RE-PRODUCING SOCIAL RELATIONS
POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE AND ISLAM IN POST-SOVIET TAJIK ISHKASHIM

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of PhD in Social Anthropology with Visual Media in the Faculty of Humanities.

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Abstract

The University of Manchester, Aliaa Remtilla, PhD in Social Anthropology with Visual Media.

Re-producing social relations; Political and economic change and Islam in post-Soviet Tajik Ishkashim

This dissertation explores what it means to be post-socialist for Ismaili Muslims living in the Ishkashim district of Tajik Badakhshan. It examines the legacies of the Soviet era in people’s everyday lives, questioning how people continue to see themselves as socialist notwithstanding the putative end of state socialism.

Part of what it means to be socialist has to do with expectations of what the state should provide. Tajik Ishkashimis experienced the Soviet Union as an allocative centre that helped them greatly. The post-Soviet Tajik state is unable to provide for Tajik Ishkashimis in the way of the former Soviet Union. I suggest that Tajik Ishkashimis’ religious leader, the Aga Khan, and his development institutions have gone some way toward filling this gap, making the Imam appear to be the new paternalist centre.

I propose that we think through Ishkashimis’ memories of their relations with the Soviet allocative centre through what I call an “economy of grace”. Drawing on Pitt-Rivers’ theorization of “grace” as a morally-driven gift of excess that the receiver is never expected to (be able to) return, I trace the ways in which this economy of grace continues to frame Ishkashimis’ post-Soviet engagement with the Imam and his institutions, if not with the Tajik state. I then explore the moral legacies of Soviet socialism by examining how Ishkashimis try to maintain values that they associate with socialism, most notably the privileging of social relations over the market.

Where both the Tajik state and the Imam’s institutions fail to provide for Tajik Ishkashimis in the way of the former Soviet state, Ishkashimis turn to labour migration. I draw on Greenberg’s (2011) and Jansen’s (2011) definition of “normal” as the predictability of daily life to demonstrate that remittances enable those living at home to maintain the rhythms and trajectories of “normal” village life. One of the effects of migration, however, is that the absence of migrants has made villages in Ishkashim no longer feel like home. It is my contention that wedding videos actualize a transnational home by giving hope that migrants who had been present in Ishkashim for when the wedding was taped might one-day return.

Many hope that the Imam will create jobs in Ishkashim that will bring home migrants because they see that his development projects in Afghanistan have had this effect. Tajik Ishkashimis want their state to enable such development work on their side of the border too, but they also worry that the work of the Imam and his institutions will force them to negotiate the norms and values of what it means to be Ishkashimi with their cross-border Afghan kin. And so, they look to the Tajik state to firmly enforce the border and keep clear the division between Tajik and Afghan Ishkashim.

Ultimately, notwithstanding the incapacity of the Imam and his institutions to provide for Tajik Ishkashimis in the way of the former Soviet state, the Imam continues to garner legitimacy because he is also a spiritual leader. As such, the Imam commands a moral order, motivating people to be good so that they can achieve spiritual enlightenment. I explain that for Tajik Ishkashimis, being good is not (yet) defined by orthopraxy. Instead, Ishkashimis strive to be good in their own ways within the context of the changing socio-economic circumstances.

In many ways, even though Tajik Ishkashimis’ present socio-economic situation is ostensibly worse than during the Soviet era, they now have access to the Imam in a way they never had before. Tajik Ishkashimis hold out hope for a better future, one that looks very much like their Soviet past, only better. Better because it has the Imam in it and the spiritual component of his leadership gives him the potential to satisfy them in ways that the former Soviet state could never have.
Declaration

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Maps

Map of Tajikistan and the surrounding region (Google 2012).

Map of Tajikistan (Wikimedia 2011).

The red area marks the district of Ishkashim. The blue box marks the approximate location of the administrative district of Ishkashim (see below).
The yellow circle marks the location of the Afghan Bazaar, the bridge and border post. From top to bottom, the villages circled in red are Avj, Mulvoj, Yakshvol, Sumjin, Nud (the Rayon) and Ren.

Satellite map of the administrative district of Ishkashim (Google 2012).
Chapter 1

Legacies of Soviet Socialism
This dissertation examines how people living in the Ishkashim district of Tajikistan’s Badakhshan province have accommodated to political and economic changes since the fall of the Soviet Union. In 1991, the Soviet Union was dissolved into a number of nation-states of which Tajikistan was one. This led to a cessation of subsidies to member republics and their constitutive districts from the erstwhile Soviet state causing certain economic changes. Within months, a civil war broke out, which was followed by a number of years of civil unrest. By the time I conducted fieldwork in 2008-2009, the political situation had largely stabilized although adjustment to changing economic structures and their underpinning values and ideals was ongoing.

In Ishkashim, the principle agent pushing for market reform was the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), an international non-governmental organization (NGO) led by Tajik Ishkashimis’ religious leader, the Aga Khan. The AKDN, oftentimes in collaboration with institutions such as the World Bank, the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and USAID (United States Agency for International Development) explored ways to bring Badakhshan to an idealized end point of economic stability and self-sufficiency by focusing on poverty reduction (as seen for instance in Herbers 2001; Kanji 2002; Breu and Hurni 2003; ARD 2004; Jumaeva and Robinson 2004; Robinson et al. 2010). This teleological construct, in which the aim is to find what must be done in order to achieve an idealized outcome that is presupposed, corresponds, in its vision of fixed beginning and end points, to the “transitology” literature of post-socialist political and economic analysts (Aslund 1992; Winiecki 1993; Rumer 2005). For them, it is possible for “transition” to one day be over – if it is not already – because whether or not a state or region is socialist or capitalist can more or less be objectively assessed.

According to such an approach, the prefix “post-” is a temporal designation. When these studies speak of post-socialism, they refer to the end of a distinct phase or era that can now be easily replaced with something else – in this case, a different economic and political system. The uncertainty over what would follow state socialism – in Burawoy and Verdery’s terms, the scepticism over “whether the result will be capitalism or over what form of capitalism may result” (1999: 16, italics in original) – led to the utilization of the term “post-socialism” to refer “to whatever would follow once the means of production were privatized and the Party’s political monopoly disestablished” (Chari and Verdery 2009: 10-1). Many anthropologists are critical of the term’s implied temporality. Sampson (2002), for instance, is uncomfortable with how the focus on post-socialism
reifies the shift in 1989 without acknowledging prior shifts in Eastern European state socialism. Chari and Verdery (2009) suggest that in order to break the implied linear progression from “socialism” to “post-socialism”, “post-” should be understood as an analytical and not a temporal indicator.

This dissertation builds on the work of these anthropologists, emphasizing, in Humphrey’s words, that “there never can be a sudden and total emptying out of all social phenomena and their replacement by other ways of life” (2002a: 12). Continuities link life in the era of state socialism to people’s experiences in the years that followed (Bridger and Pine 1998; Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Berdahl, Bunzl et al. 2000; Hann 2002). As many academics have demonstrated, market activity existed in pre-1991 state socialism while redistribution and shortage continues to be a part of post-Soviet capitalism (see Lampland 1995; Verdery 1996; Humphrey 2002b; Mandel and Humphrey 2002; Taylor 2010; Collier 2011; Bockman 2012). Furthermore, people learn to adapt to the uncertainty and precariousness that characterizes a change in political and economic systems by combining new ways of thinking and acting with old. People have the tools to navigate through changes even though conditions might seem chaotic, rupturing and turbulent at times (see Nagengast 1991; Kideckel 1993; Ries 1997; Nazpary 2002; Hann 2002; Humphrey 1998; Yurchak 2006). Unlike the aforementioned understanding of “post-socialism”, these anthropologists’ use of the term denies the possibility of a simple, complete and unidirectional transition to a “capitalism” completely devoid of any traces of a socialist past.

For Tajik Ishkashimis, the end of the Soviet era did indeed mark the end of a historical period of what Rudolf Bahro (1978) calls “actually existing socialism” that had a marked impact on people’s day-to-day lives. And so, the term “post-socialism”, as used both in this dissertation and by other anthropologists, necessarily works in some ways as a temporal designation of the end of “actually existing socialism” of the Soviet variety. But the term also does more than this. The term “post-” also indicates the ongoing legacies of a discrete historical period, emphasizing that “socialism”, continues to be influential, notwithstanding its putative end. In this dissertation, I demonstrate that Ishkashimis themselves continue to strongly identify with the legacies of the Soviet socialist past. The values and ideals of socialism provide them with the tools to

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1 To refer to the present period as one that follows the historical period of Soviet socialism, I use the term “post-Soviet”.
accommodate post-Soviet changes and, in this way, legacies of the socialist past enable them to creatively engage with change.\(^2\)

The end of state socialism of the Soviet Union model has not meant that certain values and ideas regarding, for instance, the role of the state, the perceived immorality of profit or the importance of social relations, have vanished as well. Drawing on Verdery (1996)’s theorization of state socialism, I define it here as an economic and political system wherein the state is the sole owner of the means of production and therefore the principal employer. The state is driven by an impulse to maximize not profit but the “allocative power” of the state and the ruling party with the purpose of increasing the dependency of its citizens on the state’s redistribution. This has social consequences wherein the state enters all aspects of life (for an extended definition of state socialism in the Tajik context, see Chapter 4).

Drawing on the work of Hungarian economist János Kornai (1980), Verdery argues that, for analytic purposes, the umbrella term of “socialism” can be used to describe all former socialist countries since they all share strong semblances in their experiences of “actually existing socialism” (1996: 19-20). Humphrey extends this argument to the term “post-socialism”, suggesting that assuming a certain foundational unity amongst former socialist states provides academics with a broad and relevant field for comparison (2002: 12). Thelen, however, critiques the idea that it is possible to speak of “the” socialist experience, suggesting that this notion of a common ground needs to be diversified (2012: 89). In this dissertation, I ethnographically define the particular experience of state socialism for Tajik Ishkashimis. Nonetheless, it becomes clear that certain elements of how Tajik Ishkashimis experienced Soviet socialism do indeed resonate with Verdery and Kornai’s theories.

By contrast to the way some anthropologists like Verdery and Humphrey have likened socialist experiences across different countries with one another, Burawoy and Verdery (1999) stress the uneven and multiple trajectories of changes across various post-socialist countries. Humphrey acknowledges that, notwithstanding the utility of the term “post-socialism” in indicating the shared past of formerly socialist countries, “differences in

\(^2\) I use the term “legacy” even though Burawoy and Verdery critique the term, arguing that it gives “insufficient integrity to the creative and resistive processes of everyday practice” (1999: 7). In her PhD dissertation on post-war El Salvador, Montoya argues against Burawoy and Verdery’s critique, demonstrating that the metaphor of “legacy” need not suggest immutability (2011: 29-34). I build on Montoya’s work, accepting a definition of “legacy” that includes room for variation both across different post-socialist regions and over time in one place.
crucial matters such as the way ‘democracy’ is operated, attitudes to private property in land, the relation of the individual to the state, and the role of law, seem to be widening as each year goes by” (2002: 12). Over time, the term “post-socialism” might lose its utility not only as an analytic tool for the researcher, but also for people living in countries that were once socialist. As Humphrey (2002) notes, younger people have already begun to reject the term, finding that it constrains them to legacies of a past with which they no longer identify and which they do not want to have determine their future. But this is not (yet) the case in Tajik Ishkashim. Legacies of the Soviet socialist past continue to influence the present.

Before outlining the particularities of the Ishkashimi experience of post-socialism, I begin the next section by providing a very brief introduction to my field site (more detail is provided in Chapter 2).

**Post-Soviet Tajik Ishkashim**

Tajikistan is located at one of the edges of the former Soviet Union, bordered by China to the east, Afghanistan to the south, Kyrgyzstan to the north, and Uzbekistan to the west (see Maps). The mountainous province of Gorno-Badakhshan, which covers the eastern half of Tajikistan, is home to less than 5 percent of Tajikistan’s population. Formally titled Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO, also GBAP for Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province), it is the only autonomous province in Tajikistan. All visitors to the province are required to secure an additional visa, specific for travel to GBAO. This paperwork, however, does not correspond to significant autonomy in governance. As I explain in the next chapter, the autonomy of this province is largely a formality that acknowledges that Badakhshans are different from other Tajiks in terms of language spoken, religion practiced and the remoteness of the region (Davlatshoev 2006).

With mountains covering most of the region, Badakhshans live in small pockets of land that line the valleys along streams fed by glaciers. The province is bordered by

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3 See also Grossman 2010 on Romanians who reject the term.
4 Drawing the name from the higher mountain ranges to the east of Ishkashim, the Soviets often used the term “Pamir” to refer to all of Badakhshan. The majority of Shugnis have adopted this term to refer to themselves and “Pamiri” has become more common than “Badakhshani” in Khorog and in migrant communities living in Dushanbe and abroad. Nonetheless, for the families amongst whom I conducted fieldwork in Ishkashim, it was important to be true to the origin of the term “Pamiri” and they rejected the term when possible, choosing to use “Badakhshani” instead. As such, in this dissertation I use the word Badakhshani as much as possible when referring to the residents of GBAO. My use of the term “Badakhshani” is not meant to refer to the broader district of Badakhshan that crosses into Afghanistan, Pakistan and China as well. When I wish to
Kyrgyzstan to the north, China to the east and Afghanistan to the south. In 1951, 7 regions were defined within the province: Shugnan, Ishkashim, Roshtkala, Roshan, Darwaz, Murgab and Wandsh. The capital of GBAO, Khorog, is located in Shugnan. The region where I conducted fieldwork is the district of Ishkashim, located on the river Pyanj, which also serves as the border with Afghanistan. Both Wakhi and Ishkashimis live in this district. The Wakhi are a group of Badakhshani who have a language of their own, distinct from the language spoken in Ishkashim. Nonetheless, politically and historically, the term Ishkashim also refers to Wakhan and vice versa.

Within the broader district of Ishkashim are a number of smaller administrative districts. I conducted my research in an administrative district within the region of Ishkashim that is also called Ishkashim. This administrative district is comprised of six villages that line the river Pyanj. From West to East, these villages are: Avj (my base), Mulvoj, Yakshvol, Sumjin, Nud and Ren (see Maps). Nud is the rayon or capital of the region and as such is more often referred to as the Rayon than as Nud. Thirty kilometers separates Avj from Ren, which is itself just one kilometre east of the Rayon. Avj is 80 kilometers east of Khorog. Only two of these Ishkashimi villages, Sumjin and Ren, continue to speak the Ishkashimi language. The other four speak Tajik almost exclusively. Thus, I conducted my research in the Tajik language. Tajikistan is the only Central Asian state that is not mainly Turkic speaking; the Tajik language is a variety of Persian (Farsi).

Since I give an extended history of Tajikistan in Chapter 3 and further discuss my own personal experience of fieldwork in Chapter 2, I move on now to indicate how the Tajik Ishkashimi experience of socialism and post-socialism differs from other places. The poorest of the Soviet republics, just 6% of Tajikistan’s 143,100 square kilometres of land is arable (Akiner 2001: 5), with most of it devoted to cotton and wheat production. The

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5 This border is known for its drug, gem and arms trade, making it a place of international concern and attracting the influence of American, European and Russian investment in military training. While I touch on these issues in Chapter 7, they are not a primary concern of this thesis.

6 Badakhshani have their own set of Southeastern Iranian languages, different from Persian, a Southwestern Iranian language. The languages spoken in each district of Badakhshan also differ from one another.

7 In Ishkashim, the everyday pronunciation of Russian, Tajik and Arabic words often differs from their written form. Since the knowledge produced and represented in this dissertation was based on research that was conducted using adabi Tajik, I have not attempted to transliterate words from the written version of the Russian, Tajik and Arabic languages and scripts into the Latin alphabet. Instead, the orthography of non-English words in this dissertation is based on their everyday pronunciation in Ishkashim.
little land available in Badakhshan is unsuitable even for cotton production. Rocky and with bad irrigation, the Soviets dedicated this land to the production of hay. Since the formation of this Soviet Republic in 1924, Tajikistan had been heavily reliant on subsidies and loans from the central Soviet state. Badakhshan was 97% dependent on imports from elsewhere in Tajikistan and the USSR (Ibid). And so, the first significant way in which the Ishkashimi case differs from other places is that Tajik Ishkashimis found themselves in relation with the Soviet state in a very particular way.

Ishkashimis have a strong and positive memory of having invited the Soviets to establish their economic and political regime in Badakhshan. They saw themselves as net receivers of goods and support, giving little in exchange for what the state provided. It is worth noting that along with providing all that it did to Tajik Ishkashimis, the Soviet state also placed certain constraints on its citizens. For instance, Ishkashimis were not allowed to openly practice their religion, nor could they look over to the Afghan side of the river for fear of reprisal. If people could accept these constraints, then life was generally good if not luxurious. There were opportunities for studying at a high level, there was no food scarcity and roads and electricity were developed even in the most remote of villages. At least this is the way the former Soviet state is remembered. Tajik Ishkashimis are, therefore, generally positive towards the state and state effects (see Mitchell 1999). The state is accepted as a benevolent and paternalistic master with the good of the people at heart whether or not certain state projects could be subverted by local officials and by people themselves (see Chapter 3 for more on why the Soviet state invested so much in Ishkashim, and Chapters 4 and 5 for how this particular experience of state socialism has made Tajik Ishkashimis expect the state to act in certain ways).

In 1991, when the Soviet Socialist Republic of Tajikistan gained its independence as a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and subsidies from the erstwhile Soviet state ceased (Akiner 2001: 5), the country fell into economic turmoil. The Tajik civil war that began soon after, killing over 100,000 and cementing regional divides, further degraded the country’s economy (Ibid). Emomali Rahmon emerged from the Civil War as the President of the country and, at the time of my fieldwork, continued to serve as President, governing the state in a dominant party system with his People’s Democratic Party of Tajikistan (for a more detailed history see Chapter 3). This Tajik state – and here I come to the second way in which the Tajik case is distinct – does not have the same resources as the former Soviet state, meaning that it is unable to gain legitimacy and support by generous distribution. It has, nonetheless, attempted to
constrain the complete dismantling of state ownership of the means of production, resisting the complete privatization of land. But it has perforce had to let in agents of change such as the World Bank, the IMF and other international NGOs. In Badakhshan, one of the foremost such actors is the Aga Khan and his various institutions.

This leads to the third way in which Tajik Ishkashimis – and Badakhshanis more generally – differ not only from other post-socialist people but also from other Tajiks: they are Ismaili Muslims. Whereas most Central Asians are Sunni Muslims, the majority of Badakhshanis are Ismaili Muslims. As defined in the Ismaili Constitution, Ismailis are Muslims who believe in the oneness of God (Aga Khan IV 1987). Like other Muslims, they believe that the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet and the Quran is divine revelation. Ismailis follow the Shia tradition of Islam, believing in an Imam descended from the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law, Ali, who is believed to hold both spiritual and political authority over his followers. Disagreement over the succession in the Imamate at various points in history led to the splintering of Shias into a number of groups, of which the Ismailis are the second largest (see Daftary 1998). Ismailis continue to have a present living Imam, Aga Khan IV, Shah Karim Al-Hussaini. He is the Ismailis’ 49th Imam. He currently lives just outside Paris and it is from this base that he executes his religious and humanitarian activities.

Central to Ismaili theology is the dialectic between the batin (interior, hidden, spiritual, eternal, esoteric) and the zahir (visible, apparent, temporal, transient, exoteric) (Corbin 1983). One way to think through the relation between these terms is through the Imam. He has a two-fold, zahiri and batini, responsibility to his followers [murids], namely to improve their quality of life (zahiri responsibility) and to “light the murid’s path to spiritual enlightenment and vision” (batini responsibility) (Aga Khan IV 1987). Unlike the Soviet era, when contact with the Imam was not allowed, in the post-Soviet present the Imam and his AKDN are actively involved in the everyday lives of Badakhshanis. The Soviet Union’s collapse and the ensuing political, economic and social upheavals have left a space in Badakhshan that is being filled not only by the new Tajik state, but also by the Imam and his institutions. The Imam’s non-profit organization, the AKDN, has been particularly active in Badakhshan since the fall of the Soviet Union. Most notably, during the Tajik Civil War, the AKDN’s subsidiary organization FOCUS

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8 For more on Ismaili “rule books” and “constitutions” that were produced amongst the Ismaili Khojas of India and East Africa throughout the 20th century see Hirji 2011: 146-153.
Humanitarian Assistance provided much needed aid to Badakhshan that is reported to have prevented widespread famine (Bliss 2006).

This dissertation does not embark on a direct critique or analysis of any of the Imam’s institutions. Instead, I examine how Ishkashimis incorporate these institutions into their existing frameworks, making sense of an institutional structure whose presence in the region is less than a decade old. For this reason, instead of referring to specific agencies, foundations or institutes I speak more broadly of “the Imam’s institutions”. These include both the development arm (the AKDN) and the religious institutions (which include the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Boards and Councils (ITREB or ITREC) and the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS)). All of these institutions fall within the remit of the Imam who continues to guide their projects and this is a large part of the reason why, even though the development institutions self-identify as non-denominational (akdn.org), Ishkashimis, like both Ismaili and Sunni Murghabis, do not always differentiate between the Imam’s religious and secular activities (see Mostowlansky in progress).

Because he is a religious leader, the Imam’s material investment in the region is not only welcomed, it is expected; as written in the Ismaili constitution, it is the Imam’s duty to work to improve the quality of life of his followers. The Imam does this, in part, by collecting from wealthy Ismailis worldwide and redistributing (in a manner not unlike the Soviet state) via various development agencies. Ishkashimis, therefore, view the Imam as a paternalist chief and redistributing centre (Chapter 4). Unlike their relationship with the Tajik state, Ishkashimis continue to legitimize the Imam and his institutions, even when the Imam and his institutions are unable to distribute to the same extent as the former Soviet state, by drawing on their spiritual relationship with their religious leader, the Imam. Furthermore, unlike the Soviet state, many of the AKDN’s projects, such as their efforts to decollectivize land, work to liberalize Badakhshan’s economy and moralize making money for individual gain. This causes some adjustment in thinking which affects the particular post-socialism of the Ishkashimis, some of whom still see themselves as socialist (Chapter 4).

In summary, Ishkashimi experiences of post-socialism differ from other post-socialist places because (1) they have a strong nostalgia for the Soviet state that is only slightly tempered by various memories of suppression; (2) there is a lack of support and, indeed, cynicism about the Tajik state, which is in part due to the Tajik state’s incapacity to support them in the way of the former Soviet state and in part due to memories of President Rahmon and his party fighting against Badakhshanis during the Tajik Civil
War; and (3) these Ismailis look to their religious leader, the Aga Khan, and his institutions as a replacement paternalist centre and redistributive power who, in some ways, is more satisfactory that the former Soviet state since the Imam enables religious practice, but in other ways is unable to do what the Soviet state did, namely provide enough jobs with living wages for everyone.

As the dissertation explores what have been the ongoing legacies of Ishkashimis’ expectations of the state (Chapters 4 and 5), it also unpacks how Ishkashimis accommodate the changes that are simultaneously taking place. The three main changes I examine are: the reliance on labour migration and the resultant emptying of the villages as more and more Ishkashimis leave the district for Dushanbe and Russia to earn a living and support their families (Chapter 6); the improvement of life on the Afghan side of the river and increase in contact with cross-border kin (Chapter 7); and the physical (zahiri) presence of the Imam (and his institutions) in the region where Ishkashimis are used to having just a spiritual (batini) relationship with the Imam (Chapter 8).

Before moving on to an outline of the dissertation, it is worth clarifying what I mean by the word “accommodate”. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2011), the word has three senses that are applicable for this dissertation: (1) to adapt to, (2) to equip, prepare, make provision for, allow; hence to assist, provide comfort or convenience to (3) to bring into harmony. The word can be both transitive and intransitive and, in its transitive form, is sometimes reflexive. This means that subsumed within the concept of “accommodating to change” is both the sense that Ishkashimis are adapting themselves to change, and that others are making these changes more convenient for them. Making change consistent often entails showing the correspondence of that which has become different to whatever it was before, but sometimes Ishkashimis also settle difference by coming to terms with differences on their own accord.

Ultimately, the question of accommodation is one of how Ishkashimis sometimes, with the help of others including the state, religious and development institutions, harmonize change. What emerges in each of the chapters that follow is that as Tajik Ishkashimis accommodate change, they focus on the maintenance of social relations. The importance of reproducing social relations is one way in which they see themselves as carrying on the legacy of the Soviet socialist past. But oftentimes the relations they produce differ from those of the past or, in some cases, are altogether new. In order to indicate the various ways in which Tajik Ishkashimis produce and reproduce social relations, in the title of the dissertation, “Re-producing Social Relations”, the word “reproducing” is hyphenated.
Chapter Outline

This dissertation begins with two chapters, Chapter 2 “Home(s): Methods and Methodologies” and Chapter 3 “Setting the Scene” that explain how the research project was carried out and provide the reader with some knowledge of the history of Tajik Ishkashim.

Chapter 4, “We’re post-Soviet. We’re not post-socialist” further develops the argument made thus far, examining the legacies of socialism in terms of Tajik Ishkashimis’ expectations of what a state should provide. I demonstrate that Tajik Ishkashimis experienced the Soviet Union as an allocative centre that benefitted them greatly. While the post-Soviet Tajik state continued to work as a strong centre, resisting the complete privatization of land and retaining control of social services including hospitals and schools, it was unable, at the time of my fieldwork, to provide for Tajik Ishkashimis in the way of the former Soviet state. The Imam and his institutions went some way toward filling this gap, making the Imam appear to be the new paternalist centre. I then examine how these changes have, in turn, altered the way that Tajik Ishkashimis relate to work and labour. Although they continue to have a paternalist centre, that this centre is not the state has affected the way people relate to work.

Chapter 5 “Making money is not bad: Moralizing market relations” also explores the ongoing legacies of Tajik Ishkashimis’ expectation that the paternalist centre should provide for them within the framework of what I call an “economy of grace”. Drawing on Pitt-Rivers’ theorization of the concept “grace” as a gift of excess that the receiver is never expected to (be able to) return, I trace the ways in which this economy of grace continues to frame post-Soviet engagement with the Imam and his institutions, if not with the Tajik state. I then explore the moral legacies of Soviet socialism by examining how Ishkashimis try to maintain values that they associate with socialism, most notably the privileging of social relations over the market. Ishkashimis try to maintain such relations with one another through an economy of favours, avoiding the marketization of social relations as much as possible. But favours are not always good; the wrong favours prevent the right relations from developing. It is here that the “economy of grace” becomes relabelled as “corruption” and is used to explain why a given system or institution does not work. In this vein, even though the AKDN does not always work as well as they want it to, Ishkashimis can continue to see the Imam as infallible because Ishkashimis separate the Imam from those who work for him, just as they separate their
understandings of the ideal forms of socialism and capitalism from the reality of these systems in practice.

Where both the Tajik state and the AKDN fail to provide for Tajik Ishkashimis in the way of the former Soviet state, Ishkashimis turn to labour migration. Chapter 6 “Labour migration: Maintaining a normal home” takes a closer look at Ishkashimis’ everyday lives. I draw on Greenberg’s (2011) and Jansen’s (2011) definition of “normal” as the predictability of daily life to demonstrate that remittances enable those living at home to maintain the rhythms and trajectories of “normal” village life. One of the effects of migration, however, is that the absence of migrants has made villages in Ishkashim no longer feel like “home”. There are few possibilities to establish a future in the district and consequently the Ishkashimis’ community has become transnational. I argue that for Tajik Ishkashimis, home and movement have become mutually constitutive as processes of home-making take place in a transnational space. Many hope that the Imam will create jobs in Ishkashim that will bring home migrants and make it possible for Ishkashim to once more be the spatial location of home-making processes. For the time being, it is my contention that wedding videos actualize this transnational home by giving hope that migrants who had been present in Ishkashim for when the wedding was taped might one day return.

In Chapter 7 “Afghanistan: The Tajik state and the AKDN at the border” I shift my attention to a different transnational relationship, namely that between Tajik Ishkashimis and their cross-border Afghan kin. The Imam and his institutions are also active in Afghanistan, and AKDN development projects on the Afghan side of the river have improved life in ways that are visible from the Tajik side of the river. Ishkashimis are pushing for the Tajik state to loosen its restrictions on the AKDN so the institution can pursue its projects on the Tajik side to the same extent as it has done on the Afghan side. But there is a tension at play. A bridge and official border crossing funded by the AKDN that connects Tajik and Afghan Ishkashim has also opened up the potential to activate relationships with Afghan kin from whom Tajik Ishkashimis had been separated for decades. Tajik Ishkashimis are ambivalent about how close they want to become with their cross-border relations. Even as they acknowledge both their shared genealogical relatedness and their shared belief in the Imam, Tajik Ishkashimis feel most comfortable when they can look upon Afghan Ishkashimis as living remnants of Tajiks’ own past since this makes it possible to view themselves, by comparison, as modern. While Tajik Ishkashimis want the AKDN to have a greater presence in the region, they also want the
Tajik state to firmly enforce the border to prevent them from having to negotiate the values and norms that define what it means to be Ishkashimi with their Afghan kin. I suggest that Tajik Ishkashimis’ ambivalence on this point reflects their uncertainty about the roles they hope both the Tajik state and the AKDN will play in their future.

Chapter 8 “Being a good Ismaili: Striving to achieve batini didar” shows the Aga Khan’s reach beyond the AKDN. With an ethnographic analysis of the Imam’s visit to Badakhshan in 2008 (darbar), I suggest that it is not just the leader of the AKDN that a hundred thousand Badakhshanis made economic sacrifices to see but also a religious leader, whose presence aids in the quest to achieve batini didar. This quest was important even before 1991 but has become a social phenomenon in the post-Soviet context. In his batini role, the Imam commands a moral order; people need to be good in order to achieve spiritual enlightenment. But being good is not defined by orthopraxy. Instead, Ishkashimis strive to be good in their own ways within the context of the changing socio-economic circumstances.

Existing anthropological literature on the Imam’s post-Soviet influence in Badakhshan focuses on this zahiri role that the Imam plays with only a passing note that “devotion” to the Imam facilitates the Imam’s development projects (Keshavjee 1998; Akiner 2002; Freizer 2005; Bliss 2006; Steinberg 2006; De Cordier 2008; Settle 2011). Based on my research, I strongly suggest that the relationship between Badakhshanis’ devotion for the Imam and their commitment to his development projects merits more than a passing note. Crucially, the mix of different economic systems currently in play works largely because of the Imam. He is what people see and focus on.
Chapter 2

Home(s): Methods and Methodologies
In this chapter I use the notion of “home” to think through the methods I used to conduct fieldwork. I question the home/field dichotomy by examining what “home” is (or becomes) in the “field” and how the “field” can come back to an anthropologist’s “home”.

Problematizing the Home/Field Dichotomy

Gupta and Ferguson (1992) suggest that anthropologists can best problematize cultural difference when it is not conceived of in the dichotomy “us” vs. “them” but at the borderline, the point of contingency where the fixity of “ourselves” and “others” as categories is destabilized. They advocate innovative fieldwork approaches to reflect the understanding that difference is mapped onto multiple grids and not only onto that of physical territory. Multi-sited research, or conducting anthropology “at home” amongst the majority population in the United States or Europe, Gupta & Ferguson propose, could contribute to the problematization of the neat separation between “home” and “field”, “here” and “there”, “self” and “other”. My dissertation demonstrates that fieldwork need not be conducted in a familiar place for such dichotomies to be contested.

My “field” fits a textbook definition of what Gupta and Ferguson describe as Malinowskian orthodoxy: I “worked for a long time in an isolated area, with people who speak a non-European language, and [I] lived in ‘a community,’ [that was] small, in authentic, ‘local’ dwellings” (1997: 13). My own experience with fieldwork demonstrates that there are many networks that connect people across geographical boundaries. When I arrived in Ishkashim, I found myself not only in a place of strangeness and difference but also one of connection and familiarity. Networks that connected the people in Ishkashim with me, even before we first met, stretched across state borders and between global cities and rural areas in seemingly remote places.

My entry into the field traced a path through this network. In August 2008, I left Vancouver to begin fieldwork. I had a plane ticket booked to Moscow, where I planned on staying for a week before going on to Tajikistan. It was in Moscow that I met Olim, a Tajik Ishkashimi who told me about his village and encouraged me to visit his parents once I arrived in Badakhshan. But to explain how I met Olim I need to go back to Manchester.

This is not to say that all anthropologists agree with Gupta and Ferguson’s argument. My argument in this chapter is in line with that of Frederick Barth (1969) who sees identity as generally fluid and only defined at the point of a border where people confront someone they see as different to them (see Chapter 6). The categories of “us” and “them” are not permanent but situational.
I am, like the Badakhshanis with whom I work, an Ismaili Muslim. My ancestors come from an Indian mercantile caste, the *khojas*, many of whom now identify as Ismaili. Many *khojas* have lived outside India for generations, first in East Africa and later in the United Kingdom and Canada. My parents are practicing Ismailis and I too attend the Ismaili mosque (*jamatkhane*) when time permits. During my pre-fieldwork year in Manchester, I met a young *khoja* woman who had just moved to Manchester, Sabhira, in *jamatkhane*. I told her about my research and excitedly noted that I had just booked my flights to Moscow, en route to Tajikistan. Sabhira responded that a family she had been very close to while growing up in Kenya had just moved to Moscow. She offered to put me in touch with this uncle, Salim. Salim was in Moscow working to establish a new branch of the Aga Khan Foundation with the aim of helping Tajik Badakhshani migrants in the city.

Salim found my research interesting and, without offering the support of the Imam’s institutions, was extremely welcoming. He invited me to stay with his family in Moscow, arranged my onward flights from Moscow to Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, and began to put me in email contact with Tajik Badakhshani who he knew. Once I arrived in Moscow, Salim arranged meetings for me with those Tajik Badakhshaniis living in the city who spoke English. One day, he had some work to do with a group of Tajik Badakhshaniis and later invited them to stay for dinner so I could get to know them. It was at this dinner that I met Olim. Even though Olim gave me the name of his village and his parents’ names and phone numbers, I did not initially intend to visit them. My plan was still, as I had written in my pre-fieldwork research proposal, to conduct my research from Darwaz, a primarily Sunni district in Badakhshan with one Ismaili village.

When I arrived in Tajikistan, Zevar, the niece of a friend I had made in Moscow, picked me up from the airport and took me to her home. Zevar was fluent in English, having worked for foreign NGOs as a secretary for a number of years. Over the next couple of days I also spent time with Shabnam, a Shugni from Khorog who was living with Zevar’s family while completing her training to become a surgeon. Shabnam’s sister, Fawzia, was also visiting Dushanbe and would be returning soon to Khorog. Fawzia suggested

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10 For accounts of how *khoja* identity became defined, over time, as Shia Ismaili Muslim see Sila Khan 2004 and Asani 2011.
11 Pseudonyms are used for all people in this dissertation with the exception of Olim and his parents. After discussing the issue with the family on the telephone I have chosen not to use pseudonyms for them. It would be nearly impossible to hide their identities since my relationship to them is made clear in the accompanying film “The Other Side”. 

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that the two of us travel to Khorog together, inviting me to stay with her family in Khorog for as long as I liked. I accepted her offer and, after a week in Dushanbe, I found myself on a twenty-hour bumpy car ride that took us the 500 kilometres from Dushanbe to Khorog.

When we finally arrived, the last thing I wanted to do was get back into another car! Much to my chagrin, Fawzia’s mother, who I called Nan, explained that Darwaz was a further seven-hour drive away from Khorog. I recalled Olim’s offer of his family’s hospitality and inquired how far away Olim’s village, Avj, was from Khorog. I showed Nan the name and phone number of Olim’s family in Avj. Nan had been sceptical of my urge to go to Darwaz ever since I had told her about my plan; she did not know anyone there and was uncomfortable with the idea of my arriving in a village with no contacts at all. Nan knew of Olim’s parents. They had lived in Khorog for some time during the Soviet era and they had a very good reputation. Olim’s father, Shirinbek, was, like Olim himself, a surgeon. His wife, Hadija, was a nurse and they were known for being hospitable and respectable people. Nan insisted that I visit Avj first and not consider going to Darwaz until and unless I did not find Ishkashim suitable for my research. Convinced by the shorter driving distance, I agreed. Fawzia offered to come with me to Avj and so the two of us set off.

It did not take long after arriving in Shirinbek’s home to decide that this was where I would spend my year. We did not share a language with which we could communicate with one another since I spoke little Tajik at this point, but I felt an intangible sense of familiarity and comfort in their house. With Fawzia’s help with translating, I explained my project. Shirinbek and Hadija were eager for me to stay with them for a year while I conducted my research. Their readiness to welcome me into their house is, in part, a product of a strong ethic of hospitality (see Chapter 8). But there were also more practical reasons why Shirinbek and Hadija were so welcoming. Since labour migration had greatly depleted the population of the villages, there were not enough hands to bring in the harvest. Furthermore, Ishkashimis feared loneliness and boredom over the long winter months. I would help on both counts.

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12 Nan is the Shugni word for “mother”.
13 By “respectable” I mean that Olim’s parents were people whose character and behaviour matched Nan’s expectations of what makes a good Badakhshani. When speaking about Shirinbek and Hadija, Nan stressed that they were hardworking and well educated.
I will return shortly to this story to trace how Shirinbek’s home, my field, became my home. First, I wish to return to the proposition with which I began this section, that even this prototypical example of a Malinowskian fieldwork location offers an anthropologist the possibility to problematize the dichotomy of “us” versus “them”. The story I just told of my entry into the field demonstrates one way in which the fixity of these categories was destabilized even before I arrived in Tajikistan. For Shirinbek, I was not (only) a foreign researcher but (also) a guest sent to him by his son and accompanied by an acquaintance from Khorog. The network that connected us together stretched across the world, through Vancouver, Manchester, Moscow, Dushanbe, Khorog and Avj. From place to place, specific convivial relationships between particular actors led me to Avj.

Shirinbek and I, even before I flew to Moscow, already belonged to the same transnational social field (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004). Every person in the network that connected us together, Sabhira, Salim, Olim, Zevar, Shabnam, Fawzia, Nan, Shirinbek and Hadija, is an Ismaili Muslim. This is more than a passing coincidence. I only met Sabhira because we both pray at the same jamatkhane in Manchester. Salim was eager to have me stay with him because my research on Tajik Ismailis overlapped with his expertise and contact networks of Badakhshani migrants in Moscow but also because I was, like him, a khoja Ismaili. The cultural implications of our shared khoja traditions played an additional role in our connection. To give a few examples of how being a khoja Ismaili connected us:

- My grandmother in Vancouver prepared lasarn jo ladoo (a dish made from millet flour and garlic), which I brought with me for Salim’s family when I visited; he had emailed me that he had been unable to find millet flour in Moscow and had been craving this dish.

- We shared a number of ritual practices of prayer that are specific to the khoja practice of the Ismaili faith and in which I partook while I was in Moscow. This reinforced the connection we shared.

- My parents spoke with Salim and his wife on the phone before, during and after my visit to Moscow. One of the first things they did was to establish shared kinship connections. They later met in Khorog as both my parents and Salim, his wife and son all happened to be visiting Tajikistan at the same time.

- We all spoke Kucchi, a dialect of Gujarati spoken by many Khojas.
Even though Salim was a friend of an acquaintance, a girl I had met just once, because we were both *khoja* Ismailis, we also belonged to the same transnational community. It did not take much effort to establish a familial relationship since we not only shared a set of theological beliefs, but also language, kin, religious rituals, and recipes.

There are differences between the *khoja* and Central Asian traditions of the Ismaili religion. Many (but not all) of our religious rituals differ and I did not share language, kin or food with the Tajik Ismailis I met. But our shared belief in the Aga Khan as our religious leader was extremely significant. To share a love for and faith in a shared Imam led many Tajik Badakhshanis to see me as a sister of sorts. We were siblings who shared the same spiritual father. Throughout my year in Badakhshan, people I met at the bazaar or while driving from one place to another became friendlier when they learned that I was an Ismaili. I was no longer just a foreigner; I was also an Ismaili sister. Connecting to Shirinbek and others in Ishkashim through our shared Ismaili beliefs undoubtedly determined the type of knowledge my fieldwork experience produced.

This question of what it means to be related in religious terms – to belong to a shared transnational religious community – is a theme I explore further in Chapter 7 as I discuss cross-border relations between Tajik and Afghan Ishkashimis. I suggest that the Imam’s institutions play a significant role in providing the transnational Ismaili community with a means of relating to one another. Steinberg similarly demonstrates that the global Ismaili institutions provide Ismailis in various parts of the world with “a non-territorial, but highly-centralized community [that] can act as a primary site of allegiance” (2006: v). Steinberg focuses on participation in institutional activity as a way of making manifest one’s belonging to this transnational community. Similarly, in Chapter 8 I examine the transnational spiritual connections between Ismailis that is mediated by their Imam. I suggest that Ismailis are united by their shared vision of the Imam as a *batini* leader.

Of course a shared religion is not the only way in which seemingly “other” places and people can be made to seem contiguous. For instance, Malgorzata Biczky, a Polish anthropologist who has just begun her fieldwork in Badakhshan, told me in a phone conversation that her own experiences growing up in a post-socialist country helped her to find a point of contingency where the fixity of the categories “us” versus “them” could be destabilized. Fieldwork does not need to be conducted by an indigenous anthropologist at “home” in the West, in order to problematize the dichotomy between “home” and “field”. Transnational social fields connect home and field even when these two places appear to be diametrically opposed.
Shirinbek’s home in the village of Avj became my base. Shirinbek and Hadija are important actors in this dissertation. Not only did they serve as my principal “informants”, but it was also through them that I connected with others in the district. A brief biography of their lives is, therefore, helpful. Shirinbek was born in Avj and Hadija was born in Ren. Both studied in Dushanbe before returning to Ishkashim, where they met in the district hospital in the Rayon. After getting married, they lived and worked in Dushanbe and in Khorog. Their return to life in the village coincided with the fall of the Soviet Union.

Their oldest son, Jamshed, went missing in the first months of the Tajik civil war. Unable to cope with the grief, they chose to leave their memories behind in Khorog and moved back to Shirinbek’s home village in 1992. Shirinbek took charge of the hot water spring treatment center and hospital located in Avj. Hadija worked as a nurse at this hospital. When I moved in with them, both were retired, although Shirinbek continued to work as a surgeon, living and working in the Rayon three days a week, to augment his pension.

I spent the first month of fieldwork living in Shirinbek and Hadija’s house without leaving its environs. This gave me a chance to learn Tajik, and with the harvest to be brought in there was more than enough work for me to help with. Shirinbek and Hadija’s daughter, Gulia, had given birth to a girl the day I moved into the house. In addition to Gulia’s newborn and older daughter, two more of Hadija and Shirinbek grandchildren, whose parents were working in Moscow, also lived with us. Since Gulia was bed-ridden following her birth, I was the only woman, apart from Hadija, old enough to do the housework and care for the children. As Shirinbek was away for half the week working and Hadija spent the days in the fields, I did the cooking and cleaning inside the house. As a woman, it was easy for me to take on these gendered tasks. Even though I did not speak the language when I first arrived, I was able to peel potatoes and dress a child, activities that men do not often perform. In that first month, a (female) representative

14 Gulia is Hadija’s brother’s daughter. Hadija’s brother died when Gulia was three years old. Gulia’s birth mother had seven children to care for and Hadija took the youngest three to ease her sister-in-law’s burden. Within a year, two of these children returned to their birth mother, but Gulia stayed with her aunt. Eventually, Gulia’s adoption was formalized with the signing of adoption papers. Gulia continued to maintain a close relationship with her birth mother, Gulhunzo, until Gulhunzo passed away. Gulia remains close with her brothers and sisters by birth, considering them siblings and not cousins. She considers Hadija’s children to be brothers and sisters also. In this way, her adoption has intensified her relations.

15 An Ishkashimi woman once told me: “Men are like guests in their own house.” The point she was making is not that men do not do any work but that their work is located outside of the house itself, in the fields. When men enter the four walls of their house, they are served and waited on much like a guest (female or male).
from nearly every house to which Shirinbek and Hadija were related came to visit Gulia and give their muborak bodi (good wishes) to the newborn baby. My first introduction to these Ishkashimi villagers, therefore, consisted of my serving them a cup of tea and welcoming them. I played the role of the daughter of the house. Throughout Ishkashim I became known as “the Canadian daughter of Shirinbek” and only secondarily as an anthropologist.

