as we approached the summer, but still relatively early due to the tall mountains. At least at this time of year, the neighbourhoods in Shosh, UPD, etc, got a few hours of sunlight and could forget their dark winter days. As I sat on the floor, waiting for the tasty home-cooked meal made by my friend and colleague Aylar, I heard my flat-mate Farishta ascend the wooden stairs to the apartment, accompanied by Suhrob and Nekruz laughing loudly.

In his early 30s, Nekruz was a friendly, animated man who came from Yomj, a village not far from Khorog on the side of the mountain looking directly over towards Afghanistan. Nekruz loved Yomj and, although he had lived elsewhere, he found Yomj to be the most beautiful place in the world; a thought I indeed share with him. A popular place to go swimming in the hot summer months, Yomj is one of a handful of villages in the region which lies extremely close to the border. Indeed, after our visit to the Spring of Nāşiri Khusraw and dropping Nekruz home, Suhrob and I were on the way back at dusk when a green laser shot from across the river and followed our car as we drove. "Don't worry, I'm sure it's just children playing around," said Suhrob, laughing my obvious tension off. For, while Yomj was a beautiful place with lime trees lining the road and dramatic snow-capped mountains at certain times of the year, its close proximity to Afghanistan brought with it a strong reminder that the situation on *weruya* was very different, with the Taliban's recent seizure of power and an existing uncertainty as to what that would mean with regard to the border. The border, which was the hot topic at this time due to the increased military presence in GBAO following the Taliban's takeover in Autumn 2021, had not always existed. It was one effect of rupture which had survived periods of shifting geopolitics, regimes, and uprisings. Prior to the ruptures of the late 19th and 20th century, the River Panj had not been a symbol of the separation of countless families and communities, and places like Yomj were not divided. Before the border, *meruya* and *weruya* had very different meanings.

3.1 *Meruya* and *Weruya* as Articulations of Pamiri Cultural Identity

Taken literally, *meruya* means “this side” in Shughni, deriving from the word for face or side (*ruya*) and the proximal demonstrative pronoun; conversely, *weruya* means “that side.” While *ruya* can refer to any side or face, the two terms are used specifically to designate banks of a river from one another, determined by where the speaker is standing in relation to the river. In practice, however, the two terms have become synonymous with one specific river: the River Panj. The westward-flowing River Panj, getting its name from its five tributaries, is the “geographical centrepiece of the Shughni-speaking region” (Parker 2023, 3), having served as a vital water source for thousands of people in Tajikistan and Afghanistan since time immemorial. This river is central to the geography of the southern limits of Central Asia, stretching from the heights of the Wakhan Corridor, finding its basin through the regions of Ishkoshim to Vanj, where soon after it meets the Vakhsh River to create the source of the Amu Darya (or Oxus).

The importance of the River Panj in Pamiri lifeworlds is undeniable. Prior to the introduction of national borders to the region, families and communities would live along both sides of the river, not divided by geopolitics, but united in sharing the same interconnections with each other and their environment, the Panj being part of this. Sharing common languages, cultural and religious traditions, and finding sustenance from the same environment, Pamiri communities living along the River Panj would inhabit both sides if conditions allowed. In addition to Yomj, other villages such as Darmorakh on the road to Ishkoshim also serve as good examples of this, with the river being so narrow in parts that it is possible to speak across the current.

The occurrence of the ruptures of the past centuries greatly altered Pamiri lifeworlds, attempting to sever interconnection across a newly drawn border. In accordance with the Pamir Boundary Commission of 1893–5 in which British and Russian imperialists demarcated their spheres of influence, the right bank of the River Panj became Tajikistan, and the left bank Afghanistan. This designation, which represented shifts in power and, from the mid-1920s had a dramatic impact on the daily life of Pamiris, had a lasting effect on the meaning of *meruya* and *weruya*. What had been a linguistic way of differentiating between sides of a river now became markers for nation states. For Pamiris on the right bank of the River Panj, *meruya* became Tajikistan, and *weruya* Afghanistan. For Pamiris on the left bank, the case appeared in perfect symmetry.

The terms *meruya* and *weruya* are not only a practical way to differentiate between banks of the river, but are expressions of positionality which are historically-informed. By using *meruya*, Pamiris articulate a belonging to a specific side

of the river, and thus to a Pamiri community which has had a varied historical experience from the other side. Following the creation of the Soviet Union and the militarisation of the border, Pamiri communities then under the jurisdiction of the Soviet Union underwent processes of social and economic reform in line with those of the rest of the Soviet Union (see Kalinovsky 2018; Kassymbekova 2016; Akyildiz and Carlson 2014). In contrast, Pamiris living on the left bank, protected slightly due to their distance from the administrative capital of Kabul which had formerly been the seat of invading Afghan forces, had a very different experience living through the internal ruptures Afghanistan faced during the 20th century as a religious minority. By using *meruya*, Pamiris therefore position themselves in relation to these events, expressing a shared experience greatly affected by, in the case of GBAO, a Soviet heritage.

In short, *meruya* can be viewed as an expression of a cultural identity. Defined by Hall (2003, 225) as “the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past”, cultural identity is formed by continuous interactions and negotiations of similarity, difference, and heritage. With the help of “frames of reference and meaning” (Hall 2003, 223), members of a group or community develop an understanding of “what we really are” (Hall 2003, 225), creating a cultural identity which Hall sees as “the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture.” (Hall 2003, 226). In this way, *meruya* is a way of articulating the cultural identity of being Pamiri, with the river as a point of reference to the historical ruptures which were inflicted upon the once unified communities.

In this way, the distinction between *meruya* and *weruya* is historical and culturally informed as it alludes to separation and the development of contrasting experiences. Just as *meruya* can be understood as an articulation of “we”, so too can *weruya* be replaced with “they”. The division caused by the border demarcation, therefore, is undeniable. The deviation in Pamiri identities follows a similar path to the conceptualisation of Tajik ethnic identity in the region. As Brasher (2011, 115) observes, while communities on both sides of the river shared similarities and historical connections pre-Soviet period, “they did not conceive of themselves as members of a clearly delineated ethno-national group”, and what is perceived as Tajik differs greatly in Tajikistan and Afghanistan.¹ The same can be said for Pamiri identity; there is no singular definition of who is Pamiri. Articulations

¹ This text is from 2011 and, since then, there has been a noticeable rise in pan-Tajik ethnic identity in Afghanistan within the context of resistance to the Taliban regime post-2021. These sentiments are, to my knowledge, largely not shared by Tajiks in Tajikistan.

of Pamiri identity differ greatly throughout Pamir, regardless of being *meruya* or *weruya*. For example, in addition to the term “*pomere*” which has been previously discussed in the introduction, cultural heritage objects such as *toqe* (national hats) can vary greatly throughout Pamir in terms of colour, shape, and fabric. What is commonly referred to as a *toqe* in GBAO, for example, is more closely associated with one specific area in Pamir, namely Shughnon and Rushon, rather than representative of an all-encompassing *pomere toqe*.

In GBAO, which is the focal point of this study, *weruya* has come to be associated with a strong sense of fear. This fear did not suddenly come into existence with the Taliban’s emergence in the heights of Badakhshan Province, but finds its roots in the history of the region. The Mirdom of Badakhshān, references to which date back to the 7th century (Beben 2023, Nourmamadchoev 2015), existed in various forms of (self-)governance until its formal division in 1895. Before the emergence of British, Russian, and Qing imperialist interests in the region, which began in the 18th century, Badakhshān was under repeated threat from the Emirate of Kābul (Emirate of Afghānistān post-1855), with their leaders, stemming from the Durrānī Dynasty and House Bārakzaī, sitting in Kabul. The invading forces, who came to be known as “*afghon*” in reference to their origins in the lower regions of Afghanistan, formed the base for imaginations of Afghanistan and Afghans which still prevail to this day. There were many periods when Badakhshān was invaded and ruled by foreign rulers, such as Murād Baīg of Qundūz who annexed Badakhshān in 1829, and Dūst Muḥammad Khān of House Bārakzaī who led several campaigns to capture the northern limits of Afghanistan (Beben 2023). Pillage and enslavement were widespread in such annexations (Iloliev 2013; Mastibekov 2014) and the situation of Badakhshān worsened greatly (Beben 2023). While the threat of Afghan invasion was not the only issue facing Badakhshān prior to the imperialist period, most notably the pressure from the neighbouring Emirate of Bukhārā (Mastibekov 2014; Beben 2023), the events of the pre-Soviet period have become ingrained in the collective narrative of Badakhshan and therefore play a central role in Pamiri cultural identity. While many details are often left out, the core of such tales portray the Afghans as foreign invaders and oppressors, edifying an imagination of Afghans and Afghanistan as a threat.

Upon the emergence of Russian imperialist interests in the region, the rulers of Badakhshān practised warm international relations with Tsarist Russia, exemplified by the pirship of Yūsuf Alī Shāh, in coordination with Azizkhān. As an Ismaili Muslim religious authority, Shughnān-based *pir* Yūsuf Alī Shāh himself conducted political correspondence with Tsarist Russia, seeing it as potential support against a possible invasion by the Emirate of Bukhārā (Mastibekov 2014, 59). While Pamir officially became part of the Russian Empire in 1905, Ismaili practices continued to be observed and zakat was continued to be paid to the Bombay-based

Aga Khan (Mastibekov 2014, 59). The activities of the *piren* during these times were pivotal in securing the well-being of Ismaili Muslim communities living under Russian imperialist rule (Iliiev 2013). While Tsarist Russia had maintained a relatively tolerant approach to Ismaili Islam, the Bolshevik Revolution and subsequent incorporation of Western Pamir into the Soviet Union brought with it an increased disregard for Ismaili Islam and religion in general. Following the foundation of the UzSSR, of which the autonomous region of Gorno-Badakhshon existed within the boundaries of the Tajik ASSR, and the redrawing of these boundaries to the Tajik SSR which included GBAO, the south-eastern boundary of the Soviet Union posed several issues for Soviet leadership and therefore became the focus of certain policies which have left their remnants to this day. The ongoing Basmachi Revolt (1917–26), which saw a movement of anti-Soviet uprisings all across Central Asia, thematised the disdain felt by many who did not accept the new doctrine being propagated. Soviet discourse on the Basmachi Movement focused on discrediting the Basmachi as a mix of bourgeois land-owners or ignorant peasants, financed by the exiled Emir of Bukhārā from his refuge in Afghanistan, with the revolution being eventually exhausted due to the prevalence of class solidarity and acceptance of non-Muslim Communists (Nourzhanov 2015, 178). While the Basmachi Revolt was not only religiously motivated, with other issues such as land ownership coming into play, it still today occupies a multi-layered position in Tajikistan's national historical narrative (Nourzhanov 2015). The initial fear of invading Afghans was then further developed in the early years of the Soviet Union: then, the Afghans were seen as harbouring the Emir of Bukhārā, i.e. the great *kulak* (landowner) who had been a very recent threat to peace in Pamir.

With religion undergoing increasing control in the Soviet Union, Central Asian Muslims came under intense scrutiny beginning in the period known as Stalin's Great Terror (1936–8) which left a lasting imprint on the lives of those living in Pamir. During this period, characterised by crackdowns on religion and political opposition, there were many actions which could lead one to being labelled an "enemy of the people" (Rus.: *vrag naroda*) and subjected to persecution such as forced labour or capital punishment. Being sent to Siberia, among other threats, shaped the experience for many living in the Soviet Union, especially in those early days. For Pamiris, however, I would argue that this threat was heightened due to their proximity to the border. While others could adjust to the newly imposed Soviet regulations and expectations of the state, many Pamiris were living beside a constant reminder of the life they had once had and which they were no longer permitted to have. Furthermore, their proximity meant that they, like the border, were intensely monitored and therefore had a heightened precarity of, even if unintentionally, being subjected to policing measures and punishment.

These dark times are described by Tasar (2017, 14) as leaving a shadow on the remainder of the Soviet times, marring the Soviet Muslim experience by anti-Islamic violence which did not occur to this level in other postcolonial contexts. As is argued in this chapter, the events which characterised the breakup of Pamir and early days of the Soviet Union caused fear in the bodies of Pamiris which hindered them from crossing the River Panj and maintaining connection with their loved ones on the other side. This immobility, as an effect of rupture, exemplifies how fear controls the body and the memory of this fear can last several generations and outlive the actual threat itself. Turning to the three family stories presented in this chapter, collected during various meetings in Khorog and online, it becomes evident that both the fear of the imagination of *weruya* and threat of repercussions continues to affect the movements of young Pamiris. All interlocutors are young men from GBAO who were born at the very end or after the collapse of the Soviet Union and therefore have no personal experience with the events themselves, yet have grown up informed of their history and are affected by it. In this sense, the focus of this chapter is not the factual correctness or attention to detail of the family stories they share but rather the way in which the memory of fear continues to be transmitted through these stories.

This memory of fear, which has been passed down from generation to generation through oral histories such as those presented here, still affects the lives of younger generations of Pamiris. While the initial threat of Soviet persecution has since passed, the fear of what lies on the other side of the river has been further developed in recent years by global discourses of Islamic Extremism and the war in Afghanistan, creating a multifaceted fear which restricts the movements of Pamiris. This fear of *weruya* and what it represents is a key part of Pamiri lifeworlds and is a shared experience for many living in close proximity to this border. In this sense, the fear which restricts Pamiri bodies also brings the community closer together through a shared experience and history. Just as the ruptures of the 20th century are key to understanding Pamiri lifeworlds, so too are the feelings which they triggered and continue to trigger.

This chapter borrows heavily from the approach outlined by Levine Hampton's (2022) discussion of locating emotion in oral history narratives in her thought-provoking paper on her family's relocation from Glasgow to East Kilbride and the domestic violence entwined within. As Levine Hampton highlights, her closeness to the interlocutors, in this case immediate female family members, adds a further layer to the retelling of this sizable migration wave from the impoverished tenements of the crowded city to so-called New Towns in the 1960s. Combining the emotional retelling with the spatial dynamics of migration, Levine Hampton argues that emotion helps to situate such marginalised narratives spatially, connecting oral history and critical geography through emotion. The three

family stories presented in this chapter have much in common with Levine Hampton's case study in that (forced) migration defines each narrative and the temporalities of rupture it evokes. For all three family histories, the great ruptures of the creation of the Soviet Union and its collapse are featured strongly, but so too are moments of relocation, exile, and separation which come to define the pathways of these three families.



Fig. 5: View from Yomj towards Afghanistan. Smith (2022).

3.2 Overcoming Fear in Nekruz's Journey to *Weruya*

The perfect host, Aylar poured cups of tea for Farishta, Suhrob, and Nekruz as they took their seats on the floor beside me. The smell of the tasty food which Aylar was preparing with her husband, Hugo, filled the room and our stomachs started to rumble. Opening his bag, Nekruz pulled out a laptop and sat it on the sofa behind his back. Equally excited to share his family history, Nekruz had ac-

cepted our invitation to dinner and even brought his laptop to share some photos of Yomj. The photographs Nekruz shared were actually not of his family, but of Yomj following the infamous Barsem Flood Disaster in 2015. Between 16th and 20th July of that year, hot weather combined with extremely high rainfall led to a massive mudslide which destroyed around 80 houses in the area (see Zafar and Uchimura 2023). Following this environmental disaster, many families were forced to relocate to a newly-created settlement nicknamed 'Rahmonobod' after the President.

Yomj is on the other side of the mountain from Barsem so we had huge rockfalls due to the flooding. Once the rains stopped, I went with my father to this area [shows photographs] and really there was nothing, just hundreds and hundreds of rocks. Thank God our house was not destroyed. You know, we Shughnis are strongly connected to the land. The Russians sent expeditions to Murghob but they had to return because they felt too sick with the heights. But for us, we are used to living in these conditions.²

Nekruz's words make-up one of the central points of this book that I owe to the people in Pamir who shared their experiences with me: Pamiris are strongly connected to the landscape. This can be seen in how the landscape and changes to it are present in almost every aspect of daily life. Be it planning a trip to Dushanbe depending on the rainfall, to moving to relatives in the winter months to avoid avalanches, and even describing where one is in relation to the river, the landscape plays a key role in Pamiri lifeworlds. The unpredictability of the harsh weather conditions coupled with poor road and vehicular maintenance lead to substantial migratory hurdles for many living in Pamir, exacerbating existing difficulties associated with (in)mobility (Blondin 2020, 2021). The immobilities of fear, as will be discussed in this chapter, are therefore not the only migration issues facing Pamiris, and environmental and economic factors, such as labour migration, play a much greater role.

Just as Pamiris are closely connected to the landscape, so too can environmental disasters play a pivotal role in historical ruptures. Nekruz was not the first person to reference the Barsem Flood Disaster; it was a common fixed point in time which people in Pamir referenced. Another example of this would be the 7.2 Bartang Earthquake which followed a few months later on 7th December, destroying hundreds of homes and causing the Bartang Valley in Rushon District to be cut-off from the rest of GBAO for several days and involuntarily relocation of many inhabitants (Blondin 2021). Further back in history, the Sarez Lake Disaster of

² Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Reworking of conversation in English with Nekruz in Khorog.

1911, in which a substantial earthquake caused a natural dam to be formed in Rushon and resulted in the sudden deaths of countless villagers. This disaster, which caused the creation of Lake Sarez, a natural dam which poses a constant existential threat to large areas of Central Asia (Bliss 2006), is also often referenced in relation to family histories due to the many refugees who were then permanently displaced and forced to resettle in other areas of Rushān and Shughān. In both cases, the devastating effects of these natural disasters left a lasting imprint of the ordering of history in Pamir, with many Pamiris seeing these as an important event which changed the course of history.

Environmental disasters are ruptures as they present a point of disconnection and force redirection. During my stay in Tajikistan, there was a devastating avalanche in Khorog which destroyed many homes in UPD and Shosh, two neighbourhoods at the foot of the mountain. Anticipating an avalanche, many families had taken to leaving their homes during the snowy months and staying with relatives in other neighbourhoods. 15 people were killed in this avalanche, and three others in similar avalanches in the greater GBAO region (Asia Plus 2023a). While aid was limited due to ongoing governmental restrictions and the inaccessibility of the region due to weather conditions, residents themselves formed rescue missions to pull victims out of the snow and community-organised fundraising quickly followed over social media. Here, we see moving due to the fear of rupture, innovation out of urgent need in the formation of rescue missions, and social media engagement for those who could not physically aid in the area. While the rupture of the avalanche itself brought with it death and destruction, the event brought many Pamiris together in the form of community initiatives and fundraising which had in recent times been dissuaded due to the unspeakable events of recent years. Hence the disruption caused by the avalanche brought social movement among the community.

3.2.1 Tenacious Emotions in Oral Narrations

Environmental disasters signal disconnection because the landscape is an anchor for historical narratives through its materiality. The River Panj, for example, is central to Pamiri lifeworlds in Shughnon and its neighbouring regions. It was interesting to see how, in the case of Nekruz's family, the river had played a key, defining role in his fate. As I sat with my friends in this cosy apartment, we listened intently to the life story of Nekruz Sr.:

Let me tell you the story of my family. My grandfather, I'm named after him, came from the other side of the river, Afghanistan. There was a rebellion in the 1920s, I'm not sure exactly

when it was but it was around the time of the creation of the Soviet Union. The people on the other side had a revolution because they wanted to remain united; they wanted Badakhshan to remain as one. Unfortunately, the Russians told the Afghan Emirate about this planned rebellion and it was crushed. Many men were killed in the fighting, and women and children fled to Tajikistan. My great-grandfather sent my great-grandmother and their 8-year-old son across the river to safety. No one saw my great-grandfather after that; he must have been killed in the fighting. [...] So my great-grandmother is trying to cross the river with her child but the water is very strong and it was very dark so she loses him in the river. She reaches this side but my grandfather is stuck on the Afghan side. So my grandfather, a small child, is scared and begins to cry out for his mother in the darkness. Thank God that he cried out in this moment because a man heard him, wrapped him in a sheepskin, and carried him across the river to his mother. I can imagine my grandfather standing there, cold and afraid in the pitch-black, crying for his mother. But thank God that he did because otherwise that would have been the end of the story. But, well, here I am.

Nekruz narrates a clear connection between rupture and the fate of his family, with the River Panj as a fixed point of reference. In a time when Pamir was going through an intense rupture, faced with imminent separation and uncertainty, the only option seen by families was to send women and children across the river. Risking death by crossing the icy waters of the River Panj, many women and children did indeed reach safety, like Nekruz's great-grandmother and grandfather. For Nekruz, he understands that the actions of his relatives directly led to the continuation of his family tree. By crossing the river all those years ago, the lives of his family members changed forever as they left the Emirate of Afghānistān and fled to what was to become GBAO. Symbolically, crossing the River Panj was a rupture to Nekruz and his family for the complete change in trajectory it caused.

The rebellion Nekruz refers to is known locally as *maram bolwo* (Engl.: Maḥram's Rebellion) of 1925, named after the rebel leader Maḥram Baīg. According to Emadi (2005), in early April of that year, around 800 armed men in Shughnān rose up against Abd al-Rahmān's oppression of Ismaili Islam. The rebellion was quashed, resulting in many deaths and thousands of refugees fleeing to Tajikistan. As evident in the letters collected by Boyko (2002) from this time, to which Emadi (2005, 179–80) refers, the rebels appealed to the Soviet Union to accept the refugees and grant them citizenship, citing the oppression they experienced under the Afghans. The aftermath of the rebellion saw the River Panj strictly controlled by Pashtun officials from the south of Afghanistan and a weighty prize put on the head of Maḥram Baīg (Emadi 2005, 180). From this point on, the lifeworlds of *mer-yua* and *weurya* grew even further apart, with Pamiris in Afghanistan experiencing several decades of oppression and marginalisation due to their Ismaili Muslim beliefs and practices, and Pamiris in Tajikistan undergoing a Sovietisation focused on the eradication of religion altogether.

Pausing for a moment, Nekruz was evidently experiencing many emotions and, as a listener, I too felt sad upon hearing how he described his grandfather as a small child crying out for his mother all alone in the darkness. In the time since this one conversation, whenever I have shared this part of Nekruz's family story in discussions, colloquia, etc., I have often noticed the impression of sadness on listeners, even those who have never met Nekruz and are even unfamiliar with Pamir. It seems that there is something in the way Nekruz told this story which affects the universal listener. The image of a small child crying out for his mother in the darkness with nothing but crashing waves around him perhaps speaks to the desire in us all to protect children and those most vulnerable. Nonetheless, the emotion in this moment of desperation is somehow preserved powerfully in the oral narrative of Nekruz.

Continuing his story, Nekruz detailed what happened to his great-grandmother and grandfather after they settled in the newly-defined Soviet Union:

My great-grandmother was very beautiful and she was able to marry a widower, so my grandfather grew-up with step-siblings and half-siblings. So even though just my great-grandmother and grandfather survived, we have a huge family. My grandfather died just before I was born, so sadly I never got to meet him, but I still feel a strong connection to him. You know, he never went to the river to see his family over there. At that time, in the Soviet Union, if you went too close to the river they said you would get a 'trip to Siberia', meaning that you would be arrested and sent to a forced labour camp. The local elders also advised against trying to track family down. They said, 'No good will come of it.'

What Nekruz describes here was the reality for many Pamiris who were cut-off from their families due to the border's presence. After the creation of the Soviet Union and the lasting political division of Pamir, the Soviet government under Stalin's leadership sought to cut any family ties which existed among border communities. For Pamiris, this meant that the border itself became something to be feared. The threat of being sent to Siberia, i.e. to a forced labour camp, was enough to make communities extremely wary of going near the border and trying to maintain any contact with their relatives on the other side.

Again, emotion plays an important role in the transmission of Nekruz's family history. The fear of approaching the border is a lasting emotion which still exists in GBAO today. While in the Soviet times, the threat was of governmental punishment, today's Taliban presence has made *weruya* synonymous for a forbidden and dangerous place. This can be seen further in Nekruz's narrative:

My family also didn't want me to go, but there was no stopping me. In 2014, I worked on a small project together with a friend and one of our professors. The idea was to collect stories and traditions which had been lost during the Soviet times. We would compare fairy tales for example, and see what had been left-out by the Soviet censorship. I have so much data

from this on a hard drive somewhere but I've never used it. We weren't really interested in the project, we just wanted to find a way to cross the river and find our families. So we crossed the bridge here at Tem without any real idea where they could be. I was a little scared; I thought, what if I find them and they say, 'No, go away. We have no relatives.' I was quite apprehensive. So my friend and I crossed the bridge and asked around to see if anyone knew our families.

As can be seen here, the fear of *weruya* was enough for Nekruz's relatives to dissuade him from crossing the river and trying to track down their relatives. The Soviet campaign of disconnecting families and communities in border regions has indeed stood the test of time and still affects bodies to this day, coupled with historical imaginations of Afghanistan as a dangerous place. It is interesting to note that the same fear was felt by Nekruz when he was crossing the river. Perhaps it was more a fear of the unexpected, but it still made him hesitant to make this journey to *weruya*.

When we think of Soviet heritage, we think of material objects such as the striking architecture which is slowly being demolished in Dushanbe (Asia Plus 2022b), or Tashkent's stunning subway stations. Nekruz's story, however, highlights another aspect of materiality, namely emotion. The emotion, in this case fear, he felt crossing the river was inherited. As someone who was born after independence, Nekruz himself had no direct experience with Soviet campaigns and the threat of detention which aimed to sever communities. Instead, Nekruz heard stories of those times and the emotions felt by his elders were transmitted along with the narratives themselves. Emotion, therefore, is located within the communicative memory of oral narrations and is an "affective tie" (Assmann 2008) which connects the community through a shared identity.

3.2.2 Reconnection through Names

For Nekruz, his journey was not in vain and, despite his fears and hesitation, he was able to reconnect with his family:

After a while, someone directed us to a house. I knocked and introduced myself, and they knew I was a relative because we looked so alike. It's funny, this house I knocked at, I can see it from my village. I must have seen it everyday, but I had no idea that my relatives lived there. So I go inside and my cousin introduces himself and his family. I laughed because they had exactly the same names as us. He goes, "I'm Nekruz," but I said, "No, I'm Nekruz." [Nekruz laughs a lot] And there was Hikmat, Nemat, Farrukh...I asked, "Where is Muslim?" And then my cousin calls Muslim and a young boy comes in, "Here he is." Crazy, it was like I knew them already.

As confirmed in further interviews, it was common for families on both sides of the river to continue family names. As one colleague from Roshtqa'la, Umed, told of his own family:

They gave the same names to keep the memory alive. So that they wouldn't forget. I know that I also have a cousin called Umed from Afghanistan, in fact there are many Umeds in our family. It was just a way of maintaining this connection and, well, I guess it worked because it does make it a lot easier to trace your relatives.³

These are just two small instances of people in Shughnon relying on family names to find their relatives. Names in Tajik Shughnon follow a patrilineal structure inherited from the Soviets, with the family name often being the great-grandfather's name as the head of the household during the introduction of ID cards and other official Soviet documents. This name would of course carry the russified ending '-ov/ev(a)', depending on the preceding letter and gender. In recent years, however, President Rahmon has encouraged his citizens to drop the russified endings, he himself having done this in 2007, with a law passing in 2020 to ban the endings on newborns' documents (Altynbayev 2020). While I was told by some interlocutors that it is still possible to keep the russified endings if you pay a small bribe when registering the birth of your child, many people throughout Tajikistan had already opted to drop the russified endings independently. Names in Afghan Shighnan, however, are less strictly regulated and surnames are often selected when applying for an ID card (taskira). Due to this flexibility and lack of patrilineal naming structure, names such as 'Pamirzad' (son of Pamir) or 'Arya' (Aryan) are very common but serve little function as even siblings can have different surnames. In Afghan Shighnan it is, however, the first name of the father which is more discerning, something which is not to be underestimated in Tajik Shughnon. Family, as one friend, Jamshed, told me, is everything in Pamir:

When you're a kid and you do something wrong, the adult telling you off will say 'Who is your father?' They don't ask your name, they ask the name of your father. It's because in our society, the parents are responsible for the child's education, how they are brought up etc. So if I do something bad, the blame doesn't go on me but on my father because he should have raised me better.⁴

³ Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in English with Umed in Dushanbe.

⁴ Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in English with Jamshed, Khorog.

Names in Pamir, therefore, are not only a useful tool in maintaining a family connection, but bring with them a societal weighting. In a place like Khorog where everyone knows everyone, a name can mean everything. It is therefore interesting, thinking of the consequences of the separation of Shughnān, that the interrelation of Pamiris halts at the River Panj. What had been, in places like Yomj, one shared community structure where everyone knew everyone else, was destroyed by the creation and subsequent militarisation of the border. While Nekruz did not know that his cousin lived only a few hundred metres away from his house, prior to the creation of the Soviet Union, this shallow part of the river would have been crossed regularly and the two sides would have not been neighbours, but part of one community. It is in these family histories, therefore, that the effects of the separation can be so acutely highlighted. By scaling down to the smallest instance, i. e. the body, the intimate, everyday effects of the separation can be viewed through an emotional, affective lens.

The emotion in Nekruz's retelling of his grandfather's story was palpable. Not only could we in the cosy apartment feel his joy at explaining the names of his reunited cousins, but also his sadness at his grandfather's distress, crying out for his mother in the dark as a scared, lost child. While Nekruz Jr. and Sr. never met, the emotional connection between the pair is undeniable and could lie in how the story was told to Nekruz by his relatives who had met him. This love, sympathy, and gratitude towards his grandfather turns Nekruz's retelling of the story into an emotional experience for the listener; something which speaks to the experience of emotion in communicative memory.

3.3 Ismaili Repression in Abdulloh's Narrative of Soviet GBAO

The family stories I collected during fieldwork, of which these three were selected, were full of palpable emotion. Separation, persecution, and violence were commonplace in the historical experiences of people living in Shughnon. Abdulloh's story was no exception to this. Abdulloh was a close friend of my friend and colleague, Davood, who insisted that we meet. I was sitting on the terrace of a small coffee shop next to the *jamoatkhona* in Khorog where we had arranged to meet. Indeed, Davood and I had tried to track Abdulloh down the day before, going to his place of work. But sadly his neighbour had died in the night and he was at the funeral, a regular occurrence in a small town such as Khorog where everyone knows everyone. Just as the heavens started to open and Davood and I began to give up hope that Abdulloh would venture out in the rain, a slim man with a head



Fig. 6: Toqe displayed in the Khorog City Museum. Smith (2022).

full of blondish hair arrived, shaking the water off of his coat. After exchanging greetings, Davood insisted on buying the coffees:

It's part of our culture. He's a Saidzoda; I should give him anything he asks for. If he turns up at the house and asks to marry my daughter, I should give her to him. There is even a special place in the Pamiri house where the Saidzoda is meant to sit. If I go to sit there, my grandmother will shout at me and say, 'That's the *joyi Said*. Leave it free for the Said!'⁵

Abdulloh, one of the most polite and patient people in Khorog, waited for Davood to finish, trying to suppress his chuckle. With a dry demeanour, Abdulloh replied:

Actually, I have never heard of this. Perhaps your grandmother was messing with you? In any case, yes I am a Saidzoda. This means my family can trace their lineage back to the family of the Prophet. Davood told me you have some questions about my family, so I'll tell you what I know. Back before the creation of the Soviet Union, Badakhshan was led locally by the Pirs. They were learned religious authorities who could read and write. At that time,

⁵ Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in English with Davood and Abdulloh, Khorog.

there was a Pir for each district: Shughnan, Rushan, Wakhan, etc, one for both sides of the river because at that time there was no great divide. While not all Pirs are Saids, my relative was the last Pir of Shughnan and he lived in Porshnev. When the Soviet Union was created, as I'm sure you've heard, the Pirs fled to the other side of the river. So many of my relatives fled to Afghanistan, but we stayed on this side of the river.

With this, we turn to the topic of Ismaili Islam in GBAO during the Soviet times. Due to fear of persecution, religious leaders fled the newly formed Soviet Union and resettled in the Emirate of Afghānistān, where they remained for the rest of their lives. From this point on, Ismaili Islam on *meruya* and *weruya* followed two very different paths.

While listening to Abdulloh, I was reminded of a similar story I had been told, not in Khorog, but in Dushanbe. I had been living with a Tajik family and would often discuss my research interests with them at the kitchen table. My host father, Zohir, had some family roots in Bukhara and told me the story of his grandfather's death at the hands of the Bolsheviks:

So my grandfather was a mullah and, when the word came that the Bolsheviks were coming, he decided to flee to Afghanistan. Actually, he ran to Pamir first and wanted to get to Afghanistan that way by crossing the river. So he fled, leaving behind his many wives and children. He got to the border but the soldiers were already there and were checking everyone. He had the idea to hide himself as a woman and put on a paranja [veil covering the whole body] so the soldiers could not see him and joined a group of women. Unfortunately for my grandfather, the soldiers took one look at the group of women and thought, 'Wait, why is this one woman so much bigger and taller than the others?' and so they shot him. And that is how my grandfather died, a mullah dressed as a woman.⁶

While Zohir intended for the story to be entertaining, delivering it with much laughter, the reality is that religious figures, faced with the rupture of Revolution and the creation of the Soviet Union, fled to Afghanistan in the hope of avoiding persecution. Similarly to Nekruz's relatives, rupture once again forced mobility, but in Abdulloh and Zohir's case the direction was to *weruya*. The escape of religious figures in this time highlights how fear can affect the body by forcing mobility. With an approaching threat, the body's reaction is to flee to a perceived safe place. In the case of the *piren* and other Ismaili elites, Afghanistan, while fraught with persecution from the Emirate's Sunni majority (Emadi 1998), was deemed to be a safer option than remaining on the Tajik side of the river. In this moment, *weruya* represented a safe haven and the border enabled a level of protection

⁶ Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in Tajik with Zohir, Dushanbe.

from the approaching threat of the Bolsheviks. Those days leading up to 1930 therefore show how flexible the imaginaries of *weruya* and *meruya* can be, and how this perception is deeply connected with the lifeworld. Years later in 1992, many people would again cross the Panj into Afghanistan, fleeing the civil war or trying to find a safe route to Pamir which was then under blockade. Despite the decades in between these events, the view of *weruya* as a safe haven, and the border as a kind of protection, prevailed.

Being Ismaili in the Soviet Union

Western scholarship on Islam in the Soviet Union has at times focused on dehumanising Soviet Muslims, portraying the religion and its followers as a threat which needed to be maintained. This is exemplified in Bennigsen and Broxup's (1983) *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State* in which the authors, the former of which was much revered in the field of Islam in the Soviet Union and Central Asian Studies, argue that the networks and connections in which Soviet Muslims moved posed an existential threat to the Soviet Union due to their conflicting loyalties. This and similar approaches, based on the simplification and generalisation of Muslim bodies, calling loyalties into question, have since been challenged by the wider academic community which aims to deconstruct the colonial frames Muslims have been placed in (e.g. Said 1997; Shooman 2014; Amir-Moazami 2016, 2022; Morey and Yaqin 2010, 2011). One work which challenges the notion of competing Soviet Muslim loyalties is the historian Tasar's (2017) *Soviet and Muslim* which approaches its subject matter by investigating the moments of interaction, rather than conflict, between the Muftiate and the Soviet regime in the post-War years, arguing that this relationship gave way to a moderate Soviet Islam. Perhaps most controversial in recent years has been Ro'i's (2000) *Islam in the Soviet Union* which, while criticised for its focus on Soviet narratives and leaving little room for Soviet Muslim experiences (DeWeese 2002), nonetheless provides an extensive historical survey of Soviet records, including committee meeting minutes and other official documents, and argues that there was a definite shift in Soviet policy towards Islam after the Great Patriotic War following the creation of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SAD-UM). Ro'i and Tasar's work, when read together, paint a fuller picture of the post-1941 Soviet period in Central Asia, yet pay only passing attention to the unique situation in which Ismailis found themselves. To fill this gap, Aksakolov (2014, 2024) and Mastibekov (2014) provide a definitive assessment of the situation of Ismaili Muslims during this time, highlighting the varying relationships between Ismaili authorities and government officials and drawing from both archival research and interviews with many key figures. Similarly, Iloliev (2022) approaches the

lived experiences of Soviet Ismailis, e.g. through the example of observance of *panjtani*.