During my first few days in Avj, Shirinbek’s children and grandchildren who live in Khorog and Dushanbe were still enjoying their summer vacation in Avj. Everyone called Shirinbek “Bobo”, meaning “grandfather” and so too did I. Hadija was called “Jia”, which I assumed to be a shortened version of her name, and so I called her Jia as well, not thinking to call her “Aunt” (Hola or Amma). After some time I realized that “Jia” meant “mother”. I continued to call her this. It would have been strange to distance myself from her at this point and it suited the way our relationship had developed. Continuing to call Shirinbek “Bobo”, however, was slightly more problematic. Once his older grandchildren returned to school in the larger cities, four grandchildren remained, all under the age of five. They began to mimic Gulia, calling Shirinbek “Daddy” instead of “Bobo”. I was left as the only person calling him “Bobo” since I felt a bit strange calling him Daddy. I already had a Daddy. I did not have a Jia or a Nan, so those titles did not seem to interfere with my relationship with my own mother. But after some time, Shirinbek raised the issue, telling me casually that it made no sense for me to call him “grandfather” especially because his own grandchildren were calling him Daddy. And so I began to call him Daddy (Dedi). That I call Hadija and Shirinbek “Jia” and “Dedi” placed me within the Ishkashimi kinship system significantly more clearly than if I had, from the beginning, used the more generic terms for “uncle” and “aunt”. I became a part of Dedi and Jia’s family life in a very specific way, assuming the responsibilities of a daughter while they in turn acted as my parents.

16 Hola (maternal aunt) or Taga (maternal uncle) is often used as a polite form of address to a stranger who appears to be a generation older. Appa (older sister) or Aka (older brother) is used for someone older within the same generation. These are the terms used to address neighbours, old friends, vendors at the bazaar and even a random person on the street. But in more familiar situations, using these terms, particularly Appa and Aka, is more than simply a sign of respect. It also indicates the (symbolic) presence of a kinship relation in such a way that it invokes an incest taboo. As one man told me, when young women call him Aka it makes him feel castrated. It is a clear indication that there is no potential for a future sexual relation.

17 In one extreme example of this, a young man came to Dedi to formally ask for my hand in marriage. Since he was locally understood to be my father, the young man believed Dedi had the authority to give me away.
Even as Dedi and Jia incorporated me into their home, many Ishkashimis remained aware that I already had my own home. In fact, I already had two, one in Vancouver and one in Manchester. Just as migrants continue to be active in the lives of those in Ishkashim (see Chapter 5), Ishkashimis presumed that I too would continue to be active in processes of home making in Vancouver and Manchester. My home with Dedi and Jia would be my third. People who met me for the first time found it surprising to hear me address Shirinbek as ‘‘Dedi’’. After the initial surprise wore off, nearly everyone accepted our relationship. But in no way did my being Dedi’s daughter negate my other home(s).

The first things that Jia and Dedi told people about me were that (1) I was an Ismaili who prayed with Jia every day and (2) that my parents had come from Canada to visit Ishkashim and they continued to phone me every day or two. The first point marked that I was an Ismaili sister, while the second noted that my parents in my Canadian home were worried about their unmarried daughter travelling alone. These two points emphasized that I shared similar values to those espoused by Ishkashimis themselves, making it even more convincing that they could incorporate me into their home. One more point leads on from this. Not only do I have multiple homes, but my relationship with Dedi and Jia has also multiplied the number of homes they have. As Dedi says near the end of the film that accompanies this dissertation “The Other Side”, “We have another house in Canada” (“Yak khona e digar dar Canada dorim”).

In Ishkashim, daily life is built around houses. People stay in their own houses, a space delineated not by a building but by an area relationally constituted through the domestic

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18 If we follow Massey (1994)’s understanding of place as process, then Ishkashimis’ home cannot be defined by just one house or even by the 6 villages that constitute the administrative district. Home is, as I demonstrate in Chapter 5, made through transnational relations. Their relationships connect Ishkashimis living in Ishkashim to migrants in Moscow, to kin living across the river in Afghanistan, to the Imam in Paris and to other Ismailis living in a number of countries around the world. These connections all work together to make a “home” that is at once located in a house in Ishkashim and also transnationally produced.

19 I often overheard people saying: “Look! She’s even calling him Dedi!” (“Bebin! Ura Dedi megad!”).

20 Gulia often had the same issue with Dedi’s distant relatives, or with Dedi and Jia’s old friends from before Gulia was adopted who knew Dedi and Jia to have had only three sons and a daughter. For these relations, Gulia was not a daughter, although she could be like a daughter. Her primary identity shifted back to her birth parents, and her principal “home” – the primary family to which she belonged – reverted to her birth parents.

21 In February 2012, Olim visited Vancouver and stayed with my parents (I was in Manchester at the time). In an email to me, telling me about his trip and the relationship he had developed with my parents, Olim wrote: “I was introduced to Jamati leaders [leaders of the Ismaili religious institutions in Vancouver] as ‘…my Tajik son from Russia’” (February 22, 2012). Drawing attention to our parallel experiences visiting one another’s families, he went on to write: “It seems like now you are a specialist in Pamiri Ismailism and I’m the one in [the] khoja tradition” (Ibid).
work that must be done. Frequently, these spaces overlap with those of neighbours, for instance through the chores of herding sheep or tilling the fields. Visiting someone else’s house outside of this context is an event, one marked by the donning of a more formal outfit and, for women, putting on a bit of makeup. The home is the locus of social activity and people are eager for guests to come to provide a break from the routine. Guests are fed, and hosts are often eager for them to spend the night. There is much to be said on the extension and reception of hospitality (see Chapter 5) but my focus here is to stress the particularity of doing research in a region that places so much prominence on the house as a place not only of domestic but also of social activity.

The only times people gathered outside of a home or extended domestic space was when standing by the road trying to hitch a ride to a neighbouring village, at the weekly cross-border Afghan bazaar or when going to the hot springs to bathe. These situations are all purpose driven, with socializing a by-product. I made it a point to visit schools, to play ping-pong with students in the school’s gymnasium, to go to the bazaar each week, and to bathe at the hot springs also on a weekly basis. But it was rare for me to make these trips unaccompanied. Since Ishkashimis themselves do not like to be alone, they presumed that I, too, would feel similarly. For this reason, a neighbour, friend or family member accompanied me on my outings whenever they could. Always being in the company of others was, at times, comforting but often it was frustrating since it limited with whom I could talk and about what topic.

Another strategy I employed was visiting Dedi and Jia’s extended family living in the other villages in Ishkashim. Visiting other villages in this way did not mean leaving the house for a public space but simply moving from one house to another house. Once a guest, it was difficult to leave that house. While, on occasion, I managed to have lunch in one house then dinner in another, it was often difficult to suggest moving to a different house without insulting the host by insinuating that another house might be preferable. In order to visit as many houses as possible without upsetting my hosts, I made it clear that my home was with Jia and Dedi. I never stayed elsewhere for longer than three days at a time.

After I had acquired sufficient fluency in the Tajik language, I established a travel routine that paralleled the movements of Ishkashimis around me. I followed Dedi as he went to the rayon each week to work at the hospital. Staying from Monday to Wednesday, I spent my two nights with various families from the rayon and from Ren – all relatives of either Dedi or Jia. Sometimes I managed to spend one night each in two different houses, other
times I spent both nights in the same place. On Saturdays I went to the Afghan bazaar after which I would sometimes accompany a friend back to Yakshvol or Mulvoj. I would walk back to Avj on Sunday. My nights spent in the houses of a number of different Ishkashimis helped me to place my intimate experiences in Dedi and Jia’s house into perspective. By routinizing my movement in a manner that corresponded to the mobility patterns of those around me, I was able to orchestrate conversations with a variety of people in casual settings. These informal interactions, transcribed in the form of field notes, constitute the primary source of “data” for this dissertation.

The implication of this research method is that my understanding of Ishkashimi life is from a very located perspective within one extended kin group. In Ishkashim, it is possible to trace a genealogical connection to nearly everyone. As such, even though I did not conduct formal interviews with state officials and others in positions of power, I had conversations with many of them who were Jia and Dedi’s extended relatives. I occasionally stayed at their houses, speaking with them casually over dinner and into the night. Sometimes in Jia and Dedi’s house, when these state officials came as guests, I would help cook and serve a meal over which we would sit and talk.

Since I often related to Ishkashimis in the same way that they related to one another themselves, there was no clear distinction between what was “research” and what was just regular life. According to Hastrup (1987), what makes fieldwork relations different from those we otherwise have is that ethnographic research is like looking at a mirror in which both one’s informants and oneself are reflected. In this way, even as the “field” increasingly feels like home, the anthropologist continues to hold a third-person perspective from which they observe not only others but also him/herself. In the same vein, the anthropologist becomes a familiar stranger to both those s/he is studying, and to him/herself. Even when I felt at home in Ishkashim, once I began to think like a fieldworker, I immediately found myself, to borrow Weil’s terms, both a “stranger-at-home” and in a “home-with-stranger” (1987: 196).

**The Field at Home**

In this section I explore some of the ways in which “the field” comes back “home” with us even after the year of fieldwork has been completed. Weil (1987) speaks of how, in the process of writing, we [anthropologists] find ourselves back in the “dream” of being in the field. But this dream is not lived only when writing. Just as many other anthropologists do, I have continued to stay in touch with Dedi and Jia and their
immediate and extended family since my return to Manchester. Jia and Dedi are used to arrivals and departures and the absence of close kin. Their two sons live in Moscow and their daughter lives in Dushanbe. I have become, like them, a migrant, geographically absent from the homeland but still active in the network of relations that constitutes “home”. As I argue through my discussion of economic migration in Chapter 5, remaining active in this transnational home is as much, if not more, about showing that you care and that you remember those at home (and vice versa) as it is about remittances.

There are a number of ways that I continue to remain active in my Ishkashimi home from a distance. I call Avj regularly. If I do not call for a couple of weeks, Jia gets worried and asks Olim, who also calls Avj regularly, to track me down through email. Through these phone calls, I keep up with local gossip, learning about who passed away and who got married. I also have the opportunity to feed back some of my ideas and arguments while asking for further clarification on certain points. I call other Ishkashimis once a month or once a year, in part to demonstrate that I have not forgotten them even though I am not in Ishkashim with them. These phone calls also give my Ishkashimi relations the opportunity to demonstrate that they have not forgotten me either.22 They tell of the last time I came up in a conversation, reminisce about my time in Tajikistan and tell me of an old wedding video they had re-watched in which I was dancing.23

My fieldwork was not multi-sited. It was conducted within the “arbitrary location” of the administrative district of Ishkashim and within a clearly defined time period of one year. I draw the term “arbitrary location” from Candea (2007). Candea, like Marcus and Fischer (1986) and Gupta and Ferguson (1997), argues that the field should not be conceived of as a naturally bound place. But Candea argues against the multi-sited approach to fieldwork advocated by Marcus & Fischer and Gupta & Ferguson, demonstrating that while a multi-sited approach is meant to deconstruct the notion that cultures are territorially bounded, multi-sited research ends up reproducing this holism but on a different grid. Candea proposes that choosing and sticking to a bounded geographic area as a place from which to conduct research results in highlighting its incompleteness when the arbitrariness of this decision is acknowledged. An arbitrary fieldwork location,

22 It is rare for Ishkashimis in Ishkashim to call their relatives in Moscow or Dushanbe; it is usually the migrant who calls home.
23 Gulia, one of the people I became the closest with during my time in Ishkashim, went one step further; over a year after I had left the field, she gave birth to a girl whom she named Nafeesaa, after my own sister. Gulia had already named her older daughter, born the day I moved into Avj, after me.
he explains, “gives us something to strive against, a locus whose incompleteness and contingency provide a counterpoint from which to challenge the imagined totality of ‘cultural formations’” (2007: 180). Following Candea’s call, I use Ishkashim as a “contingent window into complexity”. My fieldwork was “arbitrarily located” in the 6 villages that constituted the district of Ishkashim. Through this location I was able to study a range of connections with people, places and institutions elsewhere. Of course, since Ishkashim is defined as much by its links to the outside as it is by its own boundaries, after returning home from the field, I became one such outside link.

This is not the only way that my field appeared in my post-fieldwork “home”. Both while in the field and for some time after my return, I understood my research to be about Ishkashim. These were the people to whom I was ethically bound. What I was later forced to acknowledge, however, was that non-Tajik Ismailis living in other parts of the world self-identified as belonging to the same (Ismaili) network of relations as Ishkashimis. To research the Ismaili religion through Ishkashim meant that Ismailis elsewhere in the world also saw me as having taken up the research and representation of the transnational religion as a whole. This meant that I should be held accountable to the transnational Ismaili community. That I was Ismaili myself further emphasized this obligation of mine. I raise these issues here so as to demonstrate that in choosing what to include and what to exclude in this dissertation I have had to be mindful not only of the Tajik Ishkashimis with whom I conducted my research, but also of the transnational Ismaili community who also read themselves in my work, oftentimes (but not only) through how they expect the Ismaili institutions to respond. Even though I have bound my research methods to the geographic boundaries of the Ishkashim district, this contingent window demonstrated, without needing to multiply my research sites, that the Ismaili community cannot be spatially bound. Through religious belief and identification, people who have never met one another felt closely related even though they did not share a language, cultural traditions, or political beliefs.

That my research with Ishkashimis could be seen to speak for a transnational community more generally is made clear in an experience I had whilst screening a rough cut of my dissertation film for a mixed Ismaili and non-Ismaili audience at the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS), an initiative of the Aga Khan, in London. Before discussing it, let me first take the opportunity to make some brief points about the role visual anthropology plays in this dissertation more generally. There are two instances in the dissertation where I examine how Ishkashimis use images – photographs and videos - to relate with people.
who are geographically separated from them. First, within my discussion of migration, I look at how wedding videos actualize family relationships across distance (Chapter 6). And second, I analyse how Ishkashimis relate to the images of the Imam in both *zahiri* and *batini* ways, questioning how the *zahiri* presence of the Imam has altered Ishkashimis’ engagement with the Imam’s image (Chapter 8). Together, these two parts of the dissertation demonstrate how Ishkashimis use visual media in different ways to adapt to the changes taking place around them in this post-Soviet context. They demonstrate the importance of context, both within the image and of the viewing situation, in framing the social relationships the image brings about.

In addition to analysing how Ishkashimis use images, I also use images myself as a form of representation. Through film I explore the cross border relationship between Tajik and Afghan Ishkashimis. The river Pyanj that separates these two countries was only enforced as a closed border in 1936. The footage I shot in Afghanistan raised some enlightening conversations amongst those Tajiks for whom I screened it. As Ishkashimi women observed that so-and-so in Afghanistan looked remarkably like one of their Tajik relations, the footage worked as a bridge to connect the communities and actualise relationships that were not otherwise active. Their favourite scenes were those of women in Afghanistan performing their everyday chores and speaking of how many cows they had, how often they were milked and whether or not they had trouble with foxes and wolves. Tajik Ishkashimis’ biggest criticism of my filming was that I did not shoot the meals we ate. I had often found myself so hungry and eager to eat that each time food was served I quickly put away the camera so I could eat myself and only succeeded in capturing one meal of *sheer choy* (milk tea). The Tajik Ishkashimis watching the footage commented on the flat bread being served, noting that Afghans, like Tajik Ishkashimis’ own ancestors, do not use yeast. But they were disappointed not to see the rice pilaf dishes we recounted being served. The way Ishkashimis used the footage I shot in Afghanistan to visualize and make connections with their cross-border neighbours echoes my aforementioned argument that, for Ishkashimis, images have the capacity to actualise relationships across distance. There is, of course, a rather significant difference, namely that with the footage I shot I, the anthropologist, am contributing to the building – and altering – of relationships between Tajik and Afghan Ishkashimis.

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24 *Sheer choy* is the staple diet in Badakhshan. It is eaten for the morning meal and sometimes also for lunch and/or dinner. It consists of a large bowl of black tea with milk and salt. Each person adds butter or fat to taste then soaks chunks of bread in the tea soup, eating the meal with a spoon.
Screening the raw footage for Tajik Ishkashimis is very different from screening an edited version of the film for a Western audience. The context in which my film is screened and the specificity of who a viewer is play strong roles in determining how the audience relates to my research project and to Tajik and Afghan Ishkashim. I will now return to my discussion of how Ismailis in the West see themselves being represented in my work on Tajik Ishkashimis. I begin by describing the responses to a cut of my film at a work-in-progress screening at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London.

The majority of those present were khoja Ismailis and while there was a range of responses from amongst them, one man in particular was concerned about my portrayal of Sunni/Ismaili tensions on the Afghan side. He suggested I make two films, one for an Ismaili audience that could be much the same as it was, and one for a non-Ismaili audience that would be heavily censored. This way I could elicit a discussion on inter-religious relations in a safe environment while enabling the institutions to maintain control of the public image of the religion. Sunni/Ismaili relations are no longer an important theme in the film. As I re-edited the film to coincide with the main arguments of my chapter on the Tajik-Afghan border, inter-religious issues became secondary. Still, it is worth noting that I believe that the Tajik Ishkashims amongst whom I worked would actively encourage me to write about arguably contentious issues. As Dedi once told me, it is only by discussing, within an academic context, the problems present within a given society that these issues can be reconciled. The rigour of the academic process was, for him, sufficient to ensure the utility and validity of releasing a given issue into the public domain.

The critique levelled at me during the film screening came from a different perspective. The concern was with the public image of the Ismaili community. Problems within the community could and should be discussed amongst Ismailis but were, ideally, not to be made public. Unsurprisingly, this has informed, to a certain extent, studies of Ismaili history, theology, ritual and peoples. In order to maintain the integrity of this research project, I have not affiliated myself with any Ismaili institution and in this way am not formally accountable to any restrictions they might wish to place on my work. However, the reader of this dissertation should keep in mind that I myself am a practicing Ismaili. This has affected my access to knowledge about the faith and the relations I formed with Ishkashims and has also, both consciously and unconsciously, for better or for worse, informed my analysis of the material. Being an Ismaili also means that I do not wish to antagonize or alienate myself from the religion’s institutions. Notwithstanding certain
instances of self-censorship, I believe that my dissertation provides a unique contribution to knowledge about Tajik Ismailis and the Ismaili way of being that is not yet in the public domain and that few would be able to study.

To end this section, I wish to note the rapidly increasing popularity of Badakhshan as a place to conduct anthropological research. While I was in the field, two other PhD students were simultaneously carrying out research: Till Mostowlansky of the University of Bern who is looking at Ismaili/Sunni relations in the Murgab district and Zohra Ismaili of the University of Chicago whose work focuses on the politics of resource use. Two PhD dissertations that I draw on extensively in this dissertation have successfully been defended (Keshavjee 1998 at Harvard University; Steinberg 2006 at the University of Pittsburgh) and one other, a comparative analysis of mother death in childbirth in Tajik and Afghan Badakhshan, was in the writing up phase (Liese 2009 at Stanford University). Of these studies, only Steinberg has published a monograph based on his research (2011) while Keshavjee and Liese have published articles based on dissertation chapters (Keshavjee and Becerra 2000; Keshavjee, 2004, 2006; Liese 2010). Since my return to Manchester, I have become aware of at least half a dozen anthropologists with the intent to conduct fieldwork in Badakhshan. This means that at least a dozen PhD students studying for degrees in anthropology at European and American universities have conducted their fieldwork in Tajik Badakhshan since the fall of the Soviet Union. This does not take into account anthropologists studying at universities outside Euro-America or researchers in other fields. This is a significant number given the current population of the district is barely more than 200,000 (Statistical Agency of Tajikistan). While Tajik Badakhshan has thus far been greatly understudied, my dissertation comes at a time when its popularity is increasing at a very rapid rate.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that the boundaries of a place can never be clearly defined. In different ways, we try to hold them steady. This helps us to place ourselves in relation to those around us, be it as a kinsman or as a researcher. But in different contexts, these boundaries need to be redrawn, forcing us to acknowledge that divisions we otherwise presumed to be given might not always hold. In this dissertation I have picked the arbitrary location of Ishkashim from which to explore post-Soviet change and in the next chapter, I provide some historical context to the region. In so doing, I touch on how its boundaries have changed through time.
Chapter 3

Setting the Scene
Badakhshan is frequently described as one of the few untouched parts of the world whose imposing mountain ranges and narrow valleys keep the region in isolation. In his travelogue about Badakhshan in the early 20th century, Sir Aurel Stein describes Badakhshan as an “ancient historical scene” (1933: 331), suggesting that “this small corner of Asia, in its alpine seclusion, seemed indeed as if untouched by the change of ages” (319). Mingled in with his wonderment at encountering what appears to be pristine living history, Stein regularly compares his observations with those of travellers who preceded him and whose writings he has read. From as early as 350 BC, trade merchants and pilgrims have traversed these mountains (e.g. Stein 1933). This mountain range was a part of the Silk Route and the icy peaks of the “Pamir knot” were preferable to many travelers in the summer months than the Taklimakan desert to the north (Wood 2004).

Badakhshan might appear to be remote and inaccessible but such a characterization obscures just how connected it has also been to other parts of the world. The effects of international politics have always been, and continue to be, quite tangible (Kreutzmann 2003: 234).

In this chapter, I trace part of the political history of Badakhshan, beginning with the Great Game in the latter half of the 19th century, moving through the Soviet era, into the post-Soviet civil war and finishing with a brief introduction to the post-Soviet changes to land tenure. The chapter is divided into the following sections: “The Great Game”, “The Soviet Era” and “The 1990s”. These temporal frameworks are in no way uncontested and clearly defined periods. For one, the transitions from one period to the next take place over time. Although Soviet soldiers arrived in Badakhshan until 1920 and treaties and declarations officially establishing the creation of the USSR were signed in 1922, the beginning of the Soviet period is locally marked as 1936, the year when the border with Afghanistan was closed, even though land reform began some years before. Categories like “the great game” or “the civil war” do not necessarily hold significance in Ishkashim when labeled as such. The time that preceded Soviet rule is referred to simply as vaqt i bobogi (the time/period of our ancestors) while the civil war is vaqt e gushnagi (the time of hunger). This chapter does not seek to provide an ethnographical account of Badakhshani history from an Ishkashimi perspective but is more simply a review of the history of the region drawn from secondary sources with Ishkashimi accounts of the past sporadically noted. The aim is to provide a brief overview of the historical context.

25 The beginning of the Silk Route is often associated with the Han dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD). Wood suggests that certain parts of the route continued to be used as late as the 1930s (2004: 10).
26 Compare with Banerjee’s The Pathan Unarmed (2000), which is an ethnography of the past.
necessary for a reader who has no familiarity with the region to follow the arguments of the chapters that follow.

**The Great Game**

For much of the 19th century, Britain and Russia engaged in strategic competition over sovereignty in Central and South Asia known as the “Great Game” (Kleveman 2003). Russia and Britain, two colonial powers expanding their reaches into Central Asia and India respectively, found themselves in a number of contests as they tried to define the borders between the two empires. The mountainous region of Badakhshan appeared to be a suitable buffer zone, ruled in part by the Russian protectorate of Bukhara and in part by Afghanistan, a country whose foreign policy was periodically in British control.

While the Russians and British were thus engaged, the region of Badakhshan was being ruled by the Bukharan Khanate, a feudal state, which had been in control of the region since the 16th century (Noelle 1997: 87-97). In the late 18th century, a change of dynasties in the Khanate led to the formation of the Emirate of Bukhara. These Bukharan Emirs ruling the region of Badakhshan surrendered control to the Afghan state in 1873 (Ibid). The boundary between these two regimes was never clearly defined and some historians suggest that both sides would have taxed the local Badakhshani leaders (Bliss 2006: 63). Multiple layers of authority simultaneously prevailed with regional sovereignty in a district like Wakhan or Shugnan under the authority of a local mir who in turn reported to either Bukhara or Afghanistan (Bliss 2006: 143). Given that the mirs of Badakhshan were themselves ethnically Uzbek, in what follows I use the term “Badakhshani” to refer to the predominantly Ismaili population living in the mountains of this region.27 There are also Badakhshanis who are Sunni Muslims but their experience of the region’s history would have been somewhat different than that of the Ismailis who are the subject of this

27 It is unclear exactly when the Badakhshanis became Ismailis. It is possible that the conversion process could have begun as early as the 10th or 11th century under the self-professed Ismaili Samanid ruler, Nasr ibn Ahmad Samai (Ibid: 60). Nasir-i-Khusrow, a da’i (missionary) from the Fatimid empire, who is popularly credited with converting the Zoroastrians living in the area, fled to Badakhshan at the end of this period, having been chased out of Merv (present-day Turkestan) by Sunnis (Steinberg 2011: 111). However, Ivanow (1948) suggests that when Khusrow arrived in Badakhshan in the 11th century, the present residents of Shugnan, Ishkashim and Wakhan had not yet arrived in the area. It is known that Ismaili refugees fled the Ismaili fort of Alamut due to persecution by the Sunni Mongols in the 13th century (Daftary 1990) and it is suggested that they escaped to Badakhshan where they were able to maintain their religious beliefs. The Pamir mountains were one of the few places that evaded Mongol rule (Rakowska-Harmstone 1970). This is because by this time freely flowing trade along the Silk Road had come to an end (Wood 2004). As a consequence, the Pamirs were seen as “unimportant” by regional powers (Bliss 2006: 62). This isolation served to protect the Ismailis from religious persecution by first Mongol and, and thereafter, Turkish rulers (Daftary 1990), all of whom were Sunni Muslims.
dissertation and as such I will make it clear when I write about Badakhshanis who are Sunnis.

Ishkashimis’ accounts indicate, in their conglomeration of all pre-Russian rulers as “Sunni”, that there was little difference from their perspective between being ruled by Afghans or by Bukharans. Bliss makes a similar observation in his analysis of an account of the political history of Badakhshan written in German by Grevemeyer (1982):

One notices that, on the one hand, the change of rulers is stressed (between Kokand, Bukhara, an autonomous Badakhshan and the Afghan kingdom) and, on the other, that a remarkable continuity in the privileges of the upper class may be observed. This means that, despite all the wars and repeated new overlords, the sayyids, mir, pir, or however they are named, as well as the liegemen in the sub-regions and villages, managed to retain their places at the upper end of society and thus their privileges as well (2006: 148).

Ishkashimis with whom I spoke about their pre-Soviet history explained to me, citing history books in the Russian language as well as stories passed down from generation to generation, that for centuries, Ismaili women in Badakhshan had been raped and abducted by Sunnis (both Afghan and Bukharan) while Ismaili men had been sold away as slaves. Primary and secondary sources corroborate these stories, explaining Afghan and Bukharan oppression of Badakhshanis as being either a product of or manifested within the rhetoric of religious difference. Stein speaks of deserted villages he passed in the southern regions of Badakhshan as the practice of local rulers to sell women and children as slaves caused extensive emigration to the north (1933: 316). Munphool Pundit, in his correspondence to the British Political Department, India Office in 1867, also explains the induction of Ismailis (who he refers to as simply “Shia”) into slavery using the Sunni/Shia (Ismaili) divide:

Following a doctrine of their own creation, that the “Sharah” (Muhammadan law) permits the Sunni to make slaves of Kafirs, amongst whom they include the Shias, they have been in the habit of capturing their Shia and Kafir subjects, as well as Siahposh Kafirs or others kidnapped or forcibly brought away (Pundit 1870: 37).

Attempting to analyze this oppression, Frank Bliss, a former AKDN aid worker who has written one of the most comprehensive historical accounts of Tajik Badakhshan, suggests that violence against the Ismaili Badakhshanis was, in his words, “ideological” (2006: 63). Citing Kreutzmann (1996), he explains that Sunni rulers would have seen the Badakhshanis as “shameful Shiites” and “false Ismaelites” (Kreutzmann 1996: 79 in Bliss 2005: 63).
Hakim Elnazarov and Sultonbek Aksakalov, two Tajik Badakhshani Ismaili researchers working at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London have also written of the Badakhshani experience of pre-Soviet Afghan and Bukharan rule. Drawing on diaries and reports of Russian military officials stationed in Badakhshan they argue that rule by the Sunni Afghans and Bukharans subjected Ismaili Badakhshanis to “ruthless persecution, often genocidal in nature” (2011: 50). According to their research, Sunni rulers suspected the Ismailis of serving as spies and agents for both the Russians and the British. But as Bliss notes, it is important not to consider the Badakhshanis only as victims of oppressive rule by other ethnic and religious groups. Bliss reports that in the mid-19th century, the Shugnis launched an attack against the Kyrgyz of Murgab, expelling them temporarily from the region (2006: 66). Badakhshani resistance against the Afghans and Bukharans also played a role in establishing who ruled the region.

In the late 18th century, Badakhshani Ismaili leaders had, for the first time since their conversion to the Ismaili religion, established direct links with the Imam who was, at the time, based in Bombay, India (Ibid). The Imam had confirmed the status of the Badakhshani pirs, a hereditary position, and these leaders began collecting zakat (tithes) from the Ismaili population and transporting this wealth to Bombay (Ibid). By the late 19th century and into the early 20th century, these pirs held considerable control over their Ismaili followers, although Afghan, Bukharan and Russian rulers all treated them with suspicion. From the perspective of the Bukharan (and later, the Russian) leaders, Aga Khan III’s loyalty to the British provided a constant concern that the local Ismaili population would support the British. The local Badakhshani Ismaili religious leaders, pirs, did in fact continue their contact with their Imam during this period.

In 1873, the Anglo-Russian treaty was signed, recognizing the Amu Darya (Pyanj river) as the border between the two protectorates of Russia and Britain. The problem with this treaty was that it gave Shugnan, Roshan and Wakhan (including Ishkashim) to Afghanistan (even though parts lay on the right Bukharan side of the river) and Darwaz to the Bukharans (even though parts lay on the left Afghan side) (Becker 1968: 103-4). Those signing the treaty had little familiarity with the region themselves and it was not until ten years after the drawing of the treaty that the official Russian Pamir Expedition reached the region of Badakhshan to examine it themselves.

When this expedition of Russians arrived in Badakhshan, the local Ismaili population was quick to approach them and appeal for support in defending themselves against the
Afghan and Bukharan rulers.\textsuperscript{28} Eventually, the appeals of these Badakhshansis reached St. Petersburg where, fearing that the Bukharan empire was under threat by Afghanistan, the Russian minister of foreign affairs raised the issue with the British ambassador. Recalling that the 1873 treaty listed the Amu Darya as the border between Bukhara and Afghanistan, the Russians requested that the Afghans retreat from land that belonged to Bukhara, even those parts of Shugnan, Roshan and Wakhan on the right bank of the river. It took nearly two decades, but eventually Britain agreed and the borderlines that continue to be used today were drawn (see Becker 1968: 157-8 for a more extended account of negotiations).

By 1898, Russian troops were stationed in three locations in the Bukharan west, two of which are known to have been in Khorog and Nud (Becker 1968: 157; see also Stein 1933). Nonetheless, the land continued to be a part of the Bukharan empire and, as such, the Bukharan Emirs continued to tax Badakhshansis. During years of drought, the Russians interceded on behalf of the Badakhshansis to prevent tax being collected that would inevitably lead to famine (Becker 1968: 215). Ismailis frequently complained to the Russian troops in Khorog and Ishkashim that they were oppressed by their Sunni Bukharan rulers and talks of annexing the western Pamirs to the Russian-controlled eastern Pamirs ensued. But the Russian commanders based in Tashkent refused out of fear that, should Russia directly control the western Pamirs, Britain might push to recover land elsewhere in exchange (Ibid). In 1905, a compromise with Tashkent was reached, whereby the Pamir Detachment was given the power to administer Shugnan, Roshan and Wakhan. Formally, the region remained a part of the Bukharan empire to ensure that there would be no retaliation by Britain. All taxes were abolished except for one token tax to the Bukharans, to honour the formality of their rule. Thus, 1905 marks the date when Russian rule began in all of Badakhshan.

Even today, Ishkashimis who recall this part of their history describe the Russians as saviours who had liberated Ismaili Badakhshansis from the tyranny of Sunni domination. Elnazarov & Aksakalov note that not only did the Russians stop Sunni oppression, but the Russian military also helped the Ismaili pirs to establish an irrigation system, building canals that enabled new types of seeds and crops to replace the opium previously cultivated in the region (2011: 52). But Akiner suggests that in comparison to the Russians’ modernization policies that drastically improved the lifestyle of Tajiks in the northern region of Leninabad, now called Khujand, there was relatively little

\textsuperscript{28} See Elnazarov and Aksakalov (2011: 51-2) for an account of rebellion against the Afghan rulers of the time led by a Shugni pir.
improvement to the daily life of Badakhshanis under this new regime. Where changes were felt was in a drastic reduction of taxes. In comparison to the Emirate of Bukhara, the Russians after 1905 collected half of the previous land tax, one-third of the livestock tax and only five percent of the harvest tax (Akiner 2001: 10).

I conclude this section with a brief note on the socio-economic status of Badakhshanis at the turn of the 20th century. Society during this period was extremely differentiated with a very large gap between the rich and the poor. Data collected by Russians at the end of the 19th century for the general “Pamir” region, lists nearly 75% of all households as poor. Approximately 60% of those classed as poor owned under a hectare of land and few had animals (Ibid: 150). That those classified as poor could also be landowners indicates the low productivity of land in Badakhshan. Only 2.6% were deemed rich, with more than 8.76 hectares of land (Bliss 2006: 149). More specific data from 1917 lists 5.9% as well off, 27.2% in the middle bracket and 66.9% as poor. Bliss goes on to observe that literature on Badakhshan before Soviet rule rarely mentions the type of food eaten by the well-off but focuses instead on foods, like grasses and wild herbs, used to stave off hunger at the end of winter (2006: 160). From this data, it becomes quite clear that Badakhshanis’ eagerness to be ruled by Russians was not only a product of their will to be relieved from Sunni oppression. Regardless of the religion of a ruler, or lack thereof, a drastic reduction in taxes and infrastructural help would understandably have been welcome.

**The Soviet Era**

In comparison with the neighbouring countries on, or near, the southern border – Afghanistan, Pakistan and almost certainly India too – the Pamiris did extremely well under the Soviet Union, especially from the mid-1950s onwards. This is why, in spite of having been subjected to often violent change under Stalin, and suffering continued denial of political rights under the Soviet system, most people are united in their criticism of the changes that took place after Tajikistan became independent. If you ask anyone about the advantages and disadvantages of the old and new systems, the honest reply is almost always: “We would like to have the Soviet Union back.” Although people do value democratic freedom, this does not help them cope with the actual physical hardships resulting from the present economic and political crisis (Bliss 2006: 243)

In this section I outline the historical context of the Soviet era in Badakhshan while touching briefly on contemporary literature suggesting that the very existence of Central Asian nations is a product of the Soviet state. I end this section by returning to Bliss’ quote above, providing some data that demonstrates how and why the Soviet system benefited the Badakhshan region so much.
In most of Tajikistan, the Tsarist regions were taken over by the Soviets in 1918 after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. Guerrilla-style *basmachi* revolutions followed suit in the north of Tajikistan, as in elsewhere in Central Asia (Akiner 2001: 10). But neither the initial Soviet presence nor the anti-Soviet resistance was immediately felt in Badakhshan. While the (Tsarist) Russian military based in Khorog dispersed in 1918, no Soviet soldiers arrived to take over control of the region (Elnazarov & Aksakalov 2001: 54). With no foreign power in control, in 1920 the Bukharan Emir re-conquered Khorog, declaring Badakhshan once more a province of the Bukharan empire. But less than a year later, Soviet soldiers arrived, welcomed by the local Badakhshanis who had already begun to revolt against the Bukharans (Ibid). Unlike the rest of Bukhara that formed the Bukharan People’s Soviet Republic in 1920 (Akiner 2001: 10), Tajik Badakhshan became part of the Soviet Turkestan Republic (Elnazarov & Aksakalov 2001: 54). Five years later, in January 1925, it joined the new Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) as an autonomous region. Even after the Soviets gained control of Badakhshan, local rulers, based in Afghanistan, continued to mount attacks on Soviet territory into the early 1930s (Bliss 2006: 74).

The majority of Ismaili Badakhshanis are deemed to have supported Soviet reforms that enhanced the social positioning of the oppressed classes, but some, mainly the *pirs* and the wealthy landlords, remained wary of changes to traditional structures of governance (Elnazarov & Aksakalov 2001: 54). Many Ishkashimis, particularly those who were Communist party members, opine that the Russian Soviets treated the Pamiris well, building schools, hospitals, cultural centers, powerhouses, roads, and airports, because the Pamiris were so welcoming of Russian rule (see Chapter 5). Badakhshanis were likely eager to welcome Soviet soldiers because the Soviet regime promised total rule by the Russians with no involvement by either Bukharans or Afghans, unlike the Tsarist administrative regime that still had to accommodate to the officially declared rulers, the Bukharans (Bliss 2006: 74). But many Badakhshanis I spoke with offered an alternative explanation: Badakhshanis were open to Soviet reforms because of a message sent to them in 1924 from the Imam of that time, Aga Khan III. The missionary Sabzali advised the Pamiri Ismailis not to resist Soviet rule, explaining that the Soviets would improve their lives and that Badakhshanis should take advantage of what the Russians had to offer. The Imam foreshadowed that one day, the seemingly indestructible empire would “melt like snow” and disappear, a prediction that strengthened the Ismailis’ faith in their Imam when it came to pass some 70 years later (see also Keshavjee 1998: 87).
Notwithstanding this message from the Imam, the Soviet leaders of the 1920s, like their predecessors under the Tsarist regime, worried that Badakhshans would continue to give their allegiance primarily to their Imam in Bombay (Elnazarov & Aksakalov 2011: 54). The *pirs* who opposed Soviet rule continued to hold a degree of power over the local population, even those who supported Soviet reforms, as the open border with Afghanistan enabled them to continue bringing *zakat* (tithes) to the Aga Khan. In 1936, the Soviets completely closed the river Pyanj, cutting off contact with the Imam. As noted above, this establishment of an impenetrable border is what Tajik Ishkashimis use today to mark the beginning of exclusively Soviet rule.

This enforcement of the border completely stopped Afghan raids on the Soviet right bank, which had been ongoing throughout the 1920s. But with the enforcement of the border, contact with Badakhshani relatives living on the left bank of the river also ceased. When the Soviet militia on horses, who manned the front day and night, enforced the border, the odd individual who had been traveling on the other side of the river became trapped. From this period on, Tajik Ishkashimis were unable to cross the river or communicate with people from the other side. They feared the threat of deportation to labour camps should they look across it.

Given Ishkashim’s location on the border with Afghanistan, the Red Army had a heightened interest in establishing a strong military presence in this district. Each house within each village on the Soviet side of the border was under observation by soldiers for a probationary period of approximately three to five months until a decision was made as to whether the family could be trusted as faithful Soviet citizens. At this stage, nearly no Ishkashimis spoke Russian and communication with the Red Army was difficult. Dedi tells of how, when his family was under observation in this way, his mother had a tricky time explaining to the soldiers, using sign language, that she desperately needed to leave the house in the middle of the night with her son: he had an unfortunate case of diarrhoea and would not be able to wait until the morning to visit the toilet!

During the Stalinist purges of this period, those exiled or killed are reputed to have been *khalifas* (local religious leaders) and those who resisted Soviet reforms. In these early years of the Soviet Union, the Ismaili institution of *pir* -ship was eliminated. But the

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29 It is unclear whether the Imam’s message encouraging his followers to submit entirely to the Soviet system was a response to Soviet concerns or whether the Soviets were simply unaware of the Imam’s message. Either way, the message did not prevent the Soviets from ultimately cutting off Badakhshans’ contact with the Imam.
Soviets were more tolerant of the lower level *khalifas*. While *khalifas* from other districts in Badakhshan tell of their forefathers having been sent to gulags in Siberia during these Stalinist purges, *khalifas* in Ishkashim claim that their forefathers were never actively persecuted although they were watched carefully. These Ishkashimi *khalifas* reason that their forefathers had been permitted to stay because they had been forthcoming in accepting land and property reforms. More generally, Ishkashimis currently living in Ishkashim claim to have had no ancestors personally affected by the purges; those affected would either have been killed or would no longer be living in Ishkashim.

**The Creation of Nations**

It was also in the 1920s and 1930s that the Soviets executed their nation-building policies (see Appendix I for a more extended overview of the literature on the Soviet-era creation of nations). In creating states, the Soviets were careful to establish the administrative apparatus of a nation with a distinct political class, bureaucracy and intelligentsia that would contribute to perpetuating the republics’ own national form. Roy stresses that Soviets created the form of nations, national territory, symbols, languages and cultures that were experienced as a “habitus”, a vision of the world and an internalized way of being. Each republic was given the conceptual instruments required for legitimacy and self-definition. But he stresses that nationalist sentiment was not fostered. Nations were not created to be independent; nationalist ideology – communism – was rooted in Moscow. The creation of national forms enabled the 15 Soviet republics to share a unifying nationalist sentiment that in turn would not question the working of a nationalist framework. This *homo sovieticus* was a multi-ethnic inter-nationalism that respects multilingualism and the rights of people; nation states were necessary to ensure that “small peoples” maintained the same rights as “big” ones (Roy 2000: xiv).

The Soviet state created the trappings of statehood, providing each republic with its own frontiers, name, reinvented past, a distinct ethnic group that the republic was to embody, and even a language (Roy 2000: vii). In Tajikistan, the Soviets implanted the trappings of statehood through the first half of the 20th century. In 1929, they created the Communist Party of Tajikistan. In the 1930s, perhaps the most important nation-building project was the building of the road from Dushanbe to Khorog in 1937. That same year, the Soviets introduced the arts with both the State Opera and Ballet theatre and the Tajik State Philharmonic Orchestra established within a year of one another. And in that same decade, the All-Tajik Games were held for the first time in 1934. Educational institutions followed suit. In 1948 they founded Tajik State University and in 1951 the Academy of
While a republic of the Soviet Union had the trappings of the state, including a government, it did not have sovereign powers. Strategic decisions were made in Moscow and applied to all the republics. Similarly, the sovereignty of the autonomous regions, like the Autonomous Region of Gorno-Badakhshan, was subject to the authority of the higher powers, in this case the Communist Party of Tajikistan. The Communist Party of each republic in turn could have its decisions reversed by the highest authority in the union, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, based in Moscow. GBAO was created as part of the ASSR of Tajikistan, but Roy opines that this autonomous region was not considered to have a corresponding “nation” of its own. In censuses, Pamiris had no ethnic category of their own and were required to define themselves as “Tajik” (2000: 66). Whereas in 1964, Pamiris were separately identified in an ethnic map of peoples of the world, they were omitted from a 1968 Soviet atlas of Tajikistan. Part of the problem was that the distinction of Badakhshan was religiously based, a premise the Soviets would not acknowledge. Badakhshans also spoke a language of their own, but Roy notes that the Soviets later considered this “national language of Gorno-Badakhshan” to have been “purged” (Ibid). Even though the ethnic group was not acknowledged, the region maintained its autonomous status and Roy suggests that this was a strategic, political move. Because of Badakhshan’s location on the border with China and Afghanistan and close to Pakistan, all of which have large Ismaili populations, what Roy terms “a

30 Bacon explains that at the onset of the Soviet era, all Central Asian languages were written in the same script. This established multilingualism in a way that appeared to separate the region from Russians while emphasizing Central Asia’s links with Muslim neighbours outside the union (1980: 190). For this reason, the Latin alphabet began to be introduced in 1924, beginning with Azerbaijan. In 1925, a law was passed forbidding texts written in the Arabic script to be imported. In 1928, the latinization of Central Asian languages began and was completed by 1930. There was no negotiation of dialects into the writing process of the language but in under a decade, Soviet Russian linguists used the language spoken in the administrative center to establish the official state language. This cut people off from classical works of Central Asian tradition, particularly the Quran and Persian poetry. The campaign to eradicate illiteracy coincided with the introduction of the Latin script and so the number of people who read and wrote the Tajik language in Latin quickly exceeded those familiar with the Arabic script. The next generation of political leaders who had learned to speak and read Russian realized the political and economic importance of the language. Keeping Central Asian languages in the Latin script prevented the capacity to “borrow” Russian words into the language and also required people to learn two alphabets. Learning to read and write the Tajik language in Cyrillic encouraged Central Asians to learn Russian (Ibid). And so, within 10 years, the Latin script was replaced with Cyrillic.
showcase of good Soviet Ismailis” could have great utility in the case of any potential border altercation. Notwithstanding the Soviet state’s efforts to downplay the existence of a Badakhshani or Pamiri ethnic group, Badakhshans themselves strongly identified – and continue to identify – as distinct from other Tajiks (Davlatshoev 2006).