Prior to creation of the Soviet Union, Ismaili Muslims in Pamir stood in connection to the Imam through hereditary pirs who had pledged their allegiance to the Aga Khan. In the 1920s, a reformist movement known as *Panjabhai* (five brothers) stemming from Greater India held influence in some parts of Pamir and created division amongst the Ismaili religious authorities until it was halted by the Aga Khan III (Aksakolov 2024, Iloliev 2022). Ismaili Muslims in Pamir were therefore influenced strongly by a religious authority sitting in British-occupied India, following the teachings of the local *piren* as an extension of the Ismaili Imam. This would suggest that, as the process of Sovietisation began, efforts to curb Ismaili Muslim practices would rest on breaking any connection to the Aga Khan. It was this connection to Aga Khan III, who at this time was based in Mumbai, which opened them up to suspicion, largely due to the fear that he was plotting to orchestrate a rebellion among the Ismailis of Badakhshon (Tasar 2017, 44). Indeed, it was only after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 when Ismaili Muslims could find connection with *Hazar Imom* once again (Aksakolov 2024).

Once the Soviet authorities had consolidated power by the end of the 1920s, Ismaili Muslim religious authority became their point of focus in GBAO. Under Stalin, the *piren* were targeted, causing many to flee to neighbouring Afghanistan, while their followers remained the subject of aggressive propaganda (Aksakolov 2024, 372). In an attempt to harness support for the Great Patriotic War, *khalifa* as leaders of smaller local associations became responsible for many aspects of Ismaili Muslim religious life such as funeral rites. However, according to Ro'i's (2000, 423–3) study of Soviet reports, these men, who were chosen locally, had largely not been trained in the Qur'ān, nor had they been in the presence of the Aga Khan. Nonetheless, Aksakolov (2024, 376) points to general difficulties of the Soviet authorities in obtaining figures, though the number of officially registered *khalifa* more than halved due to the renewed anti-religious campaign under Khrushchev (1953–64), while there continued to exist a number of illegal *khalifa*. In contrast to Ro'i's (2000) study which presents the authority of the *khalifa* as increasingly peripheral, Aksakolov's (2024, 377–8) research highlights the active role the *khalifa* played in representing Ismaili Muslim interests in the face of Soviet repression, with several voicing criticism of Soviet policies and acting independently of the *piren* and Ismaili Imam due to the impossibility of maintaining contact. The existing scholarship therefore paints a picture of repression and a de facto Ismaili religious authority operating separately from the hereditary powers outside of the country.

Family stories like Abdulloh's provide a human perspective to this historiography and offer emotional, experiential insights. It should be noted here that Ab-

dulloh is very softly-spoken, more out of his polite mild-mannered personality rather than the effects of silences or unspeakableness. While Abdulloh does not use strong language in the quotations which follow, this should not be interpreted as a lack of emotion. For Abdulloh's family, the anti-religious measures of the Soviet regime greatly impacted their lives and were experienced by them daily:

Life was not easy for my family in these times. Everyone knew that the Saids were important religious figures and this is why they were heavily monitored under the Soviet regime. They were viewed with suspicion and lived within many limitations. They were not even sent to fight in the War, in case they defected from the Soviet Union.

It is interesting to note that the supposed threat of Islam, propagated by the Soviet regime, led to very real restrictions on movement for its citizens. Just as Nekruz told of a fear of approaching the river due to possible persecution and imprisonment, Abdulloh's family's movements were also restricted, but to a different end. For most families, it was to sever any kind of familiar connection, but for the families of the *saiden* it was to keep them inside of the Soviet Union and thus under control.

As Abdulloh continued to explain, matters changed nearing the end of the Soviet Union:

The condition improved a little in the 80s. The Soviet Union was opening up and they had some international relations with Afghanistan. Once, a delegation came to visit from Afghanistan. Suddenly, these men from the government came to our house and brought carpets. We had never had carpets before. But they wanted to show, 'Look, we treat our religious people well. They are living comfortably.' It was all for show.

The time Abdulloh refers to, often categorised as the Perestroika and Glasnost period from 1985 to the end of the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev, saw an easing in the repression of Ismailis, with families like Abdulloh's being invited to events and the possibility of reconnection with the *piren* who had fled (Iloliev 2008, 2013). The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan also offered a temporary easing of border controls. Following the Saur Revolution (1978), in which President Daoud Khan was overthrown, Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan via bordering regions the following year. Emadi (1998), in his detailed chronology of the situation of Ismaili communities in Afghanistan throughout the 20th century, argues that, through the politicisation of the Ismaili intelligentsia and their support for the pro-Soviet government, Ismailis were able to preserve both their religious knowledge and identity in spite of their position as a minority. Part of these opportunities was educational mobility, and many Ismailis studied in the Tajik SSR and thus traversed the border (Emadi 1998, 115). Furthermore, through these connections

with the Soviet Union, many Ismailis supported the development of border communities in Badakhshan Province, for example with the construction of transborder power lines in Shighnan (Emadi 1998, 115). These instances of cross-border connection, made possible by the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, are one of the few state-level instances of *meruya* and *weruya* coming together during the Soviet period.

Similarly in Tajikistan, many Ismailis held important positions in the government, usually pursuing careers as teachers or government officials due to the lack of agricultural opportunities in GBAO (Herbers 2001, 371). For example, one of the country's national heroes, Shirinsho Shotemur, originated from a poor family in Porshnev and pursued a political career, being credited with Tajikistan's independence from the UzSSR in 1929, before himself falling victim to Soviet repression in 1937. Varying negotiations of identity could explain the discrepancy between the treatment of religious figures, and the positions held by many Ismailis. Emadi's (1998, 103) analysis of Ismailis in Afghanistan is conducted through the lens of *taqiyya*, which he defines as "a precautionary dissimulation of their faith in a hostile environment," arguing that this principle helped Ismaili Muslims to move into favourable positions and ultimately support themselves post-occupation. The option of *taqiyya* was perhaps not available to religious figures like *saiden* who, by birth, were revered among Ismaili Muslims communities. Other Ismaili Muslims, such as Shotemur, maintained a public appearance that was void of religion, keeping matters of belief private. I would propose moving away from the concept of *taqiyya*, which is religiously laden, and instead approach these negotiations of identity as a result of rupture. Due to the distance felt following the creation of the Soviet Union between both *meruya* and *weruya*, and the *piren* and their Soviet *murid*, a distinction between Ismaili as religion and Ismaili as experience developed in Soviet GBAO, with Soviet Ismailis adopting a form of *taqiyya* as a way to protect themselves and fashion a lifeworld in this new context.

Abdulloh's family story therefore provides an intimate perspective on a widely discussed issue relating to Islam in Soviet Central Asia: the treatment of religious figures and the practise of religious rites. While many in Pamir were able to practise their religion in secret, confining religious activities largely to the home or behind closed doors, those known to be influential in religious matters could simply not hide. Against the background of the Bismachi Movement which saw religious and landowning elites form a resistance against the Bolsheviks throughout Central Asia, Abdulloh gives a small hint as to life for those who did not flee to Afghanistan and continued to live *meruya*. While previous systems of religious authority were not compatible with Sovietisation, for example the authority of the Aga Khan III, some practices were able to withstand the rupture of Sovietisation. Thinking back to Davood's introduction, he had learnt from

his grandmother that the *saiden* were special people who should be given full, unconditional respect. The religious authority of the remaining *piren* in Afghanistan, some of whom re-established contact with their Soviet *murid* post-Independence (Iloliev 2008, 2013), changed drastically after the collapse of the Soviet Union when, in 1995, Aga Khan IV visited the region for the first time. Indeed, in the years which followed, great reforms were introduced as Ismaili Muslim communities in Tajikistan and Afghanistan joined the global Jamat. Having been largely unified several decades prior, the rest of the global Jamat had already experienced sweeping reforms which, upon introduction to Pamir, required the retirement of Pirship in place of increased training and responsibilities for *khalifa*, each selected in cooperation with Jamati institutions which were also introduced. This great shift in religious authority and increased institutionalisation of Ismaili Islam, in line with the global Jamat, meant that the very term *pir* largely became a thing of the past, used only to denote historical Ismaili figures such as Pir Nāşiri Khusraw. However, *Saidzoda* and the weight it carries, is still in use, as can be seen from Davood and Abdulloh's interaction, meaning that, although some articulations of religious authority died out, the lineage to the family of the Prophet upheld its significance in GBAO.

3.4 Azizkhon's Narrative of Stalin's Great Terror

It was a dark winter night in Khorog. The kind of night where all you can do is stay inside and hibernate, escaping from the piercing cold and potential wolves outside. From under the thick *lef* (synthetic blanket) next to the *pechka* (electric heater), I was checking my social media when a message appeared from a name I did not recognise. The user explained that he followed me on another platform and was interested in my research on Pamir. As it turned out, we had many mutual friends in Khorog, including my flatmate Farishta, and this is how I came to know Azizkhon. A researcher, Azizkhon had left Tajikistan several years ago to study and had since settled abroad. After exchanging messages while I was in Tajikistan, we found time upon my return for a long zoom call in which he could finally tell me the story of his family.

Initially, we came into discussion because of my research but Azizkhon soon revealed that the other side of the river had always sparked great interest in him:

For me, Afghanistan was always this place I associated with culture and music, but also my family homeland, as well as this desire to see my relatives. [...] As a child, my sister and I were very interested in Afghanistan. We listened to Afghan music a lot. We would climb onto the roof of our house and adjust the antenna, trying to get the Afghan channels on



Fig. 7: Flowers left at an abandoned shrine in Khorog. Smith (2022).

TV. My father was so annoyed because we disrupted the signal and he couldn't watch the Russian channels.⁷

The image of two children messing with the TV antenna is not only amusing, but highlights the interconnection experienced at the heights of Pamir. In one position, the antenna allows an audio-visual connection to a country hundreds of miles away, while the other position brings the neighbouring country a step closer. In both cases, the antenna allows the children to overcome various national and physical borders, all through their interaction with the materiality of the antenna itself. Azizkhon and his sister were not alone in connecting with Afghanistan in this way. Before the Taliban took control of the country in September 2021, it was relatively common to tune-in to Ariana TV or Tolo News for alternative Persian-language programming to Tajik state channels such as Safina TV and Televisiوني Tojikiston. Through a mutually-intelligible language, *weruya* became instantly accessible and the divide of the border was temporarily overcome for the

⁷ Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in English with Azizkhon, online.

length of one news segment or programme. Unfortunately for Persian-speakers, following the events of September 2021, the broadcasting language of most programmes switched to Pashto and thus Tajik viewership appears to have dropped. TV broadcasting, for now, appears to not have survived this particular rupture.

3.4.1 Faith to transcend Borders

As Azizkhon explained, his family was scattered across both sides of the River Panj:

My family on my grandmother's side are from Rushan, up a valley. My great-grandfather was one of 6 brothers. My great-grandmother was married to a man on the other side at a young age; she was so young that she used to call her husband 'uncle'. My great-great-grandfather, her father, decided to migrate and wanted to get his daughter back, so he made a deal with her husband to release her from the marriage in exchange for some hectares of land. So he got his daughter back and then married her to his nephew, my great-grandfather. He moved closer to Khorog, but then he was relocated to Ghund by the ruler at the time. [...] Some relatives came from the Afghan side and they still managed to maintain this network, for example some of my relatives travelled about 200 km to visit a shrine in Afghanistan and make a sacrifice. Afghans in general settled on the Tajik side of the river but used to take animals and dried fruits to Afghanistan. But this stopped when the crack-down began.

As can be seen from this small excerpt of our conversation, families lived along both sides of the River Panj prior to the creation of the Soviet Union. What is particularly interesting here is the use of place names to position the narrative so it is understandable to the listener, i.e. me in that moment. Khorog, at the time Azizkhon recounted, had little significance. As a city, Khorog was developed extensively during the early Soviet years, being the administrative capital of GBAO and therefore an important centre. Before this, however, when the River Panj held far less significance, Khorog was a small village sitting at the convergence of three rivers. Due to its proximity to Afghanistan, Khorog became a Russian military outpost in 1895, and gradually grew throughout the Soviet period, gaining key infrastructure such as a hospital, airport, and the addition of several schools (Middleton 2016). The reference to Khorog, as a fixed point on the map with which the listener can locate the narrative of Azizkhon's family more easily, would have been less relevant at this time, reminding us of the importance of context-sensitivity when dealing with multiple temporalities.

The same can be said for Azizkhon's references to the sides of the River Panj. While not completely irrelevant in this time, the river today plays the role of a national border; dividing not just land but many families and communities. By em-

phasising the mobility of many people prior to the creation of the Soviet Union, Azizkhon highlights the irrelevance of the border from a contemporary perspective. This is not to say that the river held no importance whatsoever: as a central point in the geography of Shughnān and other areas in its proximity, the River Panj has greatly impacted Pamiri lifeworlds. Still, the apparent ease with which Azizkhon's relatives could cross the river speaks to the politics of the border regime which came to be imposed on Pamir, a border regime which focused its attention on halting the physical movement across *meruya* and *weruya*.

As Azizkhon continued, the Soviet times were not easy for his family and the repressions of Stalin were strongly felt:

My grandfather was born at the start of the 1930s, during the beginning of Stalin's crack-downs. [...] My great-grandfather was even sent to Siberia. He was accused of domestic abuse but really he had some kind of problem with his neighbour and this guy accused him. There is a shrine in Afghanistan called Polkhoja. It is believed to have the footprint of Nāṣiri Khusraw. In 1941/2, when my great-grandfather was taken to Siberia, my great-grandmother faced towards this shrine and prayed through the whole night, standing on one foot.

From this excerpt, it becomes apparent that there is a clear shift in Azizkhon's narrative, not before the creation of the Soviet Union per se, but following the beginning of Stalin's Great Terror. This rupture is what orders Azizkhon's narrative prominently, appearing to be the cause of his family's division and change in trajectory. From this point on, the narrative enters into a new period, the Soviet.

Azizkhon's narrative offers a different perspective from Abdulloh's as his family were not known religious figures, but rather nondescript followers and therefore their experiences give a glimpse into non-elite issues during the Soviet times. Similar to Nekruz's account, Azizkhon offers a story of separation but focusing more on Stalin's Great Terror as the initial rupture. This is presumably because Azizkhon's family experienced this time directly, whereas for Nekruz's family it was rather the ever-present fear of what could happen if one stepped out of line. Therefore, Azizkhon's narrative offers an account of what would happen if one, indeed, stepped out of line.

For Azizkhon's great-grandmother, the fear for her husband's fate caused her to enter into an intense act of prayer and devotion. Standing on one foot, she prayed throughout the whole night for the protection of her husband. This highlights the desperation felt by Azizkhon's great-grandmother in this moment and demonstrates how Stalin's repressions held an affective power over the bodies of Pamiris. When one experiences fear, according to Ahmed (2014), the body seeks a place of safety, i.e. something familiar which offers stability and defence against the threat. By turning to prayer, Azizkhon's great-grandmother was seek-

ing refuge in a turbulent time, i. e. asking *Xutho* (Engl.: God/Allah) for help. Moreover, the desperation of standing on one leg for the whole night articulates the desperation she felt at the prospect of losing her husband. In this way, the fear of what could happen to her husband, and by extension her and her family, caused her to use her body in an extreme act of prayer, demanding physical determination and ultimately exhaustion and pain.

Azizkhon's great-grandmother's prayers also highlight the importance that certain sites in Afghanistan still held, post-rupture. While standing on one leg and praying, she was facing a sacred site several hundred kilometres away on the other side of the river in what was then an even more distant place than was before. Despite the extensive political boundaries and borders which now encompassed her and hindered her pilgrimage to that sacred site, she still prayed in its direction and thus placed herself in connection to it through prayer. This would suggest that this shrine and perhaps others like it were capable of withstanding the ruptures which had otherwise disconnected the lifeworlds of Pamiris in the region.

I would argue that it is due to the shrine's materiality that it withstood the rupture of Stalin's regime. The shrine mentioned here, which is one of several throughout the region attributed to miraculous events concerning either Nāširi Khusraw himself or other *doi* or *piren*, is a location associated with great religious significance and therefore holds importance in the lifeworlds of many Pamiris sharing the same belief. While the militarisation of borders and policing of communities can pose great hurdles to overcome, the shrine as a fixed point of reference remained for Azizkhon's great-grandmother and she was able to orient herself towards it in a personal act of prayer. This suggests that, like many others, the shrine was part of her lifeworld, even though she could no longer visit it.

Such shrines, similar to the Spring of Nāširi Khusraw, therefore present an interesting case study when approaching ruptures, especially in the context of Ismaili Islam during the Soviet period. With the creation of national borders comes an immobility which makes partaking in a pilgrimage almost impossible. Furthermore, the anti-religious campaigns of the early Soviet period also caused a degree of immobility as, even if one could in theory partake of a pilgrimage, the threat of repercussion was too heavy for many believers. Additionally, the policing of border communities, as can be seen in the narratives of Abdulloh and Nekruz, prevented Pamiris from having any connection with the other side out of fear of retribution from state security. Nonetheless, Azizkhon's great-grandmother found her own way of maintaining a connection with this sacred place in spite of the growing barriers around her. By praying towards the shrine, as she believed, she was fulfilling her religious duties while begging for the protection of her husband.