The point important to make clear at this juncture is that cleavages amongst different Tajik groups were so strong that the nation-building project has always been a challenge. Akiner demonstrates that the different regions of Tajikistan share little history and describes the country as “the most artificial Soviet construct in Central Asia” (2001: 2). She explains this fragmentation as being due in large part to the geography of the country. The high mountains and extreme climates complicated by frequent natural disasters such as earthquakes and landslides, she argues, made accessibility very difficult. This resulted in various communities developing independently, without the cultural or economic influence of one another. First during the Soviet era and even after the civil war, the country has been striving to push past what she terms its “fragmented legacy” (Ibid:3).

Akiner argues: “the atomization of traditional communities enhanced micro-ethnicities and, perhaps more especially, micro-loyalties and micro-allegiances” (Ibid: 25). These divides became more visible in the 1980s and, as they developed, paved the way for the civil war of the 1990s.

The regional divisions were also reflected in who had political control of various state institutions. In the first few years (post 1924) Pamiris and Gharmis filled most of the high-level government and Communist Party posts.31 According to Roy, Pamiris in the early Soviet period were eager to participate in the creation of a Tajik “nation” because, he proposes, it made it possible for them to escape from their marginality (2000: 124). The Soviets, for their part, were eager for Pamiris to take over power because they were poor and not visibly religious. Perhaps Badakhshanas were able to manipulate the Russians because they had become accustomed to dealing with them since the 1870s (Ibid: 113).

By the 1940s, it appeared that people from the Leninabad region of Tajikistan (now called Khujand) had come to control Tajik politics. Akiner explains that this region was the most industrialized and highly educated part of the country that had a large population

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31 Some of these Pamiris are: Shirinsho Shotemur, First Party Secretary 1929-30, Second Party Secretary 1930-2, and Chairman of the Supreme Soviet (Parliament) 1933-7; Ibragim Ismailov, Second Party Secretary 1932-4; Saifullo Abdulloev, Second Party Secretary 1936-7 (Roy 2000: 113).
relative to its size and, in the pre-Soviet period had already gained experience in the political sphere. They were not alone leading the country but were joined by Pamiris and Gharmis, both from significantly less populated areas. People from Leninabad might have predominated in the state institutions, but it is alleged that those in power were working not for regional interests but with personal interests in mind (Akiner 2001: 20-1). During the 1970s war with Afghanistan, Pamiris were given control of the MVD (Ministry of the Interior) and part of the KGB, which they retained until the end of the Soviet era. The Russians feared that the majority Tajiks (Sunnis) would collude with the Afghan mujahedeen. By contrast, the Ismaili Pamiris were a safer alternative particularly because Afghan Ismaili Badakhshanis supported the Soviet invasion (Roy 2000: 114). The divisions between different groups of Tajiks discussed in this section are arguably what led to the post-Soviet civil war. Before I turn to an account of the war, I briefly outline Badakhshanis’ socio-economic experiences of Soviet rule.

**Badakhshan: A Net Gainer During Soviet Times**

Bliss suggests that no part of Badakhshan has ever been of substantial economic benefit to any ruling empire; its value lies solely in the function it has played as a buffer zone or border region. The taxes collected in the 18th and 19th centuries were, he explains, all used in the wars required to maintain control over the region in the first place. The economic situation of the region has not changed since. As I noted above, for the Soviets the Pamirs were of utmost political significance, being as they were on the border between China, Afghanistan and the Soviet Union itself. A developed Badakhshan would show those living across the river in Afghanistan, and, by reputation, those in Pakistan and even India, that the Soviet system was superior to their own feudal and capitalist societies (Bliss 2006: 247). And so, even though they were aware that this would be a great financial drain (at the expense of the western Soviet republics), the Soviets began

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32 The MVD, while under Pamiri control, was reputed to have been filled with scandals. In charge of law enforcement, for instance, the MVD had access to cars that were to be used by the police force. So many of these vehicles were misappropriated and sold unofficially that Akiner describes the militia as being “quite literally stranded, unable to pursue criminals” (2001: 27). It was not only the MVD that was corrupt. Organized criminal networks – mafias – enjoyed state protection in Qurghonteppa and Leninabad. According to Akiner, they worked separately both from each other and from the official economy. A citrus fruit black economy was established in Qurghonteppa that made use of water, pipes and fertilizers provided by the state for local sovkhozes. In general, however, using products of the sovkhoz for other purposes was not considered theft; Bliss explains that many saw it as helping yourself to your own supplies (2006: 247).
investing in the development of the oblast.\textsuperscript{33} In Roy’s words, the region of Gorno-Badakhshon “lived entirely by perfusion” (2000: 196).

Agricultural reform was one of the first Soviet projects. Bliss suggests that the collectivization of agriculture in GBAO started as early as 1933 (2006: 246) but Tajik Ishkashimis mark the 1936/37 agricultural year as the first to be run communally, with the land collectivized in a \textit{kolkhoz} (collective farm). Under the \textit{kolkhoz}, the farmers continued to own their own land; only production was collectivized. Proceeds were then distributed accordingly. Bliss opines that given the small size of landholdings in the pre-Soviet era, it is unlikely that there were many dispossessions as a result of the \textit{kolkhoz} movement (2006: 249). Nonetheless, production appeared to increase mainly because no taxes were paid to the state.

During the pre-Soviet years, land in GBAO was used for subsistence farming. Any surplus would have been used for paying taxes and only a very minimal amount of the harvest would have been available for barter. Because of the low yields resulting from agricultural production in the Pamirs, Soviet planners shifted the economy of GBAO to livestock breeding in the years following World War II.\textsuperscript{34} In order to feed the increased herds of animals in the Murgab region, land in more arable areas like Ishkashim was dedicated to growing animal fodder. Little land was used to grow food for human consumption, a decision that was to have significant consequences in the immediate post-Soviet years when subsidies from Moscow and imports from elsewhere in the Soviet Union ceased.

Over time, the four Ishkashimi villages of Avj, Mulvoj, Yakshvol and Sumjin combined into a single \textit{kolkhoz}, with its own \textit{rais} (chairman) and, underneath him, separate leaders for each village called \textit{brigadier}. Unlike the \textit{kolkhoz}, \textit{sovkhозes} were state farms and each \textit{dekkon} (farm worker) worked for a stable salary, not dependent on the profits of the enterprise. On \textit{sovkhозes}, the state provided additional support to buy machinery, seeds and other assets to increase profitability. Since the profits of \textit{kolkhoz} workers were valued at about one-third of the wages of those working on a \textit{sovkhоз}, reforms took place

\textsuperscript{33} Since the \textit{sovkhозes} were continuously subsidized by the Soviet state and because much of the borrowing took place outside of the public eye, it was not until the 1990s, when the prospect of privatization was broached, that this debt became significant. Bliss notes that in the early 1990s many Badakhshonians continued to be unaware that the collective farms, as they were run, were not economically viable without significant subsidies from the Soviet state (2006: 247).

\textsuperscript{34} While the land might have been best used for this purpose, the remoteness of the mountain villages made it difficult to sell the animals. By the time they were transported to Osh to be sold, the livestock had lost over a third of their weight (Bliss 2006: 253).
to bring the two in line with one another and by the 1970s, the remaining kolkhozes were incorporated within the sovkhоз system, leaving 28 sovkhозes in the entire province of Badakhshan (Herbers 2001: 370-71).

The sovkhоз, and not the district administration, was responsible for local infrastructure within its geographical remit. It ran nurseries, primary schools, hospital wards, bridges and roads. It delivered free food to state hospitals, high schools and army bases located on sovkhоз land (Bliss 2006: 251). But since the agricultural changes had not resulted in a significant increase in production, in order to fund these social services, loans were taken directly from Moscow without the knowledge of anyone locally (Ibid). Sovkhозes also amassed disproportionately high debts because they had more workers than really needed (in GBAO between 2 and 10 times the amount needed), and bought advanced machinery not absolutely required. In addition to farming, industry in Khorog kept over 2500 people employed in factories processing building materials, light industry (textile and shoes) and processed food (Bliss 2006: 259). Roy explains that the Central Asian republics’ relationship with Moscow was colonial in that they provided the Soviet Union with cheap raw materials such as cotton and aluminum but the centre also invested greatly in the development of these countries, pouring seemingly endless resources into the region (2000: 195).

I end my account of Soviet era Tajikistan with an overview of the improvements Soviets made specifically to the province of Badakhshan. This data comes entirely from Bliss’ text. It is notable that development workers acknowledge that the high quality of life Badakhshanis enjoyed during the Soviet era cannot feasibly be recreated in the near future (see also Herbers 2001; ARD 2004). I begin with general investments to local infrastructure, outline the status of health care, review education standards then end with the household economy (salaries and costs and access of goods).

**Local Infrastructure**

In 1929 the first airplane landed at a temporary airport in Khorog with a proper airport built in 1932. The first car arrived in Badakhshan in 1931. From 1932 -1934 the Soviets built a road from Khorog to Osh. By 1940, the road from Dushanbe to Khorog had been completed. This road was only 525km in comparison to the 740km road to Osh but had been much harder to build, as there were more mountain passes to dynamite through.

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35 From 1926-1928, for instance, the USSR gave Tajikistan 30 million roubles in aid (Bliss 2006: 248). Energy, too, was continuously supplied to the republics below the market price (Roy 2000: 196).
Botanical gardens were built in Khorog in 1940, the second highest in the world at the time, after gardens in Darjeeling (India). An observatory was also built at the Fedshenko glacier in 1932 (Bliss 2006: 248-9).

Health Care
Bliss quotes at length a 1993 international report that evaluated the health system at the end of the Soviet era:

1. The health status of the population in GBAO is better than that of most middle-income countries in the world.
2. The health system is accessible to everyone, with facilities located in even the most remote settlements and there are no economic barriers to access.
3. It is equitable in its treatment of groups of people who, in many other systems, are often disadvantaged, such as women, the poor, those living outside major towns, etc.
4. There are large numbers of well-trained professional staff, both doctors and nurses.
5. There are 15 hospital beds per thousand population, a higher ratio than in almost any country in the world.
6. There is a higher ratio of doctors and nurses to population than for almost all middle-income countries, etc. (2006: 254-5)

Education
With regards to education levels of the province of Badakhshan, at the end of the Soviet era, 90-95% of the population had 9 years of schooling and 70-75% had 11 years. 12% of GBAO’s population had studied at university and an additional 13% took 2.5-year diploma courses meaning that a quarter of the population had taken advantage of higher education opportunities. Even those who did not go on to study after their high school diploma received a decent education as indicated by the fact that 78% of teachers had a 5-year university degree and there were no more than 10-15 children per class on average (Bliss 2006: 255). Studying hard was highly valued by Ishkashimis themselves and they continue to acknowledge that pursuing an education was largely possible because the Soviets made it possible. The region of Ishkashim had 44 schools and 800 trained teachers for 6300 students (Bliss 2006: 256). Schoolbooks and educational materials were free and boarding schools were provided for orphans and those living in villages so isolated that there was no school available. In situations where the closest school was
some distance away, transportation for students was free. In the administrative district of Ishkashim, for instance, Avj has no school, Mulvoj has a school from Grades 1-9 and Yakshvol has a school from Grades 1-11. During the Soviet era, students had access to a bus that would take them to school each day. Today, those living in Avj must walk the 5km to Mulvoj or, for the older children studying in Grades 10 and 11, the 8 kilometres to Yakshvol each day.

**Household Economy**

In 1980, in the Ishkashim region alone, there were 33 retail stores and 10 food stores (Bliss 2006: 257). In general, sparsely populated areas like Badakhshan lacked the problems with “queuing” that characterized socialist experiences elsewhere. Periods of shortage were followed by a large delivery of televisions, for instance, and then for a while all stores in the province would have them in stock. Cars were allocated but there was a long waiting list. Nonetheless at least 1/3 of the population owned cars. While there was not much choice for the Ishkashimi consumer, having stores and money with which to buy products was considered an improvement from the pre-Soviet barter economy.

**Average Monthly Salaries at the end of the Soviet era, in roubles** (Bliss 2006: 260)

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<td>Farmers</td>
<td>112</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>179</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>145</td>
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<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>182</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology and Education</td>
<td>221</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior Administration</td>
<td>300-350</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Average Salary</strong></td>
<td><strong>152</strong></td>
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**Costs at the end of the Soviet era, in roubles** (Bliss 2006: 260)

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<td>500g loaf of bread</td>
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<tr>
<td>1kg flour</td>
<td>0.20-0.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>1kg butter</td>
<td>3.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Water, electricity and heating per month</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flight to Moscow</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes, wheat, vegetables etc.</td>
<td>Often free for sovkhoz workers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The 1990s

Soon after the end of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan was plunged into a four-year civil war. At least 100,000 people died, 10% of the population was internally displaced, and between 60,000 and 100,000 refugees fled to Afghanistan (Keshavjee 1998: 482-3). I provide the reader with a review of the principal events of the war in Appendix II. In this section I focus first on Tajik Ishkashimis’ experiences of the war years and, thereafter, on the decollectivization of land that took place at the end of the 1990s.

The Tajik Civil War was fought largely on regional grounds meaning that people were killed or attacked based on their ethnic identity. Badakhshansis and their neighbouring Gharmis joined forces against the Kulyobis and Khujandis (Leninobodis) who, eventually, were supported by the Uzbeks, Russians and, indirectly, by the United States (see Appendix II). By November 1992, the Kulyobi Emomali Rahmon became head of state and, although tensions continued until 1996, he maintained this position, one he continues to hold today. According to Zimmerman (2006), one of the effects of Badakhshans having been a part of opposition forces means that the government formed by Rahmon pays little attention to the needs of those in GBAO.

Most of the war’s fighting took place in Dushanbe and its environs – the southwest of the country. The mountains prevented the fighting from reaching Badakhshan. Those Ishkashimis living in Dushanbe or elsewhere in the country were those who witnessed most of the violence. Since many Badakhshansis were highly educated, many lived and worked outside of GBAO. Nearly all Ishkashimis I met had lost relatives during the war. Not only had many died, but so too were some of them lost, with bodies never found. Dedi and Jia’s oldest son, a journalist living and working in Dushanbe, was one such individual who disappeared in the early years of the war. Both Dedi and Jia went to Dushanbe to try to find him, alive or otherwise. They recounted that blood ran through the streets of the capital like rainwater. Jia spoke of the mass graves she visited, only to be told by soldiers that there were indeed hundreds of Pamiris buried there, but they had not been identified before burial; her son could well be one of them but she would never know. In this dissertation I do not focus at great length on the implications of death in Ishkashimis’ daily lives. This is something that I hope to write about at a later date. But it is worth noting that problems Ishkashimis experienced during the time I was there were always downplayed because they seemed trivial in comparison to the death and uncertainty that they remember as having characterized the civil war.
The early 1990s saw significant disruption in the lives of those Badakhshani living in GBAO not only because they feared for the lives of their relatives living elsewhere. With the onset of the civil war, working adults whose jobs abruptly became unsalaried as the government who had paid them dissolved. Many continued to work, however, especially teachers and doctors, and people recount with pride the years they contributed to the future of their village by educating their youth without remuneration (see also Niyozov 2001). A barter economy evolved, one that relied heavily on trade with Afghans from the other side of the river. In addition to food, the drug and arms trade also took hold in the province.

Even though teachers continued to teach, there were no notebooks, pens or pencils left in the shops and some years later, a lack of children’s shoes meant that 20% of students were unable to attend school. By 1996/7, Bliss claims the clothing shortage was even more of a pressing problem than food scarcity (2006: 288). Clothing shortages were particularly critical given that temperatures drop well below zero degrees Celsius and snow and avalanches are a common occurrence. Over decades of Soviet rule during which all goods had been imported and bought in shops, Badakhshani had largely lost traditional methods of their crafts traditions and no longer knew, for instance, how to make their own shoes or to farm land without modern machinery. The development agencies had to teach Badakhshani their own traditional farming methods, ones that had been continuously in use on the Afghan side of the river (Ibid: 285-7)

In 1992, the University of Khorog was established. A number of Badakhshani who had PhDs and were working at universities elsewhere in Tajikistan or the former Soviet space returned to Badakhshan as refugees during the civil war. They began to work at the University of Khorog and those who earned their degrees during the civil war now say that the education they gained at that time rivalled any of the top universities in the Soviet Union. The quality of education has since deteriorated since many teachers, along with doctors, lawyers, geologists and farmers, have left Badakhshan as labour migrants. Teachers began to receive salaries from the Tajik state once again in 1995 but these rarely amounted to more than 4 USD a month. By 2002, salaries had tripled but this covered only 20% of basic needs. In 2008/9, the government had raised salaries to 25-30 USD a month, but with labour migrants in Russia earning between 1000 and 2000 dollars a month, staying at home and teaching was a luxury in which only few could afford to

36 During this period, and up until 2005, soldiers from the Russian army were stationed along the border in addition to the Tajik soldiers who continue to be stationed there.
indulge. Salaries in the health sector were even lower than in education yet in the 1990s, more than 80% continued to work (Bliss 2006: 290). A university degree had little financial worth during the time of my fieldwork when even those with degrees were working as construction workers in Moscow. Nonetheless, many Badakhshani tried to attain diplomas. For Tajik Ishkashimis a high level of education gives one status and respectability in the community. This may be a result of the fact that the Aga Khan has issued multiple firmans (edicts), distributed throughout Badakhshan since the fall of the Soviet Union, insisting on the importance of education. He has also established schools and universities in Badakhshan and provides scholarships for study abroad (see Chapter 5).

A young Ishkashimi mother who was a schoolgirl during the war told me that for her, little changed during that time. She continued to go to school during the mornings and bring the sheep out to graze in the afternoons. In the summers she went to the ailoq (summer grazing area high up in the mountains) with the animals. She acknowledged that there had been a shortage of food, and that in the early years of the war her mother had made bread from potato flour, but emphasised that the Imam had soon sent them food and once this humanitarian aid arrived, there were no problems. One Ishkashimi woman told me with pride that Boris Yeltsin, then president of Russia was reputed to have commented that everywhere in the world, people worked hard and there was no free food – except for in the Pamirs. If you wanted free food, that was the place to go. Yeltsin is, in this alleged quote, referring to humanitarian relief facilitated by the Aga Khan Development Network, which provided free food and clothing to GBAO from 1993 until the end of the millennium. This support is said to have saved the population from “a humanitarian disaster” (Daftary 1998: 207; Niyozov 2003: 6).

In September 1992, the Imamate sent Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) representatives to Badakhshan to assess local needs. By January 1993, famine was acknowledged. At the time, the population had risen to 242 000, including 55 000 refugees. Although there was little direct damage to GBAO during the civil war (Kosach 1995: 137), it suffered greatly as a result of the destruction of the road connecting it to Dushanbe since no food or supplies could be imported. In 1993, the Tajik state provided the province with just 10 per cent of the food estimated to be required. The following year this increased to 25% but given that, by 1995, the oblast was only producing 20 per cent of its own food, there

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37 AKF is a subsidiary of the AKDN. See Appendix III for a chart detailing the various institutions that structure the AKDN.
was a significant shortfall of food supplies. The difference was made up for with humanitarian aid. In January 1993, the USAID, the EC, the Swiss government and other nation states combined to give 3 million USD of support plus aid in kind (i.e. surplus food supplies) specifically to the province of Badakhshan. AKF’s humanitarian assistance programme, FOCUS, directed this aid. In March 1993, the first humanitarian aid arrived and by the end of the year, FOCUS has distributed 1500 tonnes of wheat (Bliss 2006: 288).

AKF used a road from Osh in Kyrgyzstan to transport the goods directly into the province of Badakhshan. In 1994, the AKDN helped Pamiris to found their own NGO under the AKDN umbrella, the Pamir Relief and Development Programme (PRDP), and from then on, AKF transferred distribution duties to the PRDP (now known as the Mountain Societies Development and Support Programme (MSDSP)). Expatriate AKDN workers, like Bliss, downplay the link between the transnational network and the Badakhshan-based PRDP. Ishkashimis who received this aid rarely, if ever, met a non-Badakhshani, as most PRDP workers were Shugnis. Still, the PRDP continued to use vehicles stamped with the AKDN insignia. By 2006, over $112 million USD of aid had been donated to Badakhshan via the AKDN, 19 times more than what the government of Tajikistan provided, with aid peaking in 1996 (Ibid). By 2001, land had also been decollectivized. Furthermore, by this time humanitarian support had nearly come to an end.

The process of land decollectivization in Badakhshan began in the early years of the 1990s. By 1993 there were already some individual dekton farmers who had taken the initiative to lease land from the sovkhoz. In 1994 and 1995, the PRDP decided only to support private farmers and refused to open its seed programmes and competitions (with

38 Law No. 184 (December 1990, amended December 1996) regulates the leasing of land between state, kolkhoz/sovkhoz and individual or groups of workers. Law No. 544 (March 1992) introduces independent “dekhan” farms while Decree No. 699 (October 1993) details the step-by-step process of how these farms should be allotted and how individuals can apply for them. Decree No. 522 (June 1996) details how collective farms can be reorganized into independent dekhan farms, and outlines the “rights” individuals have to withdraw shares from the collective and receive a demarcated land plot, one that should be in the area where the worker had worked. These are further delineated in recommendations issued by the Ministry of Agriculture (1997), however, these land use rights are only suggestions to be taken at will and are not binding. Decree No. 621 (October 1995) states that it would be reasonable to transfer unprofitable kolkhozes and sovkhozes into forms of farming corresponding with a market economy, such as lease share enterprises, cooperatives and dekhan farms. Profitable sovkhozes are to become kolkhozes (ie collectives and not state farms). Specialized farms for seed-growing and cattle-breeding will continue to be state farms but will be called “goskhozes”. In practice, the term “sovkhоз” proliferates, few have heard of a “goskhoz” and apart from GBAO, the marketization of farming has been slow (Duncan 2000: Annex 2).
cash or seed as prizes) to the sovkhozes. Individual farmers received loans of seeds and fertiliser that was to be repaid in kind with 10% extra than initially received. The PRDP then loaned this return to another farmer. This policy was designed to encourage more farmers to withdraw land from the collective, however at this point only 5% of land was being cultivated independently (Bliss 2006: 306).

People resisted decollectivization, according to Bliss (2006), because the sovkhoz demanded a fixed payment from individual farmers and not a percentage of the harvest. With the assumption that individual farmers would produce more than if the land was farmed in a collective, the sovkhoz set “rent” at a price equivalent to 100% of the Soviet-era norm. For instance, if documents from the Soviet era stated that the sovkhoz produced 1300kg of grain per hectare of farmland, the independent farmer was expected to produce even more than this and, therefore, the sovkhoz charged him rent at 1300kg of grain per hectare. In reality, however, the Soviet-era norm as written in the books had not been achieved for some time. The amount the sovkhoz was expecting to receive from these individual farmers amounted to 130% of the harvest (Bliss 2006: 308). Using our example, the farmer was only able to grow 1000kg of grain per hectare. In 1996, the PRDP negotiated with the sovkhozes in Badakhshan that 30% of independent farmers’ harvest should go to the sovkhoz. But just over a year later, all of the sovkhozes in GBAO collapsed and their land was distributed to individual farmers (Ibid).

Decollectivization in Avj and Mulvoj did not begin until after the sovkhoz was dissolved. Ishkashimi villagers explained to me that three or four Badakhshanis working for the PRDP came to each village from the rayon (center of Ishkashim) with a firman (edict: referring to the aforementioned Land Code) from the president Emomali Rahmon informing everyone of their right to withdraw their land from the collective and farm individually. Each village held a meeting with representatives from each household present. A committee comprised of men (and more infrequently of women) with knowledge of the different soil types in the sovkhoz led the meeting. Occasionally the khalifa, or men with authority derived from other accomplishments or activities (i.e. veterans of WWII), also served on the committee.

The process of dividing land was not one of land restitution based on individuals’ pre-Soviet land holdings, as in other postsocialist areas (see Abrahams 1996). Bobo Shaft, an elderly man from Mulvoj told me:
If we had done that [dredged up pre-Soviet land ownership and used this information to inform the distribution of land], some people would have been left with no land at all, so we split it evenly.

The land was first graded into classes I to III based on the quality of the soil and its proximity to resources such as access to water. Instead of compensating bad land with more of it, everyone received a portion of land from each class. At least one plot of land was adjoining the house. This meant that people had plots of land in different places. Every villager received the same share of land irrespective of age, sex, profession or length of service in the Sovkhoz or Kolkhoz (Herbers 2001: 373). The size of land was proportional to the number of people in the household, including refugees from the civil war.

With only seven families in the village of Avj, there was little problem with its residents receiving all classes of land close to their house. The neighbouring village of Mulvoj, however, did not have enough land for its four-dozen families. Many received plots in Avj, five kilometres away. They do not complain about receiving land in Avj since even during the Soviet era a large number of Mulvojis worked in the sovkhoz land in Avj. They complain, instead, that the Tajik state, unlike the former Soviet state, does not provide transportation between the two villages. They now have to walk the five kilometres in each direction to plant, water and harvest their land. These villages do not have a tractor either. The Ishkashimi villages of Ren and the Rayon, however, do have a tractor which independent farmers are able to use if they can find fuel. Whereas land in Avj is plentiful, enabling sons who do not inherit land in both Avj and Mulvoj to move out of their parents’ house and begin their own independent farms, there is less land available in Ren and the Rayon.39 I pick up these issues of the land decollectivization process in the following chapter, unpacking the role of both the Tajik state and the AKDN in facilitating the process.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has worked through recent Tajik history up until the end of the Tajik civil war. I have focused particularly on the Ishkashimi and Badakhshani experience of the past, drawing on both academic literature on the topic and my informants’ own stories. The rest of this dissertation focuses on the legacies of this past, a decade after the end of the civil war.

39 The youngest son in each family (or youngest daughter if there are no sons) inherits the family land and house. Older siblings are increasingly moving to Dushanbe or Russia. Most aim to buy a flat in Dushanbe, even those who live and work in Russia (see Chapter 6).
Chapter 4

We’re Post-Soviet. We’re Not Post-Socialist.
Returning to Manchester after my year in Tajikistan, I began to have Skype conversations with Dedi and Jia’s son, Olim, the English-speaking migrant I had met in Moscow. We would catch up on gossip, discuss his family history and talk through my anthropological analysis of his home. During one of these conversations in November 2009, he raised the issue of a summary of my PhD he had found on the University of Manchester website. It was very interesting, he opined, but there was one problem with it. I had described Tajik Ishkashim as post-socialist. And so Olim corrected me:

We’re not post-socialist. We may be post-Soviet, but we’re still socialist.

Olim’s observations are acute. I had modified both the civil war and the Tajik state with the adjective post-socialist where both might better be described as post-Soviet since it was the end of the former Soviet state that enabled their existence. I thought I understood Olim’s preference for the term post-Soviet but as I continued to write I became increasingly uncertain what he meant when he rejected the term “post-socialism” (a term that I had come to embrace) in favour of “socialism”. In March 2012, over two years later, I asked him. Olim explained to me that Ishkashimis were still socialist because what he called “collectivist values” continue to be an important part of how Badakhshanis live their lives. He surmised:

The Soviet Union broke up, yet socialism is still there.

Then he said:

There is also now the threat that Western individualism will break our socialist spirit, our communalism.

Olim went on to give an example of how Ishkashimis’ “socialist spirit” was waning, elucidating with the example that now people hire one or two people to build houses for them instead of seeing such projects as communal, with friends and relatives all coming together to help one another. For Olim, the end of the Soviet Union was not enough to break Tajik Ishkashimis’ “socialist spirit”, although it might well change over time as their lives become influenced by what Olim called, at various points in the conversation,

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40 The two sentences in question read:

Over the past two decades, the people of Tajikistan in Central Asia have undergone a number of drastic changes beginning with a rapid shift from over seventy years of Soviet rule, through a violent post-socialist civil war, to the present, peaceful yet economically precarious situation of nation building.

While the post-socialist Tajik state has allowed for freer practices, its incapacity to economically support its citizens has forced many Pamiris (and Tajiks alike) to find work in Russia leaving the villages drained of their youth (Remtilla 2012, emphasis added).
“Western individualism”, “globalization” and “occidentalization” (he did not use the term “capitalism”). The “socialism” that exists now is (becoming) different from the “socialism” of the Soviet era.

I explained to Olim that while he was correct regarding my usage of post-socialist on the website, that in my dissertation I used the term more broadly; “post-socialism” acknowledges the end of the Soviet era, capturing the differences that have since emerged without rejecting the ongoing legacies of socialism – both in terms of people’s ideals and values and in terms of their expectations of the state. He agreed with my explanation and, as our conversation went on, Olim occasionally used the word “post-socialist” interchangeably with the term “socialist”.

Olim’s point that Ishkashimis see themselves as still socialist resonates with my own observations. I examine what it means to say that certain socialist values have continued into the post-Soviet present in the next chapter. This chapter unpacks the tensions of being “post-” by looking at how certain ways of engaging with the state (that some might label as “socialist”) continue even though the state (and state-like entities) have changed. I begin, in the next section, with an exploration of what state socialism entails for Tajik Ishkashimis.

**Soviet Socialism for Tajik Ishkashimis**

My discussion with Olim reveals that “socialism” can have many different “actually existing” forms. It is not (only) a historical period that ended, for Tajiks, in 1991, but can (also) be an adjective to describe certain values that persist in an economic system or a political project that others might describe as a welfare state. Thelen and Read explain that socialist understandings of welfare were initially linked to the moral idea that workers should be entitled to assistance from a “paternalist” industrial business. Since waged work and state-regulated pensions were guaranteed, the idea was expanded so that the socialist states began providing these entitlements in a more universal, comprehensive and centralized system of social security provision. Subsidized consumer goods were almost universally available and states also provided services including education, transportation, childcare and cultural facilities (2007: 7-8).

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41 “Post-socialism” is an etic term. Olim is the only Ishkashimi with whom I speak in English. The rough translation of “post-” into Tajik, ba’d az, is a temporal indicator that closer approximates the English word “after”.
For Verdery, this “socialist paternalism” was central to the Party’s official ideology. More importantly, preserving the “allocative” or “redistributive” power of the state was vital in its efforts to secure popular support. Describing the Party as acting “like a father who gives handouts to the children as he sees fit” (1996: 25), Verdery explains:

The Benevolent Father Party educated people to express needs it would then fill, and discouraged them from taking the initiative that would enable them to fill these needs on their own (ibid)

This was particularly the case in Tajik Ishkashim where, as described in the previous chapter, the region was a net receiver of goods and support from the Soviet state. While the socialist state was, elsewhere, criticized for producing low quality services and for causing shortages (Ledeneva 1998; Verdery 1996), these complaints are downplayed in Tajik Ishkashimis’ memories of life under the Soviet system (see Chapter 3 and 5).

The paternalist nature of the erstwhile state is most succinctly captured by Tajik Ishkashimis’ recollection of it as their soheb (master). The word soheb, literally translated as “master”, is used to describe people who defend one’s best interests. This is usually one’s father. For instance, a young Ishkashimi woman who chose to divorce her husband because her in-laws beat her explained to me that she could afford to do so because she was “soheb-dor” (one who has a “soheb”). She ran away from her husband’s house back to that of her father (her soheb) where she knew she could stay indefinitely. That Ishkashimis refer to the former Soviet state and to their fathers using the same term reinforces Verdery’s argument that:

While socialism resembled many other political systems in emphasizing the family as a basic element in the polity, I believe that it went further than most in seeing society not simply as like a family but as itself a family, with the Party as parent (Verdery 1996: 64)

I first heard the word soheb used to describe the state by an Ishkashimi woman who had married a wealthy Sunni politician and was living in Dushanbe. She was returning to Ishkashim for the first time in a decade and we found ourselves in the same car. We were at a rest stop in the middle of the bone-rattling, 40 hour drive to Badakhshan when she began vociferously complaining that now that the Soviet Union had dissolved, Badakhshan had become be soheb (without a master). There was no one to fix the potholes or re-lay the tarmac and even if the government finally finished building the new

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42 In some cases, married women also refer to their husbands as soheb.
43 A landslide left us stranded on the road for hours, nearly doubling the time it takes to travel the route in good weather.
road from Dushanbe to Khorog, they would surely not be creating any jobs in Ishkashim. For this woman, as for many people living in other former socialist countries, the socioeconomic changes since 1989/91 have been experienced as state abandonment (see also Kideckel 2002; Nazpary 2002; Pine 2002). But this is not necessarily the case for everyone in Ishkashim.

After her rant, the woman complaining about being be soheb got up to go to the toilet, along with her Sunni sister-in-law. Once she was safely out of hearing distance, another woman quietly noted:

_Imam jon dorim ane? Mo sohebdor hastim!_ (We have [our] dear Imam don’t we? We do have a soheb!)

Others grunted in agreement, but the conversation did not continue. I later brought the question to a number of other Ishkashimis: _Ishkashimio sohebdor hastano?_ (Do Ishkashimis have a soheb?). Each response I received introduced the Imam as today’s soheb.

I now turn first to the Tajik state and then to the Imam and his institutions to examine how each continues (or fails to continue) to act like a paternalist centre. As I do so, I build on Thelen and Read (2007)’s argument that the rollback of state provisions after 1991 is not accurately described as a “withdrawal” of the state. Post-Soviet governments have not completely eliminated all welfare entitlements and, in situations where provision has been decentralized, non-state actors can also produce state effects.

**Searching for a Post-Soviet Paternalist State**

One of the ways in which the Tajik state continues to influence Ishkashimis’ daily lives is through its (sometimes arbitrary) laws. President Rahmon, and through him the Tajik state, continues to issue edicts controlling various aspects of everyday life including what type of light bulb to use (energy-efficient ones to reduce electricity bills), how many people can attend a wedding (to help people save money during the economic crisis) and who is allowed to pray (to prevent against Islamization). By issuing such edicts,

44 Two Badakhshanis living in Khorog suggested to me in personal conversation that the Arab Spring of 2011 appears to be influencing resistance against the current Tajik government, citing a small rally that took place in Khorog on 15 June 2011 against the perceived corruption and clan loyalties of the law courts (see also Stratford 2011). Around the same time, a riot broke out in President Rahmon’s home province and political stronghold of Kulyob after referees decided a game on a last-second play in favour of a football team whose owner and striker is Rahmon’s son (Cam 2011a). Wiegmann (2009) suggests that civil unrest is likely to ensue if labour migration should be curtailed as this would lead to an influx of unemployed men. The Tajik government, for its part, is attempting to prevent popular resistance by not reporting on the events that took
Rahmon appears to be acting in a paternalist manner. However in Tajikistan, just as Humphrey (1998) notes for Mongolia, these edicts are ambivalently followed. Even though weddings are only allowed to be three hours in length, a rule strictly followed in restaurant weddings in Dushanbe, Khorog and the centre of Ishkashim, I have danced until 5am at more than one wedding in Mulvoj. Many of the guests worked in the army and police, most notably a man I knew to be one of the chiefs of the Ishkashimi police, but none of them called for the wedding to come to an end even after the stipulated three hours had come and gone.

Similarly, when Dedi’s daughter, Malika, told him about an edict issued by the president that everyone should begin using energy efficient light bulbs, Dedi laughed. It was common knowledge that these light bulbs were imported exclusively by one of Rahmon’s daughters. We had already begun using these light bulbs in Avj in order to reduce our electricity bill, but we had bought ours from the Afghan bazaar; Rahmon’s daughter would not profit from our purchase. Malika disliked the quality of light these bulbs emanated and told us that while they had switched over in her office space, she refused to do so in her house in Dushanbe. Dedi, like his daughter, found it absurd that a few individuals could use their power to increase their personal wealth. Nonetheless, he gently chided her: “Well if it’s a firman (edict) then you have to follow it.” Malika did not argue with him, but by the time I had left Tajikistan, she still had not changed her light bulbs. Where the state had “force” (in her office space) she changed light bulbs, but she maintained that her home was a place over which the state had no authority.

There is a tension between wanting the state to act the way it should – as a paternalist centre – and being sceptical of the state’s or President’s ulterior motives. Ishkashimis engage with the Tajik state by employing methods learned during the Soviet era. Just as they practiced the religious part of the wedding ceremony (nikoh) in hiding when it was banned by the Soviet state, they continue to find subtle ways to circumvent or evade rules issued by the current state. This does not negate the presence of the state. But when Tajik Ishkashimis reminisce about the paternalist Soviet state, they focus not on the restrictions it placed on its citizens (ostensibly in Tajik Ishkashimis’ own best interests), but on welfare provisions and subsidies.

Place in Egypt and Tunisia (Anon. 2011) and by cracking down on Islamist influences, who are believed to constitute the largest threat to the state. Most recently, President Rahmon banned children under 18 years of age from attending mosques that have not been approved by the state (Reuters 2011) and has arrested a BBC reporter who he accuses of having membership in the banned Hizb-ut-Tahrir Islamic movement (Camm 2011b). It is unclear whether such measures will be successful.
In some ways, the post-Soviet Tajik state can be framed as continuing to provide social services. As Thelen and Read explain, if governments completely got rid of all welfare entitlements, they would risk the loss of public support (2007: 9). In Tajik Badakhshan, nearly all hospitals, schools and universities are run by the state. But the services and wages paid in public sector institutions are insufficient to fund daily life. The Tajik state is not able to provide for Ishkashimis in the same way as the former Soviet state. It never made economic sense for the state to give to the Badakhshani population as much as it did and the Tajik state, operating on a much smaller scale than the former Soviet state, does not necessarily have huge surpluses to redistribute to Badakhshan even if it wanted to do so.

People in a number of other post-socialist countries are similarly struggling with the post-Soviet shift in state provision. Speaking of the Mongolian context, Humphrey nicely explains people’s sentiments:

What is difficult for us to imagine is the dashing of expectations. There are no expectations of the law, or that politicians or police will keep to their word, or that money will keep its value, or that you can trust a stranger. But till recently there were expectations that electricity would be free, children would be taken to school, heating or winter fuel would be provided, pensions, grants, and wages would be paid, houses would be maintained, and land, fodder, and tractors would be there to use. People are affronted that they themselves have to find petrol, pay for electricity, mend the roof, and run here and there to arrange everything. They feel abandoned […] Many people told me, ‘No one is going to help us’ (Humphrey 1998: 461-2).

Just as Humphrey describes, in many ways Ishkashimis also feel as though the post-Soviet Tajik state has abandoned them. The state no longer provides liveable wages, subsidized goods or housing. The Tajik state does little to fulfill their “expectations” even as people in Ishkashim continue to anticipate the state in their plans. Similarly, Verdery (1996) notes that in Romania, after the state-socialist regime fell in 1989, people continued to expect the state to provide subsidies. She suggests that this demand for state involvement reflects Romanians’ wish to see the state regulate the reform process. She explains:

45 She explains how publishing houses appealed to the state to subsidize the cost of paper. This, literary magazines argued, would make books and journals affordable. Romanians opine that museums should not be commercial but should be run with funding provided by the state. When the Health Minister asked a doctor why he doesn’t consider private practice, he was told: “Why should I pay to rent space and to get insurance, material stocks, and all that expensive equipment when the state can do it for me?” And besides, where would I get the money?” (Verdery 1996: 214).
Such instances show how Romanians accustomed to the presence, subsidies, and interventions of socialism’s paternalistic state have responded to its seeming disintegration by reconstituting a center to which they can continue to appeal. Although the state’s power has been deeply compromised, they have continued to anticipate it in their plans (Ibid: 215).

This also resonates with Jansen’s account of post-socialist, post-Yugoslav Bosnia and Herzegovina where, he describes, “the state’ was first and foremost resented for not being enough of a state where it counted” (2011: 13). Jansen uses the concept of “gridding” to describe citizens’ efforts to establish rhythms and trajectories that could be shaped, structured or ensured by becoming encompassed in institutional statecraft (Ibid: 8). People seek to be a part of vertical grids in order to guarantee mundane practices, like getting drinking water (rhythm) or knowing that one’s education will lead to employment opportunities (trajectory) (Ibid).

Ishkashimis want to be incorporated into the state’s gridding structures in order to guarantee the normalcy of their daily lives (see Chapter 5). Citizens look to the state to act as a patriarch that, even while holding the capacity to punish, is also endowed with the obligation to care for its citizens (Jansen personal conversation, see also Glick-Schiller and Fouron 2001: 186 on Haiti). The state, in order to ensure that people can live normal lives, must provide the social, economic and political circumstances required to enable people to fulfill at least their most basic needs (Greenberg 2011, see Chapter 5). But people feel that this is not happening.

That the Tajik state, like the post-socialist Mongolian, Romanian and Bosnian states, is seen as unable or unwilling to provide for its citizens does not necessarily mean that Tajik Ishkashimis have experienced a complete withdrawal of the state from their lives. Brkovitch (in progress) notes that non-state actors can take over the “roles” of the state. She cites Dunn as arguing that non-state actors can be as responsible for the regulation of life as states are (2005: 173-193) and she quotes Trouillot’s observation that the practices of NGOs and trans-state institutions, such as the World Bank, can “produce state effects as powerful as those of national governments (2001: 130 in Brkovitch in progress: 9-10). Taking Brkovitch, Dunn and Trouillot’s arguments, then, the incapacity of the Tajik state

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46 Jansen draws on Scott (1998)’s notion of the “grid” to describe the state’s attempts to centrally record and monitor the “unruly” diversity of people, places and things (Jansen 2011: 7). Jansen’s use of the term “grid” differs from Scott’s in that Jansen conceives of the grid as a matrix, a term derived from the Latin root for “mother” that also means “womb” (within which something is embedded and from which one develops). Whereas Scott speaks of grids as being imposed on people in opposition to attempts at self-government, Jansen demonstrates that people often seek out grids. He strongly asserts that people “found little enthusiasm for autonomy outside of grids” (Ibid: 11).
to provide for Ishkashimis in the way of the former Soviet state need not imply a complete “withdrawal” of the state. As indicated above, to a certain extent the Imam and his institutions have stepped in to act as soheb.

The Imamate’s Institutions as an Alternative

In Chapter 3, I demonstrated that Soviet nationalities policy resulted in the creation of republics with the trappings of a state but with no real power. The strong centre of Soviet socialism was not based within these individual republics but in the Soviet centre of Moscow. In the previous section, I demonstrated that the Tajik state continues to hold the trappings of a state but the international Soviet state no longer exists to function as the primary redistributing power. In its place, I suggest, the Imam’s institutions have stepped in to some degree, working as a transnational distributor. As described in Chapter 2, during the Tajik civil war the Aga Khan Foundation facilitated the provision of humanitarian relief. Even though the Imamate no longer provides food, fuel and clothing in this way, the memory of the Imam’s support is strongly ingrained in the minds and hearts of all Ishkashimis.47 Immediately following the dissolution of the Soviet state, the Imam’s institutions stepped in to fulfill Ishkashimis’ basic needs. Ishkashimis continue to be confident that they are protected by their Imam – their soheb – and that should any type of disaster strike the region once more, that the Imam will mobilize the resources of his institutions and his political contacts in Badakhshan’s defense. Even though the AKDN does not provide free food and goods at the moment, the Imam’s institutions continue to act like as a redistributive center.

One way in which the Imamate redistributes is from one Ismaili population to another. During the Imam’s 50th anniversary celebrations, for instance, commemorative rosaries (tasbihs), shawls, bookmarks and other goods were produced and sold to Ismailis around the world. Prices were inflated in Canada, the United States and Europe in order to subsidize these products for the population in lower income countries like Tajikistan. Some Tajik Ismailis I spoke to, however, were appalled that they had to pay anything for these items. Things coming from the Imam should be free, I was told. Consumption, particularly in relation to the AKDN as provider, is seen as a “right” and not the privilege of those with wealth. As Verdery describes for pre-1989 state-socialist Romania, when consumers’ desires were not fulfilled, the desires were exacerbated further. Consumption became “the focus of effort, resistance, and discontent” (1996: 26) because according to

47 Because the Imam runs the AKDN, Ishkashimis conflate the work of these development agencies with the leadership role they hope the Imam will eventually fulfill.
socialist ideals, everyone had an equal right to goods provided by the centre according to his needs. From the perspective of Ishkashimis, who were not paying zakat (tithes) to the Imam at the time of my fieldwork, the flow of funds redistributed through the Imam resembles that of the Soviet era: Ishkashimis were predominantly receiving from the Imam. When they did give to him, for instance a voluntary monetary contribution for his Golden Jubilee, this was framed as a “gift” (see Chapter 5 for more on gift relations with the Soviet state and with the Imam).