It is interesting to note here that, since Pamir became part of the global Jamat and thus underwent a series of reforms to unify administrative matters and some religious practices, the significance of many shrines was also affected. In Khorog, for example, there was once a small shrine by the side of the road which connects Gulaken with Barkhorog, in an area called Choynak. The shrine, consisting of a tree and stone which were believed to have been the site of a miracle, used to be visited by local pilgrims who would offer prayers there. After Aga Khan IV's first visit to the region in 1995, however, the practice of praying at shrines was discouraged and thus the shrine fell out of use. While the meaning of the shrine changed, that did not change its materiality, i.e. the tree and the stone still stand there to this day. On one visit to the former shrine, I also noted that people had left flowers and small stones, suggesting that the shrine is still occasionally in use. Therefore, while the interpretation of a material object can change, the actual material existence of it does not, highlighting the role that subjectivity plays in the veneration and perception of material religion (Gamberi 2021).

3.4.2 Lost Connections from (Im)mobility

Despite his great-grandmother's prayers working and him leaving the Gulag, it was much longer until Azizkhon's great-grandfather was free to return to Pamir:

After Siberia, he was sent to Vakhsh to work on the cotton fields together with many Volga Germans. After the death of Stalin, he requested to go back to Pamir saying, 'I just want to listen to the flowing water and die.' And so, he returned to Pamir. He would often disappear in the summer months, leaving my great-grandmother alone. No one knows where he went.

There is something of a symmetry in the fate of Azizkhon's great-grandfather. From his exile to Siberia, then forced migration to the cotton fields, and then back to Pamir, he appears to have wanted to be in Pamir, but on his own terms. The restrictions he had suffered during his exile were now lifted, and he wanted perhaps to experience the freedom of movement he had missed out on all those years ago.

Restriction of movement was a running motif in Azizkhon's family story. Sadly, the fear of the border meant that, for Azizkhon's family, there was no happy ending:

My father was born in the 1960s and he used to wonder why my grandfather didn't know anything about his family. [...] He could have probably gone to Afghanistan to look for our relatives in the 1980s when things were more relaxed, but he was too afraid. In the 1990s, we came into contact with a man from Afghanistan but he told us that we had no rel-

atives left there. That part of the family had had only daughters, apart from one relative who was killed in a wrestling match, so the family name died on that side of the river. [...] Actually, this is attributed to our family curse. I was told that my I-don't-know-how-many-great-grandfather, who was blind, once met a fairy king who cursed our family so that every generation would only have one surviving male son. That lasted until my generation, it seems, because I have a brother.

The story of Azizkhon's family is testament to the real consequences the Soviet politics of fear had on communities living along the River Panj. The ever-present threat of persecution for approaching the border or maintaining connection with one's loved ones was enough to sever family relationships and, in the case of many families, cause these connections to be lost forever.

In closing, Azizkhon shared his own thoughts on the fate of his people, highlighting the lasting effects the ruptures of the 20th century have had:

It's the story of human tragedy. The British came, and then the Russians, then Stalin. There's this Iron Curtain and you just can't cross it. You know, one guy even tried to swim over the Pacific, just to get out of the Soviet Union. Families were torn apart; brothers didn't see each other for decades. Fathers didn't see their sons. We had some slight reconnection: my uncle is a dentist and he set-up a practice in a place called Barponja, on the Afghan side of the river. One of his patients told him that we have some distant relatives still around. We have the same faces and the same names, but I never went there. I think I'm a little worried that I would turn up and they would be like 'Oh, what do you want?' I guess there is just memory now, no real connection.

For many families, this is sadly the case and the connections which existed before the ruptures of the 20th century have been lost forever. Azizkhon's own apprehensions at searching for connection, shared by Nekruz, highlight how successful the Soviet measures in creating a long-lasting severment were. After close to a century, hope appears to have been lost for many in the possibility of reconciliation or any possible return to life before the border demarcation.

3.5 Pamir Imagined through Memory and Emotion

These three family stories, shared by three young men from GBAO, are representative of the effects the rupture of the border demarcation had on Pamiri life-worlds. For Nekruz's family, this caused the forced migration of his great-grandmother and grandfather, leading to family separation of roughly 90 years, but, thanks to Nekruz's tenaciousness, also the reconciliation of the family a few years ago. For Abdulloh, the forced migration of many relatives to Afghanistan and the religious persecution which followed affected the movements of his fam-

ily, but are also representative of the larger issue of religion during the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, his family's status as *saiden* is something which has ultimately withstood the many ruptures. Finally, in the case of Azizkhon's family, the forced migration of his great-grandfather changed their trajectory from having lived actively across the river. While his great-grandmother's connection to the shrine on the Afghan side is evident of the ability of materiality to withstand ruptures, the family connections were unfortunately not as strong and were ultimately severed forever.

While these three family histories deal with separation, they also highlight the interconnection of Pamiri lifeworlds. While the border separates these and countless other families in Pamir, there is still a desire to know where one comes from. As Nekruz said, Pamiris are closely connected to the environment and this does not simply stop at the border. This would suggest that, despite the passage of time, Pamiris still long for a sense of connection, a connection which transcends the border itself. In this way, this chapter highlights the tenacity of familiar and communal interconnection, speaking to the greater argument that Pamir can be conceptualised as a region in its own right, irregardless of the political borders and imaginaries which prevail. Through this lasting interconnection, the fearful imaginaries of *weruya* have the potential to be overcome, and suggests the possibility of a future post-border Pamir.

Furthermore, this chapter also highlights how materiality can withstand rupture. Just as Azizkhon's grandmother prayed towards the shrine in Afghanistan, so too did power lines in Shighnan present points of connection which transcended the border. Even the emotion in the narratives of Nekruz, Abdulloh, and Azizkhon speaks to the residual nature of emotion, being closely connected to experience and memory. The materiality of fear was enough to hinder Nekruz's grandfather from attempting to find his relatives, which was passed down to Nekruz through communicative memory. Yet still, materiality acts as an anchor in rupture, as exemplified by the shrine in Afghanistan, being a way for Azizkhon's great-grandmother to orient herself within the chaos around her.

What hinders Pamiris from seeking reconnection is not necessarily fear of the border itself, but rather an imagination of what lies on the other side of the river. These imaginaries, finding their roots in pre-Soviet threats of invasion from neighbouring Emirates, were given traction in Soviet political imaginaries which served as ways of controlling the body. The fear propagated by these imaginaries, coupled with the threat of political repercussions, hindered many Pamiris from crossing the border and maintaining connection with loved ones. It was, in some part, the same fear that caused Ismaili Muslims in the Soviet Union to adopt new practices, redirecting themselves away from Ismaili as a religious category and instead pursuing opportunities offered by the Soviet regime. This chapter therefore high-

lighted ways in which Ismaili-Pamiris dealt historically with the rupture of the foundation of the Soviet Union.

For these three young men, and other younger generations of Pamiris, these family stories shape the way they position themselves within the world. Just as *meruya* and *weruya* become historically-informed articulations of cultural identity, so too do narratives of the past shape the Pamiri perceptions of the environment and lifeworld. The tenacity of emotion gives Pamiris a sense of where *meruya* ends and *weruya* begins, but also reminds them of a vague connection that transcends the border. This chapter therefore contributes to the greater argument that Pamiri lifeworlds represent more than just the political boundaries of GBAO, as the remnants of familiar connection and communal interconnection still exist for many, despite the many political attempts to break them. Through such family stories, therefore, Pamir becomes much larger, sweeping across the River Panj and paying little attention to the hindrance of the border, as borders may stop mobility, but they cannot stop emotion.

4 Unspeakable Histories of Independence and Civil War: Drawing Lines in Rupture through Shughni Popular Songs

It was early spring and I was walking in Korvon, a busy textile market with Siawash and his brother, Shahriyor. As a tailor, Siawash was a regular at Korvon and, with the promise of tasty food afterwards from an Afghan restaurant closeby, I joined them one Saturday when they went to buy fabrics. As Siawash bartered with a vendor about one particular order he had, namely a very elaborate sequined dress he had been requested to make, I walked around the market stalls with Shahriyor, chatting about any topic which came to mind. A singer from Afghanistan, well-known in the restaurant circuit, Shahriyor was well-versed in the music scene. I mentioned that Siawash had told me their father was an expert on Shughni language, having been one of many scholars from Afghanistan to study in the Tajik SSR, and I asked Shahriyor if he also sang in Shughni:

I can sing in Shughni, of course, but most of those songs I get asked to sing, like *Ay yorum biyo* or *Pomir kuenard*, are from over here. In Afghanistan there wasn't really a market for it. It has a lot to do with money: that side of the river is very poor and to make music you need recording equipment, a studio, etc. This is probably why songs in Persian are more popular. [...] But that's not to say that people don't write in Shughni. Our dad, for example, writes poems. Beautiful, clever poems in Shughni. It's funny, once there was an event at the Ismaili Centre here and our father was asked to write something for the event. So he drafts this poem and, oh my god, it's super sexy. Something about lovers, you know what I mean. He sends it to the guys at the Ismaili Centre and they're like, it's great, but please take out all the steamy parts. The problem was, if you took out all the steamy parts, there wasn't much left.¹

Admittedly, I too laughed a little, imagining the coordinators at ICD reviewing the poem, blushing as they read it.

As a form of artistic expression and creativity, songs offer the opportunity to discuss sensitive issues, using various literary devices to disguise the text's true meaning. In this sense, Shughni popular songs can provide insights into views on periods of rupture which are less-widely discussed, for example the civil war and other periods of hardship in GBAO. Through the ingenuity of song-writers working with Shughni language, Pamiris get the chance to process the circumstances they find themselves in without putting themselves in a precarious situation.

¹ Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in English with Shahriyor in Dushanbe.

This chapter therefore shows how Shughni songs can be used as a tool to deal with rupture, be it by the song-writer or the listener. Through the use of literary devices such as allegory or embedded narrative, song-writers negotiate sensitive issues, while also giving the listener advice on how to deal with rupture. Similar to the poem penned by Shahriyor and Siawash's father, which expressed feelings of passion and desire, Shughni popular songs can express thoughts and opinions which are, at times, in conflict with what is understood as socially or politically acceptable. In this way, songs can be used as a tool to negotiate what is, or rather has become, unspeakable due to the current situation in which the song-writer finds themselves.

Such silences are discussed by Dragojlovic and Samuels (2021) who draw attention to the role the unspoken and unspeakable play in anthropology, viewing these as moments of possibility to trace histories, rather than blockages. In this sense, silences can be telling despite their inaudibility. Kidron (2021) highlights the perceived authenticity of silences in traumatic memories, arguing that silences are equally part of the narrative and add to its meaning. This meaning-making, therefore, can be seen as a way of expressing oneself when articulating unspeakable truths. In GBAO, there are certain topics which one can simply not discuss freely. In contrast to the poem of Shahriyor and Siawash's father which shocks societal understandings of what is appropriate to discuss in public, the topics which are covered in this chapter relate to political themes and are closely connected to the current repression of Pamiri cultural identity in Tajikistan. It is for this reason especially that, in contrast to the other chapters of this book, this chapter does not feature any ethnographic interviews. This is not to say that I did not discuss such sensitive topics during my time in GBAO, but rather any discussions I had took place on the (un)spoken understanding that I would not include these in my research. Instead, I turn to popular songs as a way to navigate my own experiences with silences and also offering a methodological way of writing an ethnography during rupture. In this sense, I listen to the silences of my interlocutors but replace these with the audibility of popular songs.

While Chapter Three dealt with the role memory plays in family histories, passed down from generation-to-generation through spoken narratives, developing a sense of Pamiri cultural identity through the use of communicative memory, this chapter addresses another form of communication: songs. Shughni popular songs are an important part of Pamiri lifeworlds as they make-up the rich soundscape (Porteous and Mastin 1985) of many aspects of daily life, be it driving the road from Dushanbe to Khorog, sitting in a restaurant, or dancing at a neighbour's wedding. The canon of Shughni popular songs is extensive and closely tied to key regional artists such as Lidush Habib, Daler Nazarov, and Muboraksho, with artists usually holding a repertoire of Tajik and Russian songs as well. While record-

ings of popular Shughni songs date back to the Soviet times, for example many tracks by Lidush Habib, these songs possess a timeless quality due to the central role they play in the lifeworld.

Songs are not only artistic expressions of creativity and ingenuity, they are also essentially stories and can help us work towards a conceptualisation of Pamir. Ingold (2022a) approaches space through what he calls the logic of inversion, i.e. that life is enclosed by various boundaries which means that things occupy the world rather than inhabit it, as the world is not a product of life but rather the location of it. In this way, Ingold (2000, 2022a) sees being alive as a movement of wayfaring in which human beings move through life along paths, with those paths meeting at certain points with other individuals, creating places which are points of interconnection between inhabitants. Essentially, Ingold (2022a 185) argues that life is defined by constant movement, with wayfaring being the “most fundamental mode of being in the world.” Ingold (2022a) uses this approach to space to deconstruct the meaning of “local”. Firstly, Ingold (2022a, 181) opts for referring to people as “inhabitants” rather than “locals”, as “it would be quite wrong to suppose that such people are confined within a particular place, or that their experience is circumscribed by the restricted horizons of a life lived only there”. Secondly, Ingold (2022a, 189) criticises the convention of the term “local knowledge”, offering “inhabitant knowledge” as an alternative, as it represents a top-down approach to the study of indigenous peoples where the “local” is seen as a container in which knowledge is passed down from generation to generation, treated as culture and thus tied to place. Finally, Ingold (2022a, 189) argues that scientific knowledge and inhabitant knowledge are both the result of wayfaring, “For scientists are people too, and inhabit the same world as the rest of us.”

In contrast to classification, which Ingold (2022a, 195) views as a way of sorting things based on characteristics instead of context, stories identify and position things through context (Ingold 2007, 90). Telling stories, therefore, is to tell of the history of relations between things, i.e. of “their paths of movement in an unfolding field of relations” (Ingold 2022a, 196). In a storied world, “things do not exist, they occur” (Ingold 2022a, 189), meaning that points of relation represent the interweaving of stories, in which inhabitants share the knowledge of their life’s story through narratives. By telling stories, inhabitants “relate, in narrative, the occurrences of the past, bringing them to life in the vivid present” (Ingold 2022a, 189). In this way, inhabitants learn from each other, gaining knowledge of others’ stories and integrating it into their own. In the act of story-telling, inhabitants take their perception of the world and “trace a path through it which others can follow” (Ingold 2013, 110; 2022a, 197). Underscoring the educational nature of story-telling, Ingold (2013) views life as a lineal movement through the world in

which knowledge is gained from experience, and in turn stories offer guidance from more experienced inhabitants. Stories, therefore, present a lens through which the lessons of the past are communicated to younger generations, who, in turn, can learn from the experiences of their elders.

Songs and poetry in Badakhshon has been viewed thus far in terms of religious expression, perhaps most notably by van den Berg (2004, 2015, 2017) whose research focuses on Persian Ismaili poetry from the mediaeval period until present day. In her extensive study of religious and secular minstrel poetry, van den Berg (2004) highlights the role of musicians and poets as cultural custodians who have kept this long-standing tradition alive in Pamir from generation to generation. Through a variety of lyrical poetic genres, van den Berg (2004) contends that such cultural production highlights the artists' long-standing connection with a rich literary and intellectual lineage. Moreover, van den Berg (2016) stresses the role poetry has played in preserving religious knowledge in Badakhshon through a performative identity, highlighting the role religion plays not only in the (song) text itself, but performance practice and form.

This performative identity is extended by Goibnazarov (2017, 2025a, 2025b) with an anthropological analysis of *qasidakhoni* as a performative expression of multiple identities. For Goibnazarov (2025b), time and place play an important role in this performance, highlighting how genres of Ismaili Muslim religious songs from GBAO can transport the listener to a time and place of great significance. Building on the work of van den Berg and Goibnazarov, this chapter looks to contemporary popular songs, viewing these as a continuation of the literary, musical tradition practised in Pamir for centuries and strongly ingrained in Pamiri lifeworlds. Through their preservation of oral histories, Pamiri listeners can gain a sense of self in connection to the Pamiri lifeworld by way of a common historical narrative and shared experiences, further edifying Pamiri cultural identity while preserving the knowledge of rupture.

While often not included in the Pamir region but rather the neighbouring Karakoum, Marsden (2005) has also detailed how poetry can be used as a tool for expressing opinions and negotiating complex situations. In his study of everyday Muslim life in Chitral, Marsden discusses the role such poetic articulations in Khovar language play in the wider cultural and intellectual landscape of this religiously diverse valley, arguing that Islam is not only observed through religious practice, but is also present in poetry and other cultural expression. In this sense, poetry can be seen as a part of the everyday as people enter into this existing intellectual tradition while searching for a way to articulate their thoughts and feelings.

Musical and poetic studies of Pamir therefore portray the region as resilient and adaptive to rupture, highlighted by the long tradition of music and poetry

which is still practised to this day. I propose viewing the songs in this chapter, therefore, through the lens of resilience, highlighting the adaptive nature of these texts as the song-writers find ways to navigate the ruptures around them. Not only as a way to articulate one's thoughts and feelings when confronted by unspeakable truths, popular songs fit into the long-standing musical, literary traditions of Pamir due to their ability to maintain relevance. Music and poetry, as the existing scholarships shows, are deeply embedded in Pamiri lifeworlds with many genres playing important roles in religious and cultural expression, but also intellectual thought and articulations of identity. Through close textual analysis, this chapter therefore argues that Shughni-language popular songs utilise a variety of poetic techniques to offer the listener advice on how to strengthen resilience in the face of rupture. As will be shown, this can take the form of blatant obstinance and choosing love over comfort, a decided silence when faced with social dichotomy, or the act of forgetting and moving on.

This chapter deals with how historical narratives are preserved in spite of unfavourable conditions and explores the role of Shughni language in this memory-making. The connection between Pamir languages and knowledge preservation has been investigated by Dodykhudoeva and Ivanov (2009) who argue that local knowledge and local languages mutually preserve each other. Taking the example of place names, the authors highlight that Pamir languages are repositories of traditional knowledge, preserving skills and values which have been passed-down orally. Tying this to Ingold (2022a), languages are therefore carriers of knowledge due to the histories which are embedded in them. Just as place names carry a history, so too does any other aspect of language as it grows out of the interactions of humans with and in the environment. Therefore, when the language is in danger of dying-out, so too is the knowledge which it preserves. In this chapter, I build on the idea of language as a tool of preserving knowledge, extending the field to the preservation of historical narratives and, ultimately, drawing a connection between a collective historical narrative and a collective Pamiri cultural identity which I view as resilient, i.e. flexible and adaptive to rupture (Smith 2025).

4.1 Pamiri, Shughni, or Shughnani?

In GBAO, several Eastern and Western Iranian languages exist alongside each other; namely the 'minor' Pamir languages of Shughni, Rushani, Khufi, Bartangi, Roshorvi, Sariqoli, Yazghulami, Wakhi, and Ishkashimi, and the state language of Tajik (Dodykhudoeva 2023). Therefore, there is linguistically no single Pamir language but rather several, gaining their name in reference to the mountainous highland region. These languages, while heavily influenced by Persian and Russi-

an vocabulary, differ from the national language of Tajik, and are given the status of “protected” languages in the 2009 law *On the State Language of the Republic of Tajikistan* (Taj.: *Dar bāray zabāni davlatii jumhūri Tājikistān*). As Dodykhudoeva (2023) has observed, GBAO is a diverse, multilingual region with speakers using several languages in daily life. While it is the most widely-spoken language in Shughnon (i.e. Khorog, Ghund Valley, Roshtqa’la, and surrounding villages), Shughni (Shugh.: *xughne*) is widely spoken throughout GBAO (Mostowlanksy 2017a), with sizable linguistic communities outside of Shughnon, for example in Murghob and Ishkoshim. Rushani (Shugh.: *Rehne*) and Shughni are mutually intelligible, often referred to simply as *pomere* (Engl.: Pamiri), while Wakhi and other Pamir languages are not. As Davlatshoev (2006) highlights, moreover, most non-Pamiris outside of GBAO perceive there to be only one Pamir language and are unaware of this linguistic diversity.

Pamir is a linguistically diverse region and, in addition to the Pamir languages, Tajik, Kyrgyz, Russian, and English can be heard throughout the region in varying degrees. Bolander (2016, 2017, 2021) has highlighted the role of English in Ismaili Muslim networks, enabling for Ismailis Muslims in GBAO and neighbouring Gilgit-Baltistan in Northern Pakistan to live in active interconnection with *Hazar Imom*, the authority of the Ismaili Imamat, and other Ismaili Muslims throughout the global Jamat. There is a strong desire to learn English in GBAO and it is a point of prestige to have a child studying in the English-medium class at the Aga Khan Lycée (AKL) in Khorog, or the University of Central Asia, not only for linguistic skills but also these educational institutions’ connection to *Hazar Imam*. While the AKL has since had its licence revoked due to a crackdown on Aga Khan-related programmes (Eurasianet 2023), UCA continues to operate. English language classes were also taught in the *jamoatkhona*, but its program has since been greatly restricted due to ongoing state repression. While the *farmon* of *Hazar Imom* are translated into Tajik, the strong desire to learn English stems from longing for a closeness to the Imam, whose addresses are always in English which is stated as the official language of the global Jamat in the Ismaili Constitution.

In addition to English, Russian is still widely spoken in GBAO and continues to play a great role in Pamiri lifeworlds. While Russian was the language of interethnic communication in the Soviet Union, the language maintains its importance in the region due to heightened migration to Russia. Most interlocutors I spoke with had relatives in Russia, and several had also studied in universities in Moscow, or in Russian-language institutions in Tashkent or Bishkek. There is also a Russian-medium class in the prestigious Presidenti school in Khorog. While English primarily presents the possibility for connection to *Hazar Imom*, both English and Russian point to the possibility for migration and increased economic and educa-

tional opportunities. It is therefore limited to speak only of Pamir languages when discussing linguistic lifeworlds in GBAO as the region boasts a high level of multilingualism which is the result of its interconnection in shifting scales and temporalities. As it was not possible to conduct fieldwork in Afghanistan, it is difficult to judge the situation in Shighnan on the other side of the river and thus this chapter deals solely with GBAO.

The language this chapter focuses on is often referred to with three different names: Pamiri (*Pomere*), Shughni (*Xughne*), and Shughnani (*Xughnune*). From my observations, most inhabitants of Shughnon would use the three interchangeably, with Shughnani being the least common option. Nevertheless, one interlocutor, Nazar, insisted on the usage of Shughnani:

This word Shughni, it makes no linguistic sense. I am from Shughnan, so therefore I speak Shughnani. If I was from Rushan, I would say I speak Rushani and no one would question it. I am a Shughni, but I speak Shughnani.²

Evidently, the issue of the language's name is strongly connected to the conceptualisation of a shared identity based on geography. Nazar's words suggest that speaking the language originating from Shughnon is pivotal to being a Shughni. Looking more closely at the words used, 'Shughni' would therefore suggest a belonging to the 'Shughn-' group, while Shughnon would be understood as the place where the Shughnis live. In turn, Shughnani would mean 'to be from Shughnon'. Following this logic, therefore, the location and people cannot be easily separated, while the language seems to be very clearly tied to the location.

However, while both gain their name from the albeit vague geographical region, it should be said that Shughnis do not necessarily come from Shughnon exclusively. For example, when Davood once attempted to teach me Shughni, he started by explaining the difference between place and language:

So, *xughne ziv* means Shughni language. *Xughne* is the language, but *Xughnun* is the place, or joy. I am *Xughne*, like the language. But, I am actually not from *Xughnun*, I am from Bajuw. There, we speak *xughne* but we are in Rushan, or *Rehun*. Actually, Bajuw people always try to be neutral when it comes to Rushan and Shughnan. There was a war once between Rushan and Shughnan, and Bajuw remained neutral because they were in Rushan but they were Shughnis. [...] So, I would say I speak *xughne* and I'm a *xughne*, but I am from Bajuw, which is in *Rehun*. Confusing, I know.³

² Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in English with Nazar in London.

³ Excerpt from ethnographic fieldnotes. Re-working of conversation in English with Davood, Khorog.

For Davood, in contrast to Nazar, to be a Shughni is not necessarily linked to the location but rather belonging to a certain group of people. In Davood's understanding of what it means to be Shughni, the location itself is relatively unimportant as, in his own words, he comes from Bajuw which is not in Shughnon but is populated by Shughnis. I had come across a similar phenomenon before when asking where Shughnon actually is. There are many different ways to view Shughnon. For some, Shughnān is a historical mirdom which covered not only the present-day district of Shughnon, but also Roshtqa'la and other areas on either side of the River. For others, Shughnon is anywhere where the Shughnis live, seeing the place as defined by its inhabitants. For others still, Shughnon ends when you reach the River Panj, and the other bank is entirely "Afghanistan", of which Shighnan is a district of Badakhshan Province. Attempting to find consensus, I have chosen to use the term "Shughni", both because this is the most widely-used, but also for its focus on the group of speakers, rather than geographical location. While a convincing argument could be made here for using "Pamiri", given that this alludes to the cultural identity focused on in this book, this does not give enough specification as the languages do differ greatly throughout the region.

4.1.1 Shughni as a Surviving Language

Shughni has been described in academic research as an oral language and lacking a comprehensive writing system (e.g. Dodykhudoeva 2002). While this may have been true several decades ago, just like other areas of Tajikistan and greater Central Asia, it is not that Shughni lacks a comprehensive writing system, but rather there is no formal education in Shughni language. Thinking back to Siawash and Shahriyor's father and his poems, informal communication in Shughni is very much alive and well, and Shughni-language knowledge production is growing more popular in Tajikistan and Afghanistan (Parker 2023, 11). I would argue that the assumption that Shughni is "just" an oral language stems from knowledge hierarchies in the pre-Soviet times. For centuries, religious knowledge was held by the *piren*, Ismaili authorities who could read and write, predominantly in Persian. Persian is therefore of great historical significance in Pamir as, in addition to being widely spoken in Davoz, Vanj, and Ishkoshim, it was through this language that history and religious knowledge was passed down in material form, in addition to shrines and other religious sites (see Iloiev 2008). This knowledge was therefore written and read by those who could understand it. In this sense, such knowledge remained in the hands of religious authorities and was not necessarily shared with those who could not read. The power of narrative was therefore held almost exclusively by the *piren* up until the creation of the Soviet Union

and wide-spread educational reforms including alphabetisation were introduced. Shughni education was, however, short-lived as Pamiris were categorised as an ethnic minority and therefore did not enjoy the same cultural and linguistic promotion as other nationalities. While Shughni was given particular attention by native-speaking Soviet scholars, Tajik and Russian were ultimately the two languages of education in GBAO (Parker 2023).

This is not to say that Shughni is no longer printed; Shughni is printed. While there is a dictionary which bases the writing system on the latin alphabet, with several additions from IPA (Alamshoev 2021), this writing system is not widely used by the speakers themselves, presumably due to the lack of educational opportunities to learn written Shughni. In GBAO, it is far more common, presumably due to informal digital language use such as text messaging, for speakers to write Shughni with the Russian or English writing systems. While neither Russian nor English fully encapsulate the phonetics of the Shughni language, ‘missing’ letters are substituted and instantly recognisable to all speakers in GBAO. A good example of this is the voiceless dental fricative [θ], which appears as ‘t’ in Russian, ‘th’ in English, and its IPA grapheme in Alamshoev’s Shughni dictionary. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for speakers to switch alphabets during written communication, even in the same message (Gregg 2025). In Afghanistan, Shughni is written using an adapted version of the Pashto writing system.

There also exist a limited number of printed literary works in Shughni. When asking interlocutors for an example, they almost always name *Zindage az naw tcasud sar* (Khudobakhshov 2016), a love story written entirely in Shughni language using the official writing system. This novel, as confirmed by the signed statement by Prof. Muqbilsho Alamshoev of the Institute of Humanities in Khorog, is the first novel of its kind, making a significant contribution to the language’s preservation. There are, however, other publications in Shughni language which predate this book significantly, albeit using different writing systems. During the civil war, for example, the newspaper *Farhangi Badakhshān* regularly published reader submissions in Shughni, written using the cyrillic writing system. These submissions, mainly poems which were printed alongside Tajik language submissions, together with *Zindage az naw tcasud sar* give a small insight into recent printed Shughni but do not encapsulate the countless instances of handwritten Shughni. Be it a student’s notebook, shopping list, or Siawash and Shahriyor’s father’s sexy poems, written Shughni can be found all around GBAO, Dushanbe, and in diaspora communities. Therefore, Shughni is a written language with a generally accepted spelling, grammar, and other conventions. However, as it is not taught in schools, and even strongly discouraged (Amnesty International, 2024), Shughni lacks the real educational structures required to fully establish itself and ingrain a comprehensive usage in its speaking community.

For these reasons, Shughni and the other Pamir languages are classed as endangered languages and included in UNESCO's red book (Dodykhudoeva 1999). With an estimated speaking community of around 95,000 worldwide (Endangered Languages Alliance), the language is faced with several issues hindering its growth, for example the prominence of Russian and English, and the Tajik state's current campaign to curb its acquisition (Amnesty International 2024). That being said, I would argue that Shughni is a surviving language for, despite the countless obstacles it has faced over the centuries, it remains the most widely-spoken first language in GBAO and diaspora communities. This begs the question, how has this language been preserved over the centuries, despite lack of written sources? The answer is clear: Shughni has been preserved through its strong oral tradition. Songs and poems, largely but not solely limited to religious texts, are regularly performed and have kept not only the language but also the Ismaili religion alive (van den Berg 2016). This chapter therefore sees Shughni popular songs as an example of how language and history are preserved in linguistic communities with no strong written tradition. In these songs, the knowledge of both language and historical events cannot be separated due to the communicative nature of the songs. Just as the language transmits the knowledge of the historical events, including the narrator's emotions and thoughts, so too do the historical narratives act as a way of transmitting language, as the language needs content. For this reason, the song lyrics have been written out in their entirety, so that they are preserved as examples of Shughni language.

Anyone who has studied a foreign language passionately has no doubt enjoyed translating the lyrics of their favourite songs into their mother tongue. A useful way to quickly expand one's vocabulary in the target language, translation is a challenging task which requires not only great technical linguistic skill, but also a context sensitivity which is only to be gained through extended immersion in the region. In this regard, I am not qualified to translate the following songs effectively. While I now, thanks to my wonderful teacher, Mavluda, in Khorog and my friends who tirelessly taught me countless idioms over coffee and refused to speak to me in English, command a basic level of Shughni, I enlisted the help of my friend, Marifat, who I was able pay thanks to the generous contribution by the Women's and Equal Opportunities Office at the Institute for Asian and African Studies. A graduate of the English faculty at Khorog State University, Marifat commands a high level of English and, as a native speaker of Shughni and its Rushani dialect, a God-send to me and my book.

This chapter attempts to highlight the use of Shughni songs for the re-telling of historical events through close textual analysis of three popular songs: *Arod nest zindage* (Lidush Habib), *Sipinin xaparak* (Temursho Imatshoev), and *Muysafed* (Zafar Band). These three songs were selected for two reasons: firstly, they repre-

sent the work of three key Shughni-language artists originating from GBAO. These three artists are well-renowned among Shughni-speakers and their songs were often referenced by interlocutors when discussing Shughni language. Secondly, these three songs all indirectly reference events following the collapse of the Soviet Union and outbreak of the civil war, a period of rupture in regional history which remains to this day a taboo subject. Through lyrical, poetic representations of past events, these songs navigate a sensitive subject without directly taking a position in a highly politicised field. Therefore, songs provide an alternative to ethnographic interviews for instances where safety of the interlocutor cannot be guaranteed. Moreover, the indirect nature of the songs means that the knowledge shared in them, for example perspectives on rupture, are seen by Pamiris as applicable to many different contexts and maintain their relevance years after the rupture. All songs featured here are written using the unofficial Shughni writing system commonly found in digital communication. In doing so, my intention is that all Shughni-speakers, regardless of geographical location, will be able to read the lyrics and understand them.

4.2 Depopulation and *Arod nest zindage*

Lidush Habib (1963–2002) was a singer-songwriter born and raised in Khorog. In his work, which often consists of simply him and his guitar, Habib provides social commentary to life in Khorog during the late 1980s and 1990s, covering Glasnost and Perestroika, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the civil war from the perspective of his local Khorog. The song which has been selected for analysis, *Arod nest zindage* (Engl.: There is no life here), is written in the first-person and tells of the narrator's need to migrate away from Khorog due to the increasingly desperate economic conditions towards the end of the Soviet Union, while he laments leaving.

The song begins with the opening lines:

Wath murd loven te
Sayle mah juun
Arod nest zindage
Ar me biyabun
Te ho yoshe mafev
Ar be kuhistun

[They tell me let's go
 Travel the world
 There is no life here
 In this desert]



Fig. 8: A remnant of Soviet GBAO in Khorog. Smith (2022).

Don't burn your youth
In these mountains]

Here, the narrator, presumably Habib himself, describes the pressure he feels to leave Khorog, here simply “these mountains”. “They”, perhaps his family or the greater Khorog community, argue that there is no life there and he should migrate because he is still young and can build a life for himself. Depicting Khorog as a desert or “*biyabun*”, colourfully represents the lack of opportunities for young people in the area, likening it to a dry, empty place. In the next verse, this imagery heightens to suggest that Habib is indeed trapped there:

*Wath nala tut doiyum ruaftoda
Tund tu dil ar qafas arang paranda
Ar joy ar tu vinam tund to dil khafa
Tut mu khezand de vad
Toy af az murd de bas
Ghayri to tar ichisga*

[They say that you are always depressed
You, your heart is like a bird in a cage

Everytime we saw you, your heart is sad
 When you are next to me
 You are enough for me
 Except you nothing else]

As a bird in a cage, the narrator's heart is trapped in Khorog, suggesting he cannot let go of where he comes from. In this verse, the narrator eludes his hesitance for leaving to his love for a lyrical "you", presumably Khorog itself but embodied in this song as a romantic partner. This verse, and the song as a whole, tell therefore of a strong emotional connection to Khorog, which can also be seen in the next verse:

Mund nist navas
Lak tam mu dil mis vid
Doim ar qafas
Tut mu khezand de vad tuyafath murd bas
Ghayrin to tar ichisga mund nest hawas

[Except for you I do not want anything else
 And let it be that my heart
 Is always in a cage
 If you are next to me it is enough
 Except for you I do not need anyone else]

The narrator laments his fate, stating that he does not want to leave because of his love. This self-sacrifice will keep him in the mountains, even when those around him tell him to leave. Ultimately, the narrator reaches his decision to stay in the final verse:

Arod mu zindage
Arod mu hushe
Arod mu qismatat mu yorat umre
Ghayre Pomir nest joydod bide

[Here is my life
 Here is my happiness
 Here are my destiny and my lover
 And there is no place better than Pamir.]