The Imam’s development network also works within a broader redistributive umbrella. The AKDN has both for-profit and not-for-profit enterprises within each country it works. The profits from its companies are redistributed to fund the not-for-profit projects. The Aga Khan’s legitimacy, however, is not only reliant on economics but also on Ishkashimis’ belief in him as a religious leader (see Chapter 8). For this reason, even though the AKDN’s legitimacy is gained in part through its distributive activities, it is not reliant on this to maintain its legitimacy (see Chapter 5). Instead, the AKDN advocates capitalist efficiency and the principle of self-sufficiency. It acts as a “centre”, then, both by distributing necessities and by changing political and economic structures.

One of the changes facilitated by the AKDN is its push for the oblast government to disband the sovkhozes. Both AKDN and World Bank evaluation reports alike argue that without the Aga Khan Foundation’s intervention, the decollectivization process in Badakhshan would not have taken place (Bliss 2006; Tetlay and Jonbekova 2005). Indeed, GBAO is the only Tajik province in which decollectivization took place in the mid-1990s. Although the AKDN appears as the primary instigator behind decollectivization, Ishkashimis who talked to me about the reasons why the sovkhozes had been disbanded opined that the motivating force behind decollectivization was the state’s incapacity to support them in the manner of the former Soviet state. Because of its own weakness and incompetency, the state needed to find an alternative way to keep its citizens alive. The AKDN helped by facilitating decollectivization.

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48 Development reports stress that the AKDN did this with the support of Oblast government officials. Bliss notes that the president of the oblast was one of the strongest advocates of “private” agriculture. The AKDN funded trips for senior government officials to the Northern Areas of Pakistan to see how productive private small farm management in mountainous environments could be (Tetlay and Jonbekova 2005: 12). Other members of the oblast government and leaders of individual rayons began to support “privatisation” after initial hesitation while those who continued to opposed it were unable to derail the process once it had been put in motion (Ibid: 308). Tetlay notes that the greatest resistance came from the state farm managers but because of government support they were unable to halt the decollectivization.
The first harvest following decollectivization saw an immediate increase in crop yields that was understood to be because of higher production per acre (Bliss 2006: 310). An elderly man from Mulvoj, Bobo Shaft, explained to me that once the harvest was brought in, even those who were sceptical of independent farming were convinced that this was the best way forward. In Ishkashim, land that had been used primarily to grow hay in the Soviet era began to be planted with potatoes, carrots and grain using seeds provided by the AKDN. Those Ishkashimis who continue to live in the villages now produce grain, potatoes and carrots that last for about eight months of the year. Some increase their herds of sheep, goats or cows so they can sell animals to the butcher. With this cash, they can buy food for the remaining months of the year, pay for their children’s education etc. Animal husbandry is limited, however, by the amount of work an increase in animals entails, by the amount of fodder one can grow (at the expense of growing wheat and potatoes) and, furthermore, by the oft-occurring theft of farm animals by wild wolves and foxes. It is partly for this reason that most of a family’s income comes from migrants or from trade (both licit and illicit).

Ishkashimis acknowledge that their yields have increased now that they farm individually. But land has not been privatized. Unlike many of the Eastern European post-socialist states, in which collective farms were divided into plots of private property that could be owned, used, and sold according to the proprietor’s wishes, land in Badakhshan was decollectivized but not turned into alienable property. According to the 1990 Land Code, Law No. 326 (amended in 1996), land is under the “exclusive ownership of the state,” although the decollectivization of land is permitted through life-long inheritable tenure, land lease and land use agreements with the state (1996: 238). Agricultural land that is not used for more than one year, or two years for land assigned from non-agricultural land use, should be re-appropriated by the state and redistributed to ensure the “best use” of all land (1996: 250-1). The state’s refusal for land to be turned into a

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49 In Polanyi’s terms, land has not yet become a “fictitious commodity” and the state is strongly resisting international pressure to privatize land in order to maintain this principle. Commodities, whose prices are determined by the supply-and-demand mechanism, are the key elements of the market economy. Polanyi defines a commodity as “an object produced for sale on the market”, where a market is defined as “actual contacts between buyers and sellers” (1957: 75). All essential elements of industry must become commodities, but Polanyi argues that labour, land and money are all essential elements of industry that are not commodities according to his definition of the term. He explains that labour is human activity that is simply a part of life. It is not produced for sale and can neither be detached from life, nor be stored. Land is nature and is not produced by man. And money is a token of purchasing power that is not produced but comes into being through mechanisms of banking or state finance. Since none of these three “commodities” are produced for sale, Polanyi describes labour, land and money as “fictitious” commodities.
commodity that can be bought, sold or mortgaged, indicates that it maintains policies that can be described as “socialist”.

Decollectivization enables us to think through how different entities such as the Tajik state and the AKDN work together following the dissolution of the Soviet state. In the process of decollectivization, the Imam’s institutions demonstrated to Ishkashimis that the former Soviet state had been giving to Badakhshan more than it was taking in return (Bliss 2006: 330-1). This is why the sovkhoz worked during the Soviet era and why it could not be a functioning economic model without state subsidies.50

The AKDN is pushing for the region – and individual Ishkashimis – to become self-sufficient. But at the same time, the Imam’s institutions are also paying those who work for them liveable wages, providing high quality education, subsidizing pharmacies, improving the quality of hospitals and working to increase agricultural production. The Aga Khan frequently speaks out against the narcotics trade and, in so doing, is attempting to limit the second economy. Soviet socialism was also a modernist project and the AKDN has picked up where the Soviet state left off, establishing a cell phone network, acquiring a lease on the rights for Pamir Energy, the principal supplier of electricity in the region, and working to improve roads and build bridges. The important point here is, in Steinberg’s words, that “the complex of global Isma’ili [sic] institutions is certainly an “alternative” to the nation-state. But the state remains; it does not disappear” (2011: 8).

As Heathershaw argues, even as transnational NGOs appear to highlight the weakness of the Tajik state, they also reinforce the state’s sovereignty (2011: 146-8).

The AKDN is careful to work in collaboration with the Tajik state, although those who work for the AKDN occasionally paint the institution as a (temporary) replacement for the state. Bliss, for instance, concludes his book by opining, “once the situation has improved” (in other words, ‘once the AKDN has improved the situation’) “the state must resume its responsibilities” (2006: 335). In this vein, Verdery suggests that “transition” in the “post-socialist” context is not to capitalism but constitutes the privatization of power or the “parcelization and reconstitution of sovereignty” (1996: 209. By this she refers to the processes through which people shore up or reconstitute a political and, by extension, an economic centre in the face of changes, like privatization, that threaten to decompose

50 Kanji, a researcher on poverty reduction, wrote, in a study commissioned by the Aga Khan Foundation, that GBAO is a part of the world that “cannot compete within a neo-liberal, market-based development paradigm” and might well need “redistribution, subsidies, and systems of social protection” (2002: 150).
what once sustained the socialist state’s power. In Tajikistan, this power has shifted not only to local government officials but, more significantly, to the Imamate’s institutions. Verdery goes so far as to liken the parcelization of sovereignty to feudalism. Within the scope of this metaphor, the Imam might appear to be a feudal patron of sorts, whose suzerainty is Badakhshan. I do not use this metaphor because (1) it implies a teleological regression to a time that precedes modern socialism and (2) because it implies a multiplicity of “lords”.

For Tajik Ishkashimis, the metaphor of the ongoing legacies of socialism is more appropriate. Their Imam is a modernizing force, much like the former Soviet state. Ishkashimis note that their standards of living have regressed since the end of the Soviet era, but in comparison to the Afghans living on the other side of the river Pyanj, life is still modern (Chapter 7). Furthermore, from the vantage point of an Ishkashimi, socialism continues to be a more appropriate characterization of the present situation than feudalism because sovereignty has not been divided amongst competing patrons. Even though the Tajik state and the AKDN might have tensions with one another, Badakhshans are able to use both as allocative centres without having to pick one over the other. This is not to say that, even when combined, they are the same type of centre as the former Soviet state.

**Work**

Even though the Tajik state and the AKDN can be framed as socialist in some ways, they also foster certain tendencies that do not fall under local understandings of what socialism should consist of. Ishkashimis see the land decollectivization process as a part of the state’s need to make Ishkashimis self-sufficient and, by correlation, less dependent on the state. By giving people the right to produce for themselves from the land, the Tajik state no longer needs to subsidize or provide food and wages to farmers. Alongside these changes, Tajik Ishkashimis’ attitude towards work has also shifted. The socialist work ethic morally associated the paternalistic responsibilities of the state toward its workers with the individual who was expected to engage in productive state work (Pine 1998: 120). Part of the state’s obligation (not only in post-Soviet countries but elsewhere too) is to create jobs or compensate with unemployment benefit (see Feaux de la Croix *in progress*: 9). Even though the state has not privatized land, by allowing the AKDN to decollectivize land, the Tajik state is seen to be reneging on its obligation to provide for
its citizens. As Ishkashimis have begun to provide for themselves, they see themselves as being increasingly alienated from the state.  

Lampland (1995) suggests that this process of commoditizing labour began before 1989 in state-socialist Hungary. Factory and collective farm workers calculated the monetary value of each hour of work they invested because of the strict limits on the time they should be working. This commoditized their labour in a way that alienated workers from its product. In Ishkashim by comparison, some, like the Mulvoji woman, Zohra, are reputed to have worked extremely hard during the Soviet era, striving to always reach the highest quotas even though there was no increase in financial compensation for her extra work. This earned Zohra recognition from both the state and from other Ishkashimis and it was for this recognition (the counter-gift to her extra effort) that she worked towards (I explore relations of exchange with the state in Chapter 5).

Things have since changed. In much the same way as Humphrey describes for post-Soviet Buryatia, remunerated work is no longer a career or a calling but a strategic value. People are no longer defined by, for instance, being a calf herder and having a job does not guarantee one’s livelihood as it did during Soviet times. Instead, work has become irregular and contingent to the needs of the household (1998: 460). Feaux de la Croix argues that where Soviet labour ideals covered multiple aspects of work (i.e. social duty and help, livelihood and wage labour), now they are rarely all found within just one job (in progress: 20). During my fieldwork, all Ishkashimis, no matter their professional training or expertise, needed to farm their decollectivized plots of land. Doctors, teachers and policemen all sow wheat, potatoes, carrots and other vegetables, without which most would be unable to survive on their meagre state salaries. Those who had spent the

51 Humphrey (1998) explains that with the absence of a strong post-socialist state to serve (in Verdery’s terms) as “chief”, the collective continues to play a central role in Buryat society, even though it is no longer the primary unit. Buryats have ceased to assume that it will provide security from childhood to old age even as they continue to insist that collective farms should exist (Ibid: 452). Mongolians have become reliant on their own subsidiary plots of land (that are separate from and additional to the collective farms) to survive (Ibid: 457) and there is no functioning legal system to enforce top-down commands from within the collective or even broader state structures. Whereas people, during the Soviet era, would follow the demands of the state or the collective out of fear, they now do so because of social pressure or because they find it to be the best available option (1998: 450). Much like Humphrey, Roy (2000) argues that kolkhozes that continue to exist elsewhere in Tajikistan are solidarity networks that absorb the sudden poverty resulting from the collapse of the USSR and that privatization has been resisted because it comes with the risk of social destabilization. However, Kandiyoti critiques Roy for “freezing” a complex negotiation process that also involves international donors, local managers and other rural groups, not only the state and kolkhoz farmers (2002: 247). In Ishkashim, the collectives have all been disbanded and people’s attempts at “gridding” oftentimes take place through the Imam and his institutions.
Soviet era working full-time at a professional position, earning a salary with which food products were bought at the village store, needed to cut their hours of salaried work to till their land. Bliss questions whether the state should allow and even encourage the sub-letting of land, in order to enable professionals to devote all of their time to their profession while still earning something from their land (2006: 311). The way it stands, land reform has reduced the value of education-based work.

Furthermore, people now work for the sake of individual profit instead of to achieve status. “These days,” Zohra told me, “there is no need to work so hard.” In comparison to the effort (*mehnat*) she used to expend during the Soviet era, there is far less manual labour to perform in order to till the smaller plot of land dedicated to her family. There is also the added benefit of being able to reap a profit from any extra work invested in, for instance, increasing the size of a herd of goats. Many who were farmers during the Soviet era share the perspective that labouring for oneself instead of working toward the common goal of communism is a much less exhausting task.

A by-product of this shift from working either for status or to reach the end goal of communism to working solely for profit has been that work is no longer a career but a strategic necessity. Dedi and Jia, for instance, complained that people only bother working when the salary is good enough, or when they could take a bribe or a tip to offset the work invested. During the Soviet era, by contrast, people worked for the love of work, they told me, a luxury they could afford because without land to farm they could focus completely on their work as doctors and nurses. Since, during the Soviet era, professional salaries were akin to a monthly living stipend that was little more than the amount given to uneducated farmers, the purpose of working during the Soviet period, Dedi and Jia say, was not about earning a living; it was about helping others and about building socialism (see also Chapter 5). Everyone had enough to eat and live on and education was free so people did not need to work for the sake of acquiring these basic needs. Dedi and Jia’s critique is that the present political and economic situation prevents people from being able to “work with their hearts,” being driven instead by the need to earn a living.

But the withdrawal of the state as a redistributive force and the resultant increased focus on work for the sake of profit has not led to the complete disembedding of the economy from social relations. People still achieve status through their work. For instance, even though she now has less work to do, Zohra still strives to be seen by others as *kobil* (hard working). How such “hard workers” are judged has now changed. People are no longer judged by the effort they put in to their work but by their capacity to produce results.
These results are not evaluated in terms of profits but, instead, by how the profits are used. Jelondi, for instance, who worked hard as a labour migrant and, before that, as a border guard for the Russian army, gave his money to his sisters and parents and was unable to buy a house for his own family. He is nokobil, unable to fulfill his obligation to provide for his wife and children. Zohra and Jehanbek’s son, on the other hand, had saved his earnings – also acquired by working as a labour migrant – and had used the money to buy a house in Dushanbe. He was kobil enough to attract a girl from Khorog to marry him, when usually city girls are wary of marrying someone from the village who might not be able to sustain a lifestyle to which they have become accustomed. The skills needed to fulfill obligations have changed; where kobil used to simply indicate a hard worker – someone who brought social capital to the family by exceeding the norm and winning awards – those who are kobil in the post-Soviet context are those who are smart workers. In other words, they are able to get what they need whether or not they work hard. In this sense of the term, even narcotics dealers who use their profits to provide for their families can be described as kobil.

To end this section, let us turn to the question of the embeddedness of the economy. Polanyi (1967) asserts that transition to a system of market exchange leads to the disembedding of social relations from the economy in favour of principles of rational self-interest. Gudeman, like many others, critiques Polanyi’s argument, suggesting that all economies are both embedded and disembedded. Instead, he introduces two “value realms”: mutuality and the market. The market is the competitive “trade of goods and services that are separated or alienated from enduring relationships” while the realm of mutuality is of people who “live from goods and services that mediate and maintain social relationships” (2009: 18). The market is a contract made for its own sake, whereas mutuality is a commitment, an activity undertaken for the sake of something else (Ibid). The market and mutuality are reliant on one another: “the mutual domain provides the transcendent and necessary conditions for the emergence of trade, although communal allocations are not the whole of material life, for a degree of impersonal trade is always encountered” (Ibid: 19).

Even though disembedded economies are reliant on mutuality, Gudeman gives examples of instances in which “market practices and models erase their contingency and dialectically undermine their existence […] by mystifying and veiling the mutuality on

52 In the absence of a Soviet soheb, the reliance on heads of households (and not just on the Tajik state and the Imam) to act as soheb has increased.
which they are built” (Ibid: 37). I suggest that Tajik Ishkashimis are doing the opposite; they dialectically undermine the *markets* by focusing on the mutuality that drives exchange. Efficiency is the central value of the market, but this is not a value Ishkashimis have adopted. Instead, they assess their peers using the category of *kobil*, one that judges the extent to which one is able to use profit (gained, perhaps, through the market) to fulfil social obligations. Jelondi, for instance, is *nokobil* even though he has consistently secured jobs with good wages. His efficiency is veiled by his inability to convert his profit into “goods and services that mediate and maintain social relationships”.

**Conclusion**

There are a number of ways in which the legacies of socialism – what Olim calls “socialism” and what I have labeled “post-socialism” – continue to be felt in Tajik Ishkashim. The Tajik state has retained ownership of all land and President Rahmon issues edicts to his citizens in a paternalist manner. Furthermore, where the Tajik state is unable to provide for its citizens, an alternative *soheb*, the Imam and his institutions, step in as an allocative centre. Of course, not all post-Soviet changes can continue to be framed within the socialist model of redistribution by a central planner and in the next chapter I examine how Ishkashimis justify the increase of market-based activities in a post-Soviet situation that continues to be laces with a “socialist spirit”. For Ishkashimis, market relations become problematic when they are disembedded from social relations. So long as they can frame market-based activities as contributing to the development or maintenance of social relations, they are able to justify them as upholding the primacy of the social.

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53 One of Gudeman’s most convincing examples is the work of new institutionalist Janet Tai Landa (1994), who reframes the work of Meyer Fortes and Malinowski to suggest that the mutual ties of kinship and reciprocity can be explained as a consequence of self-interest (2009: 34-37).
Chapter 5

“Making money is not bad”: Moralizing Market Relations
I ended Chapter 4 by noting that Ishkashimis continue to value the principle of mutuality over efficiency. I build on that argument in this chapter, arguing that, for Tajik Ishkashimis, a market economy can be made sense of through existing moral frameworks if market practices are productive of social relationships. The Imam plays a significant role in making this possible. It is my contention that for Ishkashimis market practices are problematic when they are seen as being for the sole purpose of acquiring profit and/or power. Market activity becomes acceptable when it is not driven by economic self-interest but by obligation, mutuality, or social approbation. To recall Olim’s statement, “We’re not post-socialist. We may be post-Soviet, but we’re still socialist,” this chapter demonstrates another way in which the post-Soviet present maintains the values of the “social”.

**An Economy of Shortage or an Economy of Grace?**

My focus on Tajik Ishkashimis’ experiences of socialism in the previous chapter focused on Verdery’s description of socialist states as allocative centres. Verdery explains that such socialist states experienced a tension between needing to distribute goods in order to maintain legitimacy while needing to accumulate the goods – and *not* distribute them – in order to ensure power and control (1996: 26). The socialist system in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union sacrificed consumption in order to focus on the central production and control of basic necessities and how they were to be distributed (Verdery 1996: 27). This means that while food and clothing were guaranteed, the quality, ready availability and choice of these products were not. The resultant tension between redistribution (for legitimacy) and accumulation (for power) led to constant shortages of goods, hence the “economy of shortage” (Ibid), what Kornai labels an “economy of shortage” (Kornai 1980).54

The long lines that characterized the economy of shortage in Eastern Europe never appear to have existed in sparsely populated Ishkashim according to various people there. But hoarding, another indicator of endemic shortage, was undoubtedly a widespread practice. One middle-aged woman proudly recounted to me how her son accumulated matchboxes. A loaf of bread cost slightly less than the smallest currency piece available and so her son took his change in the form of matchboxes, which he then hoarded. During the civil war, when matchboxes were no longer available for purchase, they had enough to last not only their own household, but also their neighbours, through the shortage.

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54 The endemic shortage was further heightened by the vast defense production of the Cold War.
Even though the “economy of shortage” aptly describes how Soviet socialism actually existed, it does not seem adequate to describe the way Ishkashimis remember the Soviet system. Ishkashimis did not consider the lack of ready availability of luxury goods (like televisions) as important as the fact that they were provided with electricity and stable, sufficient salaries with which they could buy and use the television whenever it arrived in stores. Soviet socialism was experienced as distribution (see Chapter 4). Ssorin-Chaikov (2006) uses the concept of gift-exchange to think through relations between the Soviet state and its citizens. He suggests that labour during the Soviet era was framed as a gift to the state and in some cases even to the specific leader of the time—for instance to Stalin (Ibid: 361). These gifts are part of a never-ending cycle of reciprocal yet hierarchical interdependence whereby the socialist state provided its citizens not only with salaries but also with subsidized goods and protection. Receiving from the state in this way obligated Ishkashimis to it, demanding that they, in return, (appear to) perform well at their jobs. Their hard work (or at least the appearance of working hard) was rewarded, in turn, with gramotas (certificates of achievement).

Now that these subsidies and awards no longer exist, Ishkashimis have come to realize that the Soviet state’s distribution and provision did much more than simply fulfill its obligations. The Soviet economy subsidized Badakhshan more than it did other regions in the Union and these subsidies were not economically productive (Bliss 2006: 330). There is, therefore, a subtle difference between Ssorin-Chaikov’s account of gift relations with the state and the one I am giving of Tajik Ishkashim. The Stakhanovism he speaks of was about the over-fulfillment of a plan, either in the form of producing a greater quantity than expected or producing the expected amount ahead of time. This surplus product demonstrated that socialism was indeed a gift to the Soviet public while, at the same time, the workers’ over-fulfillment of the plan was a counter-gift, demonstrating their gratitude to the state. Central to this exchange is the notion of “excess” (Ssorin-Chaikov 2006: 362). But where Ssorin-Chaikov indicates cynicism about Stakhanovism, noting that in reality deadlines were constantly extended and quotas oftentimes not reached, Tajik Ishkashimis remember such exchanges with the Soviet state more seriously. In their eyes, Soviet socialism really is remembered to have given them far more than expected and, in return, their hard work was an earnest attempt to demonstrate that they too could give at least a bit.

55 See Mauss (1954) on salaries being insufficient payment for labour.
56 As noted in Chapter 4, the purpose of (the appearance of) hard work was to achieve a goal—social approbation, or receiving a gramota.
It is my contention that the concept of “grace” extends Ssorin-Chaikov’s thinking of gift exchange in a way that captures Tajik Ishkashimis’ relationship with the former Soviet state. This exchange is not purely reciprocity, since underlying people’s relationship with the state is the idea that no matter what you give you cannot match what the state can give you. In an essay entitled The Place of Grace in Anthropology, Julian Pitt-Rivers defines grace as “something extra, over and above “what counts,” what is obligatory or predictable” (1992: 217). I propose that we call Ishkashimis’ recollection of the former Soviet system an economy of grace. If we define that which is “obligatory or predictable” for the state to provide by present conditions, then the Soviet state can, in retrospect, be said to have consistently graced its citizens with “something extra, over and above ‘what counts’”.

Ishkashimis spoke often of how much the Soviets did for them. They talked of the roads, schools and hospitals built, the extension of electricity, the ready availability of food, coal, clothing and luxury items, the subsidized travel, the free education and the guaranteed employment. No other regime had ever invested so much in the region. Even the Imam and his institutions cannot compare. To give an example of how the Soviet state is remembered to have graced Tajik Ishkashimis, when an avalanche blocked the road between Khorog and Ishkashim for a week in February 2009, Gulia was left stranded in Khorog where she had attended a wedding. A visiting neighbour, Surkh, compared the inefficiency of the current state to the former one:

Now there is just one snowplough and if it breaks down then that’s it. But during the Soviet period there was never such a problem. Roads were always cleared immediately. And you know what else? Our roads were fixed every year. Now, the snow falls and breaks the roads and they stay that way, getting worse and worse and worse.

57 I am indebted to Caroline Humphrey for drawing my attention to Pitt-Rivers’ work on grace in her keynote speech at the Economies of Favour conference at Wolfson College, Oxford (January 2012).

58 Pitt-Rivers’ work is based in the Mediterranean and, as such, he focuses on the Christian tradition, tracing the root of the concept of grace to the theological principle of it being the “will of God”. While I bring in some religious connotations to the term when I think about Ishkashimis’ relationship with the Imam through “grace”, I wish to separate grace from its Christian roots. Like Humphrey (2012), I too use grace to think through people’s relationships with one another and with the state in an entirely non-religious manner.

59 This is an etic concept that, as will later become clear, is derived from a particular tradition of post-Soviet scholarship focused on “favours”.
Surkh’s nostalgia for the Soviet state highlights the promptness with which its favours were bestowed. Furthermore, even as they were over and above what Ishkashimis now get from the current state, they were also regular.  

Ishkashimis felt a sense of superiority over other Tajiks and even other Central Asians, opining that the Soviet state favoured them over the rest. “Az hama moro ziodtar nagz medid” (“Of everyone, we were liked the most”), Jia told me. When Ishkashimis told me of the amount that the Soviets had invested in Badakhshan I often asked why. Why would they do so much for a region that could give nothing back? I received a range of responses. Some of the most oft repeated were:

- We were the ones who invited the Soviets here in the first place. It’s because we were so open to and eager for their presence.
- We’re modern and liberal people. (Almost always exemplified with references to gender equality, with statements such as: Our girls sit besides boys at schools. Our women don’t wear the veil. We women work. Women and men sleep together in the same room)
- We have taken advantage of everything they [the Soviets] have given us and that made them want to give us more.

In each of these responses, Ishkashimis searched to explain why the Soviet state would care about them. Not once was I told: “It was their duty to help us”. Of course, for the Soviet state, investing more in Badakhshan was, theoretically, about creating equality between regions, something that was for the good of all Soviet citizens and not a favour to Ishkashimis. Ishkashimis are not unaware of this. Nonetheless, in hindsight the aid is remembered as a favour specifically to Badakhshanis. More importantly, the reasons Ishkashimis gave as to why the Soviets might favour them all highlight instances in which Ishkashimis feel they graced the Soviet state. What Ishkashimis gave the Soviet state, by being modern, liberal and open to Soviet policy, was over and above what was the norm.

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60 It is also worth noting that Surkh, like other Ishkashimis, uses the passive tense extensively. Sentence structure in the Tajik language makes the inclusion of the subject optional. The object begins the sentence which ends with the verb. The conjugation of the verb indicates who the subject is (I, you singular, you plural, him/her or they). In this case the verb tense refers to him/her/it. Surkh could be speaking of the Soviet state, the Communist party, a local government official or even the snowplough driver. Although this is an artefact of translation, the absence of the subject of the sentence, seems to convey a sense that the roads just magically happened to be fixed. The state becomes a faceless, encompassing entity that is somewhere out there and not embedded in the community through the people and institutions that represent it in everyday life.
for Tajik or Central Asian citizens and can be construed as a favour. As such, an exchange of favours is taking place.

The relationship that I am identifying is one that takes place through time. Ishkashimis in the present are framing an action of the past as an act of grace. The denial of grace, then, is that both the Ishkashimis and the Soviet state when bestowing (what we now read as) favours upon the other did not see their actions as gratuitous – as excess – in the moment of giving. If a verbal exchange were to accompany the exchange of favours, the giver might well say: “It’s nothing – we’re just being who we are, doing what we do. We expect this much of ourselves.”

Of course, the very notion of an economy of grace is a paradox. Grace is, from the actor’s perspective, a free gift. Even though the giver emerges a creditor, the motive is moral: to give in such a way that denies the gift. An economy implies regularity of exchange. In an economy of grace, then, favours are being regularly given and returned.

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61 The economy of grace I am describing is Ishkashimis’ memory of a way of life and economic system that is no longer active. Dedi told me on more than one occasion:

We were constantly striving to reach communism but it is only now that we realize that what we had was as close to it as we possibly could have been. In comparison to today, what we had then was communism.

While living through the Soviet era, Ishkashimis focused more on the problems with actually existing socialism and what they needed to improve to reach the teleological end goal of communism. But, in comparison to post-Soviet life, what they had then was pretty close to the ideal. The remembered past downplays many of its actual faults in favour of its positive elements that no longer exist. One of the advantages remembered of the Soviet system was the extent to which Ishkashimis were “graced” with goods, services and subsidies.

62 Like other gifts, a return for a gift of grace is expected. This often takes the form of a verbal expression of thanks that denies that a favour had been done. Pitt-Rivers highlights a range of such phrases: de nada (Spanish), de nulla (Italian), de rien (French) and “don’t mention it” in English. In Tajik hich gap ne (no problem) plays the same role. He explains:

The denial is not in fact the denial of the sentiment which inspired the act of grace but rather that any obligation has been incurred. It is a way of asserting that the grace was real, that the favour was indeed gratuitous. It is a guarantee of the purity of the motives of the gratifier, a way of saying (as we shall see below) you owe nothing for this favour, it is an act of grace (1992: 218, emphasis in original).

This is not to say that the statement of denial cancels the debt incurred. He who conveys his grace or favour emerges a creditor. But the importance of a favour (a word Pitt-Rivers uses interchangeably with grace) is the purity of the giver’s motives.

63 Pitt-Rivers writes:

...the essential opposition [of grace] is to that which is rational, predictable, calculated, legally or even morally obligatory, contractually binding, creating a right to reciprocity. Grace is a ‘free’ gift, a favour, an expression of esteem, of the desire to please, a product of the arbitrary will, human or divine, an unaccountable love. Hence it is gratuitous in yet another sense: that of being not answerable to coherent reasoning, unjustifiable, as when an insult is said to be gratuitous, or when a payment is made, over and above that which is due (1992: 224).
That which is “extra” becomes expected and predictable. This tension between an obligatory and an extraordinary act aptly describes the tension between an act in time and one remembered from a different time (or in comparison to another place).

I would also like to propose, albeit tentatively, that the goods provided by the Soviet state might also have been understood as favours even at the time in which they were received. If, as Verdery and Kornai suggest, shortage was the norm for the socialist system, then instances of provision were over and above what was obligatory or predictable. If it is the norm not to have ready access to televisions in the shops, then when a shipment arrives, they appear to be a gift bestowed specifically to that district at that time. Verdery herself makes a similar point, arguing that the socialist state created shortages by accumulating goods and this gave it power, but it had to distribute these goods in order to garner legitimacy. I go one step further to explain that from the perspective of Ishkashimis, this was not necessarily a calculated act but also, from the perspective of the receivers, a gracious one. Just as Ishkashimis welcomed the Soviet state and treated it well by being model citizens, the Soviet state also had the interests of Ishkashimis at heart. Grace, in this sense, is not only about “excess”. It is also a form of exchange driven by a moral intention and not by the commercial drawing of equivalences between goods or services given and those received (Pitt-Rivers 1992: 219).

I now turn my attention to the present, to examine the ways in which an economy of grace might be found in Ishkashimis’ relationship with the Tajik state or the Imam’s institutions. Before doing so, I would like to note that I have used the term “economy of grace” and not “economy of favours” in order to highlight the moral intention of the gift. The concept of an “economy of favours” has its own history within post-socialist literature, which deals with corruption, illegal or second economies (see Ledeneva 1998). As Pitt-Rivers notes, a favour, by going above and beyond what is expected, is often outside that which is prescribed by the law. It is “in excess” of the law. By using the phrase “economy of grace” I am, by contrast, drawing attention to the giver’s attempt to be good. I will return to favours with a more ambiguous morality later in this chapter. For now, I stick with those presumed to be well intentioned, well received and largely well perceived.  

64 Pitt-Rivers says of grace: “values of the heart take precedence over legal and economic considerations” (219)
65 The question of who considers an act to be good is an important one that I will further explore when discussing favours that are more ambiguous. In this section I have focused on how givers
Economies of Grace with the Tajik state?

Given that I have linked the grace bestowed by the former Soviet state directly to the failings of the post-Soviet Tajik state, and have also suggested that grace is mostly retrospectively realized, it appears difficult to imagine how Ishkashimis might continue to find economies of grace in the post-Soviet context. Indeed, Ishkashimis do not often find that the Tajik government favours them.

During my year in the district, the Tajik state gave Ishkashim a bus that made a weekly trip to Khorog on a Monday and to the Afghan bazaar on a Saturday. The bus did not pass through Avj on its way to Khorog but Avjis regularly used it as a form of transport to the Afghan bazaar. The ride cost just 2 Somoni instead of the usual 5 we would pay to car drivers. The bus was an unexpected gift from the state. Of course, in comparison to what the Soviet Union provided, I was frequently reminded, it was nothing. Nonetheless, it was a big deal for this state that appeared to not care at all for Badakhshani to make such a gift.

Those Ishkashimis who understood the bus to be emblematic of what I call grace suggested that the state’s motivation could be because Ishkashimis are Tajik speaking. Khorog was obliged to receive a bus because it was the capital city. But Ishkashim also got one because most of its residents do not speak a Pamir language and this endears them to the state/Rahmon. Those who saw neither this bus nor the new school being built in Mulvoj as gifts from the state suggested that funding for these projects came from the Imam. The state/Rahmon had probably already siphoned off a portion of the donation and Ishkashimis were receiving the leftovers. For these people, the Imam encompasses the Tajik state (see Ferguson and Gupta 2002: 982-4) and the Tajik state itself was incapable of being gracious or generous. Even though Ishkashimis spoke the Tajik language, they were still Badakhshani. Civil war-era animosity remained strong and few believed that those in power cared to improve the lives of those against whom they had fought just over a decade prior.

Furthermore, Ishkashimis did not perceive those currently in power in the Tajik state at the upper levels to be working towards a political project or even the betterment of society at large; state officials were perceived to care only to maintain their own power and receivers morally frame favours exchanged. But it is also worth mentioning that while Ishkashimis and the Soviet state might well have seen the favours listed above to be uncontestably good, some analysts do not agree. Emadi (1998), for instance, critiques the Soviet state’s development projects for having led Badakhshan into a position of dependency (in Bliss 2006: 330-1).
and to improve the lives of those immediately related to them. Any action must, therefore, be read as self-interested. This is true for Ishkashimis’ understandings of both Tajik state actors and those in power during the Soviet era. However, the Soviet state is often retrospectively remembered not only as an undifferentiated time period with little difference drawn between the years led by Stalin, Lenin, Gorbachev etc., but also as an ideological project supported by political structures. The system transcended the egotistical aims of those in power as all citizens, even those who were not Communist party members, were working towards its realization. By contrast, the Tajik state is seen as having no greater aim than its own reproduction and enrichment of those in power. Ishkashimis associate the Tajik state with Rahmon, a human being with personal connections and interests who is believed to value these above the betterment of the country as a whole (see also Heathershaw 2011). Where I did find economies of grace in the post-Soviet context was in Ishkashimis’ relationship with the Imam and his institutions and it is to this I now turn.

**Economies of Grace, the Imam and his Institutions**

Even where the Imam’s institutions, like the Tajik state, fail to provide for Ishkashimis in the same way as the former Soviet state, I suggest that they continue to be lauded – and can continue to be incorporated within an economy of grace – because the Imam confers favours in ways other than distributing goods and services. Ishkashimis’ relationship with the Imam brings back some of the religious connotations to the concept of “grace”. In some ways, the Imam is believed to actually confer the grace of God on his followers. As I argue in Chapter 8, Tajik Ishkashimis work hard to be good enough to be blessed with *batini didar*, a spiritual vision of the light of the Imamate, but whether or not they achieve such a transcendent experience is, ultimately, out of their control. *Didar* is a blessing conveyed upon them by the Imam. The Imam’s physical presence in the region on his *darbar* and work-related visits are favours he graces upon them that Ishkashimis in turn seek out.

Jia has written the following poem in the Ishkashimi language, which goes some way towards elucidating this Ishkashimi/Imam relationship:
Untitled Poem  
By Hadija Davlatmamadova (Jia)

Imom e zamon kol sohib hi muridon  
Tse poot kadami van barakat pe jeuki hon  
Mesh boboot meush beebee togh don pe asrati dedori hi mowlo  
Meushboi hudo nasib keul didori mawloi zamon

Pas eeseuv voonon arzanda meureed hi mavlabo  
Nakonon arriyoi shakeut nakeunoon hato  
Keunon sat ba zamon shukrat ba dari van  
Za vuny yi dost soya ba sari I murido

Translation
The Imam of the time gave his followers a soheb  
From the first time he stepped foot in Badakhshan, barakat [blessings] came to every house  
Our grandfathers and grandmothers left without ever having seen their mowla [master/lord]  
God gave us the nasib [good fortune/fate] of seeing our Mowla of this era

Come close then, let us be truthful followers of Mowla  
Let us not do bad things and let us not make mistakes  
Let us give thanks at each moment for having him  
As long as his hand is there, his followers are all [protected] under shade [that he provides].

In the poem, Jia notes the novelty of the Imam’s presence and protection. It is their good fortune to be living at a time in which the Imam is an active part of their daily lives, a blessing that they must be thankful for. There is, thus, a sense that all that has come to be and is destined to become is a matter of the grace of the Imam and of God (see Chapter 8 for an explanation of how the term khudo captures the simultaneity of the Imam being both zahir and batin, a human being and the nur that is God). The Imam’s help is undoubtedly a gift of sorts, one that demands a verbal expression of thanks. Throughout the day, Ishkashimis exhale expressions of thanks, for instance using the phrase shukr (thanks) khudo, as they go about their daily activities. After every meal, they recite memorized prayers that invoke thanks to khudo, nabi (the messenger, i.e. the Prophet Muhammad), Allah and even explicitly to Imom e rasul. Ishkashimis recount making such expressions appreciating the blessings of God even during the Soviet era (albeit in abbreviated form and not in public places), indicating that this relationship is not entirely new. The grace of khudo incurs a debt that Jia suggests repaying by being good (see Chapter 8 for more on how Ishkashimis try to be good and the role of the Imam as the ultimate authority on what is good). For instance, the Imam’s presence now, is a product
of the centuries over which Ishkashimis’ ancestors prayed and maintained their belief. In these ways, Ishkashimis see exchange with the Imam to be primarily about morality.

As the slippage in the term khudo, which refers both to God and to the Imam, indicates, there is interplay between Ishkashimis’ batini relationship with their Imam, a spiritual leader, and their zahiri relationship with the same man who is also the head of the development network. Khudo graces both the batini and the zahiri realms. Through the same figure come subsidies, investments and humanitarian aid as well as the key to receiving didar. The work that he does with his development network is, in some ways, perceived as his duty. But never before have Ishkashimis had such a zahiri relationship with the Imam and this makes it feel over and above what they are accustomed to expect from what had previously been solely a batini relation. Whereas the Soviet state’s fulfilment of obligation in the past is considered “grace” – in excess of what is expected of it – when held against the norms of the present, the Imam is seen to grace Ishkashimis when his actions in the present are compared to previous Soviet and pre-Soviet era zahiri relations with the Imam.

More importantly, the help of the Imam and his institutions fit within the rubric of an economy of grace because, whether or not their help is expected and unsurprising, it is seen as the product of a moral aim, not a commercial one. The grace lies not (only) in the content of what is given, but in the sentiment behind the giving. But the AKDN is helping Ishkashimis increase their access to markets and help them to use them to maximize profits and efficiency. There is yet another paradox here. The content of the AKDN’s “gift” – self-sufficiency – runs counter to the mutuality being produced by framing the development aid within the economy of grace. Pitt-Rivers explains: “Taking reciprocity out of the field of grace detaches it from the sentiments and objectifies it, making it abstract and depersonalized” (Pitt-Rivers 1992: 241). Ishkashimis are careful not to let this happen. Not only do they insist on holding the Imam and his institutions’ capitalizing processes within the moral framework of the grace economy, they also, as I shall demonstrate in the next section, try to reframe their own market practices in this way.

**Making Money is Not Bad: Moralizing Market Relations**

The anthropologist, Salmaan Keshavjee, who conducted fieldwork in and around Khorog in 1996, opines that the Imam and his AKDN are mediating a transition into “a new world

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66 Pitt-Rivers describes grace as a “mediative concept” (1992: 244). By this he means that grace is “a point of junction between the ideal and the real world, the sacred and the profane, culture and society” (Ibid).
order” of free-market capitalism (1998: 91). While Keshavjee notes the multiple, oftentimes contradictory reactions Badakhshans had to these changes, he also asserts that this is not only a shift in economic infrastructure, but of “an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs, morality, etc.” (Ibid: 90). The AKDN, Keshavjee proposes, is changing what is “common sense” for most people (Ibid). 67 Keshavjee conducted fieldwork at the tail end of the Tajik civil war. The end of the Soviet era was recent and the changes being introduced by the AKDN were new. Over a decade later, my fieldwork demonstrates that the “transition” Keshavjee speaks of has not taken place but certain practices and values that might be described as “capitalist” have been adopted.

In this section, I build on the work of other anthropologists who demonstrate that participation in the market carries implications of morality (Kaneff 2002; Pine 2002; Watts 2002). Since people take part in market activities as social persons who are already participating in a variety of relations, the particular socio-political and economic context in which the market takes place determines its moral value (Humphrey and Mandel 2002).

In Tajikistan, as in other post-socialist countries, a socialist valuation of the market continues to influence social practice (Kaneff 2002; but see Pine 2002 for how post-socialist political changes have also changed the Gorale of southeast Poland’s attitude toward money). 68 As Kaneff (2002) illustrates, those who occupied prominent positions in socialism felt shame when participating in market activity in post-socialism. Yet, they often had no choice but to engage in such activity.

To illustrate one way in which Tajik Ishkashimis – even those who continued to identify as socialist – incorporated market activities into their lives, I use the case study of Dedi’s goal to create a profit-driven pharmacy. While Dedi’s house was nearly two kilometres away from the main road, up a steep hill, Dedi had also acquired the use-rights for a plot

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67 However there is no social class restructuring happening simultaneously. Instead, the AKDN has kept Communist Party members in power in the locally run AKDN projects.

68 Kaneff explains the history of socialism’s negative perception of the market:

While the negative view of the market can be traced back to Marx (see Parry and Bloch 1989), it was developed by Lenin in his discussion of the peasantry as ‘petty commodity producers’ (Lenin 1968: 495) who engaged in market activities. In this way, the peasantry was represented as an antagonistic class to the proletariat, that is, to that class which held the historically leading role in the realization of Communism (Kaneff 2002: 34).

All Ishkashimis saw themselves as members of the proletariat and, by extension, disassociated themselves from market activity. As Feaux de la Croix observes, in Central Asia class has become invisible, not only in popular discourse but also in academia. She draws on the work of Lampland (2000) to propose that the absence of discussion about class might be because, in the 1970s, the Soviet Union proclaimed an end to the class struggle, labeling everyone as a member of the proletariat (in progress: 19).
of land by the main road. It faced the hot water springs and was a perfect location for Dedi to open a pharmacy. His plan was to sell his homegrown medicinal herbs from here. This was not the first pharmacy Dedi had built since the fall of the Soviet Union. During the civil war years, Dedi had been in charge of the hospital at the hot springs and had built a pharmacy there. When land was decollectivized some years later, however, this pharmacy, within the fence enclosing the hot springs, remained in control of the state-managed hospital. Had Dedi built the pharmacy outside of the hot springs enclosure, he believed he could have claimed it for private use. As it was, Dedi moved his herbal medications to his house and began selling his treatments from there.

Making a profit from a business run from the house was a rather challenging proposition in Ishkashim. People who would come to see Dedi for help, because they were coming to the house, needed to be treated as guests. For the token 5 somoni that Dedi charged per treatment (barely more than 1USD), Jia spent nearly that much, if not more, serving tea, bread, sweets and (on occasion) a meal to his patients. Dedi was hesitant to charge more. His “pharmacy” as it stood, being run from the house, did not really seem like a properly functioning business. Since patients were so easily framed as guests, it became difficult to ask for money in exchange for medicine, especially when the person was a relative. Furthermore, Dedi was sympathetic to the amount of money patients might have already invested in travelling to Avj to see him. Establishing a purpose-built pharmacy at a distance from the house would enable Dedi to establish a business. He could treat visitors as clients and not guests and it would be easier to make a profit. He would feel more comfortable raising his prices.