The song, while not referencing the political and economic situation directly, tells of the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union, namely the huge depopulation of GBAO of predominantly young men. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the situation worsened for GBAO with the outbreak of the civil war in 1992. The period following this song was exceptionally difficult for the population of

GBO as they suffered an intense blockade for several years, due to the Dushanbe-Khorog road being the main way to transport goods to this mountainous region with little agriculture. This road remained blocked for most of the civil war due to government forces controlling the lowlands around Dushanbe, which the road runs through. The “desert” which Habib sings about is foreboding of the starvation felt by everyone in GBO during this time as the population suffered from a lack of food and other basic supplies. Therefore, although the song predates the blockade, contemporary listeners apply this song to this difficult time in their history, as well as to the current situation of GBO as an area with high unemployment and lacking in opportunities.

The emotion communicated in this song is palpable. While it remains unclear if Habib is singing about a romantic partner or the city of Khorog itself, the love he feels for this lyrical “you” is enough to keep him from migrating away, even if it means he will spend the rest of his youth in the mountains. This sentiment is stressed through the second half of the song, with lines such as “You are enough for me” and “Except for you I do not want anything else”, suggesting that nothing compares to the lyrical “you,” a theory which is supported by the last line “And there is no place better than Pamir”, giving a direct spatial comparison.

Suffering is also a clear theme in this song. The language used to warn the narrator to leave Khorog is a clear indication of the suffering during this period. Describing the narrator as “depressed” and his heart being “like a bird in a cage”, the sadness here is not just in reference to Habib’s own emotional response to the sorry situation in GBO, but is perhaps speaking for a whole generation of young people who saw the hardship of those days. This switch in narration occurs through a shift in the lyrical “you”. Here, it is unclear who the “you” refers to, but this verse appears to be the lyrical “they” speaking to the narrator himself. However, through this switch in narration, the words could just as well be spoken by the narrator to another “you” and the song therefore bridges a gap between narrator and listener, in that the listener briefly is addressed.

While the song is from many years ago, the sentiments it expresses are still very real and current listeners continue to feel addressed. Due to the current political instability in GBO, as well as the economic stagnation which Tajikistan has suffered since the 1990s, many young people have left to seek employment opportunities in Russia, Turkey, and other countries abroad. Furthermore, the political repression of many activists and journalists has resulted in hundreds of young men being imprisoned, or seeking refuge abroad. As a result of this massive depopulation, there are few people left in GBO. Khorog, for example, used to boast a population of around 30,000 inhabitants. Now, walking through the city’s neighbourhoods, many houses have been boarded-up and serve as a reminder of

the impact recent events have had on the region. Habib's words therefore hold a timeless quality, perhaps through his lack of direct reference to a specific rupture.

Arod nest zindage therefore communicates a timeless reaction to rupture by way of Shughni language. Through Habib's words, not only his perspective and emotional experiences are communicated and preserved, but also his knowledge of this period of rupture by way of Shughni language. Through his words, Habib teaches younger generations of Pamiris about this difficult period in their history and offers them guidance by sharing his own perspective and decision to remain in Pamir. In this way, Habib's response to rupture can be understood as a form of resilience in that he is determined to remain in Pamir in spite of the dire conditions around him. By choosing to stay in Pamir, he is then faced with the challenge of having to find a way to survive there. I would argue that Habib's actions are resilient as they evoke a response to rupture which rests on negotiating hardship and surviving a dire economic situation which later led to violence and conflict.

This resilience which is present in *Arod nest zindage* is demonstrative of the existing resilience which has been practised in Pamir for centuries. Just like the minstrel poetry and religious songs and poems which have been previously studied, popular songs too can teach resilience in the advice they give the listener. In this way, the previous experience with rupture and, more importantly, how the song-writer dealt with them, is kept alive through the lyrics of these songs and can be used to help younger generations of Pamiris negotiate similar ruptures they are faced with.

4.3 Desperation and *Sipinin xaparak*

Temursho Imatshoev is another famous Shughni-language artist originating from Khorog. Known for his bluesy, guitar-driven melodies, Temursho is one artist still making music in Khorog, performing and recording both in Shughni and Tajik language. With great popularity both at home and in the Pamiri diaspora of Russia, Temursho is known for several hits such as *Pund pe Pomir*, *Yaye tu na zhiwj*, and *Diga methen*, which are instantly recognisable to most Pamiris from GBAO.

Sipinin xaparak (Engl.: Iron Butterfly), released in 2000, deals with the crash of the Tajikistan Airlines Yakovlev Yak-40 in Khorog in August 1993, during the civil war. The plane, which was meant to carry 28 passengers and 5 crew members, was grounded by local militia just before take-off. The armed men, threatening the crew members, demanded their wives and children be put on the plane, carrying them to Dushanbe and therefore out of the blockaded GBAO. The crew members were forced to accept and the plane departed with 81 passengers and 5 crew members. Unfortunately, due to the heavy weight excess this caused, the plane failed to



Fig. 9: An old newspaper front page depicting the visit of AKDN workers to GBAO. Smith (2022).

fully take-off and overran the runway, falling into the River Panj and catching fire. All but four passengers survived. According to interlocutors, the writer of the song, a close friend of Temursho, was present at the crash, seeing his wife and children off, who were ultimately killed. The song is therefore a tribute to the lives which were taken during this crash, all of which could have been avoided.

Topics such as the civil war remain highly sensitive due to the current political climate in Tajikistan. During the war, the country was regionally divided, with the Popular Front consisting of key figures in the present government, and the United Tajik Opposition which had a strong presence in GBAO. While the origins of the civil war are complex, stemming in part from issues of regionalism and differing political imaginaries during the collapse of the Soviet Union (Epkenhans 2016b), protests and growing political and social tension led to the outbreak of war in May, 1992. During the next five years, thousands of civilians fled to neighbouring countries, escaping ethnic cleansing, arbitrary violence, and food shortages. Many Pamiris living in Dushanbe fled to GBAO, travelling via Afghanistan to avoid the government-held areas in Khatlon, and remained with relatives until the war ended in 1997 after a UN-brokered Peace Accord was signed.

The situation in GBAO during the civil war was dire. As GBAO relies heavily on the transport of goods from Dushanbe, the region quickly fell into starvation as the road was blocked due to fighting. Basic necessities such as flour and oil were in short supply and, as several doctors told me, many people were forced to eat grass and other plants, leading to issues like bowel blockage and other consequences of malnutrition. Save for limited supplies brought from Afghanistan, the situation in GBAO was rapidly deteriorating. In March 1993, the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), a subsidiary of the AKDN, facilitated the delivery of bags of wheat flour to the estimated 240,000 inhabitants of GBAO, purchasing the flour abroad and shipping it to the Pamir Food Base in Osh, Kyrgyzstan where it was then driven by several lorries to areas in GBAO (AKF 1993). As one interlocutor pointed out during the rising tensions on the Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan border in 2022, “People forget that, yes the aid was provided by *Hazar Imom*, but it was driven on Kyrgyz roads.”

While the civil war is rarely spoken about in public, it is strongly ingrained in the memories of all Pamiris old enough to remember. When speaking with interlocutors of at least 30 years old, many of whom had spent their childhood in Khorog during those difficult times, there is a common memory of the day the aid arrived in Khorog. Stories of big lorries arriving, people rushing to grab hold of huge jute sacks, and general commotion and celebration or relief all belong to the shared memories of this time. Statements such as, “If it weren’t for *Hazar Imom*, I would be dead,” or “I owe *Hazar Imom* my life,” quickly follow, highlighting the overwhelming positive opinion of Aga Khan IV and the work of the AKDN in GBAO, especially but not limited to during the civil war.

Sipinin xaparak is therefore the product of this rupture in GBAO when the future held much uncertainty and life was defined by political instability and food insecurity. The song begins with:

Sipinin xaparak
Az mu dil nahtoyd
Sipinin pare sent
Sheshta rewozd
Sipinin xaparak
Sipinin dil nahtoyd
Tuta vam wene nur
Ya tar tu khez ta yothd
Wahta qarib tca sod tidoyard
Mash pund tayor che sed qarib de ve
Wahta qarib tca sod tidoyard
Mash risq tayor che sed mu qate ve
Sipinin xaparak
Tar have ta rewozd

Tuta wam wene nur
Yata mes to dil yost
Wahta qarib tca sud tidoyard
Mash pund tayor che sed qarib de ve
Wahta qarib tca sod tidoyard
Mash risq che sed mu qate ve.

[An iron butterfly
 Came out of my heart
 Lifts up its iron wings
 Now it will fly
 An iron butterfly
 Proved to have a heart of iron
 You will see her today
 She will come to you
 When the time comes to say goodbye
 When road ends be closer
 When the time comes to say goodbye
 Our sustenance will end so be with me
 Iron butterfly
 Flies in the night
 You will see her today
 She will also take your heart away
 When the time comes to leave
 When our road ends stay close to me
 When the time comes to leave
 Our sustenance will end, so be with me.]

In a poetic allegory, the song depicts the plane as an “iron butterfly” which the narrator is saying goodbye to as it flies away. This depiction is not only an allegory, but also an oxymoron. Iron, a heavy metal, contrasts with the light, elegant butterfly, painting the image of the small insect struggling to fly. Inevitably, the butterfly cannot take-off due to its iron wings and heart, being pulled down to earth and meeting the end of the road. Here, the narrator uses the allegory to describe in relative detail what happened to that fateful flight, i. e. the plane was too heavy and it ran-off the runway.

The narrator also offers a moral message in the song, albeit coded according to the allegory. With the line “When the time comes to say goodbye, Our sustenance will end so stay with me”, the narrator introduces the religious term “*rizq*”, referring to the provision of food, shelter, etc. from *Xutho*. The narrator begs the subject to not fly away because they have been forsaken by *Xutho*, implying that the flight was doomed from the start. Presumably the author is referring to the desperate conditions in GBAO during the years of blockade. In these times, when food and other supplies were scarce, there was a severe lack of *rizq*. The au-

thor's reference to *rizq* therefore implies that no one should tempt fate by flying the plane, given that the people of GBAO had not been enjoying *Xutho's* good fortune for some time. This is, due to the religious reference, quite striking as it places the blame of what happened on human error while stopping short of directly singling out individuals. In this way, the author recognises that people are to blame for what happened, but suggests that it was their desperation that caused the accident, maintaining hope despite the misfortune they had collectively been experiencing over the past months.

This song discusses the sensitive topic of the civil war without any direct reference to it. In fact, the plane crash itself is also not referenced, but rather disguised in a poetic allegory. In doing so, the narrator is allowed more freedom to express his emotions and discuss a sensitive topic without placing himself in a precarious situation. Instead, the narrator laments the loss of life and places blame on the "iron butterfly" itself for taking his heart away, rather than those who caused the plane crash. By turning the plane into an "iron butterfly", the narrator is navigating the sensitive political and social environment of his native Khorog, finding an outlet for his grief despite the difficult circumstances from which he speaks.

Sipinin xaparak therefore articulates the unspeakable through a poetic allegory in which the aeroplane is zoomorphised into a butterfly. In doing so, the song's author and singer alike are protected from potential backlash at voicing criticism or placing blame on those who pressured the aircrew to take-off. In a dichotomising rupture such as a civil war, where people are forced, due to their position or circumstances, to choose a side, there is often little room for critical discussion. This song therefore offers a way of discussing difficult topics and letting-out frustrations, sadness, and grief, while protecting oneself from backlash. In short, *Sipinin xaparak* maintains its relevance among new generations of Pamiris, not necessarily for the applicability of the themes mentioned, but rather the poetic tools used as an outlet of human emotion.

Compared with *Arod nest zindage*, *Sipinin xaparak* does not say directly which rupture has taken place and is instead more poetic in its expression. Nonetheless, the two share similar themes of struggle and suffering, be it from the humanitarian conditions of the time and lack of *rizq* or the emotional conflict of disagreeing with what society says. For, *Sipinin xaparak* is not only about a man's struggle with grief, but also his own struggle when conflicted with the realities of civil war and fratricidal violence. By avoiding open criticism of the people responsible for the crash, the song-writer nonetheless expresses his frustrations at the unfortunate loss of life which could have been avoided. While Habib's song presents a resilient message of remaining despite ongoing rupture, Temursho's words themselves do not offer advice, but rather the poetic form of the song itself. By masking the rup-

ture in a zoomorphic allegory, *Sipinin xaparak* demonstrates another form of resilience when faced with rupture: using creativity to express oneself while avoiding scrutiny.



Fig. 10: In a garden in Gulaken. Smith (2022).

4.4 A *Muysafed's* Perspective on Rupture

Born and raised in Khorog, Zafar Band, led by singer and guitarist Zafar Aziz, are well-known throughout GBAO for their folk-inspired melodies and poetic lyrics. While Zafar is recognised all over Khorog, I sadly failed to recognise him when introduced, only realising several weeks later when watching one of their music videos that I had, in fact, briefly chatted to the man I was feverishly trying to decipher the lyrics of. With other hits such as *Nanik* and *Mu verod*, Zafar Band is popular especially among residents of Khorog for their wistful, melancholic lyrics often referring to mahallahs of the city.

Muysafed (Engl.: Elder) gives a contemporary view of Pamir through the lens of an elderly man. Released in 2020, the song discusses several sensitive topics such as the civil war and current situation in Pamir in a subtle way, voicing opinions which are often not spoken out-loud. In contrast to *Arod nest zindage* and *Spinin xaparak*, *Muysafed* speaks retrospectively of the ruptures of the 20th century, hinting to the aftermath of the civil war in which Pamiris now find themselves.

Beginning in 1994, several UN-led peace talks in Moscow, Kabul, Islamabad and other cities in the region led to the signing of the Peace Accord in June 1997, putting an end to the civil war. In the Peace Accord, both sides, represented by President Emomali Rahmon and Said Abdullo Nuri respectively, agreed to a process of National Reconciliation

which will put an end once and for all to the fratricidal conflict in Tajikistan, ensure mutual forgiveness and amnesty, return the refugees to their homes, and create the conditions for the democratic development of society, the holding of free elections and the restoration of the country's economy destroyed by the many years of conflict. The highest national priorities of the country are peace and the national unity of all nationals of Tajikistan, regardless of their ethnic origin, political orientation, religion or regional affiliation (UN 27 June 1997, 2–3).

Key parts of this process included quotas for the integration of oppositional figures into political positions in the government. The months and years that followed saw the disarmament of militia and the (re)introduction of democratic processes, with the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) representing the former opposition. Nonetheless, the potential represented by the Peace Accord was short-lived.

Beginning in 2012, GBAO has seen several military operations resulting in the injury and death of militia, military personnel, and civilians. Early in the morning of 24th July 2012, special forces attacked several neighbourhoods in Khorog, attempting to capture a key civil war figure who was accused of the murder of the Head of the KGB in GBAO a few days prior (Eurasianet 2012). Many civilians, especially young men, were killed in the crossfire. While a ceasefire was brokered two days later, quickly followed by an amnesty of weapons, it was not the last time that GBAO saw violence. Most recently in 2022, several civil war figures, journalists, and lawyers were imprisoned in connection with a civil society movement in GBAO calling for justice after the death of Gulbiddin Ziyobekov, a young man from Roshtqa'la district who was murdered after an argument with a government official (OHCHR 2022, 2023; RePLITO. 2022).

These are just a few of the unspeakable events which have created a precarious situation for Pamiris living in Tajikistan. Stemming from the conflict during the civil war, the term “Pamiri” has become heavily politicised. As will be dis-

cussed in the next chapter, as an ethnicised minority living in a state whose national identity is strongly focused on Tajik ethnicity, Pamiris are often required to fit into Tajik society, and expressions of Pamiri identity are strongly discouraged on a state-level. As mentioned previously, the past years have seen public expressions of Pamiri identity being quickly discouraged and punished, for example in the case of MMA-fighter Chorshanbe Chorshanбиеv. *Muysafed* deals exactly with these ruptures of the past decades.

Beginning in Gulaken, the neighbourhood I also briefly lived in during my time in Khorog:

*Ar awle, ar Gulaken
Lum ghal xurdath sozaken
Muysafed – molene vust
Yat xu, mu paleyand nust
Dam pe sivdath, tulo dust
A bos, va de xu naswor
Ye qissayardum xumor
Thuste thod safed būnen
Oye sarand we yuhken
Nahtoyden ar mu tcemen*

[In the garden in Gulaken
Singing songs to myself
An elder gathered his sheep
He came and sat next to me
Very tired and reserved
“Get out your chewing tobacco
I desperately want to tell you a story”
He stroked his white beard
His eyes filled with tears
The tears came from my eyes]

The narrator begins to recount the story the elderly man tells him while they sit in the garden and chew on some tobacco. The elderly man tells of how life in Khorog used to be:

*Nala vaden odamen
Xu Mawloyard bandaen
Barakat vud ar wev ben
Arqissa, az sare bar
Vud, nala, ikūdand xar
Deshadente tuth vuthj qoq
Weth vic lap az mun at nok
Yeten vitc dive at toq
Mardum, nala, vud begham*

Beguna mis vud web qawm
Zhir darunen vud iloj
Xu nomusen naparthod (x2)
Ye turgħa vitc at ye deg
Yakdigararden vitc nek
Ar jumaen vad yakjo
Gozaksedte tamosho (x2)
Az diland vud wev salum
Ishq darunen vad mudum
Navud boy, navud ghulüm
Insunen vad, inkdund (x2)

[He said there were people
 Murids of Mawla
 Barakat was in their palms
 In a nutshell, in the beginning
 Here, he said, there was a city
 On their lips the mullberries became dry
 The empty channel was full of apples and pears
 The doors and windows were always open
 The people, he said, were carefree
 Even a foreigner became their relative
 Even a stone had a use for them
 They never sold their honour (x2)
 There was a pot and a cauldron
 They were very kind to each other
 Every Friday they were together
 Standing and looking from a rock in a field with chopped grass
 When they said hello, they said it from the bottom of their heart
 They were always loving
 There were no rich, no slaves
 They were only human, that is all]

This idyllic past Khorog then suddenly changes:

Ruzo vid, fuk sud werun
Wath rinesen az xu jun
Yakdigar kinen bejun
Tca urmat bed, tca insun
Na wev num at na nihun

[One day everything was destroyed
 They forgot about their souls
 They killed each other
 They lost their respect and humanity
 Now they have no name or identity]

The song then looks into the future and hopes for better times:

Yast vid yothdta vo dawra
Lak rinesam fuk dawra
Lak rinesam mam jaun
Lak viriyam vo xu jun
Badta thiyam vo tar pund

[Maybe there will come a time
 To forget all those times
 Let's forget this world
 To find our soul again
 Then we can find our way]

Finally, the song concludes with the opening lines, bringing the listener out of the narrative and back into reality as the music fades: “*Ar awle, ar Gulaken...*” [In the garden in Gulaken...].