Hospitality is a reciprocal relation that entails one party becoming indebted to the other, a debt that can be collected at any point in the future.69 When Dedi and Jia offer their herbal medications from the house, these “sales” are interwoven with relations of hospitality. By building a pharmacy separate from the house in order to separate business from guesting, Dedi and Jia are indicating that they would prefer an immediate return on

69 Emerging research on hospitality focuses on the ambivalence and tensions that underscore this particular form of reciprocity. Candea & Da Col, eds (forthcoming) draw on Derrida’s writings on the topic to work through the aporia that hospitality requires both complete openness to the other and total sovereignty of the host. Sovereignty is required to create the distinction between self and other, host and guest, but also negates the aspirations of complete openness (Candea & Da Col forthcoming: 3-4). Pitt-Rivers also notes this contradiction in his essay on grace, but where Derrida focuses on the paradox, Pitt-Rivers balances the tension (Ibid: 5). For Pitt-Rivers, the motive of giving a free gift (grace) can exist with the obligation of returning the gift (reciprocity) without negating the moral sentiment of grace. Exchange – be it in the form of hospitality, friendship or otherwise – can be both spontaneous and interested. In this chapter, I follow Pitt-Rivers’ approach to reciprocity and hospitality.
their investment. They wish to cancel the delay of the gift of hospitality and maximize the immediate return (in cash) for the goods they are providing.\textsuperscript{70} By building the pharmacy Dedi and Jia actively constructed a space for market relations that is geographically separate from the domain of the household. While production might take place in the domestic sphere, in order for the object of production to be alienated from social relations and sold it must be taken to a different place marked as being a market space. In creating a space for commodity exchange, Dedi and Jia appear to be doing away with the exchange of grace that accompanies the material exchange of hospitality.

As I will later demonstrate, Dedi and Jia are able to morally justify their decision to build a pharmacy. But this does not prevent Jia from criticizing her kin relations and neighbours for doing the same thing: privileging profit over hospitality. The first day of spring, 21 March, is the Persian New Year, \textit{nawruz}, one of the most important religious and cultural celebrations for Badakhshani. A number of cleansing rituals lead up to the event, for instance meticulously washing the inside and outside of the house. On the day itself, people (mainly men and children) go from house to house, visiting neighbours and relatives (\textit{khona gashtuk}). Ishkashimis believe that on this day all errors must be forgiven so that the new year can be embarked upon with a clean slate. During my fieldwork, on 21 March 2009, a mini-van filled with men from Mulvoj arrived at our house after the sun had set to conclude their \textit{khona gashtuk}. We had not been expecting any more guests but quickly put together a number of dishes to serve them. Once everything had been served, Jia, Gulia and I joined the men. Jia thanked the men for coming, and then proceeded to let some pent-up anger off her chest. She told them that it was about time that they remembered (\textit{yod kardan}) her. When they (Jia and Dedi) had been important doctors living in Khorog, all the men present had come to visit them often, staying with them and eating with them. Now that they were old villagers, no one took the trouble to visit any more. This visit of theirs was long overdue. She told the men that she hoped they would respect (\textit{urumat}) her (and Dedi) enough to begin visiting them again. The men were caught off guard by Jia’s outburst. A couple of days later, one man’s wife and their new daughter-in-law came to visit the house.

Mauss’ theory of the gift proposes that a return gift is only voluntary in theory; in fact it is obligatory. Pitt-Rivers inverts this, saying that it is only obligatory in theory (the theory of Mauss). In reality, it is up to the given individual if, when or what will be returned.

\textsuperscript{70} See Bourdieu (1991) on the role a time-delay plays in making a gift out of an exchange that, without a delay in return, might be better described as barter.
He explains, “The moral obligation is only to return grace and what is resented if it is not returned is not the material loss but the rejection of the donor’s self” (1992: 239). In this case, Jia is angry because her guests have not been visiting her enough. In Ishkashimi hospitality, the host is the giver in material terms in that they expend much in feeding the guest. But it is the guest who is the giver on a moral level, gracing the host with the opportunity to give. The men who came to visit on nauruz had not, prior to this visit, been giving Jia the favour of an opportunity to host. And so Jia articulated her anger by accusing her relations of privileging material exchange over the moral. In line with Pitt-Rivers’ argument, she viewed the failure of her relatives to fulfill their moral obligation to grace her with a visit as a rejection of her self-hood. Even though she and Dedi were no longer in positions of power and prestige, she beseeched her guests to remember their moral obligations to them; as elderly relations, they still demanded respect.

That Jia’s relatives do not visit her now implies, by extension, that their visits to her in the past, when she and Dedi were doctors in Khorog, were strategic and self-interested, and indicated that her relatives privilege material goods over moral obligations and traditions. To recall Gudeman (2009)’s distinction between market and mutuality, Jia locates the Mulvojis' visits (or the lack thereof) within the realm of the market: since they only seem to visit when they need something, Soviet era visits must have been for the sake of rational self-interest. This is not how it should be. Jia took great pleasure in their nauruz visit and used the opportunity to beseech her guests to continue visiting her. If they do continue to visit now, even though she is no longer an influential person with the power to make their visit economically beneficial, then the past visits can be remembered as having been productive of mutuality, taking place on the moral level of grace and not (only) out of self-interest.

It appears counter-intuitive then, that Jia would be supportive of building a pharmacy that further depletes the number of visitors to the house. Perhaps doing this is one way to ensure that the visitors who do come to the house have moral aims, not material ones. But it also appears to be a decision made out of Jia’s own rational – material – self-interest. By building the pharmacy, Dedi and Jia would be able to save money otherwise spent on feeding guests and increase profits from sales. This apparent disembedding of the business from relations of hospitality in order to increase profits – replacing a morally motivated exchange of grace with commercial market exchange – did not fit within Jia's.

71 To return this gift of grace, the host tries to serve the guest over and above what the guest might expect.
and Dedi’s socialist vision that such services should be provided free of charge. Keshavjee would explain this apparent contradiction as part of the Imam and his institutions’ implementation of a “new world order”. Sure enough, Jia did call upon the Imam when she explained to me:

*Imomjon* says that making money is not bad. We used to think that businessmen were immoral, but we have to stop thinking like that. Your dad [birth father] is a businessman too.

Jia’s statement might appear to be the uncritical adoption of capitalist values simply because the Imam has said so. In Keshavjee’s terms, the Imam is an agent of change (1998: 87). He arrived at a particular historical period when the collapse of the former Soviet Union opened up a space for him to play an active role in Badakhshani’s lives. He is also a successful agent of change because Ismailis have faith in their religious leader (Ibid). As I demonstrate in Chapter 8, the Imam is the ultimate authority on what is good. Sarfaroz Niyozov, who conducted research in Khorog and Murgab in 2000 for his PhD dissertation in Education on teaching practices in Badakhshan, similarly observes that “‘Whatever the Imam says will happen’ was the population’s general attitude toward his authority” (2001: 293).

When Jia rationalizes building the pharmacy by stating that the Imam says making money is not bad, she moralizes profit by drawing not only on a religious leader to whom she owes unwavering allegiance, but also on a paternalist *soheb*. In using the Imam to justify change, Jia is keeping stable her belief in the Imam. Not everything is changing at the same time. Because the Imam is seen as *soheb* it is possible for Tajik Ishkashimis to both maintain their unwavering belief and obeisance of the Imam’s guidance and hold firm to their (socialist) values, some of which might appear to oppose the Imam’s advice. With the Imam’s blessing, the pharmacy, which might not be productive of exchanges of grace through hospitality, is at least graced by the Imam.

Another way to explain Dedi and Jia’s decision to open the pharmacy is that the pharmacy is productive of other social relationships. In Gudeman’s terms, the pharmacy ostensibly converts relations of mutuality into market relations; the exchange of money for medicine becomes a contract made for its own sake. But even though social relationships are not created with the buyer of goods, the transaction enables other social relationships to be developed. If the pharmacy makes enough money, Dedi will be able to quit his job in the *rayon* and live in Avj throughout the week. This would prevent Jia from staying home alone during the weekdays. They also hope that if they make a large
enough profit they could contribute to their grandchildren’s education. The example of
the pharmacy demonstrates that the advent of market exchange need not equate the
eradication of mutuality-driven actions. Values of rational self-interest can be a part of
forms of exchange that (re)produce social relations and are, therefore, deemed morally
good.

Jia justifies her own actions because she feels that she has no choice but to build the
pharmacy. Ledeneva (1998) suggests that Russians define corruption as blat only when
they are speaking of the actions of others. When they perform such an act themselves, it
is described as a favour for a friend – a good act. In a similar way, Jia is able to justify
her own decision to value rational self-interest over the production of social relations even
as she critiques the same decision when made by others (for instance, the Mulvoji men)
because she sees how her own actions continue to be productive of mutuality, just in a
different way.

To end this section, it is worth noting that although Dedi had long held plans to build the
pharmacy, the main reason why he began construction during my fieldwork period (even
though he did not have enough resources to complete the building process) is because if
he did not do so, he could have lost the land. As mentioned in the previous chapter, land
cannot be owned and has been distributed under the regulations of a land use policy.
Land designated for farming can be re-distributed if left unused for the period of one year
and land for other purposes – like Dedi’s land for the pharmacy – is allowed no more than
two years of not being used before it can be reclaimed by the state and allocated to
someone else. For Dedi, the threat of losing the land was the main reason why he felt the
need to begin building immediately. He had already lost one pharmacy he had built and
did not want to lose the land that could house another. At the time of writing this
dissertation in 2012, Dedi still has not completed his pharmacy but periodically does
some work to advance the building process. Even should the pharmacy never actually
come into being, the little work that Dedi does on the land each year enables him to keep
the land. Should land ever become privatized in the near or distant future, the plot might
well be a valuable asset for Dedi and his descendants.

To summarize, Ishkashimis are sceptical of market relations mediated by an “invisible
hand” and based on the presumption that each individual is motivated by the aim of
maximizing profit. They prefer a central chief to do the redistributing – an institution or
person with whom they can develop a caring personal relationship. For Jia, as for other Ishkashimis, “good” is defined not by rational self-interest but by an activity that benefits others (in addition to oneself) and in doing so builds social relationships. But there are other kinds of relationships and decisions, such as corruption, that Ishkashimis need to make sense of as well. It is to this “economy of favours” that I now turn.

**Economy of Favour**

I move on now to discuss an economy of grace that is often labeled “corruption”, known in post-Soviet literature as an economy of favour. Ledeneva coined the phrase in her book *Russia’s Economy of Favours* (1998) in which she discusses blat, the use of personal networks for obtaining goods and services in short supply for circumventing formal procedures. She argues that exchanges of favours enabled people to survive in the socialist system but it also enabled the system itself to survive given its rigid ideological constraints and the economy of shortage it produced. At a conference entitled “Economies of Favour After Socialism: A Comparative Perspective”, some speakers demonstrated that just as the economy of favours arose out of Soviet-era shortages, it continues today because of practical problems such a lack of employment, a lack of adequate banking and disorder in government hierarchies (Gross 2012; Hann 2012; Ledeneva 2012). While economies of favour were an important part of how Soviet society functioned, they have become a critical element of post-Soviet life in a very different way. Instead of helping people to garner extra social capital, help someone to buy a rug or enable one to get onto a flight today instead of tomorrow, corruption has become necessary to simply survive.

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72 Humphrey (2012) notes the frustration people felt when dealing with the American or British consulates where transparent rules must be followed. They much preferred to deal with embassies (like the Russian one) where rules were negotiable and “no” did not always mean “no”.

73 Humphrey also demonstrates that patronage, kinship, black markets and rural-urban reciprocities were critical elements of the official Soviet political economy; however, they remained unofficial and oftentimes illegal. And of course they always remained secondary to the primary source of income, which was from the state (Humphrey 1998: 445). Verdery adds that during pre-1989 state-socialism in Romania, the second economy was always parasitic on the state economy and inseparable from it (1996: 27).

74 Nazpary (2002: 64-66) examines this post-Soviet increase of reciprocity by creating a formula to help describe how a family accumulated resources:

\[ A = B + C + D + E + F \]

- **A** = total resources of a family
- **B** = the sum of the family members’ salaries and pensions
- **C** = the sum of contributions of welfare institutions
- **D** = the sum of the products from domestic production (from dacha allotments and domestic animals, conserving fruits and vegetables, fishing, gathering and hunting)
In her keynote speech, Caroline Humphrey argued something slightly different. She used Pitt-Rivers’ essay on grace to argue that because favours provide recognition on which self-estimation depends, and because favours cultivate social relations, in post-Soviet Russia, people often prefer to use an economy of favours, even when a legal alternative is possible. Much like the Russians with whom Humphrey worked, Ishkashimis also enjoy doing favours for one another. In October 2008, I was in Ishkashim and needed to get to Khorog. My passport had recently been stamped with a new Tajik visa and was sitting in Khorog waiting for me. In order to get to Khorog, however, I needed to pass through a military checkpoint where Tajik army officials would check my documents. An anthropologist who thought she had the correct visa but was found to have the wrong one stamped in her passport had recently told me about the trouble she had gone through, trying to convince the guards to let her stay. I was unsure how I would get through the checkpoint without a similarly problematic experience. Dedi was a lot less worried. The head of police in Ishkashim was a distant relative and Dedi was sure that, having adopted me as a daughter, the police officer would help me out. Sure enough, when the two of us entered the officer’s rather imposing Soviet-style office with a large, empty desk, large flags and a photograph of Rahmon on the wall, the policeman graciously received me. He told me that I could count on him for whatever help I needed throughout my stay and that any relative of Dedi’s was a relative of his. He telephoned the military checkpoint, forewarned them of my impending arrival and told them not to trouble me. Some hours later, when I was unable to find a ride to Khorog, he drove me there himself without charge. When we reached the checkpoint he introduced me to the officers who were stationed there, explained that I was Dedi Shirinbek’s daughter and had become an Ishkashimi. Since I was now a local there was no need to check my documents in the future. Sure enough, even when I travelled with other foreigners such as my parents, they checked the documents of other people in the car but never asked for my passport again. By not charging me or expecting any return from me but my thanks, the police officer did me a favour – one that went over an above not only what I expected of him, but also what the law demanded that he do. In doing so, he firmly incorporated me within his (and

E=the sum of resources acquired through reciprocity
F=the sum of resources created through trading (torgovat’) in the market

During the Soviet era, B+C comprised most resources and gave enough for basic survival. However, power was based on status and not on wealth. This encouraged reciprocity, as did the economy of shortage, which fostered a black market. For these reasons D+E remained important, albeit auxiliary. F remained at zero. In the post-Soviet context, D+E, as well as F, have become important for survival now that B+C have greatly decreased.
Dedi’s) kinship networks; his favour was a “boon” to new relations (see Pitt-Rivers 1992: 224; Humphrey 2012). To this day I have not repaid this debt and, to my best knowledge, neither has Dedi. But I would suggest that receiving something from me in return was never the police officer’s intention. By helping me out in this way, he successfully used grace to make himself more honourable in Dedi’s and my eyes and his own (see Pitt-Rivers 1992: 241-5 on the relationship between honour and grace).

But was what the policeman did an instance of “corruption”? Alpa Shah (2009) demonstrates that what some might deem “corrupt” can be made sense of by others within their own moral economy. For international development agencies, corruption is an obstacle to development. From this perspective, Shah explains, a corrupt actor can be defined as “an economic man, usually with dubious moralities, who misuses state resources, meant for the collective good, for his private economic gain” (Ibid: 117). What Shah demonstrates is that many people do not define their moral order according to financial utility. She draws on the work of E.P. Thompson (1971) who demonstrates that 18th century protests in England were a reaction not just against higher prices of goods but against certain market practices that violated the social norms and obligations that had, until then, constituted the normative framework of people’s relationships with dealers. Similarly, she explains that James Scott (1979)’s work demonstrates that for the pre-capitalist peasant, social order was maintained not by a drive to maximize profit but through certain rights and expectations, most notably that all inhabitants could expect to receive a minimum income. In these situations, a moral economy of rights and expectations govern economic practices and social exchanges, not (just) financial utility (Shah 2009: 119). Corruption, then, need not be seen – the way the World Bank does – as “rational economic individuals maximizing personal gain” (Ibid: 127). Their actions might be better understood within the framework of locally established norms, some of which might not correspond to the rule of law (Ibid: 126). When the policeman helped me, he was indeed (mis)using his position of power to conduct an act that did not correspond to the rule of law. But he was doing so within the framework of the locally established norm of the economy of grace.75

At the Economies of Favour conference, Chris Hann, in his closing remarks, critiqued Caroline Humphrey’s paper for using exalted language to describe people’s preference for

75 My effort to contextualize corrupt acts within particular cultural practices is not intended to be ethically relativist. Instead, as Reeves suggests, seeking to understand when and why law-breaking activities are locally accorded moral legitimacy enables us to see the state as a work-in-progress and not as an otherwise well-functioning system (in progress: 31-3).
the economy of favour. He suggested that there was a danger that we romanticize acts that cross a boundary into the corrupt. Just because people on the ground are talking in terms of favours, he argued, does not mean that the same act is not also corrupt—as defined, perhaps, by Transparency International. Hann’s comment forced me to question: when do Ishkashimis themselves view their own actions, not as favour or grace, but as immoral and corrupt? I tentatively propose that the answer to this question has something to do with money. In and of itself, money is not bad. Remittances, for instance, are useful and necessary ways of maintaining relationships across distance; they keep “normal” life going in the villages (see Chapter 6). But Ishkashimis would undoubtedly prefer a son to fulfill his obligations to his parents by helping in non-monetary means, helping to farm land or providing gifts in non-monetary forms.

The same is true of favours that might be described as “corruption”. A favour that takes the form of an action or an exchange of goods is often acceptable. For instance, a teacher can be given a large piece of meat as a gift. The meat obscures the paradox that simultaneous to being a morally good favour it is also a calculated return for a favour previously done or an investment for a favour to be later returned. On the one hand, the gift of meat is an immediate return for the act of teaching. The teacher did not leave Ishkashim to earn more money in Russia as a migrant labourer but is, instead, staying behind to teach Ishkashimi children. The meat supplements the teacher’s salary and is, in this way, a form of payment. But because it is a gift, it also succeeds in honouring the teacher. With money, it is more challenging to hold the simultaneity of gift and payment stable since it is an explicit, transparent and numeric form of drawing equivalences.76 Whereas money only has exchange value, a gift (also) has use value.

But there is also another situation in which Ishkashimis identify favours as “corrupt”—whether or not they take the form of money—and that is when the favour interferes in the functioning of a system that they believe should work in theory. Niyozov argues that Badakhshanis distinguish what he calls “theory” from “practice”. For Niyozov’s teachers, the Imam, like Lenin or Marx before him, and the ideas that all of these men advocated

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76 Many Tajik Ishkashimis told me that only the top 5% of a class graduates from university without having to pay the teachers to give them a passing grade. One student who graduated from a high school in Dushanbe with the top marks in his year was expected to pay the head of the school nearly three hundred dollars in order to receive the associated award. Since his parents refused to pay this sum, he was not given the prize. For these Tajik Ishkashimis, corruption in the schools and universities is extremely problematic. But, as Niyozov explains, sometimes corruption “might be the only way to make ends meet” while “to be an honest person means to fail” (Niyozov 2001: 290).
were not only perfect; in their ideal forms their theories of socialism, capitalism and Ismailism also resonated strongly with one another. The teachers ignored the ideological and philosophical differences between socialism and capitalism and focused instead on finding similarities between them (Ibid: 330). When they compared the AKDN with the Komsomol or the Communist party they expressed disappointment with the messiness of practice. But the ideal forms of socialism, capitalism and Ismailism offered hope for a better future. These theories were all “great and kind” and they shared the same ideal of what makes a good human being (Ibid: 304). In Niyozov’s words, “a good human being simultaneously showed the same character as a good Muslim, communist or democrat” (Ibid). From socialism to democratic capitalism, the values of “education, hard work, honesty, justice and other egalitarian ideas” remained important:

They believed in the rightness of their basic values, because all the great leaders, prophets, imams and poets have promoted these universal values. Times have changed; ideologies have shifted, but these values have persisted, the teachers believed (Ibid: 304-5).

Badakhshani can highlight the imperfections of actually existing socialism or capitalism without throwing doubt on their ideal forms (see Niyozov 2001: 123, 158, 192-3, 220-1, 246-7). In the same ways, it is possible to critique representatives of the Imam – or the former Soviet state – without attacking the leaders.

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77 According to Sino, one of Niyozov’s informants, the Imam was higher than Lenin and for this reason, he compared Lenin to the Imam more than vice versa. But for Nigin, another teacher, Lenin was also a “holy human being who cared for the poor” (2001: 304).

78 Badakhshani’s capacity to draw a correlation between such an ostensibly diverse array of ideologies and the distinction Niyozov notes between “theory” and “practice” resonates with the batin and zahir. The Ismaili scholar Ali Asani explains that: “Central to Ismaili traditions of esotericism has been the notion that a single spiritual reality underlies what may appear externally to be starkly different and disparate doctrines and creeds” (2011: 95). This Ismaili emphasis on the batin also makes it easier to accommodate change since, as Asani says, “this has meant that externals of culture, such as language or dress, have not been considered essential to Ismaili articulations of faith and identity” (2011: 95).

The historian Bernard Lewis also notes that Ismailism has changed quite drastically in different times and places (1967: 138 in Asani 2011: 95). And the previous Imam, Aga Khan III, Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah has himself drawn attention to the fluidity of the manifestation of the Ismaili faith: “Rigidity is contrary to our whole way of life and outlook. There have really been no cut-and-dried rules” (1954: 24 in Asani 2011: 95).

For Ismailis, change is manageable, so long as the essence, the batin, remains the same. This is not to say that change is not acknowledged, but that shifts in form are not as problematic if a continuous element can be identified. To list a few examples from this dissertation: migrants are physically absent but active in home-making processes; life is still normal even though it is made so not by the Soviet state but by the Tajik state, the AKDN and labour migration; the Imam still catalyzes a vision of the light of the Imamate, even though the Imam has also become a human being who visits Badakhshan in person; and mutuality is still the ultimate end goal of exchange, even though to get there sometimes you have to use the market.
For Ishkashimis, the Imam is not synonymous with the institutions that carry out his work. While the Imam is infallible, his institutions are not; they are run by human beings. Badakhshani migrants in Moscow had recently approached Zahir, an Ishkashimis migrant in Moscow, asking him to form a group of professionals that would collaborate to hold the AKDN accountable. He told me that this initiative would serve not to ask more of the AKDN, but to ensure that what the development network was currently doing in the region would be at the highest level possible. Zahir explained to me that the only perfect being was God. Since humans are inherently fallible, and since humans run the AKDN, the AKDN cannot be perfect. What of the Imam, I questioned, is he perfect? My question made Zahir uncomfortable, perhaps because my question was redundant; as an Ismaili, he expected me to already know the answer to this question. When pressed, Zahir replied that the Imam is indeed infallible.

Niyozov (2001) also notes that Badakhshani critic the Imam’s institutions. They complain that AKDN workers are corrupt or suggest that the network has not (yet) lived up to the expectations they had of it. Both critiques are followed by the assertion that the Imam is the only one who can correct these faults. The Imam can be separated from the AKDN even as it is enacting his vision. Neither the AKDN nor everyday life with the Imam in it are perfect, but still, their hopes for an improved future lie largely in their Imam. Niyozov quotes his informants as saying:

“The AKDN is staffed by the old opportunist Komsomols and Communists, who I am worried could delude the Imam’s ideas as they did with socialist ideas” (2001: 123)

“Tell the Imam that his help is gradually reaching the needy to a lesser and lesser degree” (Ibid).

“It is only the Imam who can bring justice. Only the Imam can remove these corrupt people” (Ibid).

Niyozov summarizes that the Imam is infallible on religious issues as well as on social and political intricacies (Ibid: 295). As Badakhshani try to make sense of the disappointments and insufficiencies of the AKDN and the former Soviet state, they distinguish figures of authority from those who represent them on the ground. The Soviet state is seen to have had the potential to reach the end goal of communism but never did so because those in power were “corrupt”, working only to maintain their privileges.

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79 For Keshavjee, the Imam and the AKDN are inseparable and, as such, he suggests that resistance or critique of the institutions is, to some degree, viewed as opposition to the Imam himself (1998: 92). But Ishkashimis felt comfortable critiquing changes when they had no proof that they stemmed from the Imam himself, even if they were associated with the AKDN.
Similarly, the Imam works for “justice, generosity, cooperation, knowledge and ethics” (Ibid: 297) while many individuals “use his name and institutions to promote their own selfish interests” (Ibid).

Thus, one of the primary functions of Ishkashimis’ use of the label “corruption” (koruptsia) is to explain why a given system does not work. It enables Ishkashimis to continue to believe in an infallible Imam even as his institutions are not perfect on the ground. Latour (2005) draws a distinction between mediators and intermediaries. An intermediary does not transform that which it transports. The inputs are equal to the outputs. Venkatesan uses the example of a working computer as an intermediary that enables one to type an article. Mediators, however, “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meanings they are supposed to carry” (Latour 2005: 39 in Venkatesan 2009b: 86). Inputs and outputs do not necessarily correspond to one another. AKDN aid workers accused of corruption are mediators of the Imam’s vision. Ishkashimis are calling for them to become intermediaries, a transparent conduit that does not obstruct or transform the Imam’s gracious intentions to help. Of course, this is a very different type of “transparency” than that advocated by Transparency International. Whereas the transparency of free-market relations might be seen, by Ishkashimis, as problematic because it does not produce relationships, this transparency is necessary in order to enable the right relationship to develop. This is not the relationship of favours between some AKDN aid workers and those in their immediate network of friends and family who benefit from their “corrupt” acts. The relationship Ishkashimis want to develop is with their Imam, the mediator of God’s grace.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have examined two different economies of grace, namely what Ishkashimis remember their relationship with the former Soviet state to have been and what they currently feel they have with the Imam and his institutions. Whereas the Soviet state graced Ishkashimis by providing for them, the Imam is not only a provider but also the medium through which Ishkashimis access the grace of God. These are two different ways of experiencing an economy of grace, but both rely on exchange on the level of the moral in addition to the more commercial and calculated exchange of goods. Ishkashimis also try to govern their social relationships with one another through an economy of grace, but this does not always work in practice.
Being “good” might not be practical in Ishkashimis’ world. Badakhshani often have no choice but to privilege themselves over the betterment of society as a whole. “Good” ways of being are in opposition to the ways people make the most of the market economy. The loss of the Soviet Union has led to a lack of accountability and state regulation, creating a society wherein a lack of values leads to material success. Yet Ishkashimis continue to hold that egalitarian values are shared by all ideologies. Badakhshani focus on the ethics and values espoused by great ideologies and leaders to keep hope that a better future might one day arrive. But they too have no choice but to partake – as imperfect individuals – in the confusing, chaotic and unjust environment in which they live. In the next chapter, I examine another way in which Ishkashimis incorporate work for the sake of profit – more specifically, the labour of migrants – into their moral economy.
Chapter 6

Labour Migration: Maintaining a Normal Home
Ishkashimis know what needs to be done today and tomorrow and even the next day or the next week. When Jia wakes up each morning, she brings in water from the stream, sets water to boil on the stove (or if there is no electricity, she lights a fire in the Russian-style indoor fire-stove). Then, after saying her morning prayers, she goes out to milk the cow. Meanwhile, the rest of us slowly wake up, dress the children and brush their teeth. By the time we have put the bedding away, Jia has returned from the barn and we sit down to eat breakfast (*sheer choy*). According to the season, we all have work to do. I sweep the house and every few days also sweep the yard. Jia sweeps the barn and Gulia takes the sheep and cows out to graze. Depending on the day of the week or the time of the year we might need to wash clothes, plant seeds, pickle tomatoes, organize the cupboards, or visit a neighbour who has recently given birth. Three days a week Dedi goes to the hospital in the capital of Ishkashim, 30 km away, where he works as a surgeon. None of the children in this house are old enough to go to school, but for other families, school and homework are also part of the routine. Tasks change from season to season and from week to week but there is always something that must be done. Even in the winter, with the land frozen over, the road closed by avalanches and no electricity with which to watch TV, there are always smaller projects to work toward. With light from a rechargeable flashlight hanging from the ceiling, Jia knits a sweater to give her grandson on his birthday, Gulia catches up on newspaper back-issues, Dedi writes a book about herbal medications indigenous to Badakhshan and the young girls dress up as brides and grooms.

Daily life in Ishkashim has a rhythmic routine that makes life somewhat predictable. This rhythm is constantly in flux but simultaneously remains familiar, even when routines are broken. In fact, routines are so regularly broken that the interruption of work that is a part of a day’s routine can itself be considered routine or expected. On one day a child might accidentally soil her pants, on another a visitor arrives who must be entertained, on yet another Dedi might fall ill and not go to work. Ishkashimis know what they need to do to cope with most of these day-to-day interruptions; variation is a constitutive element of the rhythm of daily activity.

Life in Ishkashim appears normal.
My use of the term “normal” is based on Greenberg (2011) and Jansen (2011)’s definition of the term. They define “normal” as the regularity and predictability of daily life. They speak of both rhythms (day-to-day routines) and trajectories (the ability to enact desires and fulfil obligations). In Jansen’s words, trajectories are “the longer-term framework in which…’rhythms’ exist, and their cumulative effect” (2011: 6). They might be associated with progression (e.g. from one grade to another in school) or with hope (e.g. to get married). An important element of these trajectories is that they be embedded in certain institutional structures, guaranteeing their eventuality. In Ishkashim, the rhythms and trajectories of daily life are not the same as they were during the Soviet era, nor are they the same as Ishkashimis hope they will one day be. But they are mostly predictable. In this chapter, I examine how Ishkashimis try to keep their rhythms and trajectories constant. They keep life “normal” amidst a change – labour migration – that threatens to alter how Ishkashimis relate to one another.

**Relying on Remittances**

In Chapter 4 I demonstrated how Ishkashimis look to both the Tajik state and the AKDN to serve the roles formerly fulfilled by the Soviet state. Ishkashimis want to be incorporated into gridding structures in order to guarantee the normalcy of their daily lives. Where the Tajik state fails to provide this function, they look to the AKDN. But the Tajik state and the AKDN are unable to completely provide for Tajik Ishkashimis in the way the former Soviet state used to. One way in which Ishkashimis have coped with these gaps is through labour emmigration. While decollectivization and the AKDN subsidies and seed programmes have made it possible to grow food, the yearly harvest

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80 Apart from Greenberg and Jansen, most anthropological research of postsocialist Eastern Europe uses the term “normal” to think through the post-1990 return to Western-capitalist forms of consumption from the socialist “abnormal” (Greenberg 2011: 89 cites Fehervary 2002; Humphrey 1995; Patico and Caldwell 2002; Verdery 1996). Jansen and Greenberg use the concept of “normal” in a different way. In the post-Yugoslav context in which both of them work, abnormal experiences cannot be corrected by “a return to the West”. Instead, “previous lives usually function as a positive source for the evocation of ‘normality’” (Jansen 2011: 5). In other words, for Jansen and Greenberg, normal is not defined in relation to consumption, but in relation to the rhythms and trajectories of daily life that were predictable during the Yugoslav period of state socialism. I suggest that “normal” for Ishkashimis is more in line with the Yugoslav experience than that of Eastern Europe. This may well be a result of the two regions’ shared experience of war in the 1990s as well as their “specific Cold War positioning” that, in both places, continues in many ways to be pro-socialist.

81 Not only do they now have land to farm, but without tractors and fuel, farming methods have also changed, reverting to pre-Soviet techniques (Bliss 2006). These routines are different from those of the Soviet era but can still be rooted in the past (see Chapter 6 for a discussion of the past). This is important because it reinforces the familiarity of these actions. Familiarity is a key element of what constitutes “home”, a topic I will pick up later in this chapter.
rarely lasts more than eight months of the year. Jobs in Ishkashim do not provide enough cash flow to buy even the basic necessities of flour and potatoes for the remaining four months. Without remittances, Ishkashimis are unable to feed their own families.82

Remittances are not only vital for day-to-day survival but also enable those left in the villages to maintain social relations. Platz (2000) demonstrates that in other parts of the former Soviet space people stopped visiting one another in the 1990s since they could not afford to serve guests without the salaries and subsidies of the erstwhile Soviet state. As I discussed in the previous chapter, hospitality in Ishkashim, by contrast, continues to be an important part of everyday life. It is because of migration – and the remittances that migrants send back – that Jia and Dedi can buy candies to serve guests and gifts for when they visit others. Remittances from migrants in Dushanbe or Russia enable Ishkashimis to maintain a semblance of “normal” life. As Isabaeva explains for the case of Kyrgyzstan, migrants leave in order to enable others to remain in the village. Remittances, she explains, prevent others from needing to migrate as well (2011: 542). This chapter is about migration and its effects from the perspective of those living at home in Ishkashim. Through a discussion of “home”, I demonstrate that although Ishkashimis have patched together the semblance of a normal life with the help of remittances, they view this “normal” as temporary.

Tajikistan is one of the countries in the world most dependent on remittances (Kireyev 2006). Large-scale labour migration from Tajikistan started after 1991, surging in 1994 and 1995. This initial surge can be explained by the civil war and a collapse of the economy resulting in a lack of jobs (Olimova and Bosc 2003: 8). But migration has not decreased in the 21st century; instead, the amount of remittances is increasing (IMF 2009; Kireyev 2006). As of 2005, about 18% of the adult population worked abroad as a labour migrant each year (Kireyev 2006: 7). According to a survey of 2000 households in Tajikistan, 85% of those leaving Tajikistan as a migrant were male, and most were either between the ages of 20-29 (people saving to get married and start a life) or 40-49 (people saving for their children’s future) (Olimova and Bosc 2003: 27-8). Whereas Tajikistan does not make the list of the top 30 remittance-receiving countries in absolute terms, it is

82 Other sources of income include the narcotics, gem and arms trade. Given Ishkashim’s location on the border with Afghanistan, such activities are known to proliferate. I do not focus on these issues here. Many (but not all) of those involved in the aforementioned illegal markets also have relatives living outside of Ishkashim. Those who could afford not to live abroad also include those in a good position to take bribes (for instance border guards) and those working for international NGOs (although NGOs are mostly based out of Khorog and so few of those living in Ishkashim fall within this category).
the number one remittance dependent country in the world when remittances are calculated in terms of percentage of the GDP (World Bank 2011: 13-4). In 2009, 35% of Tajikistan’s GDP came from remittances, significantly higher than the next highest countries: Tonga (28%), Lesotho (25%) and Moldova (23%) (Ibid).

Only some money earned by migrants is sent back to Ishkashim using banking institutions. More often, remittances are transmitted through friends and family who are returning home. In some cases, the migrant does not send money back at all, but accumulates money while abroad then brings his/her savings back to Ishkashim upon return. In these cases, the time spent working away from Ishkashim is planned in relation to the amount of money those living in Ishkashim have left. The migrant returns before these savings run out and sends money back when needed.

When I began fieldwork in 2008, Tajikistan was receiving $2.544 billion in formal remittances transferred through the banking system (World Bank 2011: 238). As Reeves explains, the global financial crisis stalled the oil-fuelled construction boom in Russia, leading to many migrants suddenly losing their jobs and many others not being paid (2012: 109). In 2009, formal remittances dropped to $1.748 billion (World Bank 2011: 238). In Tajik Ishkashim, as in the case of southern Kyrgyzstan that Reeves describes, the financial crisis did not orient people away from labour migration to Russia, but “simply raised the stakes of finding and keeping work, at whatever personal cost” (2012: 109). For Reeves’ informants, the same amount of migrants continued to move to Russia throughout the financial crisis, but there was a decrease in the number of seasonal migrants who returned home to Kyrgyzstan for the winter (2012: 109-10). By contrast, only a third of Tajik migrants can be classified as seasonal; over half of Tajik migrants stay in Russia for a period of at least two years, with most of these long-term migrants visiting Ishkashim periodically (International Labour Organization 2010: 2). Those who lost their jobs during the financial crisis took advantage of their unemployment to visit Ishkashim. Some used their time at home to get married or to hold a wedding party to belatedly celebrate a wedding previously held in Russia. But few of these migrants stayed behind in Ishkashim. Most returned to Russia.

83 Of the countries that top the list of remittance-receiving countries in absolute terms, India ($55 bn), China ($51.0 bn), Mexico ($22.6 bn) and Philippines ($21.3 bn), only Philippines is on the list of the top 30 remittance-receiving countries when measured by percentage of the GDP (12%) (World Bank 2011: 13-4).

84 A World Bank survey estimates that in Tajikistan only one-third of remittances are transferred via banks (IMF 2009: 58)
Until 1990, wages comprised 80% of a Tajik family’s budget. By 1995, this had dropped to 40% and continues to drop further (Olimova and Bosc 2003: 15). Tajikistan has the lowest average monthly wage amongst the CIS states, the payment of salaries is often delayed and the prices of essential foodstuffs are increasing at twice the rate of wages (Ibid: 16). Ishkashimis told me that the minimum cash flow required for a family with a home and no large expenses (like travel or medication) is about 300USD/month or between 1000 and 1500 Tajik somoni, depending on the exchange rate. A teacher is paid 80-125 somoni/month, a doctor 200-250. Pensions for many are below 80 somoni.

In GBAO, remittances are the basic source of income for 50-60% of households (Olimova and Olimov 2007: 106). Most of the money is used for food, clothing or healthcare and on home repair or “durables” like furniture or cars (Kireyev 2006: 13-14).

With salaries in Russia – even for undocumented workers – about thirty times higher than in Tajikistan, a vast majority of migrants go to Russia to find work (Olimova and Bosc 2003: 22). Tajik citizens are able to enter Russia and stay without a visa for up to three months if they do not work. But even though entering Russia is straightforward and legal, it is much more difficult to remain “documented” once inside the country. Within 72 hours of entering the country, all foreigners, including Tajiks, need to obtain a temporary residence registration that lasts for three months. After this, the visitor has to leave the country and re-enter as a “new” migrant, or prove that they have work and a work permit which enables the migrant to stay for nine months. Obtaining both the residence registration and the work permit is difficult and expensive and since many migrants use intermediaries to obtain these documents, many labour migrants are unsure whether the documents they are using are authentic or not (Reeves 2010: 11-2). Since the legal regime in Russia makes it difficult to settle, even those Ishkashimi migrants who might wish to settle outside of Tajikistan might not find it feasible to do so. This increases the incentive to economically and socially invest back home.

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85 The economic crisis that began in 2008 was also felt in Tajikistan. The Tajik currency, the somoni went from 3.3 to 4.6 per USD (at one point even hitting 5). The Russian rouble was also devalued during this period. With the value of both of these currencies fluctuating, Ishkashimis with whom I spoke saved their money in US dollars. For this reason, they were often more likely to quote their monthly expenditures in USD even though they used and earned Somoni on a day-to-day basis.

86 82.9% of migrants from Tajikistan go to Russia with most of the rest leaving for Uzbekistan, where many Tajiks have ancestral roots (Olimova and Bosc 2003: 22). However, few Badakhshanis go to Uzbekistan. Transnational migrants from Ishkashim (as opposed to trans-local migrants moving to Dushanbe) mostly went to Russia (Moscow or St. Petersburg). Some doctors and nurses went to Afghanistan where they could get a job in their profession.
There are different ways in which Ishkashimis use migration to make life “normal”. Quite often, one member of the family works in Dushanbe or in Russia and sends money back to support the rest of the household.\textsuperscript{87} Najmuddin, for example, first moved to Russia in 2005. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, he worked with the Russian army, defending the border running through Ishkashim. Salaries with the RUSSIAN army were high and he used his savings to build a house of his own and move his wife and children out of his parents’ house. The Tajik army that replaced that of the Russians did not pay well enough for Najmuddin to support his family and so Najmuddin moved to Moscow where he found a job as an electrician. Najmuddin lived on the premises where he worked, did not pay rent and saved most of his 1500USD/month salary. Once he had saved or sent home about 20 000USD he moved back to Ishkashim. Najmuddin was living in Ishkashim at the beginning of my fieldwork in 2008. He told me that he spends about 500USD/month for food and clothing for his family of five. This is more than the 300USD other Ishkashimis told me they needed because Najmuddin regularly buys luxuries such as cream, new clothes and the highest quality sweets and biscuits. Najmuddin was also building an additional room for his house and by January 2009, he was running low on money. By February, he had returned to Moscow.

For Najmuddin, migration is a tool that enables him to ensure that his wife and children can maintain a particular way of life. He is confident that he can actualise his family’s desires.\textsuperscript{88} His remittances enable them to include little luxuries in their daily lives while also investing in the family’s future by adding to and improving the house. Najmuddin can use up the money he has at hand since he is confident that he will always be able to make more when needed. In this way, migration works to make life normal when both the Tajik state and the AKDN are unable to provide the institutional structures that enable Ishkashimis to establish trajectories into the future. Nonetheless, Ishkashimis would prefer to have the Tajik state and/or the AKDN guarantee the normalcy of their lives than to take matters into their own hands by using migration for this purpose.

Najmuddin sees himself as being an experienced and savvy labour migrant. He is confident that with the contact networks he has established in Moscow he will continue to be able to migrate and find a job in Russia whenever he needs to. But it is increasingly

\textsuperscript{87} In a survey conducted by the International Labour Organization in 2009, of 1267 households interviewed, 71% had one member working abroad, 22% two and 7% three or more emigrants (2010: 3).

\textsuperscript{88} Normal, here, is also about consumption is so far as buying goods is a part of the rhythm of daily life.
unlikely that he will be able to do so while remaining documented since the Russian state continues to decrease the quotas it sets for migrant workers (Reeves 2010: 2-3). Migrants in Russia live a precarious existence. Even those who have obtained Russian citizenship, which prevents deportation and goes some way toward increasing access to work and level of pay, continue to self identify as migrant workers (Reeves 2010: 3). This raises questions of what, when and where is home for Tajik Ishkashimis – both migrants and those living in Ishkashim – and how “home” can incorporate absent migrants.

Home

In Tajik, there are two words that come close to the English word “home”. One is watan, meaning “homeland” and the other is khona or “house”. The word khona is used both to speak of a living abode anywhere in the world and also to speak of one’s own house. The word watan is more specific. For Ishkashimis around the world, watan will always be Ishkashim, no matter how much time has passed since they were last at home. Because there are multiple meanings to the word khona, I stick to the English word “house” so that I can specify which type of khona I am referring to. When I speak of “homeland”, however, I often retain the Tajik word watan in order to capture the specificity of Ishkashimis’ understanding of the term, as I describe it below.

Watan

A migrant living in Moscow, with whom I recently spoke on the phone, informed me that he was going back to Ishkashim to visit. “Ba watan meram” (I am going to “homeland”), he said. This would be his first trip to Ishkashim in eight years. Similarly, migrants returning to Ishkashim (even for a short visit) are welcomed back to Ishkashim with the phrase, “Ba watan rasidi!” (You’ve returned to the homeland!).

The village (and, more generally, the district) where one expects to be buried defines the location of one’s watan. Each village has its own burial ground where residents of that village are buried. The bodies of migrants who pass away outside of the village are sent back to their watan to be buried.89 This includes both temporary and long term transnational and translocal migrants. The grave of a professor who spent most of his life working in Khorog, for instance, was located in Avj. By extension, even though he had

89 At the time of my fieldwork, I was unaware of any people who had been buried outside of their village. As Ishkashimis begin to buy property and live their lives in Dushanbe and in Russia, it might well be the case that they also begin to build cemeteries elsewhere. Should that happen, it would be interesting to question whether their definition of watan has also changed.
lived most of his life in Khorog, the district of Ishkashim and the village of Avj in particular remained his *watan*.

Many Ishkashimis were unclear about my *watan*. I had been born and raised in Canada although my ancestors were from India and the three generations before me had been born and raised in Tanzania. I was going to be buried in Canada, but this seemed problematic since my ancestors had been buried in two other countries. When I left Ishkashim to go to Vancouver, it was understood that I was going back to my own home but only a few suggested that I would be going to my *watan*. The connection to *watan*, then, is not only about where one *will be* buried in the future. More significantly, it is about relations into the past with one’s ancestors, the people with whom one will be interred.

After marriage, an Ishkashimi woman is buried in her husband’s village. She acquires a second *watan*. Even though her husband’s village becomes her *watan*, in some contexts she might continue to refer to her birth village (or, if she was born elsewhere, her father’s village) as her *watan*. Young, unmarried women and married women who have never lived in their husbands’ village, having lived their married life in Dushanbe or in Russia, told me that they were uncomfortable with the idea of being buried in their husband’s village. Their *watan* was, in their minds, still their birth village or district. Notably, they never referred to their place of residence (Dushanbe, Moscow, St. Petersburg etc.) outside of their husband’s village as *watan*. By contrast, elder women who had lived in their husband’s village for years had developed a relationship with their husband’s village in such a way that it had become *watan* for them. It made sense to them that this is where they would be buried.