An embedded narrative is used by the writer to negotiate sensitive issues. The song, although written in the first person, features an elderly man who tells the story of how life in the area has changed. The singer, therefore, is not the intended narrator of the song, but an anonymous elderly man. This shift in focalisation allows the narrator to speak about the sensitive topic of the civil war and other ruptures at a distance, instead recounting the words of another by way of an embedded narrative.

The use of the embedded narrative not only allows the narrator to speak about sensitive topics, but also to share an opinion, even if it is not necessarily his own. For example, the elderly man criticises the people of Pamir for having lost their name and identity. While written before the arrest of Chorshanbe Chorshanbiev, *Muysafed* shares this desire for an articulation of group identity but does not mention the name directly, instead adopting a vague notion of name and identity which is only to be understood when the song is analysed in context. This literary device not only protects the song-writer from repercussions, but also leaves the interpretation open for the listener to come to their own conclusions, promoting critical thinking.

The embedded narrative is structured chronologically, beginning in the past and giving an idyllic depiction of the pre-Soviet times. In this depiction, the *piren*'s rule over the region is characterised by prosperity, with “*barakat in their palms*” and the river full of fruit. *Barakat* is another Islamic religious term which refers to blessings given by *Xutho*. The people are described as being happy and carefree with a strong sense of community, welcoming strangers like they are family. Moreover, there is a sense of equality and no difference between rich or poor. The past is therefore depicted overwhelmingly favourably in *Muysafed*, with

strong reference to moral ideals and a closeness to Ismaili Islam, suggesting that the loss of religion is the stem for the troubles that Pamiris now face.

While it is not specified, the past the song refers to appears to be the pre-Soviet times, as, in reaction to the approach of the Red Army, the *piren* fled to Afghanistan, leaving their *murid* behind. As highlighted in Chapter Three, the Soviet times represent a dark time for religious activities in the region. While many maintained some Ismaili practices in secret, such as the observance of prayers, little space was allowed during this time for Pamiris to express their belief in *Hazar Imom* and his doctrine, himself being defamed as a Western spy based in pre-Partition British-occupied Bombay (Ro'i 2000, Tasar 2017). In the years which followed, Pamiris remained cut-off from the rest of the global Jamat which was undergoing great social and political changes materialised in sweeping reforms to Ismaili Muslim practices and administrative structures, especially after the ascension of Aga Khan IV to the position of Imam (Andani forthcoming; Smith 2024; Smith 2025). *Muysafed* therefore subtly criticises this decline in religiosity by suggesting that this distance to the Imam led to the corruption of values. The subsequent reference to war and death is reminiscent of the violence of the civil war, which is placed here as a result of the people's distance from the religious and moral idyllic past.

Nevertheless, the song ends by voicing hope of revival. In contrast to the difficulties and loss of morals portrayed in the former verse, the final verse wistfully suggests there will come a time when all can be forgotten and the people of Pamir will find their way once again. It is interesting to note that this possibility of forgetting sits in contrast to the referenced key events in Pamiri history. In this way, forgetting is positioned as a way of dealing with memory, with forgetting offering the possibility to return to normality and move on. With regard to rupture, this would suggest a desire for continuity through a return to pre-rupture times. All this not only furthers the idealisation of the pre-rupture times in Pamir, but offers guidance to the listener for dealing with the unspeakable events happening around him. Only by forgetting all this hardship and decline of morals, the song concludes, will the Pamiri people be able to live in peace once again.

Compared with the prior two songs examined in this chapter, *Muysafed* describes perhaps most clearly the history of rupture which is known to all Pamiris and plays an important role in the development of Pamiri cultural identity. In contrast to the clear themes of suffering and struggle previously highlighted, *Muysafed* discusses rather feelings of melancholy and regret at the events of the past and where Pamiris now find themselves. Most strikingly, this song presents the theme of hope in the face of adversity with its reference to a brighter future. Therefore, the advice presented here is to hope for a brighter future which is a return to previous values and a closeness to *Hazar Imom*. This revival of religious

and moral values signals a return to the past, presented here as idyllic and far more favourable than the current circumstances. In one sense, the song is indeed also offering a strategy for resilience which mirrors that of contemporary cultural development discourses (Smith 2025). Resilience can take the form of the revival of traditional knowledge in the face of climate change and the growing need for sustainable solutions. By returning to the ways of their ancestors in pre-rupture Pamir, the song appears to contend, Pamiris can once again live in peace and enjoy the *rizq* of streets dripping with fruits brought by the *barakat* of *Hazar Imom*.

4.5 Songs as Guidance

While taken from different periods, *Arod nest zindage*, *Sipinin xaparak*, and *Muysafed* all offer guidance for dealing with rupture from various perspectives. For Habib, the prospect of leaving Pamir is too much for his heart to take and he would rather die there than leave his beloved. For Temursho, the very way his song is crafted offers the listener tools for negotiating difficult topics, i.e. by avoiding to place blame, while expressing grief in poetic form. For Zafar, forgetting is key to dealing with rupture and returning to the idyllic past. Despite these varying perspectives, all three songs use story-telling as a way to help their community by sharing the knowledge they have gained from their own experiences.

Furthermore, all three songs employ similar poetic techniques to disguise their true meaning. In *Arod nest zindage*, the narrator avoids detailing the dire economic and political instability he finds himself in, instead re-working his frustrations into a love song directed at the lyrical You, while *Sipinin xaparak* makes use of allegory to hide any reference to the plane crash, and *Muysafed's* embedded narrative distances the narrator from the topic of the civil war. These techniques speak to the skill of the songwriters in negotiating the discourses in which they move. As inhabitants of GBAO, all three artists have learnt over time how it is to be Pamiri in times of rupture, and this knowledge has impacted their song-writing as an artistic form of story-telling.

The experiences these three song-writers have faced are shared in their creations to offer guidance to other Pamiris who find themselves amid similar ruptures. The uniting theme in these three songs is the presence or lack of *rizq* which is something which listeners can easily relate to. The topic of sustenance has been an issue time and time again in Pamir, a region with little arable ground and prone to natural disasters. Living in this difficult landscape, food scarcity has been a recurring issue, especially for the region's more vulnerable families living in villages or affected by economic hardship. That being said, I would argue the

theme of *rizq* here does not stand exclusively for sustenance in the form of food supply or shelter, but rather a general safety which has not been experienced in Pamir for some time. Especially for younger generations of Pamiris, these songs offer guidance by demonstrating that the ongoing ruptures are nothing new, but that Pamiris have always found ways to survive. The guidance offered here is based on the development of a resilience to rupture.

In this sense, songs can be understood a lot like places in that they are the points at which wayfaring people meet and lines of experience interconnect (Ingold 2002a). By viewing songs in this way, the educational nature of songs as storytelling is strengthened through the knowledge shared by the song-writers, educating the listener in potential ways to deal with rupture. Therefore, Shughni popular songs represent the interconnection of Pamiri lifeworlds through their communicative usage, similar to that of the family stories presented in Chapter Three. The communicative memory of rupture evoked in these songs not only offers guidance to listeners, but also strengthens a shared Pamiri cultural identity. By sharing knowledge of rupture, the memory itself is not only preserved, but Pamiri listeners can use this knowledge to fashion their own understanding of the world and the unspeakable events surrounding them. In this way, the songs presented here serve multiple functions as they are a tool for both the artist and listener to respond to rupture. Generally, such songs speak to the wider literary field in Badakhshon as they are a cultural product which preserves knowledge. The regimes of creativity which the songs interact with, namely the literary techniques of allegory, embedded narrative, and lyrical You, are not exclusive to Shughni literature, and are no doubt inspired by other popular music styles stemming from outside of the region. Nonetheless, the themes of struggle and suffering are similar to what van den Berg (2004, 419) found to be prevailing themes of fate in the genres of folksongs and ghazals. In this sense, it is also limited to place all three songs within the same genre of popular music, as they all have extremely different musical characteristics. Rather, these three songs can be understood as popular Shughni songs, in that they are well-known throughout Pamiri lifeworlds.

These songs are tied together specifically through their use of Shughni language, sitting in contrast to Tajik, Russian, and English popular songs also belonging to the soundscape of Pamir. Shughni, however, is closely tied to Pamiri cultural identity and understandings of Shughnon as a location. The three songs presented here all strengthen the argument of understanding Pamiri lifeworlds through language and geography as all are closely connected to the city of Khorog itself, much like other popular Shughni songs. By referencing specific mahallahs like Gulaken, or singing about the mountains, the song-writers imagine Pamir geographically, positioning it firmly in this mountainous region. Furthermore, by reminding the listener of such unspeakable events in Pamir's history, the listener can posi-

tion themselves there with the song-writer in the mountains, sharing in the feelings of sadness and frustration, and hoping together for a brighter future.

Ultimately, these songs have a timeless quality which makes them easily adaptable to the current ruptures facing Pamirs in GBAO. Just as the father of Siawash and Shahriyor used his Shughni language skills to be provocative and cause a stir amongst the ICD, so too are these songs meant to evoke an emotional response in the listener, posing ethical and moral questions, while lamenting the sorry state they find themselves in. This response, regardless of which emotion it actually evokes, has the ability to transcend temporality as it shares the contemporary emotion of the song-writer with the listener, jumping in some cases across several decades. This emotional connection, made possible through the song, is private as the listener's response remains a secret to them and something highly personal. In this way, both parties can react to the unspeakable events in secret. While the sexy poems of Siawash and Shahriyor's father caused an audible stir amongst the directors of the ICD, they were deemed inappropriate to voice out loud in a public setting; so too are the memories shared in these three songs deemed as unspeakable and remain hidden for later generations to discover. By examining songs like these, therefore, it becomes possible to trace the silences caused by the inability to articulate or say out loud what one actually thinks.

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 Afghanistani¹ 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.

posals 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 response 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 ofhylomorphism 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 centre stage, 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 Nāširi 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 Ismāīlī 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 *Tājikān 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 *Tājikān dar āynay ta'rīkh* is placed in the 9th Century ACE during the reign of the Samanid Dynasty, holding-up the patriarch Ismā'ili 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.: *korenizatsiia*) 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.: *natsional'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 *tcmaken* 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 *tcmaken*, 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 entangled 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 *tcmaken*, 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:

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, mulberries. 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 Mubaliev (2015), *tuth* (Engl.: mulberries) 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).

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 associated 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 mir-dom 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 lifeworlds 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.

6 Conclusion: Challenging Continuity and (Re) Drawing the Past

Towards the end of my stay in Khorog, at the beginning of spring 2023, I had taken to accompanying my flatmate, Farishta, on her evening jog around the stadium in the centre of the city. Almost religiously, Farishta would come home from work in the early evening, dawn her running shoes, and go for a few laps around the stadium. We often joked among friends that her Strava account, an app which tracks running and cycling routes, looked like the frantic circles of a person close to nervous breakdown as she had developed a thick black circle along the stadium's running track and almost nowhere else. While Farishta would do her laps around the stadium, I, who had never jogged a day in my life and had no intention to start at 2000 m above sea level, would walk up and down the rows of the stands, enjoying the quiet that this empty stadium offered. While the stadium was occasionally used for sport, with a volleyball net and some gym equipment positioned sporadically around the grounds, the most visitors this stadium got on a regular basis were small groups of retired men who would sit around and eat *semechki* (sunflower seeds) in relative silence. For big events, almost exclusively related to the state, the stadium would be the meeting place for thousands of people, seated in neat rows and listening to the speech of the President or another government official. On such occasions, placards were set up carrying slogans such as “*Tājikistān ba pīsh*” (roughly translated as “Come on, Tajikistan”) and the stadium would be decorated with the national flag and other red, white, and green materials. This evening, however, it was completely empty.

As I walked among the empty rows of sunbleached seats, the *semechki* shells crackling under my feet, I was reminded of just how empty the city had become. Over the past year and a half that I had been visiting Khorog, more and more people had continued to leave for Dushanbe, Russia, or further afield. Just a few days before, a friend had left to train abroad, unsure when or if he would return. From the heights of the last few rows of the stadium I could see over into the boarded-up houses in Novayi and Gulaken, sealed because their families had left Khorog for good. Looking down the main street, mothers accompanied their children home from school as the sun began to set, but few men were to be seen, the result of sweeping arrests, increased forced conscription, and ever-growing labour migration all caused by the unspeakable events of 2021 and 2022. Directly across from the stadium, however, was a tall building under construction, somewhat squint and far too tall for an earthquake-prone region like GBAO. These apartment buildings, which had taken far longer than expected to construct, were understood by Khorog's residents as where the families of Tajik soldiers and business-

men would soon live, drastically changing the demographic of Khorog with the relocation of many Tajik families, some of whom already lived in apartments across the river but mainly kept to themselves.

Facing towards the mountain across the River Ghund, on which UPD, Tirchid, and Shosh sat, I read the Tajik words sprawled across the mountain face, “*Tājikam va Tājikistān zindaam*” (Engl.: I am Tajik and I live in Tajikistan). This was a relatively new addition as, just a few months prior, the mountain side had looked very different. As I had witnessed from a balcony in Novayi, the previous English message to *Hazar Imom* upon his diamond jubilee in 2017, “Welcome our Hazar Imam. Diamond Jubilee Mubarak”, was stripped away over the period of one week in Summer 2022 and replaced with this message instilling a Tajik national identity for GBAO and its inhabitants. Looking up at the slogan, sitting alongside the tall apartment building under construction, I realised just how much Khorog had changed in the short time I had come to know the city.

The changes, which were the clear result of rupture of the unspeakable events of 2021 and 2022, could be seen in the new materiality around me. The tall building and Tajik script on the mountain side represented a changing demographic which posed the prospect of Pamiris in Khorog moving to the minority, and newly-arrived Tajiks slowly building a majority. The absence of men and the boarded-up houses were reminders of labour migration or escape caused by sweeping arrests and poor economic prospects (Amnesty International 2024). Many of the mothers, walking their children home from school, were now the sole providers for their families, with their husbands either imprisoned or in exile, and sons conscripted to the military (Eurasianet 2023). So too had this rupture, which was still ongoing, created a malaise throughout Khorog and greater GBAO, with even the most positive of friends and acquaintances beginning to lose hope of a brighter tomorrow.

To future generations of Pamiris, it will be difficult to comprehend the rupture which has taken place since 2021. With the materiality of the city changing so quickly, it is difficult to find an anchor to hang-on to. More so, it remains to be seen how these times will be remembered in family stories, as for many it is still too difficult to speak of the events happening around them. Perhaps future Pamiri song-writers will write about this time, or the Pamiri heritage objects sold in shops will disappear as entrepreneurs try to adapt to the growing pressure to fit-into Tajik national identity. In any case, my own personal response to this rupture was to photograph everything that I could, keeping these moments safe for years later when it is perhaps more possible to discuss the sensitivities of these times. Perhaps this is what Nazar meant all those months ago in London; it was never about the lack of written history, but rather the redrafting of history

to which oral and material histories are so perceptible. Perhaps it was not that there was no history, but rather it had been redrafted and lost in the process.



Fig. 17: An empty stadium No. 1. Smith (2023).

6.1 Redefining Central Asia, Redefining Rupture

This book set out to investigate how histories of rupture have been preserved in Pamir. First and foremost, this challenged existing academic preconceptions of history being a largely manuscript-based discipline, and instead stressed the importance of alternative forms of history preservation. This was presented in two forms: oral and material, drawing from family histories and popular songs, as well as architecture and clothing. In this way, this book has shifted focus away from traditional approaches in history studies, and argued in favour of an existential anthropological approach which centres on the experiences of marginalised voices from Pamir. This approach began with the narratives of interlocutors and thus created a history of Pamir ordered around their own understandings of the ruptures that they as a community have experienced. In doing so, the frames of remoteness which have otherwise encompassed communities living in Pamir were deconstruct-



Fig. 18: An empty stadium No. 2. Smith (2023).

ed, instead jumping from a geopolitical, global understanding of historical continuity (Mazlish 1998) to the intimate, emotional, experiential scale.

Such a re-drafting of representations of the past challenges several perceptions of history. Firstly, this book approached history from a material perspective, viewing this as a challenge to the discontinuity of rupture. As seen in the architecture of the Pamiri house, representations of heritage are interwoven into the dwelling experience due to their materiality, which not only reminds the inhabitant of key moments of their Pamiri-Ismaili heritage, but edifies a Pamiri cultural identity through a tangible connection to the past by way of the memory embedded in the house's materiality. In this way, this book challenged notions of ruptures as breaks in continuity (Holbraad et al 2019) by arguing that the ruptures in Pamir's history are embedded in the architecture of the Pamiri house. The materiality of the Pamiri house enables a connection to the past that is therefore unbroken by rupture. Therefore, ruptures do not represent a total break in continuity but rather continuity is secured by materiality.