In some ways, Ishkashimis subscribe to a “sedentarist logic” with the administrative district of Ishkashim more broadly as the idealized *watan* (homeland). Home is a place presumed to be unchanging and constant. Sedentarism, according to Jansen and Lofving (2009), assumes people to be rooted to place and they draw “culture”, meaning, from the particular place with which they associate. Against this rootedness, movement is extremely problematic, particularly when such movement is driven by need as in the case of labour migration. As Jansen and Lofving explain, “their anticipated return re-establishes the “natural” way of the world” (2009: 14). Riccio (2002) for instance, notes that, for Senegalese migrants who are now active participants in transnational social fields, home remains located in the symbols of “the holy city, the postcolonial towns, the suburbs of Dakar” (82). People on the ground – in Senegal and in Ishkashim – frame a particular place as embodying “home”.
Malkki (1995) warns of a bias towards sedentarism that assumes a world of “rooted” peoples as natural – the norm – and makes all movement appear violent in comparison. Jansen and Lofving challenge her critique. They show that other anthropologists, like Kibreab (1999), have argued that to ignore associations with place presumes a deterritorialized citizenship (2009: 4). Jansen and Lofving take a middle road, suggesting that both perspectives can coexist and even reinforce one another. They work to demonstrate the plurality of ways in which practices of identification are (or are not) related to territory (Ibid: 5). Jansen and Lofving’s emphasis that place is important but that there are multiple ways of relating to the idea of “home” holds true in Ishkashim.

As noted, one of the ways in which Ishkashimis locate their identity in territory is through watan. Small ritual discrepancies in rites of passage ceremonies, differences in accents and dialects, and even varied gender roles make the district of Ishkashim distinct from the neighbouring districts of Goron and Wakhan. These identity markers are clearly linked to the geographic region (the six villages of Ishkashim) where people are (or their ancestors were) born and raised. But even though Ishkashimis privilege watan as their idealized unchanging and constant location for home, they simultaneously realize that it is not quite “home” at the moment. Watan is lacking the people who make it what it should be.

Hage (1997) explains that the building of the feeling of being at home requires four components: security, familiarity, community and possibility. Watan is both secure and familiar but with so many Ishkashimis living away from Ishkashim, the “community” that makes home is not physically located in Ishkashim. Nor is there much “possibility” in the district. Those at home are waiting, not necessarily for their chance to leave, but for the Tajik state and for the AKDN to create jobs in Ishkashim so that migrants will return and the translocal and transnational90 community will once again be located in “home”. This is an idealized end goal. Ishkashimis did not all live in watan during the Soviet era, nor do Ishkashimis now wish to revert all movement. Nonetheless, they treat certain forms of migration as temporary even though scholars such as Kireyev (2006) have begun to emphasise its apparent permanence.

90 Basch, Glick-Schiller and Szanton Blanc define “transnationalism” as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (1994: 7). I use this term in this chapter largely because of the prefix “trans-”, which takes into account the migrant’s ongoing connections to their host country or region, to their place of origin and to the places of settlement of other migrants with whom they have relations (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1011). I speak of both trans-local migration within Tajikistan and trans-national migration outside of the country. These two types of migration constitute different experiences for migrants in terms of documentation and bureaucracy required, languages spoken etc. but both are instances of leaving watan.
In addition to 

Khona

owning a house is a key element of being settled with the permanence required to establish routines that have the potential to continue into the future. A 78 year-old-woman observed to me: “Baroye zan, zindagi shoru mikonad vaqt i ke khonador shavad” (“For a woman life begins when she becomes khonador (someone who has a house)). To have a house means, the elderly woman later clarified, to have a husband and children. In other words, for an Ishkashimi woman to begin her life, she needs to enmesh herself in a dense network of obligations to a spouse, in-laws, and offspring. This network has a localized base: the house. For a woman to reach the normative goal of being khonador and to fulfil the associated obligations, she needs to be permanently located within a house.

Galia was a 24-year-old woman with two daughters who did not have a house of her own. Her husband, Jelondi, who I also referred to in Chapter 4, worked in St. Petersburg while Galia remained in Ishkashim, living alternately with her parents and her parents-in-law. Jelondi worked with Najmuddin in the Russian army until 2005 but unlike Najmuddin, he did not buy or build a house for himself. Instead, he gave the money he earned to his extended family, helping his married sisters to buy houses for their families. Even after he married Galia, Jelondi continued to use the salary he earned in Russia in a similar manner, buying his brother a shop and paying for another brother’s wedding. Jelondi had given 4000USD out in loans to distant cousins but as of 2009 had been unable to collect the money back. One man, for instance, bought a jeep with the loan to drive the Dushanbe/Khorog route but had not yet made enough of a profit to repay the loan. Flats at the time of my fieldwork cost upwards of 10 000 USD depending on the size and the city but Jelondi did not have that much money saved. He had no collateral from which he could take a bank loan of that size. He sent Galia 200USD a month which she would spend on clothes and gifts for her children and on food and goods for the families with whom she stayed. She did not pay rent anywhere. She was also not saving any of the money he sent her.

Galia and Jelondi are able to make do, but Galia feels a strong sense of long-term instability without a house of her own and the knowledge that it is unlikely for her to acquire one any time soon. Galia is shudor (has a husband) and farzandor (has children) but she is not khonador (she does not have a house of her own). For this reason, she is unable to envision trajectories into the future. Her children are young and have not begun their schooling and she has not committed to living in any one city, spending months in St.
Petersburg with her husband, in Dushanbe at her sister’s and in Ishkashim with her own parents and her parents-in-law. Nonetheless, the 200USD Jelondi sends his wife each month ensures that both Galia and her children can live well from one day to the next. During the time I knew her in Ishkashim, Galia was well integrated into the daily routines of each household in which she lived. I will demonstrate in the next section that while having one’s own house is important, it also makes a difference where that house is located.

**Movement**

Other migrants are more successful than Jelondi in saving their money in order to buy a house, but the houses they buy are not usually located in Ishkashim. Many prefer to buy in Dushanbe (more simply called *shahr* (city)). I suggest that, broadly speaking, there are two types of Ishkashimi migrants: those who establish their lives in houses located elsewhere, and those who are expected to return to a house in Ishkashim. One bride-to-be, Zafira, had been previously in love with a Sunni Tajik man whose parents disapproved of her – an Ismaili. They married their son to another (Sunni Tajik) woman. Heartbroken, but wanting to move on with her life, Zafira began looking for someone else to marry. Since she could not marry the man she loved, she told me that she would be practical about her search. Who she married would determine what (the rhythms and trajectories of) her life would be like. She had a good job working for the police force and wanted a husband who would permit her to continue working. She also wanted a husband who could offer her a house of her own so she did not have to live with her in-laws. And finally, she wanted a house that was either in Khorog or in Dushanbe. She did not want to live a village life that would require her to milk cows or work in the fields.

Zafira is preparing to make two big moves. The first is the movement of a bride to the house of her husband. This is a permanent move. It is a rite of passage marked by the ritual wedding ceremony and made permanent with the knowledge that when the bride dies, she will be buried in the village of her husband. Marriage marks a movement, sanctioned by ritual, that changes both the *watan* and the house of a woman. The second type of movement has to do with Zafira’s preference to have this new *khona* be in Dushanbe. She wants to marry an Ishkashimi and in this way her *watan* (where she will be buried) will remain the district of Ishkashim, but the location of her house will be elsewhere. Such movement has become largely accepted. Most Ishkashimis living in Ishkashim understand that the difficulties of life in the village are undesirable. As noted in the previous chapter, those in the villages also complain that professionals should not
have to work in the fields. While all agree that it is important to maintain family lands in Ishkashim, only one son will inherit the property (the youngest son) and the elder sons have always had to eventually separate (judo shodan). This new house of the elder brothers has generally been located in the same, or in a nearby village. Building or buying a house in a different region of the country is certainly a change, but one that has become increasingly common and continues to work within the framework of the tradition.

Zafira succeeded in finding an Ishkashimi man who already owned a one-bedroom flat in Dushanbe. He was not the youngest son of the family and had no obligation to live in his parents’ house. She would be able to transfer her job to the city and continue to work from there. Their wedding took place in the village and she made the ritualized journey of the bride from her father’s house to the house of her in-laws. The couple spent a month in the village before her husband resisted pressure from his parents to stay longer and the two moved to Dushanbe. Within a couple of weeks, Zafira’s husband returned to Moscow where he worked as a labour migrant. It is from the money that he saved working in Russia that he had been able to afford to buy the Dushanbe property but it had remained empty until Zafira’s arrival. Zafira lived there alone for some months, visited often by her sisters-in-law who lived nearby and by her own extended relatives also living in Dushanbe. She told me that although she missed her husband a great deal – she had fallen in love with him while living with him at her in-laws house in Ishkashim – she was also happy with her life in Dushanbe.

The problem was that Zafira’s husband wanted her to leave her job and join him in Russia. He missed her too. Like other Ishkashimis living in Russia, he did not own a flat in Moscow but was living in rented accommodation with other Ishkashimis. If Zafira joined him, she would not have a place of her own, nor would she easily find work. If she did work, it would likely be without the proper documentation and would not make use of her degree in criminology. Zafira’s mother and grandmother, both in Ishkashim, separately told me of their anxiety over the situation. I would soon be leaving Tajikistan and would be spending some days in Dushanbe before boarding my flight to Vancouver. When I visited Zafira, both women instructed me, I was to tell Zafira not to move to Russia. When I spoke with Zafira, she agreed with her mother and grandmother’s arguments. Even though she missed her husband, she herself did not want to leave Dushanbe where her life was settled. She wanted her husband to come back and join her in their khona. But she also knew that he would not be able to find work that paid as well in Dushanbe.
She did not know what he did in Russia, but she knew it paid well. A large part of why Zafira wanted to see her husband was because she wanted to get pregnant. She presumed that this was also why he wanted to see her. Six months after I left Tajikistan, Zafira moved to Moscow. She told me on the phone that she intended to raise her children in their flat in Dushanbe, but for the time being she had decided to try for a child in Russia. Her husband just did not want to go back to Tajikistan.

Zafira expects that she will eventually return to her house in Dushanbe. She hopes that her husband will eventually join her there, even as she remains aware that so long as he needs to earn money he will be unable to do so. He also appears unwilling to return to Tajikistan, enjoying his life in Russia. But when I asked Zafira if he would ever come back, she emphasized that his flat was in Dushanbe and that he would never be able to afford property in Russia. Moscow could never become home not only because Ishkashimis locate watan in Ishkashim but also because Russian laws make it difficult for Ishkashimis – and other Central Asian migrants - to establish the rhythms and trajectories of daily life (see Reeves 2010, 2012).

The first two types of movement I discussed – (1) Zafira moving from the village of her father to the village of her husband and (2) the couple living in a house in Dushanbe as opposed to in Ishkashim – are one-way only. Neither Zafira, nor anyone else, expect these movements to be reversed. Rituals and traditions have legitimized them. Divorce could send Zafira back to her father’s house and buying another property, and/or selling this one, could change their house but a “normal life” with day-to-day routines and trajectories that trace into the future can be established without worrying too much about these possibilities. Zafira can make long-term plans because marriage and owning property are structures that guarantee some measure of immediate certainty.

The third type of movement, however – both Zafira and her husband’s movement to Moscow – is more problematic. Zafira’s mother and grandmother tried to convince her not to go and Zafira herself was not eager about the move. All three women hoped that Zafira’s husband will eventually make a life for himself in Tajikistan so that he can establish routines of daily life in the same place as his wife and children. This is not simply a difference between movement within Tajikistan and leaving the country; the

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91 Espiritu notes that Filipinos living in the Philippines are also largely unaware of the type of work their migrant relatives perform while abroad (2003: 88). This preserves the status of migrants who often experience downward social mobility in their place of migration (see also Glick-Schiller and Fouron 2001).
tension arises when Ishkashimis feel compelled to make a life away from the house they own. Those who own a house in Ishkashim but who work in Dushanbe face a similar tension. Even Dedi, who lives in Avj but works three days a week in the Rayon, finds himself in a situation of undesirable movement. As noted in Chapter 5, he is building a pharmacy in Avj so that he can sleep every night of the week at home.

It was understood that for Zafira’s husband to fulfil his obligations as husband, namely to support his wife, he needed to live in Moscow. For Zafira to fulfil her obligation of having a child, she needed to be with her husband. And so she joined him. Both Zafira’s husband’s migration and her own enables them to transform desires into action and fulfil obligations. It is only through this movement that they are able to actualize their future plans. But even as migration, for Zafira and her husband, enables them to maintain trajectories that trace into the future, the rhythm of their daily life in Moscow is not quite the same as what they would have had in their own house in Dushanbe. Zafira’s mother and grandmother fear that, over time, migration will itself become routine for Zafira. Here, migration is not defined as living away from Ishkashim but living away from the home one owns that, in this case, is located in Dushanbe. Zafira is worried that her husband will never return to Dushanbe while her mother and grandmother are worried that Zafira, once in Moscow, will never return to Tajikistan.

From the perspective of these women settled in houses of their own, living in Moscow without owning a house is like living in limbo. Just like Galia, such women are unable to establish any long-term trajectories and the only semblance of “normal life” they can achieve is through day-to-day routines. Bryceson and Vuorela critique what they describe as a “Western” understanding that family and household are synonymous. They note that transnational families do not share a common dwelling and social policies need to account for this different composition and structure of family (2002: 28). For Ishkashimis, translocalism and transnationalism have indeed forced them to reformulate their sense of “home”, but Ishkashimis continue to hold this new “structure of family” in comparison with the ideal of families living together in the khona they own – a single dwelling. Just as discourse about “normalcy” indicates a lack thereof (Greenberg 2011; Jansen 2011), so too do discussions about homes and homeland indicate that these places are no longer the

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92 As described above, for Tajik Ishkashimis it is important to own a house; it is not sufficient to legally rent a place. This is part of the reason why migrants living in Moscow are unable to make the city “home” (from the perspective of those in Tajikistan). Even those with Russian citizenship who have the long-term legal right to rent property do not have sufficient funds to buy property in the expensive city. By contrast, property in Dushanbe is more affordable and, therefore, Ishkashimis are able to make their homes in the capital.
spatial centres of “home”. In order for *watan* to become home once more, migrants need to return to homes in Ishkashim.

**Returning Home?**

As Salih notes, even though home and migrant populations can co-exist in a single social field that cuts across national boundaries (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992: 1), the condition of being or feeling transnational can cause rupture and discontinuity (Salih 2003: 54). Salih focuses on the conflicting desires of migrants, but migration can be rupturing also for those living in *watan*. Remittances go some way towards maintaining these transnational relations (see also Blion 2002; Kane 2002; Salzbrunn 2002; van Dijk 2002). Glick Schiller and Fouron explain that for Haitians, “family is a resource” (2001: 63) that “can be experienced as a set of “debts” that must be paid and can be collected” (2001: 78). Erel (2002) explains that as relationships between parents and their children, or between husbands and wives, take on a transnational dimension, a conscious effort to show love and affection needs to be made. He talks of a young girl who used to receive sticks of chewing gum from her absent mother, which she describes in retrospect as having been “the smallest signs of love” (136). What Erel is demonstrating, which is also true for the Ishkashimi case, is that even as the migrant is fulfilling some obligations (remittances enable the appearance of normal life to continue in Ishkashim), his/her absence means that s/he is failing to fulfil others (see also Isabaeva 2011 and Reeves 2011).

These obligations are different for women and for men. A man’s obligation requires that he provide a house for his wife and children but does not demand that he spend all of his time in it. Instead, women treat men like guests even in their own home, ensuring that they are served good meals, laying out their bedding for them and fulfilling any other needs they might have. During the day, men who live in their *khonas* spend time outside the house. They work in the fields or visit with friends. Many women whose husbands lived as migrants told me that they preferred being alone at home. They no longer needed to worry about cooking well each day or cleaning quite as diligently. They could sleep later in the morning. Other women, like Lalimo, found that her husband’s absence left her with too much work outside of the house in the fields that she would not otherwise have to do. Even though Najmuddin’s migration fulfilled the obligation of saving money for the family, it came at the price of leaving his wife to fulfil obligations in the field on his behalf. Lalimo hoped Najmuddin would quickly return to ease her stress, but she said,
“raftanesh darkor bud” (“his going was necessary”). For Zafira, whose house is in Dushanbe and who does not need to worry about land or animals, her husband’s return would not alleviate her of any stress and would only add to her housekeeping duties. Nonetheless, she is eager for both to establish a life in Dushanbe, living together, because she says she loves him and wants his company.

Some of the men I spoke with, nearly all of whom had spent some time in Russia, were a bit more sympathetic to migrants in Russia who were hesitant to return. They spoke of ozodi (freedom) while away from watan noting, for instance, that they could sit in cafes and restaurants with female friends without being seen by gossiping neighbours. Living away from their homeland meant that they were not bound by the day-to-day obligations and moralities they face social pressure to maintain while in Ishkashim. But migrants’ freedom, while living abroad, was also limited because of their Tajik passport and Badakhshani ethnicity. Ishkashimis’ experience of migration varies. One man, Anis, who said he had fought with some Russian men over a racist comment directed at him, told me that he would never want to go back and was happy to work his father’s land. He was not the youngest son in the family and since he would not inherit the family house and land, he had bought land of his own in the neighbouring village and had started to build a house there. The youngest brother was still unmarried and working in Russia. Until his younger brother returned, Anis was taking care of their parents, and working the fields. Since the jobs Anis was able to find in the village did not pay him much, money sent back by his brother was used to build the house for Anis.

Other men I spoke with stressed the importance of establishing a future for their children. At a dinner with two Ishkashimi couples in their late thirties, discussion turned to some migrants who had not returned to Ishkashim in years but who had managed to secure Russian citizenship. One of the men, Aslanbek, stressed that this was something extremely important for the children’s future. Even though these migrants’ children were living in Tajikistan, they would eventually be able to inherit Russian citizenship from their parents and this would be an asset. One such couple was living in Moscow while

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93 For his part, Najmuddin was excited to leave Ishkashim. Before leaving, he took me on a walk through his fields, during which he privately confessed that he found village life in Ishkashim claustrophobic. He was eager to return to the city where “yakun kas maro nameshosad” (“no one knows me”). He had no job in Ishkashim and spent his days with family, friends and working the land. He found this to have become boring after some time. The job he had in Moscow made his day-to-day routine more fulfilling. But when I spoke to him on the phone some months after he had arrived in Moscow, he told me that he missed his children greatly. Working away from home meant that he could not have both work and family as part of his routine.
their three children lived with their grandparents back in Tajikistan. The couple had a house in Khorog that was boarded up in their absence. They had recently received their paperwork for Russian citizenship. Aslanbek suggested that now that they likely had enough money saved to return to Tajikistan for a bit, they would do so. His wife added, “Miyoyand. Khona dorand” (“They will come. They have a house”). Two years after this conversation, Aslanbek’s friends still have not moved back to Tajikistan.

Another man, Jomel, lived in Moscow and had acquired Russian citizenship. Recently divorced, his ex-wife also lived in Moscow and they shared custody of their only son. Unlike other migrants, Jomel had a good job that not only paid well but was also in his trained profession. He did not own his own flat but rented a one-bedroom flat (with the required documentation) where he lived alone. Some of my Ishkashimi (female) friends frequently enjoyed discussing which Ishkashimi would make me a good husband. The few who knew that Jomel was divorced often mentioned him as a suitable candidate for me. On one such occasion, two women were in the room when one suggested that I make Jomel fall in love with me. The other argued against the suggestion: Jomel was the youngest son. His wife would be required to take care of his aging parents and work the land even if Jomel himself stayed in Russia. His ex-wife had not been ideal because she refused to live with her in-laws. If Jomel married again it would not be for love but to help his parents. Speaking on my behalf, she stated that I would never want such a life and so should keep looking for someone else.

In both the example of Aslanbek’s friend and of Jomel, those living in Ishkashim revealed a tension at play when those whose migration is meant to be temporary appear to be staying away more permanently. The absence of such migrants is justified by the goal of securing children a better future – by acquiring Russian citizenship – but such an achievement also threatens that they might never return. Jia once told me that while Aslanbek’s friend (or at least his friend’s wife) should return to their empty house in Khorog, it seems less likely that he will now return. The citizenship means that they have the documentation to work and their salary might well be even higher than before.

Ishkashimis live the migrant experience in a variety of different ways. Some enjoy it, others do not; some are able to save a lot of money and use it to improve the lives of their families back in Ishkashim while others might have trouble securing a job or might find other ways to spend their earnings. From the perspective of those living in Ishkashim, the return of the migrant is always uncertain, and remains a topic of frequent postulation.
This tension of wanting a migrant to return home but remaining unsure if they will is not new, even though more people now experience it.

During the Soviet era, only a small elite group of educated and connected individuals were able to leave Badakhshan since its residents needed a government-issued permit to leave the province. Jia was one such Ishkashimi who had gained entrance to a nursing degree programme in Dushanbe and, as such, had a valid reason to leave Badakhshan. After three years of studying without returning home, she graduated as a nurse and received her acceptance to the Medical College in Dushanbe to train as a doctor. Fearing that Jia’s absence from Ishkashim might become permanent, Jia’s mother had her local doctor issue a telegram saying that she was seriously ill. Jia abandoned her medical studies to return home and care for her ailing mother only to realize, upon return, that her mother was only slightly ill and not about to die at all. As Jia told me:

She knew it was the only way to get me to come home. I had been away from home for too long. And she had to fulfill her duty of getting me married. So I started working as a nurse at the hospital and the doctor that wrote that note getting me to come home, he became your Dedi!

For Jia’s mother, it was clear that her daughter needed to return home; Jia’s obligations lay in Ishkashim and she was not in need of any further education. Jia was more torn. She knew she had obligations in Ishkashim (ones she could not fulfil from Dushanbe) but she also wanted to become a doctor. She still feels that her calling had been to be a doctor, something she was never able to do, but she does not appear to resent her mother – or Dedi, the doctor who wrote the note – for tricking her into returning home.

The main difference between Jia’s movement and that of many of the migrants discussed above (Aslanbek’s friend and his friend’s wife, Zafira’s husband, and Jomel) is that upon Jia’s return to Ishkashim, she had the possibility of finding a job in a place – Ishkashim – where all of her family lived. Both “community” and “possibility”, to return to Hage (1997)’s definition of home making, were in Ishkashim. Dedi had a similar story, returning after completing his MD to care for his parents, even though he had dreams to complete a research PhD afterward. He was able to get a job at the hospital in the Rayon with which he could support his family. Migrants in the post-Soviet context have less pull to return because those who want to work (mostly men) are unlikely to find jobs in Tajikistan that pay as well as in Moscow. Those who do return for periods often feel, like Najmuddin, eager to begin working again.
For many people, then, neither possibility nor community can be found in *watan* and this has caused many migrants to live away from their the homes that they own. Movement is necessary in order to build a home (Jansen & Lofving 2009: 6). Even as translocal and transnational processes of “home-making” take place in a relational space, they do not decrease the importance of place but emphasise the simultaneity of multiple places influencing the daily lives of transmigrants (Basch, Glick-Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Policies and economic situations in both the homeland and the new land of incorporation influence the daily lives of migrants and those at home. Not only migrants but also those living in *watan/khona* are translocal/national actors living in a translocal/national home (Levitt 2001: 99). Those left behind in the villages want the people they care about and depend upon to be living in the same place as them. That migrants return home is their ideal. Whether or not people (particularly migrants) actually want to live in their *watan* is a different thing entirely and not something I discuss here.

**A Transnational Home**

Ishkashimis want relational homes to coalesce in *watan* and/or *khona*. These locations, however, are not “home” without the presence of migrants. Since relational constructions of home are translocal/national, home is more an ideal than a physically defined place. As Jansen and Lofving explain, Hage’s focus on home as “possibility” makes home more than just a social or physical space; it emphasises the centrality of dreaming and imagining (2009: 16). In Hage’s own words, home is built by “a desire to promote the feeling of being there [and then] here [and now]” (Hage 1997: 108, emphasis in original). Massey speaks of place as an “event”. It is a moment in time when different processes come together in a particular place (2005: 141). I suggest that such moments succeed in actualizing the possibility, dream and feeling of being in “home” even when migrants are living away from both their house and their *watan*.

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94 That migration has led to “home” becoming transnational is not only an Ishkashimi or even a post-Soviet situation, but something observed by anthropologists elsewhere as well. Roger Rouse (1991), working in Mexico, notes that home can be pluri-local and Al-Ali & Koser, in the introduction to their edited volume on transnationalism, international migration and home, suggest that home has become “a community created within the changing links between ‘here’ and ‘there’” (2002: 6). Similarly, Espiritu (2003), working with Filipino Americans, argues that transnational connections prevent migrants from being fixed in one identity or one place (10). She cites Gloria Anzaldua’s writings on the Mexican/Texan border as saying “I am a turtle, wherever I go I carry ‘home’ on my back” (Ibid: 9).

95 Harvey defines relational space by the processes that constitute it. “Processes do not occur in space but define their own spatial frame. The concept of space is embedded in or internal to process” (2006: 123).
To give an example of one such event of “home”, I use the experience of watching a wedding video. Most people who are currently living away from Ishkashim can be found on at least one videotape shot over the past 5-7 years. Throughout my year in Ishkashim, these wedding videos were circulated through the villages and watched and re-watched. When Zafira gets lonely, for example, she watches the three-hour DVD of her own wedding. As the bride, she rarely features. Videographers focus more on the wedding guests than on the bride and groom. Zafira, who, at the time of fieldwork was in Dushanbe, says that by watching the video she remembers those she has left behind in Badakhshan and also those who are currently in Russia (like her husband) but had been in Ishkashim for the wedding. The wedding video offers evidence that not too long ago she was at home, in the company of everyone else on the tape. As the video plays the sounds and images of her friends and relatives, they enter into her new house in Dushanbe, giving her company as she remembers them. Watching wedding videos makes migrants feel less alone, and comforts both those at home and those away with the knowledge that they are remembering kin who are spatially distant and, given that others will be watching wedding videos as well, they are also less likely to be forgotten. They enable migrants to be present in the memories of those watching the wedding video from their houses in Ishkashim and enable those in watan to also be remembered by migrants. In this way, Ishkashimis are relationally at “home” despite their physical absence from watan.

Levitt (2001: 23-4) and Wolbert (2001: 31) also note the importance of videos of rites-of-passage rituals in keeping transnational communities in touch. Both focus on videos as records of events and places, enabling people in one place to “witness” an event that took place elsewhere and in so doing, fostering a “virtual community”. I, like them, argue that videos bring migrants and non-migrants closer together. However, Levitt and Wolbert demonstrate that people who were absent from an event can “virtually” partake in the party. I focus on weddings held in watan in which migrants had been in attendance, demonstrating how watching the videos hints at the possibility that they might soon return and once more be able to attend a wedding. Videos offer the possibility that different trajectories might coalesce once more.

Both khona and watan are extremely important to Ishkashimi weddings. The ceremonies are structured around a groom travelling to a bride’s parental house where the religious nikoh takes place and after which he escorts the bride back to her new house. The rituals that take place at each step along the way are particular to the watan of both bride and groom. But weddings themselves do not capture the event of “home” in the same way
that videos of the event do. Wedding videos are only a partial representation of the wedding event itself. When watching a wedding video that has taken place in the house of a kin member, the spectator is familiar with the inside of the house and even though the videographer does not provide any contextualizing wide angle shots, the spectator is able to fill in the gaps from his/her own memory. The memory of the place and of the ritual ceremonies is unlikely to be accurate to the particular time of that event. Instead, the viewer moves back and forth through different times, bringing a memory of that home during a visit made twenty years ago into conversation with the images of the wedding on the TV screen and also in relation to the gossip s/he has heard that the owner of the house recently installed new light fixtures. In this way, wedding videos are moments of what Massey calls “conjuncture” (2005: 141); multiple temporal frames and scales inhabit the moment in which the video is watched. Through the memories and hopes that wedding videos elicit, other times and places come into conversation with the wedding itself and the viewing moment. The ideal of “home” can be reached while watching a wedding video because it is an account of an actual event in a realistic mode of representation that fosters dreams for a possible future. It is nostalgic in that it evokes a past that contains future aspirations.

Since weddings that happened half a dozen years ago can be replayed in different situations, in any house in watan or even abroad, people are able to recall their old relationships with friends, family and lovers, and re-negotiate these old feelings with the relationship as it stands in the present. Videos lock in the particular details of a specific event (a wedding) that has been completed, but because they are watched with the memory of the immediate and more distant past and in the changed present, the spectator’s engagement with the images is also constantly shifting. Furthermore, once the video ends, the spectator can no longer engage with the person who is on the videotape. The “event” of home ends. For Zafira, the pleasure of repeatedly watching friends and family outweighs being reminded of the distance between them and the wedding guests in the video. While co-presence with people in the video ends when the video stops playing, there remains the potential of being together once more in the future. Wedding videos enable the experience of “home” because they foreshadow “possibility” while demonstrating that relational ties can coalesce in an event that captures both a house with which one is familiar and watan.

By comparison, Zozo was two years old when she passed away during my fieldwork period. Gulia, aged 22 at the time, was devastated. After Zozo’s death, a number of
elderly women commiserated with Gulia. They explained that, decades after the death of their own young children, they had forgotten what their daughters and sons had looked like. Gulia was comforted that Zozo appeared on more than one wedding video. “Uro hichi faramush namikonam” (“I will never forget her,”) she told me, “Suratesh doram” (“I have her pictures”). But Gulia was unable to watch these videos. It was too soon, she explained to me, it hurt too much. Even looking at still photographs of Zozo reduced Gulia to tears for hours. A video would be infinitely worse because Zozo’s movement within it would actualize her presence in a way that the photo could not. The temporary connection with Zozo through the wedding video emphasized, for Gulia, Zozo’s permanent absence from this world. Unlike migrants, Zozo is not in a translocal/national space from which she might one day return.

Wedding videos are successful in actualizing a translocal/national “home” because they give hope that one day the migrant and the viewer of the tape will be united once more. Wedding videos connect migrants to their friends and family at home in Ishkashim across geographic distance and even through time. This does not conflate space, in that watching these tapes reinforces distance even as they enable the geographic separation to be bridged. They do, however, in foreshadowing a future co-presence in space and time, frame migration as simply temporary. Ideally, migrants will eventually return to their own home, located in watan. But for this to actually happen, gridding is required. Only when Ishkashimis are once more firmly embedded in a grid-matrix – either of the Tajik state, the AKDN or a mixture of the two – do they foresee life becoming “normal” and Ishkashim becoming “home”. Migration has temporarily increased the normalcy of life in the villages, but in so doing has displaced home from watan into the transnation.

**Conclusion**

Olimova & Bosc critique academic studies and Tajik media coverage for continuing to focus their attention on the hardship of migrants in such a way that presumes migration to be a (temporary) response to economic crisis. Instead, Olimova & Bosc insist that migration has become “a part of the normal life of a society” and should be treated as such (2003: 8). Whether or not this is the case, my research demonstrates that Ishkashimis do not see it in this way. Ishkashimis treat migration as a temporary solution to a problem for which a long-term answer is the creation of well-paid jobs in Badakhshan. In the interim, Ishkashimis have figured out how to accommodate the absence of migrants, an absence that is useful in so far as it enables normal life to be led in the villages.
There are other “absences”, such as the lack of consistent electricity, that do not seem to have a proverbial “silver lining”. Even though power outages have also become “normal”, Ishkashimis want the AKDN or the Tajik state to put an end to them. For a 25-year period, beginning in 2002, electricity in Badakhshan has been and will continue to be provided not by the Tajik state but by the Pamir Energy Company, a public-private partnership with the Aga Khan Foundation for Economic Development as the main private sponsor (AKDN n.d.). Pamir Energy claims to have greatly improved energy provision in Badakhshan since its takeover (AKDN 2008; World Bank 2011), but these improvements are mainly felt in Khorog. Furthermore, these improvements do not compare to energy provision during the Soviet era.

During my fieldwork, Ishkashimi villages like Avj experienced frequent power cuts throughout the year. Often, when the television abruptly stopped working or the lights turned off due to a power cut, someone would sarcastically cry “NORMALne!” (crudely translated as “normal”). As Greenberg (2011) notes, discourses of normalcy highlight a lack of normalcy. The sarcastic use of the Russian word for “normal”, “fine” or “good” highlights Ishkashimis’ belief that the energy company’s inefficiency is predictable but does not suit the ideal of what should constitute everyday rhythms. The lack of constant energy is an instance in which both the Tajik state and the AKDN appear to have failed, quite literally cutting Ishkashimis off the grid and creating a situation that is anything but normal, even though Ishkashimis are adept at incorporating the unexpected into their routines. Power outages have become “normal” in a way that does not match either the “normal” life remembered of the Soviet past or the “normal” projected onto an idealized future. When the ideals of both “normal” and “home” become more closely approximated, they will hypothetically no longer be a part of Ishkashimi discourse.

Ishkashimis continue to hope that the Tajik state and the AKDN will soon enable a new normal to emerge, one closer in some ways to that of the Soviet past (but with a legitimate space for religious practice) than to that of the present. But the future remains uncertain. Ishkashimis plan for the future as well as they can. Some increase the size of their herd so they can sell animals to the butcher when instant cash is needed. Others ensure that they buy flats in the city before prices rise too high. But Ishkashimis cannot control – or make normal – all aspects of their lives. They are quick to relinquish agency over what ends up happening; whatever is meant to happen (khudo khohad, what God wills) will happen. When Galia speaks of her predicament, living without a house of her own, she ends her complaints with the word nasib (fate). This situation, she believes, is what was
meant for her. Similarly, when Jia speaks of how much she misses her sons who are living and working in Moscow, she often stops herself, saying *hay, nasib, che kor konim* (Well, it’s fate. What can we do [about it]?). The current absence of her sons, she is suggesting, was predestined, a written future of an indeterminate past. Whether or not they will return in the future is similarly fated. She stops herself from bemoaning their absence by reminding herself that there is no point in engaging in such postulation about an unknown future; she must simply wait for the future to become the present in order for it to become known and for the “written thing” to be revealed. Imagining the future and bemoaning the past are both rendered pointless since both were, or will be, determined by the written thing. By placing primacy on the present, Ishkashimis are able to bring the focus from uncertain futures onto that which is certain, making a life that is at once precarious into a routine that is known and liveable.

Fate is a useful coping mechanism. As I noted above, Jansen (2011) describes “normal life” as predictability (the capacity to fulfill obligations) both on a routine basis and along a longer-term trajectory. Life in Ishkashim can appear to be normal – even when longer-term trajectories are uncertain – because fate enables a kind of acceptance of the present and therefore the future and, thanks to labour migration, daily life in the present is predictable, certain and rhythmic.

To summarize, migration is a useful tool that helps those living in Ishkashim appear to live “normal” lives. But if we are to use Hage’s definition of home as security, familiarity, community and possibility, Tajik Ishkashim cannot be home because there is little possibility in the district and because the exodus of migrants has dispersed the community. Many hope that the Imam will create jobs in Ishkashim that will bring home the migrants and make it possible for *watan* to once more be the spatial location of a relational “home” that is a place of security, familiarity, community and possibility. But this future is not certain. While small disruptions in the rhythms of daily life raise sarcastic cries of *normalne*, the longer-term trajectories that are affected by migration use a different coping mechanism: fate. Part of the reason why Tajik Ishkashimis hold out hope that the Imam might one day create jobs in the district is because they have seen that he has already done so across the river in Afghan Ishkashim. And so, it is to a discussion of this border that I now turn.
Chapter 7

Afghanistan: A Fixed Border for Ambiguous Relations
In this chapter I turn my attention to a different transnational relationship: that between Tajik Ishkashimis and their cross-border Afghan kin. A century ago, there was little distinction between these two sides. But during the decades of Soviet rule Tajiks, for fear of being sent to Siberia, felt unable to even look across the river let alone cross it. Since the fall of the Soviet empire, the Tajik and Afghan states along with the AKDN have been building bridges (quite literally) across the river. Hence, this chapter examines how NGO and state involvement in this border region has impacted the everyday relationships between Tajik and Afghan Ishkashimis. While the previous chapter focused on the future, in terms of both trajectories and fate and its relation to the present, this chapter looks at tensions between the present and the past.

Throughout the chapter I use ethnographic material of the everyday relationships that Tajik Ishkashimis living along the river Pyanj have with the villagers living on the other bank. I speak of how Tajik Ishkashimis see, hear and imagine the Afghans on the other side, how gossip from one side makes its way across the river, and how Tajiks and Afghans meet one another at the weekly cross-border bazaar or illicitly at other places along the river. In addition to this data collected over the course of a year on the Tajik side of the river, I also draw heavily on a trip Dedi and I made to the other side during which I shot the accompanying documentary film, “The Other Side”.

Manetta, an anthropologist who has written an article about a Tajik Badakhshani film crew shooting a film in Afghan Badakhshan and whose work I draw on throughout this chapter, observes the implications of analyzing the making of a film as follows:

Film itself is a medium enacting a kind of virtual movement, capable of both forging new connections for the (immobile) audience and simultaneously emphasizing differences, enlarged on the big screen. Approaching the creation and circulation of documentary film as a special type of ‘movement’ allows us to broaden our understanding of mobility itself, and to explore ways that citizens of one state imagine, forge and re-forge their connections to citizens of another (Manetta 2011: 372).

This type of “virtual movement” is what I discussed with regard to wedding videos in the previous chapter. In this chapter, my focus is much more on Dedi’s “actual” movement across the border and the relationships he developed with Afghans, both while the camera was rolling and while it was not. Tajik Ishkashimis are not easily able to acquire Afghan
visas, but the data I collected during our visit enables me to postulate what sort of cross-border relationships might emerge should visa restrictions be relaxed even further.

**Sharing a Soheb**

As recently as 2003, when both Manetta and Steinberg, another anthropologist who has written about the Tajik-Afghan border, conducted their fieldwork, Tajik Ishkashimis who looked across the river saw Afghans travelling by donkey or horse (Steinberg 2011: 125). During my fieldwork in 2008, once every couple of days we would notice that on the other side of the river a lorry, truck, or car was driving along the Afghan road. Tajik Ishkashimis found it astonishing every time. Bebin! Kamaz! (Look! A truck!), they would exclaim. Of course, the number of cars that drove along the Tajik road far exceeded those in Afghanistan. What amazed Tajik Ishkashimis was that Afghans actually owned and used motor vehicles for transport. Life was visibly improving on the other side of the river and these changes threatened existing stereotypes of the comparative superiority of life in Tajikistan.

How and when did all of these improvements happen? During our trip, Dedi’s Afghan relatives told us that most of these changes have only happened within the past five years, thanks to Imomjon (the Aga Khan). An Ishkashimi told Manetta: “If they [the Afghans] follow the Imam (the Aga Khan) their living conditions will be improved” (Manetta 2011: 378). Sure enough, when Dedi and I were in Afghanistan, we were told that the Imam built the hospital we visited and continued to provide funding so that all treatments would be free. His AKDN launched an anti-drug campaign that, according to Afghan

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96 The cost of Dedi’s visa with his Tajik passport (60USD) was double the cost of the visa for my Canadian passport (30USD).
97 Steinberg and Manetta are married at the time of writing this PhD. Some of their ethnography refers to the same events but it is unclear the extent to which they conducted fieldwork together or separately. They do not mention one another in their writing.
98 It is important to note that while both Tajik and Afghan Ishkashimis gave nearly all of the credit for improvements to the Imam, the Aga Khan and his development network are not the only actors working to improve life in Afghan and Tajik Badakhshan. His projects are often funded by other agencies like USAID, CIDA, UNDP or the World Bank and are not put in place without government legitimation. For their part, both the Tajik and the Afghan governments are also pushing for greater cross-border cooperation. In 2010, Tajik Minister for Foreign Affairs Zarifi made a speech in Kabul saying that Tajik-Afghan cooperation will increase the stability of the region. He announced plans to build a new hydropower plant to benefit both countries, and noted that a fibre-optic communication cable line and numerous bridges, with more to be built in the following years, already connect the countries. A few months later, the Tajik government announced that visa restrictions would be loosened for Afghan Badakhshani in order to ease their access to emergency medical aid in Tajik hospitals (2010). The Imam is also careful to emphasize the role that both the Tajik and the Afghan states have played in permitting cross-border bridges to be built (Aga Khan IV 2006).
Ishkashimis I spoke with, succeeded in eliminating addiction in their villages. The Afghan bazaar, the weekly cross-border tax free bazaar that he had launched, attracted Afghan traders from the southern parts of Afghanistan, creating jobs in Ishkashim for taxi drivers, restaurant workers and guesthouses. The Imam is the one who built the large Ismaili prayer hall that Dedi and I visited where he employs a large number of cleaners and guards, paying wages high enough to support a family. All of this meant that while Tajik Ishkashimis were still living as migrant workers in Russia, a large majority of Afghan migrants in Pakistan were returning to Badakhshan! (see “The Other Side”). Furthermore, it is because of the strong AKDN presence in the area that Afghan Ishkashimis could be open about their religious practice and beliefs.

As we marvelled at the improvements we noted on the Afghan side, Dedi asked his cousin, who works as an anaesthesiologist at the Aga Khan clinic in Afghan Ishkashim, why the AKDN had not built such a hospital in Tajik Ishkashim. The response was davlat ijozat namidehad (the [Tajik] government does not give permission). The AKDN encounters few such limitations from the Afghan state. The Imam took advantage of the US occupation of Afghanistan to develop strong relations with Afghan president, Hamid Karzai. In 2002, just six months following the events of 9/11, the Sunni president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, met with the Ismaili leader. The Imam donated two million USD to the Loya Jirga (Grand Council), a national-level forum to elect the country’s new leadership and Karzai granted the AKDN diplomatic immunity in Afghanistan (synergos.org). Tajik Ishkashimis also want to benefit from AKDN projects and are frustrated when the Tajik state prevents this from happening.

The improvement of life in Afghanistan while in Tajikistan Soviet-era standards still have not been re-attained is frustrating for Tajik Ishkashimis. In “The Other Side”, when Dedi walks through the Afghan clinic and sees technology and instruments far more modern than what he has in his hospital in Ishkashim, he exclaims, “In tartib”. Best translated as “this is absurd”, Dedi seems to be ironically noting an inversion of fortunes. Afghan Ishkashim is a place with few trained doctors of its own. During the 1970s Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, extremely ill Afghan Badakhshanis were brought to hospitals in Khorog and Tajik Ishkashim for treatment. Dedi himself treated Afghans during this time. And now Afghanistan has a better clinic than Tajikistan.

The same line of argument is often made for differences in access to electricity. Manetta describes for Badakhshan in 2003:
Residents of relatively prosperous satellite villages outside of Khorog described their sense of separation when they flipped on their electric lights in the evening, only to watch their counterparts on the Afghan side brighten and warm their dwellings by fire and lantern light (Manetta 2011: 378)

In 2008, Tajik Ishkashimis experienced frequent power cuts while they could see electric light shining through the windows of houses on the other side of the river. The clear sense of separation – and superiority – no longer holds true. While power in Tajik Badakhshan comes from power plants in Khorog and just outside of Ishkashim’s Rayon, in Afghanistan, each village has a small hydro-powered generator. These were built through the AKDN Village Organization programme. Village residents were expected to make some contribution to the enterprise that would then be supplemented with funding from the AKDN. One of our neighbours in Avj, Barshor, told me that the pipes to channel water into the turbine in Valej (the Afghan village facing Avj) had been Soviet-era irrigation pipes in Avj. Valejis had stolen them in the 1990s. I was unable to verify this on my visit to Valej. Nonetheless, Barshor’s comment is interesting because it implies that advancements in Afghanistan have come at the expense of Tajik Ishkashimis. This sort of rivalry also underlay Dedi’s admiration of the Aga Khan hospital in Afghan Ishkashim. Dedi did not resent Afghan advancement, nor was he angry with the Imam for not building a hospital in Tajikistan. But he did question: Why not us too?

Most of the improvements in Afghanistan that I have described only became apparent to Dedi and me when we crossed the border. Those that do not cross the border – the majority of Tajik Ishkashimis – are only aware of the changes that are visible from across the river, namely the increase in cars driving along the road and the electric lights shining in people’s homes every night. Many Tajik Ishkashimis are, on one level, happy to see that life has improved for their Afghan relatives. But both Barshor’s comment about the hydro pipes and Dedi’s envy over the AKDN clinic in Afghanistan indicate that Tajik Ishkashimis also think about how AKDN investment on the Afghan side of the river might affect them. Improvement in the quality of life in Afghanistan threatens Tajik Ishkashimis’ own sense of modernity, oftentimes defined in opposition to their cross-border kin’s perceived backwardness.

Steinberg suggests that the Tajik self is defined in relation to an Afghan “other” that resembles “an earlier version of the self as it existed in its own past” (Ibid: 122-4). Like Steinberg, Manetta suggests that Tajiks nostalgically portray Afghans as “pure” and “primitive”, contemporary living models of the Tajiks’ own past. Tajiks’ nostalgia for the untouched “paradise” in Afghanistan enables a particular form of cross-border connection.
According to her research, Afghans are not very far away in terms of physical distance but they do not share the same temporal space as Tajiks. They are seen as anachronistic. And in this way, the border is “somehow un-crossable” (2011: 381). My own ethnography supports both Steinberg and Manetta’s observations. Nostalgia is indeed an important element in Tajik Ishkashimis’ relationships with their cross-border Afghan kin; Afghans are living examples of a purer past.

The Tajik Ishkashimis I spoke with over the course of my fieldwork year insisted that Afghan Ishkashimis (if not the villages themselves) were different from their Tajik counterparts:

Nazri: Mo ham khun, hum din, hum zabon hastim lekin shariyot digar shodast (We have the same blood, the same religion and the same language but our way of life (shariyot) has become different)

Haydi: Kam barobar mioyand, dur megaltand (We are only the same in some ways, they are quite different (lit. they fall far from us)).

Odina: Mohabbat kam meshad (Our love [for one another] is decreasing)

Qurbon: Nazdik nameshad, digar meshad. Sohbat nameshad. (We will not become close, [but] will become different. We will not/do not talk)

According to these statements, Tajik and Afghan Ishkashimis shared a past but have since become different groups of people. The differences that have emerged, as both Steinberg and Manetta also demonstrate, depict Afghans, one Tajik Ishkashimi man told me, as “living the way we used to fifty years ago”. For Tajiks, Afghanistan is a place that is a different time (Steinberg 2011: 124. cf Fabian 1983; Gupta & Ferguson 1992). In my film, “The Other Side”, Dedi notes that a pot some Afghan women have made out of dung is of the type Dedi’s own ancestors also used to make. Practices that are current in Afghanistan are, on the Tajik side, out-dated enough to “put in a museum”. Dedi similarly marvels at the blacksmith and the extremely large flourmill we come across.

There are a number of reasons why Tajik Ishkashimis are eager to define themselves as clearly different from their Afghan kin. Some note a difference in values between Tajik and Afghan Ismailis. A young Tajik Shugni man for instance, refused for his sister to marry a well-off Afghan Badakhshani living in Germany who had become enamoured by her after seeing her at a wedding of a mutual friend. While the Tajik man acknowledged that his educated, English-speaking sister would have a better life married to an Afghan hotel owner in Europe than to a Tajik living in Badakhshan, this young man insisted that

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99 Steinberg’s informant backdates the Afghans even further – to 1917 (2011: 124).
the couple would be forever incompatible. Of the many reasons he could have cited for this, he focused on the fact that the Afghan was raised in a capitalist country and could never understand the socialist (albeit post-Soviet) way of being Tajik.

For other Tajik Ishkashimis, Afghanistan is associated with the illegal opium and gem trades. Those who partake in such trading activities are, of course, more open to cross border relations than the Tajik Ishkashimis I am more generally referring to in this chapter. In this vein, it is important to note the different meanings that the word “Afghan” has. Afghan traders – both legal and illegal – are usually Sunni and originally come from outside of Afghan Ishkashim. From what I was told, Afghan Ismaili Ishkashimis are not as active in trading activity. Tajik Ishkashimis use the word “Afghan” to refer to both Sunni and Ismaili Afghans. The slippage in the term “Afghan” is, I suggest, part of what leads to Tajik Ishkashimis’ ambivalence in whether to develop relations with their cross-border kin. It is not always possible to determine exactly which type of “Afghan” Ishkashimis are referring to when they speak of “Afghans” and this is reflected in both Steinberg and Manetta’s uncritical usage of term. Inversely, Tajik Ishkashimis did not often self-identify as Tajik and comparing themselves to their cross-border counterparts constituted one of the few situations in which they adopted this label.

Ishkashimis also justify their accounts of Afghan as “other” in the visits they made to the other side during the civil war. During the Tajik civil war, over 80 000 Tajiks escaped the fighting in Dushanbe by crossing the border into Afghanistan (Lemon 2011). Many Badakhshanis used Afghanistan as an escape route to return home to their own villages, since the main road was impassable. Furthermore, before AKDN aid arrived, Tajik and Afghan men crossed the river to trade with one another. Tajiks exchanged pelts of fur or household objects for wheat or rice. Such movement was not legal and is remembered as having been extremely dangerous. Both the Russian and the Tajik armies guarded the border, but in some cases these guards were also dependent on cross-border trade (and bribes from those crossing the river). Some men proudly confided in me that they had

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100 Militant violence, influenced by the Taliban and other Islamist groups from Afghanistan is an issue along the western part of the Tajik-Afghan border. In September 2010, Tajik border guards claim to have killed at least 20 Taliban, further emphasizing the security threat associated with the increased porosity of the border. Afghan Badakhshan, the Afghan province that borders the Tajik province (oblast) of Gorno-Badakhshan is the only Afghan province never to have been captured by the Taliban. The securitization issues along this stretch of the border by contrast, primarily concern the illegal opium and gem trades.

101 See Reeves (in progress: 175-6, 190-2) for an account of a Russian soldier who worked the border during this time. He suggests that it is the Tajik soldiers who were reliant on cross-border trade, while the Russian soldiers were paid well enough to prevent such activity.
made dangerous trips to Afghanistan, in part for the adventure, but mostly in order to trade animal hides and family collectibles for essential goods such as rice and flour. Since such a socially justified reason for illegally crossing the border existed during the Civil War era, the morality of illegal trips during this period was more ambiguous than it has since become. Nonetheless, it is likely that many who crossed into Afghanistan were partaking in the narcotics and arms trade. The consequences of getting caught were high. One man in his early thirties, reputedly engaged in the drug trade, spent half a year in an Afghan prison during this period for being caught without a proper visa. And a middle-aged woman from the village Ren told me of a man she knew who was shot dead while trying to swim across the river.

Dedi, however, refused to cross the river during the civil war because, he insisted, it was not allowed (momken na bud). At the funeral ceremony that he organised for his oldest son, Jamshed, a journalist who had gone missing in Dushanbe in the opening months of the war, two Afghan relatives crossed over to Tajikistan to pay their respects. Dedi refused them entrance to his house and told them to go back to Afghanistan. “If they had been killed while trying to cross the river [for the funeral] that would have been my fault,” he explained, “then I would have had to risk my own life to attend their funerals in Afghanistan!” He did not want to develop relationships with Afghan kin that would require him to perform illegal acts in order to fulfill obligations. Like many other Tajik Ishkashimis described, Dedi was concerned about his reputation and wanted to be seen as law-abiding. But Dedi, unlike many other Tajik Ishkashimis, found himself in a situation wherein he could afford to live by the law. Others who might not have had the same contacts on the Tajik side did not share this luxury. As noted above, they justified their cross-border trips by citing their need; for them, the end justified the means. As Venkatesan explains, “for different people who occupy different positions of status, the logic of ends and means may vary, as do judgments about their actions” (2009a: 76).

While Dedi was able to preserve his reputation amongst Tajik Ishkashimis, Dedi’s attitude toward border crossing during the civil war earned him a reputation, amongst Afghans, as being a “Communist”. As one of Dedi’s Afghan nephews told him during our trip, “we all knew that even if we were in trouble we should never ask Dr. Shirinbek for help. We all thought that you were a communist and would turn us over to the guards.” Dedi smiled and chuckled at these accusations but never contradicted them.  

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102 In Tajik Ishkashim, the word “communist” is used in two ways: (1) to refer to the teleological end goal of the socialist state and (2) to refer to the Soviet era Communist Party. Having only
Since the Tajik civil war, cross-border relations have changed once more. Whereas roads and markets once connected Badakhshan to centres within the former Soviet Union, like Osh, the ones that are now gaining importance connect Tajik Badakhshanis outside of the former Soviet space to Afghanistan or, in the case of the Badakhshani district of Murgab, to China (see Mostowlansky 2011). Most notably, a bridge has been built in Ishkashim connecting the two sides with an official border crossing. Tajik Ishkashimis are aware that their Imam is actively attempting to foster cross-border cultural connections between Tajiks and Afghans living along the river Pyanj (see also akdn.org; Steinberg 2011: 126).

The Aga Khan Foundation has, since 2002, spent US $1.7 million building four cross-border bridges at Darwaz, Tem (Khorog), Ishkashim and Langar. Many Ishkashimis recounted being present for the Imam’s inauguration of the Ishkashim Bridge in 2006. At this event, the Imam delivered a speech describing these bridges as powerful symbols of “connection, cooperation and harmony”. The Imam focuses on both social and economic links, saying that bridges have “the potential to reduce poverty, foster trade and cultural exchanges, and promote economic growth in the region while more broadly contributing to its overall stability”. For Tajiks, the bridges and a weekly Tajik/Afghan cross-border market built by the UNDP have increased access to, and lowered prices of, goods from both Afghanistan and Pakistan. For Afghans, the bridges have increased their access to humanitarian aid and social services coming in through Tajikistan.

When the Aga Khan spoke at the opening of the bridge in Ishkashim, he noted the shared history of both Tajik and Afghan Badakhshanis and that both groups are physically isolated from their national – political and economic – centers. The inter-connectedness to be fostered by the bridges is intended to improve the living standards of both sides as they benefit from sharing resources. My ethnography demonstrates that these attempts to foster cross-border connections through official border crossings and cross-border bazaars do not succeed in encouraging Tajik and Afghan Ishkashimis to develop reciprocal relationships with one another. One Ishkashimi man, Zurbek, suggested that a bridge needed to be built in every village for meaningful relationships between Tajik and Afghan Ishkashimis to develop. This comment highlights that the existing bridge in Ishkashim might have lowered the price of tea and made it possible to buy tomatoes in the middle of

spent three days in Afghanistan, it is not clear to me exactly what the word “communist” refers to for Afghan Ishkashimis. It is most likely a pejorative term (see also the Afghan use of “communist” in “The Other Side”). Here, it is likely that Dedi accepts the accusation that he is a communist because he was indeed a member of the Communist Party who valued the ideals of the socialist party and hoped one day to achieve a communist state.
winter but it does not succeed in bringing Tajik and Afghan villagers together largely because Tajik Ishkashimis do not want to forge relations with their cross-border kin.

When walking from Avj to Mulvoj on my own in December 2008, an Afghan man who was ice fishing in the middle of the frozen river shouted out to me. I stopped my walk and we had a short conversation. He asked me who I was and when I tried to tell him that I was Dedi Shrinbek’s daughter, he told me that this could not be possible as Shirinbek only had one daughter and she lived in Dushanbe with her children. I was too young to be this daughter. Plus my accent did not sound like I was from the district of Ishkashim and he suggested that perhaps I was a relative visiting from the neighbouring district of Goron. I explained to him that I had come from Canada but had become Shirinbek’s adopted daughter (dokhtarhon) and had been staying with him for some time. He then asked me whether my Tajik brother, Dedi’s son Nosim, was still in Avj or whether he had returned to Moscow.

I was slightly taken aback that the man knew not only how many children Dedi had but also that just two months prior, one of his sons had come home for a visit. When I reached Mulvoj I shared my experience with the family I was visiting. “Bebin!” Sharifa, a 60 year old woman, exclaimed, “Afghono hama mefahmand!” (You see! Afghans know everything!). The others shook their heads in agreement with what seemed to be a trace of disdain. What is clear from this example is that news does travel across the border even without a bridge in every village. But Tajik Ishkashimis do not want to know – or be seen to know – gossip about the everyday lives of their cross-border kin. The need for more bridges is, instead, an indication that Tajik Ishkashimis will not develop cross-border relations unless someone else actively builds them.

Now that Tajik Ishkashimis have seen how different the two sides are from one another, it is this difference that they emphasise. Donnan critiques what he describes as “the theoretical tendency to deconstruct all stable identities” by demonstrating that fixity, immobility and stability can be extremely important to people living near borders (2005: 74). He explains that for Protestants living in Northern Ireland, “As long as the border is fixed and stable, local ethnic boundaries may be muted and maybe even fluid. But as the border softens or begins to move around, people’s identities are likely to be made hard and fast” (Donnan 2005: 96). It becomes important to stress difference when it is not assumed or marked. As Girard notes, “It is not the differences but the loss of them that gives rise to violence and chaos” (1979:51).
In the same vein, Pelkmans demonstrates that when the Turkish-Georgian border became more porous following the dissolution of the USSR and post-Soviet Georgians came into contact with their cross-border Turkish relatives, the differences they noticed between one another were extremely unsettling. During the years of separation, Georgians had continued to identify with their cross-border relatives and had been excited to rekindle relations once more (2006: 72-3). Inhabitants of the border village of Sarpi eventually accepted that the Turkish and Georgian parts of the village had become part of different worlds. As Pelkmans explains, “The inhabitants of the other [Turkish] Sarpi were no longer part of their own [Georgian] group. They had become outsiders and needed to stay on the other side of the border” (Ibid: 83).

Both Donnan and Pelkmans’ observations appear to hold true in Tajikistan. Tajik and Afghan identities have hardened in opposition to one another since the border became more permeable following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. At the Tajik-Afghan bazaar, Tajik soldiers guard the gate through which Tajiks enter the bridge connecting Tajikistan to the central island and Afghan soldiers man the bridge crossing from Afghanistan to the marketplace. But neither group of soldiers checks the passports of citizens from their own country, only those of foreigners. Perhaps because Tajiks and Afghans dress differently, it appears clear to the border guards of each state who is a Tajik and who is an Afghan (and who comes from neither country) and they check the documents of those who are not their own countrymen.\(^\text{103}\) There is no negotiation of what it could mean to be jointly “Badakhshani”; what it means to be “Tajik” or “Afghan” is not deconstructed but, instead, each category is further reinforced. When Dedi actually visited Valej in person would he be forced to confront his understanding of Afghans as simultaneously pure and under-developed?

As it happens, for Dedi, the trip to Afghanistan was not primarily about going to Valej and meeting kin he had never met. The two most important destinations on the trip’s itinerary were Faizabad, the capital of the Afghan province of Badakhshan, and the shrine where Nasir-i-Khusrow was buried. This shrine was also the destination of Manetta’s filmmakers.\(^\text{104}\) Dedi’s interest in the shrine was, in part, because Dedi saw Nasir-i-

\(^\text{103}\) This is notably different from checkpoints within Tajikistan, where all Tajiks must show their documents to enter or exit Badakhshan.

\(^\text{104}\) The film they were making was to be screened at an international conference in Khorog, celebrating the one-thousandth birthday of Nasir-i-Khusrow. Dedi had attended this conference. He never talked about the film, although it is likely that he saw it. For Dedi, visiting Nasir-i-Khusrow’s shrine was a pilgrimage. Further, he felt that this trip would provide perfect material for my film, for my research project, and for my own personal spiritual quest as a fellow Ismaili.
Khusrow as an important symbol of Ismaili heritage and identity. But I suggest that Dedi was also more interested in the Nasir-i-Khusrow site than in seeing Valej because, for him, the allure of visiting Afghanistan lay in visiting a country that was *different*. Nasir-i-Khusrow’s shrine was an exotic, historical landmark; it was simultaneously out of the ordinary and also culturally and religiously important. By contrast, Valej was too similar to be interesting and might well threaten to contradict the way he, like other Badakhshanis, tend to think about Afghanistan, namely as authentic, pure and unspoiled (Manetta 2011).\(^{105}\)

Unfortunately for Dedi, soon after crossing the bridge, we learned that leaving the border area of Ishkashim was out of question. Not only were many of the roads flooded, but there was also a lot of violence elsewhere in Afghan Badakhshan. The presidential elections were only months away and cars carrying Ismailis in certain Sunni-dominated areas in Afghan Badakhshan had been attacked. From a pilgrimage of sorts to Yumgan, a place that simultaneously embodied a shared history and a pristine, pure, idyllic past, our trip was turned into a series of house visits. These house visits seemed to promise the formation of cross-border relationships. It appeared that Dedi would have no choice but to bridge the spatial, temporal and imagined distance from his Afghan kin. In the next section I examine how, during our trip, Dedi rekindled relations with the Afghans with whom we visited.

### A Shared Present?

Ishkashimis maintain social relations by visiting one another’s houses – for weddings, funerals, special events, a regular visit\(^ {106}\) or to help a neighbour or relative in the field (see also Chapters 5 and 6). The weekly Tajik-Afghan Bazaar and official border crossing is insufficient to enable reciprocal relations fostered by house visits. When I asked why Tajik Ishkashimis have not developed relationships with their cross-border kin, a man in his sixties told me “for seventy years they did not come to our weddings”. Zurbek’s aforementioned suggestion to build a bridge in each village, and the associated

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\(^{105}\) Manetta suggests that even though the organizers of the Nasir-i-Khusrow conference (IIS and ITREC) wished to portray Nasir-i-Khusrow as a “unifying regional figure” (2011: 382), the Tajik filmmakers used the film to emphasize the difference between the two sides: In the eyes of the Tajik film crew, the Afghanistan they visited was pure and unspoiled. The lack of industry, paved roads, electricity and multi-story buildings left the landscape open and unscarred. The variety of animals shepherded there, the quality of the water and the wide vistas of mountains and sky all prompted the Tajiks to label the natural landscape as cleaner and purer than their own. (Manetta 2011: 376)

\(^{106}\) These visits are called *habar giri* lit. to “take knowledge” – to see how someone is doing.
implication that no visa would be necessary to cross the river, would enable Ishkashimis, both Tajik and Afghan, to visit one another whenever they so chose. Furthermore, it would almost force them to invite one another to weddings and funerals, for to refrain from doing so, should it be legally possible, would be disrespectful, impolite and would undoubtedly spark disagreement.

Inversely, to refuse or even refrain from visiting someone’s house is to refuse to develop or maintain social relations with them. A young woman from Avj, Alena told me of her acute embarrassment when she realized that the roadside house whose toilet she used once en route to Khorog belonged to a man with whom her father was fighting. She recalled that they were very hospitable and graciously allowed her to use their toilet and even offered her some tea. But Alena should never have been to their house in the first place. Like her father, she wanted nothing to do with that family. Dedi’s initial reluctance to visit the Afghan village of Valej can similarly be read as his hesitation to develop social relations with his Afghan kin. The reason why Dedi did not want to develop relations with Valejis is made clear in a scene from “The Other Side”. In the car, driving from the bridge to Valej, Dedi tells his cousin in the military, Jalol, about how, during the Tajik civil war, some of their Valeji relatives twice crossed the river and stole from Dedi’s house in Avj. Dedi’s hesitation to develop relationships with his Afghan kin stemmed from his disillusionment with how some Afghan Ishkashimis had acted during this period. Once he found himself in a situation with no choice but to visit some of their houses, he became more specific. Instead of blaming all Valejis in general, Dedi began differentiating from amongst them. Dedi claimed to know precisely who the thieves were – his relatives “Mushki” – and prefaced his account of the robberies (before I began recording the scene), with the declaration that he would avoid visiting their homes.

But neither Dedi nor Alena denied that the people with whom they were fighting – and whose houses they intended to avoid visiting – were their kin. Each of them was able to precisely trace on a genealogical chart how he or she was related to these people. Being related – connected genealogically – neither indicates nor necessitates an active relationship. In terms of cross-border relationships with Afghans, I suggest that discussions of shared genealogical connections permit Tajiks and Afghans to connect in ways that acknowledge a shared past without focusing on the different paths each side has taken in the past century. On our trip to Afghanistan, as Dedi and I went from house to house, sitting and drinking tea then eating a meal, a pattern emerged whereby Dedi would pull out a genealogy that he had written a decade prior in order to fill the gaps he had in
the branches of his lineage that ended up in Afghanistan. As Dedi described it after returning back to Tajikistan, his notes are now up to date including babies still drinking their mother’s milk (*sheer khur*).

Genealogies – both of people and places – are ways of conveying rootedness, belonging and identity (Yessenova 2005: 662). The relationship between visiting houses and tracing genealogies in some ways correlates to the rooting of kinship to a particular place. In addition to visiting Afghan relatives in their houses, Dedi also visited the ruins of his ancestors’ houses on the Afghan side. Back in Avj, he took me to the remains of the house where he said his very first ancestors to have set up residence in Avj used to live. He knew precisely which room belonged to which individual’s family and when each addition to the original house was built. Dedi was keen to note instances whereby Afghans he was adding to his genealogy had names that he knew as ancestral. It is an abstraction of their individual, but overlapping, ancestries – names before people – that generates a feeling of connection and belonging.

The transmission of names down generations means that even the unfamiliar person is rendered familiar. Shelina, a Shugni woman in her 90s, was visiting Tajik relatives when the border was enforced in 1936. Unable to return to her parents in Afghanistan, Shelina spent the rest of her life in Tajikistan. A couple of years before I arrived, she met an Afghan man from her parents’ village at the Afghan bazaar. She told me that she still remembered the village vividly. She was able to tell him where certain houses and other landmarks were located. And when she listed the names of her relatives, the young Afghan man recognized nearly everyone. However, the people with these names were not the aunts, uncles and cousins that Shelina remembered but little children. Ancestral

107 The genealogy included 7 generations before him and 2 generations after him (10 generations in total) on both his father’s and his mother’s sides. Both sons and daughters are included in the most recent generations and the names of wives are occasionally included. While descent is recorded patrilineally, Dedi also has the (patrilineally recorded) genealogy of his father’s mother and his mother’s mother although neither of these is as extensive as that of his father and mother’s fathers. The (less thorough) genealogies of his wife are also included with a note about how the two of them are (extremely distantly) related.

In Ishkashim, I saw different ways of drawing genealogies. Dedi’s began with the oldest ancestor at the top of the page with descendants listed below or to the side when space ran out. In these types of diagrams, lines were used only to connect a group of siblings (written as a list) to their predecessors and offspring. I also saw one genealogy, drawn by a schoolgirl, which literally took the form of a tree (leaves and branches were drawn in) with her, herself, in the trunk. She had been unable to fill in the gaps where both her paternal and maternal grandmothers’ mothers should lie and they were represented by empty square boxes.

108 However, Tajik Ishkashimis do not include the state or figures like the Imam or Lenin in their genealogies. They might be labeled *soheb* but are not seen as being genealogically connected (compare with Gullette (2006) on genealogical relations with the post-Soviet Kyrgyz state).
names had been recycled in a way that emplaced the 90-year old woman in her Afghan village. Shelina no longer knew anyone who lived in the village – she had outlived them all – but she felt she still belonged to that village.

Meaning cannot be drawn from the genealogies themselves, but is determined by the social situation that motivates such establishment of roots (Yessenova 2005). For Yessenova’s ethnographic situation of Kazakh villagers migrating to the city, the meaning behind villagers invoking genealogies and ancestral ties was determined by their “particular experiences of migration, displacement and adjustment to a new environment” (Ibid: 662). Situations of change encourage people to root their identity in genealogies. For Tajik Ishkashimis, changing political and economic situations, which have resulted in labour migration and the increased porosity of the Tajik-Afghan border, have led to Tajik Ishkashimis being increasingly interested in their roots, in this case, through the idiom of genealogies.

By focusing on their shared genealogy, Dedi was able to refrain from developing active relations with his cross-border kin without denying their connectedness. Edwards observes that those who search for and document their own family trees in northern England develop connections with ancestors and living kin through these genealogies. This type of kinship has a “doubleness” to it. By this she means:

...your ancestors can be either deeply implicated in the person you are or distant enough not to be too influential. Like the ovum which is understood on the one hand to forge connections into the future and on the other to be a detachable, alienable, body bit, the genealogical ancestor is also both embodied and detached - he or she is both part of who you are and safely disconnected through the distance of time (2009: 18).

Through the idiom of genealogies, Dedi and his Afghan kin, safely disconnected by the border, could relate without threatening to conflate difference between the two sides. Genealogies provide a means through which Tajiks might identify people with whom active relationships might one day be formed. In and of themselves, however, they do not activate relationships.

Tajiks and Afghans are not only genealogically related but also fictive kin. All Ismailis are brothers and sisters. They are made into kin through their shared father figure – the Imam. The Imam, a soheb, connects Tajik Ismailis not only with Afghan Ismailis, but also with the global, transnational and multicultural Ismaili community. Many Tajik Ishkashimis told me that I was their sister when they first learned that I was an Ismaili. The idea of a transnational Ismaili “family” is not particular to Tajikistan. *Khoja* Ismailis’
devotional poetry, *ginans*, also refer to the Imam as a *soheb* (pronounced *sahib*), and in their everyday lives *Khojas* speak of the Imam as their *Bapa* (father). Correspondingly, many Canadian and British Ismailis refer to Tajiks as their Ismaili brothers and sisters. I would suggest that, for the moment, Tajik Ishkashimis are more eager to emphasise their relationship with Canadian Ismailis than with their Afghan relations. While the Afghans might well, at some point demand that their Tajik relatives fulfill certain obligations of kin, be it to invite them to their weddings and funeral or give them food in a time of need, the Canadian *jamaat* is too far away to demand much. Instead, they give to Tajik Ishkashimis.

To summarize, Tajik Ishkashimis stress their genealogical connections with their cross border kin and, to a lesser extent, their shared *soheb*. But they do not want to negotiate the values and norms that define what it means to be “Ishkashimi” with their cross-border kin. Because Tajik Ishkashimis want to maintain an ambiguous relationship with their cross-border kin, they try to see the border as fixed and stable. For this, they rely on the Tajik state. The Tajik state is a tempering force that limits the AKDN from bridging the border to such an extent that the significance of the divide is negated. “Tajik” and “Afghan” are still salient categories. The presence of Tajik border guards stationed in each village along the river is a constant, everyday reminder that the river is a national border. It is common knowledge that these underpaid eighteen-year-old boys fulfilling their obligatory military service are easily bribed. But in 2008-9, the only people eager to cross the border were those trading narcotics or gems.

In some ways, Ishkashimis want the Tajik state to establish that Ismailis living in Tajik Badakhshan are different from those living in the parts of Badakhshan that are within other nation states (Afghanistan, Pakistan and China). But at the same time, Ishkashimis are pushing for the Imam and his AKDN to replace the Tajik state as their *soheb*. Tajik Ishkashimis remain frustrated with the Tajik state, even as they rely on it to maintain a clearly demarcated border.

**Conclusion**

Both Steinberg and Manetta conclude their examination of the border with questions about what cross-border relations might look like in the future. Manetta suggests that nostalgia is reliant on an impermeable border and the maintenance of both spatial and temporal distance between Tajiks and Afghans (Ibid: 383). She postulates that this nostalgia will disappear if cross-border flow increases. Tajik Ismailis will have to find
new ways to approach their Afghan kin if “the past encroaches on the present and the ‘there’ encroaches on the ‘here’” (Ibid: 384). Steinberg notes that in some ways this has already happened. Living standards in Tajikistan have decreased since the fall of the Soviet Union while Afghanistan has now become “a potential way to world markets” (2011: 125). The expansion of the AKDN, Steinberg proposes, might make Tajik and Afghan Ismailis “see each other once again as part of a single sphere” (Ibid: 126).

Indeed, my ethnography demonstrates that Tajiks are increasingly being forced to re-think their image of Afghans as both under-developed and part of a purer past. The AKDN has had a very large impact in Afghan Ishkashim and has improved the quality of life in ways that Tajik Ishkashimis can see without having to cross the river. This raises questions, for Tajik Ishkashimis, about who – the Tajik state or the AKDN – is meant to be caring for them. From a Tajik Ishkashimi perspective, the Afghan state seems to be doing little for Afghan Ishkashimis apart from letting the AKDN do anything it pleases in Afghan Ishkashim. The Tajik state goes to a greater extent to help its citizens of its own accord, but it does not do as much as the former Soviet state. It is not enough. Even worse, it appears to Tajik Ishkashimis that it is the Tajik state that restricts the AKDN from making the same investments on the Tajik side that it has made in Afghan Ishkashim. I suggest that seeing the work that the AKDN does on the Afghan side of the river forces Tajik Ishkashimis to question what the same organization could or should be doing in Tajikistan and why they are (not) embarking on such projects.

Furthermore, the leader of the AKDN is the shared religious leader of both Tajiks and Afghans. Under the Imam, Tajiks and Afghans are a part of the same transnational Ismaili “family”. This fictive kinship brings to the fore relations between Tajiks and Afghans in ways that their genealogical connections, which are also important, do not. If the Tajik state were to retreat in order to enable the AKDN to have a more active role in Tajik Ishkashim, this might bring Tajik and Afghan brothers and sisters into more active relationships with one another. But since Afghanistan is widely considered synonymous with the drug trade, and since Tajik Ishkashimis’ memories of the civil war period when cross-border relations did exist to a certain degree are not positive, Tajik Ishkashimis are conflicted about whether they want to enact every relation drawn in their family trees.

In summary, relations between Tajiks and Afghans are ambiguous and Tajik Ishkashimis prefer it that way. When it suits them, they want to acknowledge that they are

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109 It will be interesting to see how the promised withdrawal of NATO and US troops from Afghanistan will affect the AKDN’s capacity to work in Afghan Badakhshan.
genealogically related to their cross-border kin and that they share the same soheb. Tajik and Afghan Ishkashimis share the same history – a shared “blood, religion and language”. But differences between the two sides, in the present, are also very important. Tajiks and Afghans are distinct groups of people, even as all remain united as Ishkashimi Ismailis. In the next chapter I shift my focus to religion, questioning what, for Tajik Ishkashimis, it means to be a good Ismaili and how their soheb influences this moral order.
Chapter 8

Being a good Ismaili: Striving to achieve *batini didar*
In this dissertation I have emphasized the importance of the Imam as both a paternalist redistributor and as a *soheb*. He helps Ishkashimis continue to see themselves as labouring not for profit but for the greater good, gives them hope for a better future in which migrants might return home and provides a shared platform through which they can establish relationships with their cross-border Afghan kin and also with the transnational Ismaili community. But the Imam is not only important to Ishkashimis because his development projects affect Badakhshani’s daily lives. During the Soviet era and before, the Imam had no such direct engagement with the local political economy. And so I end this dissertation with an account of how Tajik Ishkashimis relate to the Imam on a spiritual level. This will help us to better understand how the Imam helps Ishkashimis accommodate political and economic change.\(^{110}\)

**The Imam and the Imamate**

I begin the chapter with an account of Tajik Ishkashimis’ Soviet era relations with the Imam. The story of how one man, Odil, learned of the change in Imams from Aga Khan III to the current Aga Khan IV provides a useful narrative through which to better understand the importance of the Imam as both a *zahiri* (visible, apparent, temporal, transient, exoteric) and a *batini* (interior, hidden, spiritual, eternal, esoteric) religious leader.

According to Ishkashimis, the first of the forty-nine Imams ever to have visited Badakhshan was the current Aga Khan IV in 1995. Prior to this, Ishkashimis did not expect to see the Imam in person. The emissaries of the nineteenth and early twentieth century who would travel between the Imam, then in India, and his Badakhshani followers, were no longer able to make these trips once the Soviets began enforcing the border with Afghanistan in the late 1930s. And so, when the current Imam replaced his grandfather as Imam in 1947, the news did not reach Ishkashim until decades later.

One middle-aged man, Odil, recounted being a university student in Dushanbe when he first learned of this change in the 1970s. During a lecture, a professor showed his students a magazine article that spoke of the wealthy leader of the Ismaili Muslim community who raced horses and whose father was depicted as somewhat of a “playboy,” once married to Rita Hayworth. “It was all bad propaganda,” Odil summarized. Following the lecture, the young man asked to borrow the magazine but his professor

\(^{110}\) Some of the material in this chapter has been published as Aliaa Remtilla 2011. ‘Potentially an “Art Object”: Tajik Isma’ilis’ Bāteni and Zāheri Engagement with their Imam’s Image’ in *Journal of Persianate Studies (JPS)*, Vol. 4, No. 2
refused. Odil explained: “He knew I was an Ismaili.” In the end, the teacher relented and permitted Odil to look at the magazine for a bit, although he was not to take it home with him. “I just stared at the photograph and tears came to my eyes,” Odil told me, “I was the first of my friends to see the Imam!”

Odil’s emphasis in telling me this story was on his having seen the Imam. When he went home and told his family about his experience, they marveled at his good fortune at having seen the photo. The Imam was alive, was internationally renowned enough to make it into a magazine (it mattered less that he was portrayed in a negative way), and they had seen proof of this. Odil and his family, at the time of this viewing, never expected to see their religious leader in the flesh. The Imam as a human being had little influence on their lives. What was important to them in the image was not the specific detail of his facial features. The photograph, instead of being the likeness of a man they knew or expected to get to know, served as an icon of religious belief and identity.

It was taken for granted that the Soviet professor would paint the Imam in a bad light. So too was it expected that the Imam had changed. The change in Imams was not as important as simply seeing the current Imam because both Aga Khan III and Aga Khan IV indexed the same referent: the nur of the Imamate. Most other Ishkashimis I spoke with had reacted similarly when they found out about the new Imam. They explained to me that during Glasnost a textbook on world religions had been released and in it was a short section on the Ismaili faith including a note that the current Imam was Shah Karim Al-Husayni, grandson of the 48th Imam. They recounted their great interest and excitement in having learned this news, but insisted that there had been little debate about why the previous Imam had bypassed his son for his 21-year-old grandson.

This lack of debate might well be because Ishkashimis believe in Aga Khan IV because he is believed to carry the nur (lit. light, in this case “souls of light”) of all Imams. The exceptional powers and qualities Ishkashimis recognize in the Imam are imputed to the Imamate (the entirety of all Imams), via the person of the current Imam (within whom the nur of the Imamate is subsumed). The institution of the Imamat – the collectivity of the souls of light of all Imams – is made manifest in each Imam (see Corbin 1983). This

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111 The philosopher and theologian Henry Corbin emphasizes that the “light” of the Imamat is made manifest in each Imam and is not incarnate in him. This means that he makes himself visible in the form in which he is contemplated. The eternal Imam epiphanzes himself to this world without coming into this world; his epiphany does not reveal his essence – it is always “relative to” (that is to say, relative to the capacity for vision of) he who contemplates it (1983: 112).
The Imam is an adept who “does not merely live in a fragment of measurable and measured Time” but who also has reflected in himself the “eternal Imamate” – the “aeon” (Corbin 1983: 36). The struggle of the fallen Angel is to redeem his position as the third Angel. Redemption from the past – from these imperfections – however, can only take place through time (Corbin 1983: 35). The Angel’s fellows who are made in his image – mankind – live in the retarded Time that marks “the gap between the fall and the reconquest of angelic rank” (Ibid: 49). This is the period of struggle and mankind combat for the Angel who has the potential of being in each one of them (Ibid: 49). Corbin defines this struggle “to return to the origin” (Ibid: 36) as the Ismaili ethic.

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leader is a man who saved them from starvation in the 1990s, who improves the quality of their lives through development projects in the present, and who gives them hope that in the future his investments will create more jobs in the province. On the other hand, when seeing the Imam as a human being working to improve the quality of their lives, Ishkashimis also have the potential to see the nur of the Imamate that they believe drives the Aga Khan to do this work. The Imam is always both a zahiri and a batini figure. And, for Tajik Ishkashimis, the most important theological principle that separates Ismailis from other Muslims is belief in the Imam(ate).

Ishkashimis speak of their religious belief using the phrase Imomro donestan (to know the Imam). When Ishkashimis asked me if I was Ismaili, they often phrased the question: “Imom-e-moro midoni?” (“Do you know our Imam?”). Some Ishkashimis described their knowledge of the Imam by stating that he was “in my heart”. Ishkashimi women who married Tajik Sunnis and who had begun to practice certain Sunni rituals like reciting their daily prayer, the namoz, told me that they continued to hold the love for the Imam in their hearts; once the Imam was “known”, this aspect of being an Ismaili could never be alienated from their being, no matter their cultural practices. For Tajik Ishkashimis, a good Ismaili is one who maintains this love no matter what circumstances s/he faces. And Ishkashimis feel they have done a good job of maintaining their faith through the Soviet period. They never stopped loving the Imam. It is understandable then, that for Ishkashimis, as for all Ismailis, the pinnacle of religious experience is to achieve didar, “to see” the Imam that they love.

An Introduction to Didar

Ishkashimis use the generic term didar to refer to the Imam’s visit to Badakhshan in person, but this does not mean that they are referring solely to his physical presence. More specifically, Ismailis speak of two types of didar: batini didar and zahiri didar. Batini didar is the moment in which an Ismaili sees the nur of his/her Imam. Zahiri didar, being in the physical presence of the Imam of the time, is a catalyst towards achieving a vision of the light of the Imamate (batini didar). In other words, seeing the Imam in person is important largely because it helps an Ishkashimi to achieve batini didar.

Both Steinberg and Marsden have discussed didar in their ethnographies of Ismaili communities in the Himalayan mountain region. Steinberg uses Badakhshanis’ narratives

49). Just as the Imam takes on the struggle of the Angel, who is a part of him, so too do Ismailis look to their Imam who they, in turn, wish to make manifest in them.
of their *didar* experiences to demonstrate that devotion to the Imam is “the single most significant fact of Isma’ili religion” and “is itself constitutive of Isma’ilism” (2011: 102). For him, *didar* is a particular encounter with the Imam through which individual Isma’ilis can develop their subjective identity as *Isma’ili*. He explains that it generates a “transterritorial sense of simultaneity” in that different Isma’ilis both within a local community and across the world know that they are all experiencing the same thing when they receive *didar*, even when it takes place in different places (2011: 103-105). While Steinberg stresses the shared elements of the *didar* experience, he also emphasizes the diversity of ways by which people approach Ismailism, acknowledging that many aspects of religious practice have not (yet) been standardized. Didar, in particular, is a religious experience that Steinberg characterizes as "unmediated, or less mediated, by institutional process and bureaucracy “ (2011: 103).

Marsden is interested in *didar* as a moment of heightened religious emotion (*mazhabi jezbat*) that can move a person to do great things (2005: 235-6). During this experience, those who believe in the spiritual powers and leadership of the Imam are able to glimpse “spiritual truth” (*haqiqat*) (Ibid: 224-5). In this chapter, I acknowledge that *didar* is an experience that brings Ismailis together. *Didar* is a way in which people can engage with the Imam individually while also performing an act that gives a sense of belonging to a global community. Throughout the discussion, my focus remains, like Marsden’s, on Ishkashimis’ personal relationship with the Imam. I demonstrate that striving to achieve *batini didar*, rather than just *zahiri didar*, makes Ishkashimis want to be good. That the man whose development network advocates the implementation of a capitalist economic system also commands a moral order means that Ishkashimis are able to, through the Imam, integrate certain morals and ethics into their understanding of how certain free market practices should be incorporated into their lives.

I begin with an account of *zahiri didar*. In November 2008, some three months into my fieldwork, the Imam visited Badakhshan. While he had, since the end of the Soviet Union, visited a number of times to perform AKDN-related duties, this was the third time that he had come with the express purpose of holding *darbar* (court) for his followers. 70,000 people are believed to have attended the first *darbar* in Ishkashim, my fieldwork district.

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*Steinberg notes: “Prescriptive questions of practice constitute a basic and prominent object of contention between Khojas and Himalayan Nizaris. The ITREB [Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board] efforts to standardize religious ritual and belief according the Khoja norms (i.e. to establish *jama’at khanas*) are met with real resistance (and sometimes resentment). This does not mean, of course, that practice is nonnegotiable, nor that it is ever really standardized” (Steinberg 2011: 101-2)
The following day, 100,000 people attended the second darbar in the provincial capital of Khorog (theismaili.org), this in a place where the population of the province as a whole is estimated at 219 100116 (Statistical Agency of Tajikistan n.d.).117

Everyone who attended darbar made sacrifices for this opportunity to see the Imam. Those living in Dushanbe needed to arrange time off from work and paid up to 200 USD for a return trip to Badakhshan. Others travelled long distances within Badakhshan to reach one of the two darbar sites. Since everyone from each Ishkashimi house went to darbar, the house needed to be locked with the animals inside the “barn” for the duration of the family’s absence. Most people spent at least one night away from their homes and many suffered great losses as a result. One woman reported losing all of her family’s ten chickens to foxes while an elderly woman, Momo Zafira from the Ishkashimi village Mulvoj, remembers the 2008 darbar as “the one when the cow died”. The cause of the cow’s death is unclear, it could simply have been old, but Momo Zafira continues to believe that, had she been present, she might have been able to save the cow. Given these risks and losses associated with such a large-scale gathering, it would be misleading to compare darbar to Soviet-era political gatherings that would have happened on a much smaller scale so as not to endanger the productivity of the farms. Everyone had something more economically “productive” that they could be doing. Badakhshanis went

116 This is according to the “number of constant population”. But Ro’i estimates that there were 350,000 Ismailis in the Pamirs in the mid-1990s (2000: 422). The difference is because Ro’i’s figure includes migrants living elsewhere in Tajikistan and outside of the country, whereas the census statistics refer to those permanently residing in Badakhshan at the time of the census.

117 The Tajik president, Emomali Rahmon, is seen to be tolerant of the Ismaili religion because he meets with the Aga Khan IV when the religious leader visits Tajikistan and because he permits the Ismaili Imam to hold darbars, or meetings, where he addresses upwards of 80 000 Badakhshanis who come to see him. Ishkashimis are critical of Rahmon but did not advocate a change in leadership. Aware that personal ambition has historically been more important to Tajik politicians than political principles (Akiner 2001: 70-72), Ishkashimis do not trust that someone with a better political platform would actually put their promises into practice. Their greatest fear is that a new leader would repress AKDN involvement in Badakhshan and Ishkashimis’ freedom to practice their Ismaili religion.

There are two explanations for Rahmon’s perceived tolerance of the Imam’s institutions. The first is that these large events take place in autonomously governed Badakhshan, out of the eye of the majority of Sunni Tajiks. Second, and, perhaps more importantly, is that the Aga Khan and his development projects are conduits for some important investments in both the province and the country, having established a cell phone company (Indigo, now renamed T-Cell after being sold) and a five star hotel (the Serena) in the capital of Dushanbe. On many of its development projects, the AKDN partners with the UN and the World Bank as well as with other nation states including Canada, the USA and the EU. In this way, by accepting the presence of the AKDN in Badakhshan, both the Tajik state and Badakhshanis have opened themselves up to the political and economic agendas of other global powers.
to great lengths to be in the presence of the Imam because he catalyzes a transcendent “vision” of the *nur* (light) of Imamate.

Steinberg likens *didar* to the Hindu experience of *darshan* in which a devotee receives the blessings of a god in either human or idol form through an exchange of gazes (2011: 103). Devotees seek the idol to confer a benevolent gaze on them. Quests for this Hindu experience of *darshan* entail significant social and economic sacrifices and intense spiritual preparation. DuPertuis recounts the intense fear of the Hindu worshippers she studied of being in the presence of their Guru while still feeling a sense of separation (1986: 119). Ishkashimis were similarly concerned about being in the Imam’s presence without seeing the *nur*. One 19 year old woman, Gulbika, in the days leading up to the 2008 *darbar*, confided in me:

> I know that the *batini didar* is more important than the *zahiri* one. But I don’t know if I am good enough for it to happen for me.

For Gulbika, as for DuPertuis’ Hindu disciples preparing to meet their living Guru, this meeting is a “spiritual test”. For Ismailis, the ability to “see the Light” is not a logical consequence of certain actions but a blessing conveyed upon a follower by the Imam. Nonetheless, Ishkashimis place the onus on themselves to ensure they are good enough for the Imam to bless them with such a vision. Tajik Ismailis take responsibility for being able to see the *nur* and this is dependent on their having prepared for the event, be it with prayers and *zikr*, good deeds or sacrifice.