Furthermore, this book's approach to ruptures challenged understandings of global continuity and shared, large-scale temporalities. As highlighted well in the conversation with Gulbegim, great historic ruptures do not necessarily pose a dis-

continuity for everyone. For Gulbegim, her own ruptures were defined by her personal relation to the house and her family, rather than larger events such as the Soviet times or civil war. Therefore, it does not fit to approach rupture in terms of global continuity when dealing with marginalised communities as they dwell far from the epicentres of such ruptures. Instead, marginalised perspectives are based on a subject-centred understanding of the lifeworld and all the interconnections which it encompasses.

Ruptures are therefore key to understanding how people make sense of temporalities and highlight how subjective perceptions of time can be. Just as time appeared to stand still in Gulbegim's house, so too was entering Roshtqa'la Fortress like stepping back in time. Without the context of rupture as a way of ordering histories, there is no clear chronology. This presents a challenge to how Central Asia is understood today as it is through the rupture of the foundation and collapse of the Soviet Union that the region was conceptualised spatially (Kirmse 2020). This rupture has led to border regions such as Pamir being marginalised from drafts of history, forgotten in greater studies due to their situation at the very periphery, far from centres of power and interest (Saxer 2016, van Schendel 2002). In this sense, Pamir Studies, as an exceptionalised field of study, has yet to be fully accepted within Area Studies, instead dwelling either as a subcategory of Central Asian Studies and limited by the boundaries created around it, or featured in case studies of the classical disciplines of Geography, Anthropology, Political Sciences, and History. Therefore, this book aimed to strengthen the growing trend towards treating Pamir as a region in its own right, viewing this as a challenge to global continuity, and joining the approaches of Kreutzmann (2020, 2022, 2023), Mostowlansky (2017a, 2017b), Bolander (2016, 2017, 2021) and others, to not only overcome the political borders which have divided Pamir, but to move towards a conceptual framework for studying trans-border flows (Mielke and Hornidge 2014).

To achieve this, I have proposed viewing Pamir in terms of lifeworld. Pamiris live in interconnection to various landscapes, as highlighted by the many case studies in this book. Through Pari's love for natural fibres, for example, we learned that Pamiri handicrafts are the product of a dynamic making process between artisans and the materials of the natural, physical landscape of Pamir. In this landscape, the River Panj plays a central role at the heart of Shughnan, while also creates a synthetic divide between Pamiris living *meruya* and *weruya*. Through interactions with other natural phenomena such as the Spring of Nāşiri Khusraw, Pamiris experience not only the physical landscape of Pamir but also religious landscapes which are informed by historical rupture and reform, articulated also in the use of Islamic concepts such as *rizq*. Similarly, the literary landscape of Pamir continues to inspire song-writers who draft Shughni popular songs following the long-standing tradition of secular and religious music in the region.

Pamir, I contend, can therefore be conceptualised as a series of landscapes tied together by the experiences of the people who dwell within these at times shifting interconnections.

One landscape which we looked at in detail was the important role which language plays in shifting scale to Pamiri lifeworlds. While most Pamiris are multilingual, Shughni, including the Rushani dialect, was the first language of all of the Pamiri interlocutors presented in this book, due in part to my many months spent in the Shughni-speaking city of Khorog. Through Shughni, we gained a better understanding of Pamiri cultural identity, most notably in the concepts of *meruya* and *weruya*. As articulations of positionality, *meruya* and *weruya* lose their meaning when translated into English and thus taken out of their geographical, linguistic context. These terms are just one example of the role the physical landscape plays in Shughni language and how, through the use of Shughni language, we can better understand the region and the lifeworlds of the people who dwell there. While Russian, Tajik, and English all play important roles in the everyday experiences of Pamiris living in GBAO, Shughni represents the Pamiri perspective in Shughnon because it is through Shughni that the positionality of the lifeworld is articulated. In this sense, Shughni is a mode of experiencing Pamiri lifeworlds, as “Experience, even the drama of pain and suffering, lies outside, inside, and alongside enacted language as its indexical and phenomenological resource” (Ochs 2012, 156). Language therefore enables the articulation of experience and the communication of knowledge, being one mode of the storied world Ingold (2022a) writes about. While Shughni remains largely inaccessible to foreign learners, due to the severe lack of learning materials outside of Pamir, this language is key to an existential approach to drafting a history of Pamir, moving away from the dominance of written history, and towards oral narratives such as family stories and popular Shughni songs.

This book has therefore presented Pamir as an experience, i.e. the experience of being-Pamiri-in-the-world. This approach, which focused heavily on the residual emotion of the memory of rupture and its role in shaping perceptions of the environment (Ingold 2022b), was able to re-draft cartographies of Pamir through personal experiences and reimagine the region as a flexible, productive space defined by those who dwell there. Therefore, this book has demonstrated how Pamir is an intersection of disciplines and calls for an interdisciplinary approach, not only to this region, but other regions which lie on the periphery of classical Area Studies. Just as the boundaries of Pamir cannot be clearly defined, so too is the experience of being alive one which cannot be split into containers.

6.2 Feeling the Lifeworld

At the heart of this book's approach is emotion, stressing its role in narratives of the past. Approaching emotion as a material experience, the tenacity and spontaneity of emotion was shown to re-draft histories of Pamir, at points deviating from the planned script. Through the three family histories shared by Nekruz, Abdulloh, and Azizkhon, the fear of crossing the River Panj and maintaining a connection with *weruya* becomes apparent in the narratives the three interlocutors share of the separation experienced by their families during the ruptures of demarcation and the creation of the Soviet Union. For Nekruz and Azizkhon especially, the affective economy of fear (Ahmed 2014) felt by their relatives continues to influence their own movements and desires to reconnect with family *weruya*. Nekruz persevered despite multiple warnings and was able to reconnect with his family after several decades. In contrast, Azizkhon's family lost the chance to reconnect as there are now no surviving relatives. The emotion in these narratives highlights how, despite the fact that they are speaking of ruptures which took place several decades before they were born, the materiality of rupture manifests in spoken family histories and can be passed down from generation to generation. Even more so, this emotion continues to affect their movements, causing a level of immobility and ultimately shaping their perception of the landscape of Pamir.

Nonetheless, this book highlighted how such feelings are unregulatable. As seen in the visit to the Spring of Nāširi Khusraw, nothing could stop the captivating feeling of visiting a sacred place. Even for myself as a non-Isma'ili, I could feel slight tinglings of the religiosity that my companions felt through drinking the water and feeling at peace for a brief moment. This experience came in stark contrast to the dry exhibition presented inside of the museum itself. The materiality of the Spring and the feelings I felt in this moment were unregulated and existed outside of the intended touristic experience I was meant to have. In this way, feelings were the way I was connected with the Spring, allowing me to experience the religiosity of the sacred site. This interconnection in which I stood with the Spring, though only for a few moments, relied on those feelings, perhaps because I lacked the belief in the theology of Nāširi Khusraw and therefore the Pamiri lifeworld connection which Nekruz and Suhrob held. Feelings, therefore, are the routes through which the interconnection of the lifeworld is experienced on a bodily scale.

Furthermore, the fear I felt in Gulbegim's house of the possibility of spirits and invisible beings highlights how, as an outsider, I could only partially feel the Pamiri lifeworld. While the feelings felt in the Spring were able to transform me, for a brief moment, from a researcher into an inhabitant by allowing me to experience the religious feelings of being in a sacred place, this did not extend to Gulbegim's comfort around the *parien*, of whom I was sacred. To experience such

elements of interconnection of Pamiri lifeworlds is something I am simply not able to do, perhaps because in my culture spirits are always something to be feared and the idea of a benevolent spirit is foreign to me, with the notable exception of *Casper the Friendly Ghost*, of course. This instance therefore highlights one of the limitations of this book: while the materiality of emotion is, in itself, universal, its elements can only be fully experienced when one is in complete interconnection with the lifeworld, which I was not. This speaks to wider issues in existential anthropology and area studies such as phenomenology and the incompatibility of epistemologies (see Knibbe and Versteeg 2008, Derichs 2015). It is false to assume that knowledge is universal, but there is a universality in the bodily reactions we experience upon certain emotions. While emotion itself is culturally informed (Ahmed 2014), feelings, I contend, are consistent and indeed offer a continuity in times of rupture.

So too was my comprehension of *meruya* and *weruya* limited. Coming from a completely different context, I could only describe but not fully understand the complex feelings of interlocutors who had grown up with a fear of *weruya* which existed in conflict with a desire for family reunification. While I could appreciate the fearful imaginary of *weruya* as I had grown up post-9/11 and watched the almost daily BBC news pieces depicting Afghanistan and the Taliban for what felt like years after, I could not understand the inner conflict felt by many people who were curious about their relatives *weruya* but were apprehensive to make contact. To understand this, as argued in this book, one would need to have complete experiential knowledge of pre-imperialism and Stalin's Great Terror, something which can only be passed down in family stories. In this sense, the narratives and memory of the past did not help me to make sense of the world around me, rather it helped me to order what I saw others experiencing. My own experiences with the unspeakable events of 2021 and 2022, which I felt both first- and second-hand, nevertheless allowed me to find myself, again only briefly, in interconnection with the Pamiri lifeworld as I, like many Pamiris living in diaspora, felt the exhaustion, frustration, and fear while waiting eagerly for messages from loved ones, or the pain upon receiving a call to say goodbye. Perhaps even more so, the fear I personally experienced while on fieldwork also caused a level of immobility as I carefully self-regulated my movements in order to not draw attention to myself or contacts (Yeh 2006). In this way, my own experience with fear shaped my perception of Pamir and my spatial movements and boundaries.

The struggle and frustration stemming from unspeakable events and societal ruptures is palpable in the Shughni songs featured in Chapter Four and exemplifies how song-writers overcome silences. Whether the situation stems from a state-level repression, economic stagnation, or dichotomising civil unrest, popular songs are a way for anthropologists to trace silences and approach moments of

unspeakableness as moments of possibility (Dragojlovic and Samuels 2021, 2023). In this way, I was able to negotiate the unspeakableness of rupture which caused silences in my interlocutors and excluded the possibility of ethnographic data relating to recent violence in Pamir.

My approach, i.e. a material, experiential at times auto-ethnography, while limited, offers a way for writing ethnography during times of rupture. Rather than asking difficult questions and attempting to break the silences which unspeakable events cause, I propose tracing these silences to try and protect interlocutors from being placed in a precarious situation. By focusing on the materiality of the lifeworld, I contend, objects become representative of not only various temporalities, but can be articulations of opinions when it is not safe to say something out loud. In times of great political unrest, conflict, and genocide throughout the world, the responsibility of the ethnographer for securing the safety of interlocutors is more important than ever.

6.3 Reacting to Rupture

The second half of this book dealt with creative reactions to rupture. Chapters Four and Five presented two ways of dealing with rupture: song-writing and making. As highlighted, the restrictions of unspeakable histories give way to ingenuity and creativity. When faced with rupture, the individual finds a way to deal with the distress or instability they see around them, or experience themselves. Dwelling in rupture, Pamiris are often restricted in what they can openly discuss in public and thus many song-writers find creative ways to voice opinions and provide a layer of protection for themselves. While this book focused on the textual ways in which song-writers give advice to the listener while veiling their true meaning, such expressions of opinion are not limited to Shughni popular songs and can be found throughout the creative world. Essentially, rupture causes the need to deal with rupture, and for many this instils creativity.

These cultural productions are the result of creative regimes which decide what is acceptable or not. As found in the case studies, Pamiris interact with multiple regimes when approaching their creative productions. Soviet heritage and its neatly-defined national identities continue to order conceptualisations of what, and who, is Pamiri. Pamir's intellectual traditions of religious and secular poetry also follows modes of cultural production which prevail to this day, having survived centuries of religious persecution and linguistic precarity. Global fashion trends, such as upcycling, speak to a return to natural materials and an environmental sustainability. Such regimes, I argue, are the results of interconnection

with multiple temporalities and scales which are embedded in the materiality of Pamir.

Shughni popular songs not only preserve the memory of rupture but also the language itself. This codependent relationship means that one could not exist without the other. In this sense, popular songs can be a useful source when approaching historical narratives from a lifeworld perspective as, through their use of Pamir languages, popular songs are often intended for Pamiri audiences and are therefore both an example of artistic expression, and articulations of collective identity. Particularly Shughni language has become politicised and strongly connected to a sense of Pamiri cultural identity, meaning that these songs, on one level, can be read as such articulations. This is achieved through communicative memory (Assmann 2008, 2013) in that the songs share intimate perspectives on key events in the recent history of Pamir, offering the listener the chance to make sense of the ruptures around them.

Creativity, as a regime of cultural production (Meyer and Svašek 2016) is not limited to song-writing but also is demonstrated in handicraft work, which also presented a way to trace silences through materiality. For Pari and Siawash, the objects they create in their ateliers are not simply heritage commodities but rather the product of their own personal experiences with being Pamiri. Having grown up hearing family stories, surrounded by the *pinz sitan* of the Pamiri house, and listening to Shughni songs, these two makers have developed their own understandings of Pamiri cultural identity and embedded these in the objects they create and sell. For Pari, these objects articulate a need to adapt to modern times in order to stay relevant, thus preserving Pamiri cultural heritage and responding to marginalisation through heritagisation (Harris and Kamalov 2020). For Siawash, his own experiences with switching between *meruya* and *weruya* have given him a unique perspective which he incorporates in the Afghan dresses he sews by upcycling scrap pieces of fabric and updating the waistline in an act of adaptation between varying creative regimes of cultural production (Meyer and Svašek 2016). Therefore, the adaptation and renewal of style, fabrics, and colours are essential to the making process as the makers work with what is available to them, both in terms of materials and market. From these two makers we have learned that adaptation is strongly rooted in the making process, highlighting the constant interconnection with the lifeworld by way of availability and demand. In this sense, their cultural production can be understood as a product of dwelling as they move through the lifeworld and try to make sense of the experiences they gain.

Therefore, the latter chapters of this book have dealt with the need to adapt which stems from rupture. In this sense, it has been shown that rupture creates the necessity for new directions, i.e. adaptation as a form of resilience (Smith 2025). Therefore, rupture appears to be a necessary step on the journey of a trav-

elling idea (Said 1983) and represents the moments of (re)interpretation and (re)adaptation. Such moments demand confrontation with the circumstances in which the individual finds themselves, which speaks to the subjectivity of rupture, as a rupture to one person can be the collapse of the Soviet Union, and to another the death of a loved one. Rupture is therefore experiential and subjective, but can play a role in the development of collective identity through shared memories. The subjectivity of rupture, as demonstrated especially by the latter case studies of this book, can be seen in how individuals respond to rupture, i.e. what they make out of it.

6.4 Looking Forward

There are, however, many other possible responses to rupture which this book did not address. As seen by the changing demographic and erasure of the text on the side of the mountain, the redrafting or even erasure of history is another response. It is for these reasons that the preservation of regional histories is of the utmost importance for, when materiality can no longer provide an anchor to orientate oneself, it is up to the intangible oral narrations to communicate the narratives of rupture, in one way as an act of defiance against the erasure or redrafting of that history from the powers that be, but also as a subjective, personal way to make sense of one's own lifeworld.

Just as there are multiple responses to rupture which have not been discussed here, there are countless other ruptures which the scope of this study did not allow. Perhaps most notable was the *didor* of 1995, only briefly mentioned in passing. This moment represented a further shift in Pamiri lifeworlds as the Pamiri-Ismaili community was united with *Hazar Imom* and the rest of the global Jamat. Many interlocutors recounted their memories as children of hearing the Imam speak for the first time and seeing people gather *weruya* to join the event from across the river. Stories of family members mending their ways and striving to live more religious lives are common, signalling a transformation brought by religious reform. This rupture also brought with it administrative changes to Ismaili Islam and the foundation of ITREB as the Ismaili religious authority in Tajikistan. The implications of this event have been discussed by others in more detail (e.g. Levi-Sanchez 2021), but I did not focus on this rupture due to the heightened precarity of non-normative religious practices in Tajikistan (see e.g. Thibalt 2018), and the difficulties faced by ITREB during the time of research (Eurasianet 2022).

In the same vein, this study could also be approached from an anthropology of religion perspective. This would perhaps allow us to understand the experiential aspects of Pamiri lifeworlds even better, for example through religious sensa-

tions (Meyer 2006), sound (Eisenlohr 2018), or everyday negotiations with religious doctrine (Louw 2007). This would greatly add to the representation of Ismaili Shia Islam within the anthropological study of Islam, a field which remains heavily focused on Sunni Muslim communities. For this book, however, it was sadly not the time to discuss such sensitive issues in GBAO.

Looking forward, many changes have taken place in GBAO since I left the region in spring 2023. His Highness Aga Khan IV sadly passed away on 4th February, 2025. His death was met with great sadness from the global Jamat including Pamiris who remembered how their lives were saved through the AKF during the civil war. As per protocol, Aga Khan IV named his successor in his last will and testament: his eldest son, Prince Rahim al-Hussaini Aga Khan V. It remains to be seen how Aga Khan V will lead the Jamat in his role as *Hazar Imom*, but a restructuring of the AKDN and Jamati institutions is expected. While such religious reform can disrupt existing structures and cause change, the leadership of *Hazar Imom* as a hereditary title offers a continuity for followers to hold onto, like an anchor in times of rupture.

Perhaps this continuity is what will offer Pamiris in GBAO hope for a brighter future. While it was simply not safe to discuss aspects of religion and politics during my time in GBAO, I have tried to work around these silences by focusing on the material, experiential aspects of the lifeworld and the embeddedness of a chronology of ruptures which continue to shape it. As memories start to fade and family stories lose more and more detail, it is the materiality of the lifeworld which persists and allows us to look ahead to a different future. Therefore I sincerely hope that Zafar's words will come to pass:

Yast vid yothdta vo dawra
Lak rinesam fuk dawra
Lak rinesam mam jaun
Lak viriyam vo xu jun
Badta thiyam vo tar pund

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