Gulbika worked hard to prepare for the event. She made sure that she prayed the *namaz* everyday. She cleaned the house and the streets and helped to stitch streamers bearing both the flag of Tajikistan and the flag of the Ismaili Imamate to hang in the streets. Other Badakhshani, like Gulbika, worked hard to prepare the city – and themselves – for the upcoming visit. Each family went to some lengths to clean their house, clean the streets over which the Imam or his staff might drive, and decorate the Rayon, which the Imam would likely walk through. Banners welcoming the Imam were raised and the women of each neighbourhood combined efforts to stitch streamers bearing both the flag of Tajikistan and the Ismaili flag to hang in the streets. In a number of strategic places, both in Ishkashim and in Khorog, men climbed up the mountains to create large signs

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118 Gell describes this exchange of gazes as an “optical oscillation”: “idol’s and devotee’s perspectives shift back and forth with such rapidity that interpersonal boundaries are effaced and ‘union’ is achieved” (1998: 120).

119 See Babb (1981) for an account of the different types of gazes the idol might confer on the devotee.
welcoming the Imam and other guests. Creating long human chains, they collected and placed large stones that they then painted white to form a visible pattern.

But Ishkashimis’ quest to make themselves “good enough” to be blessed with a vision of the Imam’s nur was not limited to the days leading up to the darbar. Ishkashimis strove to be good on a daily basis, but they went about this in different ways.

**Being a good Ismaili**

The Imam serves, in some ways, as a moral guide. Ishkashimis learn about the Imam’s values not only through their personal experience of AKDN projects, but also through reading and listening to his speeches (firmans) that are circulated through the villages by the khalifas (local religious leaders). Marsden explains that Ismailis in northern Pakistan are taught that the Imam’s spiritual power makes him the Qur’an-e natiq (the talking Qur’an), meaning that “he has the unique ability to understand the hidden meaning of the book” (2005: 199). He transmits this knowledge to his followers through his firmans. Ishkashimis of all ages read and think about these firmans.

Children also learn about Ismaili ethics and values through the Ta’lim programme, a curriculum established by the IIS in London for Ismaili school children around the world. The same set of textbooks has been translated into Tajik and is taught in Badakhshan as

*The signs in Khorog read: “Welcome our Hazir Imam Golden Jubilee Mubarak” and “Asri XXI Asri Badakhshon” (The 21st Century is the Century of Badakhshan)*
an extra period in all state schools. In the district of Murgab, where Ismaili and Sunni children attend the same schools, only Ismaili students attend these classes. Steinberg, in his analysis of the Ta’lim textbooks, highlights some of the themes as being: “commonality across the diversity of the Isma’ili community, modernity and progress, membership and citizenship, liberal modes of plurality and unity in multiculturalism, disciplines of loyalty to the imam (through following the firmans and attending jama’at khana), and the importance of the past in the present” (2011: 100). In their daily lives, Ishkashimis bring this knowledge into conversation with what they see the Imam’s institutions doing.

The Imam’s values that are gleaned through firmans and the Ta’lim curriculum are rarely prescriptive. The historian of Islam, Michael Cook, explains, in his comprehensive book on Islamic moral codes, that for Isma’ili, the Imam and those who represent him have always held the authority to command right and forbid wrong. But Cook expresses his surprise that, unlike other Muslim groups with similar structures of authority, (for instance the Zaydis), little has been explicitly forbidden in Isma’ili religious politics. He suggests that this is because the esoteric core of Isma’ili belief has historically been embedded in the prevailing environment. Isma’ili would often conform to and live by the exoteric religious form of those amongst whom they lived (taqiyya) (Cook 2000: 301-4). And so, when Ishkashimis reason through what values they should hold, adopt or discard, they attempt to bring their Imam’s advice in line with their experiences, beliefs and ways of life. At times, gossip and fear of the evil eye regulate this; what and who is “good” is judged by others. But the Imam’s (absent) presence is also invoked to regulate morality.

One way this moral order is controlled is by the presence of the Imam’s photograph, a reminder of the all-seeing and ever-present eyes of God. On occasion, parents would tell their children to stop misbehaving by pointing to the photograph of the Imam noting that Imomjon was observing their bad deeds. A five-year old girl who broke a bowl when playing was already quite distressed by her misdemeanour. Her mother did not use the photograph of the Imam to introduce a new rule but to reinforce what both already knew:

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120 That Ta’lim courses are held in state schools points to the Tajik (or Badakhshani) government’s tacit support of the Ismaili religion.

121 Niyozov notes that some Sunni Kyrgyz living in the Murgab district of Badakhshan wish their children could also attend the classes so that their children could also learn about ethics (2001: 296).

122 This explains why the Soviets could consider Badakhshans to be the most “secular” of Central Asians (Akiner 2001), even as Ishkashimis themselves feel they maintained their faith.
that it was not good to break bowls. By abducting from the image of the Imam the power to discipline youth, Ishkashimis can bring the Imam into the oftentimes hierarchical (in this case generational) social relations of the family and community.

Keshavjee describes how, at a concert in 1996, the insignia of the Imam replaced the photograph of Lenin (1998: 66). This is reflective of Badakhshani perspectives that Aga Khan IV “is like the Stalin and Brezhnev of the past” (words of Firdaus, farmer, 19, in Keshavjee 1998: 66). Ishkashimis explained to me that during the Soviet era, photographs and statues of leaders like Stalin and Lenin abounded in public places. Stalin’s presence in a room, via his portrait, could be construed as being akin to a Foucauldian gaze of control. This gaze is presumed to have regulated their action (Foucault 1977: 195-228). People saw themselves as they imagined Stalin or Lenin or Brezhnev, staring out from within the photograph, would see them. A similar engagement with photographs of the Imam is possible; the image of the Imam also serves as a reminder to be “good.” That Ishkashimis have related to images of Stalin and the Imam in similar ways also indicates that Ishkashimis equate Stalin (not necessarily as a man, but as the spirit of socialism incarnate) and the Imam (the manifestation of the nur of Imamate) as moral leaders. But the Imam’s photos are found in houses as well; as a religious leader, the Imam’s reach extends past the political and economic spheres.

Even as the Imam motivates Ishkashimis to be good Ismailis and good people (the difference between these two categories is blurred and indistinct) it is difficult to pin down a specific moral order to which all Ishkashimis subscribe. For some, what is important is keeping the family together and generating wealth locally, even if this means partaking in the drug trade. For others, the drug trade is immoral and education is what makes a good Ishkashimi. Some value lavish demonstrations of wealth at weddings. Others define a good person as one who follows the law (which stipulates that weddings must be modest (tanzim)).

Marsden notes that it is often assumed that Muslim societies ascribe to a binary schema of morality in which action and thought is either lawful (halal) or forbidden (2005: 54). Some prefer a four-part spectrum of mandatory (farz), permitted (mubah), disapproved (makruh) and forbidden (haram) (Ibid). My ethnography supports Marsden’s assertion that there is no simple formula to Muslim morality that is uncontested and ready-made. Instead, what is good in any given situation must be reasoned. In Chapter 5, I examined

123 In 1996, photographs of the Imam were not yet widely accessible.
how ideas of socialism informed ideas of what it means to be good. Here, I examine questions of orthopraxy. Whereas the anthropologist Heiko Henkel argues that for Turkish Muslims living in Istanbul, prayer “introduces an objective criterion for assessing virtue” (2005: 492), I contend that for Tajik Ishkashimis one’s virtue cannot be assessed by whether or not they pray.

**Prayer**

The Ismaili prayer is different from that recited by the majority Sunni Muslims. The current prayer was issued during the Soviet era and made known to Tajik Ismailis following the Imam’s first visit to the region in 1995. Audiotapes of the prayer along with transliterated texts of the Arabic prayer in the Cyrillic script were circulated and khalifas assisted those who were interested to learn the prayer. Some of those who already prayed the pre-1995 prayer still have not made the transition to the current one. Dedi’s sister who was in her late 70s, told me that she had been unable to memorize it. When she prayed alone, she continued to recite the old one although she was familiar enough with the new prayer to follow along when recited by someone else.

Not all Ishkashimis who pray are seen to be good and conversely, just because one chooses not to pray does not mean that they cannot be good. Dedi explains that he does not pray in part because he does not have the time in his hectic work schedule to make such a commitment. But he also does not pray because he enjoys drinking vodka with friends and does not want to give it up. To pray and drink alcohol would be hypocritical, he told me. By contrast, other men who I knew to drink on occasion also prayed regularly. Dedi and some of his friends take an active interest in local traditions and rituals as well as in Ismaili history. They emphasize that knowing the history of the religion is important and point out that many who pray and do not drink also do not know too much about their faith.

For those Ishkashimis who do pray, the religious obligation of praying daily is a commitment that, once made, must be performed well. During the summer, Jia’s grandchildren who had come to Avj from Khorog during their school holidays decided to start praying. They had yet to memorise the prayer and they occasionally slept in. Unable to pray on these mornings, because all of us who knew the prayer by heart had already finished our ritual and had begun our daily chores, their grandmother sternly admonished them: “If you don’t want to pray then don’t! But none of this nim-ta-i (half way stuff).” Those who pray commit to this task and do so (pun intended) religiously. A number of rules particular to Ishkashim and, perhaps, more broadly to Badakhshan, must
be followed for the ritual to count (see Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994). These ceremonies, which include performing a ritualised pattern of ablution, saying the morning prayer by 6am, and the evening prayer between the time when a certain star appears in the sky and the time that it sets, are unlikely to change notwithstanding changes to the words of the daily prayer.

Ishkashimis consider prayer as virtuous when it becomes a habit. To emphasize the relationship between a conscious act and habitual practice, both Mahmood and Lambek critique Bourdieu’s notion of the unconscious institution of habitus, by drawing on Aristotle’s understanding of the concept. For Aristotle, it is conscious training in the habituation of virtues that ultimately (and paradoxically) makes consciousness redundant to the practice of the virtue (Mahmood 2005: 139). As morality becomes learned, it becomes an integral part of who one is as a person (Lambek 2000: 316). Those who pray are identified from those who do not. I was frequently asked, “Do you pray?” This is a “yes or no” question that cannot be answered “sometimes” or “when I remember” or “when I have the time”. Ishkashimis consider those who pray to be performing a good act but those who do not pray are not categorically judged as bad Ismailis for this decision. Lambek’s definition of morality is appropriate:

…morality is not a coherent, imposed system, a specific disciplinary order to which people are obliged to submit unqualifiedly – as, in effect, simply another form of power – but the forms and acts by which commitments are engaged and virtue accomplished – the practical judgments people make about how to live their lives wisely and well and, in the course of making them, do live their lives, albeit in the face of numerous constraints (2000: 315).

This means that to be a good Ismaili or a good Ishkashimi there is no prescriptive set of rules that must be followed. An act that might be virtuous in one context might not be so in another. This approach to moral judgment is explicated by Karen Sykes in her introduction to the book Ethnographies of Moral Reasoning. For Sykes, a moral judgment is a decision made about what is good only at that specific time and place (2009: 17).

From the short trips I took to Khorog each month, it appeared to me that Shugnis of all ages had adopted the obligation to pray more fervently than Ishkashimis. This is likely because the ITREB office is located in Khorog and the institutional advocacy of daily prayer is more strongly felt in the capital than in the outlying villages. For many Shugnis I knew, a good Ismaili was one who prayed but a moral order defined by orthopraxy had not (yet) taken hold in Ishkashim. Part of the reason why Ishkashimis (and some
Shugnis) resist defining virtue by orthopraxy might be the lingering effects of Soviet era efforts to modernize Islam.

The historian Muriel Atkin, writing about Islam in Tajikistan in the final years of the Soviet era, explains that many leaders of official Islam attempted to “modify nonessential elements of Islamic practice” by relaxing ritual obligations and reconciling Islam with communist doctrine (1989: 18). Atkin explains:

[Modernized Islam] does not object to Muslims joining the Communist party so long as they remain Muslims at heart. Full compliance with the five pillars of Islam (the profession of faith, prayer five times daily, alms-giving, the Ramadan fast, and the pilgrimage to Mecca) is not required. To remain a Muslim, it is sufficient not to repudiate the faith. The Central Asian Islamic establishment argues that the social values of the religion coincide with – indeed, anticipated – those of communism with regard to social justice, equality, brotherhood, and peace. Therefore, to be a practicing Muslim in the contemporary Soviet Union is to work for goals that are beneficial to Soviet society (Atkin 1989: 18-9).

This attitude continues to hold in Badakhshan. Islamic values are not believed to come in conflict with socialist ones (see Chapter 5) and Ishkashimis see themselves as Ismailis even if they do not practice, so long as they continue to hold the Imam in their hearts. As the historian Adeeb Khalid writes, the revival of Islam in post-Soviet Central Asia “can coexist with complete lack of observance or indeed of any belief at all, let alone a desire to live in an Islamic state” (2007: 120-1). For Tajik Ishkashimis, this resistance to orthopraxy might also be a way in which they maintain their distinction from Afghans whose women they see veiled and confined to the house.124

Of the Islamic pillars listed in Atkin’s quote, Ishkashimis would all profess their faith that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. But alms-giving has not been institutionalized, very few keep the Ramadan fast and I only met one man who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca. While this is partly explained as the lingering

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124 During the Soviet era of religious repression, the Soviet state considered Ismailis amongst the most “secular” of Central Asians, in part because women did not wear the veil and Badakhshonis considered it socially acceptable for women to study and work (Akiner 2001). While religion is deemed to have flourished throughout Central Asia since the dissolution of the Soviet state, many post-independence governments have actively sought to keep religious practice and belief under state control, suppressing expressions of belief that do not correspond with what the government considers to be legitimate (see Rasanayagam 2010). Tajikistan is no exception. The fear of extremism and “terrorist” influences from across the border in Afghanistan is often mobilized as an excuse to restrain religious practice and the power of religious leaders. Most recently, the Tajik president, Emomali Rahmon, passed a law banning children under the age of 18 from attending mosques not sanctioned by the state (2011). It is still unclear how this law will affect Badakhshan, where prayer often takes place in someone’s house and not in a dedicated place of worship.
effects of a Soviet-style engagement with religion, it might also be described as a product of a particularly “Ismaili” engagement with ritual. Ismailis, Marsden explains, draw a distinction between surface-level interpretations of the Qur’an (tanzil) and its esoteric hermeneutics (ta’wil). They search not only for the book’s inner (batini) meaning, but also for the inner meaning of ritual practice:

For Sunni Muslims, the month of Ramadan requires Muslims to abstain from food and drink during daylight hours as a way of strengthening their faith and trust in God. Yet for Ismai’lis, life itself is a fast during which Muslims must resist evil temptations and enjoin better morals and works in their daily lives. Likewise if Sunnis perceive undertaking pilgrimage to Mecca as a religious duty, for the Ismai’lis life’s real pilgrimage is the attempt to destroy the carnal soul (nafs), and replace it with spiritual perfection (Marsden 2005: 199).

Even as Ishkashimis focused on the inner meaning of ritual practice, they simultaneously emphasized that fasting and making the pilgrimage to Mecca were good things to do. The outer form of ritual practice can lead a believer to attain its inner goal. For instance, an increasing number of Ishkashimis are praying. This may well be a result of efforts by the centralized Ismaili religious institution, ITREB, to emphasize the virtue of prayer as evidenced by their aforementioned success in Khorog. But it is also because Ishkashimis have always believed that prayer helps an Ismaili to achieve batini didar, what Marsden calls “spiritual perfection”.

While I have been framing batini didar using the lens of zahiri didar at a darbar, this is not the only path available. Before the Imam became a physical presence in Badakhshan, Ishkashimis could nonetheless strive to attain batini didar by reciting one, or more, of the names of God (zikr). Many Badakhshani was told me that their ancestors used to pray regularly and one girl in particular, Manzila, explicitly linked this prayer to the ultimate goal of achieving batini didar:

My grandfather used to hide in the house and pray when nobody would see him. He was trying to do didar.

Manzila explained that his prayer was silent, but she knew he was doing zikr (the recitation of one or more of God’s names, or phrases from the Quran). Even if he had been praying the namaz, she reasoned, that would also amount to zikr because within the daily prayer the names of Allah and the Imams are frequently repeated.125

125 Many Sufi orders similarly trace their lineage to the first Shia Imam, Ali via a chain of succession called silsila. In the current daily prayer, locally called namoz but officially referred to as dua (prayer), the Ismaili silsila tracing the current 49th Imam through his 48 ancestors is recited
Before the Soviet Union restricted religious practice, Badakhshanis used to gather to recite religious poetry, sing hymns and perform zikr. This is the one tradition, I was told on more than one occasion, which has been lost. Zikr continues to be important to Badakhshanis’ religious practice even though it is no longer primarily a communal practice. Those who chose to pray often sat for a few minutes after reciting their namaz repeating phrases praising Allah (subhanallah) or simply the name of Allah (Ya Allah) or an Imam (Ya Ali) while counting their repetitions on rosary beads (tasbih). An Ismaili in Khorog explained to me that repeating the name of Allah al Rashid (the righteous one) one thousand times would get rid of any worries. Religious means are used for secular ends (see also Spiro 1966: 95-6). But zikr is also the means through which one can achieve batini didar. In the weeks leading up to darbar, the Badakhshanis I knew who prayed, both in Ishkashim and in Khorog, increased the amount of time they dedicated to zikr in preparation for didar. And on this note, I now return to the discussion of the 2008 darbar.

**Wanting to be good: Striving for Didar**

Given the effort Badakhshanis went to in order to attend darbar, I assumed that they would have been incensed when, during this darbar in Khorog, both the loudspeakers and the large screen television monitors stopped working. Given the size of the darbar site (the length of an airstrip), it was impossible, from where I was seated, to see the Imam with naked eyes while he was on stage. For most of the event, thousands of people were unable to hear or see the Imam. I was astounded when, following the darbar, no one complained. “We can read the speech later” they told me. “All that matters is that he was there with us, just meters away.” Didar kardim; didar e moro shod (We did didar [i.e. we saw/were in the present of the Imam]; Our didar is complete). Seeing the Imam at a darbar is not about getting a close-up look at the Imam’s face mediated by a TV screen nor is it about hearing his voice “live” over the loudspeakers. Video images of the Imam convey information about him as a zahiri figure (Remtilla 2011) but Badakhshanis did not attend darbar to see a human form. Badakhshanis were looking to be blessed by a vision of nur.

to conclude the prayer. While doing so, I noted that some Ishkashimis count the list on their tasbih (rosary beads) as though they were performing zikr.

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126 A khalifa in Ishkashim explained that the event would have resembled the communal praying that still occurs at a funeral, when family and neighbours gather to pray through the night and sometimes for a day or two after the body has been buried.
Many Badakhshani people were unable to look the Imam in his face when he walked by. Tears streamed down their face, blurring their vision, and one Ishkashimi who ventured to verbalize this experience explained that “the light was too bright to look at”. These same people who were incapable of physically seeing the Aga Khan are the ones who said that their didar was complete. Truly “seeing” the Imam(ate) corresponded with the incapacity to clearly see his face with their eyes. This means that if you were able to look at the Imam, you were unlikely to have had the type of didar that is important.

It is also important to note that while zahiri didar catalyzes batini didar, there is no guarantee that all instances of zahiri didar lead to batini didar. It is possible, therefore, that the tears I saw on the faces of so many Badakhshans did not all correlate to batini didar. Some could have been moved by the emotion the event aroused while others could well have been remembering loved ones who were no longer with them. It is impossible to ascertain why people were crying; still, tears are considered a sign that someone is receiving batini didar.

At neither the Ishkashim nor the Khorog darbar did my eyes water. I had a rather revealing conversation on this issue with a young man, Aman, who I considered a close friend. I confessed to him that I had actually been able to look at the Imam clearly while in his presence. Aman thought about what I had said for a moment then asked whether religion was a part of my research. I told him that it was and he replied:

Then that’s what it is. You are looking at the Imam from a scientific perspective and not a religious one. The last time the Imam came it was the same for me, but this time I couldn’t look up when he walked by. You are just going through a phase. Once you finish your research you’ll be able to get the religious experience back.

Notably, Aman is not someone who prays or practices zikr and he explained to me that just because he does not say the namaz does not make him any less spiritual. The process of preparation for batini didar – the struggle to get to a state where that which cannot be sensed can be grasped – does not rely on the performance of religious rituals. For Aman, just because I could not see the nur did not mean that it did not exist, only that I had not been able to make it visible. A rational engagement with religion prevents the type of vision that is sought. This does not mean that my experience of the Imam’s visit did not “do” anything for me; as Steinberg (2011) says, the darbar of the Imam reinforces belonging to a community of believers, all of whom are on a quest to see the Light of the Imamate. As an Ismaili Muslim, I, like others who were unable to see the nur through the Imam, could not deny that the possibility of seeing nur existed. As Aman reassured me,
once I stopped thinking scientifically about my faith I would once again be able to engage with the Imam in such a way.

The visibility of the Imam’s nur is relationally produced. The Imam’s mystical union can only be rendered visible given a particular relation Ismailis themselves must develop with the Imam although they all have different strategies for how to go about doing this. Ismailis must work on themselves to understand the batin and see the nur through the Imam. While the Imam’s zahir presence might render the nur more accessible, the Imam is primarily a catalyst or a guide to that light. The Imam is also a person who walks around, speaks and can choose in which direction he turns his head. His movements and actions, including his work with the AKDN, affect the lives of Ishkashimis. This relation between the zahir and the batin helps to explain the Badakhshani usage of the term khudo. A Persian-English dictionary defines the term as “God, master and owner”, tracing its etymology to the words “self” and “coming”, thereby related to the idea of “self-created” (Steingass 1992: 448). In the instances when Ishkashimis used the word khudo it was never clear to me whether they were referring to the Imam or to God. The word is frequently spoken. It is part of the phrase for “fate” (khudo hohad lit. what khudo wishes), and is often exhaled in supplication amidst daily activity (o khudo). When I lifted a heavy load from Jia’s hands, she called me a dokhtar az khudo (daughter from khudo). And the importance of treating guests well was explained with the notion that all guests were mehmon i khudo (guests of khudo). In each of these instances, it appears plausible that Ishkashimis were clearly (and unproblematically) referring to Allah. But when I asked one of these mehmon i khudo how she first learned about the Imam and about religion, she replied that her parents told her khudo e ton Sultan Muhammad Shah [ast] (your khudo is Sultan Muhammad Shah). What does khudo refer to here? Were her parents telling her that her “God” was Sultan Muhammad Shah or that he was her “Imam”? To say that Sultan Muhammad Shah is God is deeply problematic; it would amount to a betrayal of monotheism, and verge on idolatry. One Ishkashimi I spoke with about this issue explained to me that it was not the Imam himself that was khudo but the nur of the Imamate. I suggest that the term khudo captures the simultaneity of the Imam being both zahir and batin, a human being and the nur that is God.

The advent of the Imam as a zahir presence in Badakhshan has largely been met by humbled excitement that Badakhshani have, today, been blessed to have an engagement with the Imam that their ancestors did not have the pleasure of experiencing. But not everyone feels exactly the same. The following is an excerpt from my fieldnotes:
[Gulzara said that] back then [in Soviet and pre-Soviet times] no one ever saw the Imam and now that we do, it in a way removes the ‘batini’ (a word she used herself) from the Imam, making him a ‘zahiri’ figure, ‘inson’ [human]. She said that now we think of the Imam as an ‘inson’ [human being] but our Imam is really a ‘nur’ [light] and that was perhaps clearer before he become a face.

Gulzara appears to be realizing retrospectively that her previous relationship with the Imam was just as it should be. Her critique is of the post-Soviet intervention of the Imam’s being in time (i.e. his zahiri figure) with what was once solely a bond with the eternal nur. She went on to explain that she felt blessed to have had the Imam, particularly during their time of need in the civil war when, without the Imam’s aid, they likely would have died. She also treasured the opportunity to have attended three darbars; the Imam’s “humanity” is not necessarily a bad thing. But Gulzara fears that there might be a shift in how people “see” the Imam. He has gone from being purely batini to also being human. Gulzara’s concern is not that this reduces the Imam’s nur, but that it threatens to reduce its primacy in the eyes of Ishkashimi Ismailis. The Imam’s zahiri presence and development work, Gulzara seems to suggest, might threaten to obscure the Imam as a batini figure.

Being in the presence of the Imam arguably makes seeing the light much more accessible and available to everyone. Nonetheless, some, like Gulzara, question whether it distracts from the batin, bringing the focus instead to the zahir – to thinking of the Imam as a human being.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that all Ishkashimis strive to be good in their own ways given the changing socio-economic circumstances and within the context of each individual’s personal situation. Love for, or knowledge of, the Imam does not necessarily demand a corresponding set of actions. Ishkashimis do not (yet) root their religious identity in orthopraxy. Ritual practice and traditions are important for many, but one can be an Ismaili without performing them. Instead, the morality the Imam motivates is with the purpose of achieving spiritual enlightenment. The goal is individual and not shared and is also secret with no resulting social capital. To refer back to the argument of Chapter 5, this means that incorporating certain capitalist values – if they are ones the Imam advocates – can help them to be good in a new socio-economic context. The underlying reasoning behind wanting to be good, namely with the aim of achieving batini

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127 This is similar to the retrospective realization that “what we had during the Soviet era was communism” that I describe in Chapter 4.
didar, remains constant and provides some consistency even as the path towards being good is changing.
Chapter 9

Conclusion: A Future Like the Soviet Past, Only Better
The ethnography presented throughout this dissertation has indicated that, in many ways, the Imam and his institutions resemble the former Soviet state. Both are spoken of as *sohebs*, both can be framed as actors in what I have called an “economy of grace” and photographs of the Imam have even taken the place of images of Soviet leaders who were similarly able to command a certain moral order. But there are also important differences between the two. The Imam does not provide for Ishkashimis nearly as well as did the former Soviet state; the Imam seems to be pushing for Tajik Ishkashimis to develop relations with their cross-border kin where the Soviet state discouraged all contact; and while the command of the Soviet state remained in the public sphere, the Imam also pervades the private. Most importantly, the Imam garners his legitimacy on the basis of his role as a spiritual leader – the bearer of the *nur* (light) of Imamate – and not, like the Soviet state did, through his redistributive projects. For Tajik Ishkashimis, arguably the greatest and most welcome post-Soviet change has been that the person they see as commanding their moral order is believed to do so not for the sake of political and economic governance but in order to help them reach spiritual fulfilment.

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the Imam gives people the motivation to want to be good since, through his *zahiri* visits to the region, people have the potential to achieve *batini didar*. But the Imam does not always say how to go about being good. Through the actions of the AKDN and the Imam’s religious institutions, the Imam’s *firmans* and the *Ta’lim* curriculum, the Imam provides some guidance but this advice is not prescriptive and does not cover all situations. As such, people themselves must negotiate what, for them, it means to be good in any given situation. Notably, religious orthopraxy in terms of regularly praying the Ismaili *namoz* has not (yet) become a necessary component of what it means to be good. Instead, many of Ishkashimis’ values are legacies of what they understood to constitute good ways of living during the Soviet era.

Perhaps the most important value that has endured is the notion that economic relations should be driven by mutuality and not by the urge to accumulate profit or power. For some Tajik Ishkashimis, like Olim, maintaining this principle is precisely what it means to be “socialist”. The Soviet state is seen to have enabled such a mutuality-driven economy by ensuring that welfare, living wages and subsidized goods were provided for all. Soviet labour ideals, which covered multiple aspects of work including one’s social duty, livelihood and wage labour, are now rarely all found within just one job and people
often find themselves undertaking multiple tasks such as farming decollectivized plots of land, working a paid job, collecting a pension and helping neighbours when needed.

In the face of this change, Tajik Ishkashimis have found new ways to mystify and veil emerging market practices by framing them as being motivated by, or resulting in, the (re)production of social relations. In Chapter 5, I illustrated this point by discussing how Dedi and Jia justify the building of a for-profit pharmacy. Jia notes that the Imam says “making money is not bad” and goes on to demonstrate that money made can be used for good causes like enabling Dedi to quit his job in Ishkashim and spend more time in Avj with Jia. Should they make enough profit, they might even be able to contribute to paying for their grandchildren’s education. Profit can be productive of mutuality. At times, Ishkashimis see themselves as having little choice but to privilege themselves over the betterment of society. But, where possible, Ishkashimis try to maintain what Olim called “the socialist spirit” notwithstanding the putative end of state socialism.

If we are to define state socialism by the expectations that people had of the socialist state, namely that it should provide for its citizens without taking too much back from them, then the Imam and his institutions might well be seen as a socialist, state-like entity. As noted above, the Imam is, after all, much like the former Soviet state, referred to as soheb. Of course the Imam as soheb is not perfect. He does not provide as much as the former Soviet state and at times the values advocated by his institutions, such as the decollectivization of land and the insistence that making money is not bad, appear to run counter to Ishkashimis’ notions of how best to be good. But there is a certain kind of flourishing that can only be understood if we see the Imam and his institutions as some kind of replacement for the former Soviet state. With the Imam as soheb there is a much larger space for the cultivation of one’s spiritual self. Not only do more people strive to achieve batini didar, so too do they now have the capacity to see and engage with the Imam in zahiri ways.

Afghanistan, for instance, provides an example of what the future could be like, should the Tajik state retreat and enable the AKDN to play a greater role. In Afghanistan, not only is there a hospital with wonderful facilities that pays doctors good wages and provides free medication to all, so too are migrants returning to their villages. Jobs are seen to be better-paid and more readily available in Afghan Ishkashim than elsewhere in Afghanistan or in Pakistan (see “The Other Side”). This is not to say that Tajik Ishkashimis want the Imam and his institutions to completely take over the governance of their district completely. Ishkashimis still want the Tajik state to maintain the boundary
between them and the Afghans on the other side of the river. But the Afghan example offers evidence of the potential the Imam and his institutions’ have to improve Tajik Ishkashimis’ lives. There is a good reason why Tajik Ishkashimis place their hope for a better future in the Imam.

Of course such a hoped for future where there are well-paid jobs in Ishkashim, and where people can afford to live by the values to which they ascribe, can never be entirely attained. Ishkashimis use corruption – an economy of grace or favours that works for the betterment of an individual instead of for the benefit of everyone – to explain why life during both Soviet socialism and the post-socialist present, both with the Imam in it and without him is always left wanting. Life is always incomplete and in a constant process of change. But for now, people are able to make do. Those living in the villages want migrants to come home, but even with them absent, Tajik Ishkashimis can figure out how to make life normal. Although longer-term trajectories remain uncertain, Tajik Ishkashimis’ strong belief that “whatever khudo wants” (khudo khohad) will happen makes imagining the future and bemoaning the past pointless. Fate places primacy on the present that, thanks to the remittances of labour migrants, is predictable, certain and rhythmic.

I began the dissertation arguing against transitologists’ assumed teleology that post-socialism is an in-between period of suspension and chaos at the end of which people will finally find themselves in a capitalist system. While my ethnography shows that the uncertainties of post-socialism are lived not as chaotic suspension as people wait for a yet-to-be-revealed future but, instead, as a known, certain and even normal present, this dissertation does not necessarily suggest that what Ishkashimis want is not driven by a certain teleology. Even as Tajik Ishkashimis use fate to place primacy on the present, there is, indeed, a telos that motivates their actions, be it the hope of achieving batini didar or a dreamed of future in which labour migrants return to make Ishkashim home once more. An end goal of some sort has, of course, always been a part of everyday life; during the Soviet era, people were driven by the hope of one-day achieving a communist state. What I have hoped to demonstrate in this dissertation is, more simply, that what Tajik Ishkashimis see themselves moving toward is not capitalism. They want something that looks very much like what they had before (hence the importance of the prefix “post-”), only better. Better because it has the Imam in it and the spiritual component of his leadership gives him the potential to satisfy them in ways that the former Soviet state could never have.
Final Words

This dissertation has been overwhelmingly positive. Given the hardships and challenges Ishkashimis face, it is possible that a different researcher working in the same area might produce a narrative of how hopeless Ishkashimis’ lives have become since the end of the Soviet era. In my optimism that Ishkashimis are good at coping with whatever is thrown their way, I do not intend to downplay the precariousness of their economic situation. Instead, my ethnography and analysis reflect the way people cope with living with such difficulties on a day-to-day basis; my positivity echoes Ishkashimis’ own attitude to life.

The intimacy I attained with Dedi and Jia and their family sometimes made it difficult for me to step back and assess the situation from a third person position while in the field. In many ways, I became so much a part of their family that (to a limited degree) I lived their hopes, fears and dreams as well. It took me months and months of reading and writing in Manchester to separate myself enough to convert my personal experiences into knowledge that I could analyse and represent on the page. It is my hope that the degree of objectification required to conduct anthropological analysis has, in the end, contributed to the generation of knowledge about Ishkashimis, a group of people who themselves want the world to know what their daily lives are like. But I also hope that in the process of writing the text and editing the film I have managed to retain glimpses of the warmth and love that inspired them.
Appendix I: The Creation of Nations

Edgar cites Ronald Grigor Suny’s work, The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union, published in 1993, as the first to argue that the Soviet state “invented” or “constructed” nations (2002: 182). Since then, a number of scholars have followed a similar line of inquiry (Slezkine 1994; Hirsch 2005; Roy 2000; Martin 2001). Central Asia is a particularly interesting place to study Soviet nation-making policies since, prior to the division of the region into “national republics” in 1924, there was little by way of national institutions or national consciousness in the region (Roy 2000: vii-viii). Nations and languages were created by Soviets to break up pan-Turkism and pan-Islamist forces that served to unite the region in dynastic or religious terms as opposed to on the basis of ethnic solidarity. And yet, when the USSR fell in 1991, these created nations did not dissolve, as many observers thought they might, into supra-national identities (Ibid). Given that these republics had not experienced the loss of a nation at the onset of the Soviet Union, nor had any nationalist movement been paving the way for an independent post-Soviet nation, Roy (2000) questions how these nation states were brought into being and maintained without nationalism as a driving force.

Roy explains the Soviet project to create nations as a strategic policy of “divide-and-rule”. However, Edgar critiques his approach, noting that recent scholarship on national identities suggests “all nations are in some sense artificial or constructed” (2002: 186). Edgar questions whether “the view that Central Asian nations are uniquely ‘artificial’ may be a reaction to a time when Western and émigré scholars believed that nations existed objectively and criticized the Soviet Union for destroying the ‘real’ pan-Turkic (or pan-Turkestani) nation” (Ibid). Slezkine and Martin offer an alternative explanation, suggesting that nation-making was also an ideological project of the Soviet Union that was not limited to Central Asia but put into play throughout all Soviet states. The nation-building project was seen as an essential first step in the modernization project that would enable its citizens to eventually move beyond the need for nations, a by-product of capitalism, and into the socialist model of ‘internationalism’. Hirsch demonstrates that the

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128 Edgar notes her surprise that neither Roy nor Martin appeared aware of Suny’s text when writing their own. While Roy’s analysis of post-Soviet Central Asian nations is based on original fieldwork he conducted in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan between 1990 and 1996, Edgar critiques Roy’s analysis of the Soviet creation of nations for being based too largely on secondary sources that have been called into question now that Soviet archives are available. She points to Hirsch and Martin’s work on Soviet nationality policy as being more thoroughly based on original archive research (2002: 183).
process of delineating the borders of Soviet republics was not a top-down project but was instead an earnest discussion by both local groups and those seated in Moscow over whether to privilege nation or economy in the drawing of any given division (2005: 44-55).

Martin fleshes out the contestation at play within the Communist Party itself, noting the opposition between Stalin and Lenin on the one hand, whom he terms ‘nation-builders’ and Georgii Piatakov and Nikolai Bukharin on the other, who led a group of ‘internationalists’. Both sides agreed that nationalism was a dangerous force that threatened to unite interests across the classes and obscure the class divide. Lenin termed the ideology of nationalism a “bourgeois trick” of “masking” and “covering up” their true counter-revolutionary plans. Martin quotes Stalin:

“The remnants of capitalism in the people’s consciousness are much more dynamic in the sphere of nationality than in any other area. This is because they can mask themselves so well in a national costume” (1934 in Martin 2001: 4).

Piatakov and the internationalists reasoned that in order to quell the masking effects of nationalist ideology, nationalism itself must be attacked as counterrevolutionary, a remnant of the capitalist era (Martin 2001: 5). But Lenin and Stalin argued precisely the inverse. By giving people the nations towards which nationalism was striving, they reasoned that they could break the above-class alliance that united the bourgeois with the working class in the name of nationalist striving for statehood. Once people’s nationalist goals were fulfilled, class divisions would, thereafter, emerge. In this way, national consciousness was a necessary historical phase that would eventually lead to internationalism.

Slezkine uses the metaphor of a large communal apartment to explain the concept of Stalin and Lenin’s vision of ‘internationalism’. He explains:

"The USSR was a large communal apartment in which "national state units, various republics and autonomous provinces" represented "separate rooms." Remarkably enough, the communist landlords went on to reinforce many of the partitions and never stopped celebrating separateness along with communalism” (1994: 415)

In order to make this transition, first all the oppressed nations needed to be freed and, in Slezkine’s words, each given a “room” of their own. In Stalin’s words: “We are undertaking the maximum development of national culture, so that it will exhaust itself completely and thereby create the base for the organization of international socialist culture” (1929 in Martin 2001: 5). Lenin and Stalin associated the creation of nationhood
with modernization and, in 1931, Stalin boasted of having accelerated a thousand year process of national formation into a decade (Ibid: 6). But Stalin and Lenin drew a difference between the nationalism of small, oppressed nations, for whom the process of nation building was simultaneously a modernizing activity, and the nationalism of large, oppressor nations like Russia. The “chauvinism” of the larger powers was deemed a “great danger” while local nationalism of the smaller powers could be explained as a response to “great-power chauvinism” (Martin 2001: 7). Lenin believed that giving the working masses of ‘other nations’ the trappings of a state would undermine any distrust they might otherwise have held toward Russia, the ‘oppressor nation’ (Martin 2001: 3).

What Martin terms the Affirmative Action Empire, by which he means “a strategy aimed at disarming nationalism by granting what were called the ‘forms’ of nationhood” (3), was carried out by creating national territories, languages, elites and cultures, that did not conflict with the central state. The indigenization (korenizatsia) of elites, languages and cultures would, Stalin reasoned, “make Soviet power seem indigenous rather than an external Russian imperial imposition” (Martin 2001: 12). As Stalin explained, Soviet national cultures were “national in form, socialist in content” (1930 in Martin 2001: 12). However, the fear of nationalism being a ‘mask’ kept the Bolsheviks suspicious of national self-expression even after they had chosen a policy to encourage it (Martin 2001: 4).
Appendix II: The Tajik Civil War

In February 1990, Tajiks demonstrated in Dushanbe on the grounds that Armenian refugees were given priority over housing. With a 10-year waiting list to receive a house in the capital, Tajiks had little patience for the preference that they believed was given to the Armenians, whether or not they were sympathetic to their plight in other respects (Keshavjee 1998: 485). These 1990 demonstrations began peacefully, with calls for the First Party Secretary, Mahkamov, to address the crowd. He promised to appear at 3pm the next day but never did. Violence erupted, instigated either by stones thrown from the crowd or by shots fired by the government militia stationed on rooftops. Nine people died (Schoeberlein-Engel 1994: 22-3). The anthropologist Schoeberlein-Engel argues that Western accounts frame these demonstrations as nationalist movements, not explaining that the demonstrations throughout Central Asia were often spontaneous outbursts that escalated, often because of methods used by the government as forms of suppression (Ibid: 15).

Following the demonstrations, violence escalated throughout the city. Mahkamov called the Soviet army citing the need to defend the city but mobilized them instead to protect government officials and work spaces, leaving the rest of the city to “anarchy”. The violence finally ceased when a mediating committee formed of leaders of political opposition movements combined forces (even though they were condemned by the governing Communist party) and organized a peace demonstration that attracted tens of thousands. These events preceded parliamentary elections that the opposition groups had been expected to win. As a result of the violence, however, Mahkamov imposed a state of emergency, denying the opposition access to the press while accusing them of having conspired to incite the riots. The Communist party won the election. My summary of these events comes from Schoeberlein-Engel’s account of the civil war (1994: 22-25). Writing before the war’s completion, he argues that the Communist government was entirely concerned with holding onto its power and was willing to do anything necessary in order to do so. It was quick to use violence against protestors, used the army to protect itself as opposed to the citizens and thereafter manipulated the events to ensure its re-election. Once their power was secured, they proceeded to blame the events on the opposition, arousing the support of the local Russian population, who spoke little Tajik and rarely interacted with their neighbours while discrediting the party amongst the majority of Tajik citizens (Ibid).
Gorbachev’s reforms enabled the opposition parties to officially register following 1990. The opposition movement began to increase in strength although Mahkamov retained his power and when Tajikistan became its own republic one year later, he became the first president of the country (Akiner 2001: 35). In the meantime, between February 1990 and August 1991, the government imposed curfews, increased the censorship of the media and ensured that the Communist party retained its supervision over all enterprises, universities and institutes (Schoeberlein-Engel 1994: 26). Mahkamov and the Communist party were seen to oppose political and social liberalization and reform. On August 18-19 1991, Mahkamov supported a coup against Gorbachev by conservative anti-reformists (Akiner 2001: 35) but when the coup failed, Mahkamov changed his position. The Communist Party of the USSR had been suspended for its role in the coup and Mahkamov, just 3 days after the coup, began trying to emphasise the Communist Party of Tajikistan’s independence from that of the USSR. He was ultimately unsuccessful and the opposition groups, led by the Pamiri Davlat Khudonazarov, a member of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and Chairman of the Soviet Cinematographer’s Union, called for his resignation. Mahkamov’s successor, Kadriddin Aslanov, lasted just a few weeks before the constant (peaceful) demonstration in Dushanbe led to Aslanov not only resigning, but also to the banning the Communist party (Schoeberlein-Engel 1994: 27-8).

These moves did not stop the demonstrations that, unlike those of 1990, were well organized and with clear goals to incite political change. In response to the banning of the Communist party, Tajiks began pulling down statues of Lenin around the country. The mayor of Dushanbe feared the injuries that could potentially ensue should a large statue in the capital city be pulled down and so he ordered it removed. The event was filmed on Tajik television, broadcast live. Schoeberlein-Engel suggests that Ikramov was not responding to the public demand to pull down the statue but that the removal was actually an initiative of the Communist party itself (1994: 28). Whatever the case, the Lenin statue accidentally fell as it was being lowered and shattered. Broadcast on television were images of Tajik demonstrators jumping and celebrating on the broken

129 At this time in the civil conflict, the opposition was formed of three main groups that worked closely together. Rastokhez was a cultural revivalist movement that began critiquing the government as early as 1990; the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DP) was the political wing of the opposition that, drawing leaders and its agenda from Rastokhez, challenged the Communists’ monopoly of power; and the Islamic Party (IRP) that tried to get grass roots support for the opposition movement. The additional group, La’li Badakhshan, had the additional platform of pushing for autonomy for Badakhshan (Schoeberlein-Engel 1994: 15). Khudonazarov was not a member of any of these groups, having lived most of his life in Moscow and not having been very involved in politics prior to his candidacy for president (Keshavjee 1998: 485).
pieces. In response, a state of emergency was imposed, the ban on the Communist party rescinded and demonstrations were prohibited. Ikramov was fired. Given that respect for the image of Lenin was so ingrained in the minds of most Soviet citizens, the crackdown appeared justified to most, particularly to the Russians (Ibid: 29).

Rahmon Nabiev, who the Communist party had already put forward as their candidate for the upcoming November elections, replaced Aslanov. Nabiev, who had previously served as a Communist Party First Secretary in the early Gorbachev years, had a reputation of being both a drunkard and extremely corrupt, vices that had led to his being forced out of office at the time. He was a scarce improvement over Aslanov or Mahkamov and protests continued as tens of thousands of Tajiks continued their calls for the Communist party to be banned (Ibid: 30). The opposition remained intent on taking control of the government in democratic elections and this, Atkin argues, is what prevented them from taking advantage of the communist party’s weakness and seizing power at this particular time (in Schoeberlein-Engel 1994: 30).

Before the elections were held, Tajikistan became independent on 9 September. Khudonazarov ran for the opposition, winning 35% of the vote to Nabiev’s 57%. Many cite Khudonazarov’s Ismaili identity as being the reason that some of the more staunch Islamists did not support his candidacy (Tajbakhsh 1993: 3 in Keshavjee 1998: 493-4), but Akiner notes that even winning the amount of votes he did was an achievement; Tajikistan was the only Central Asian state not to have a landslide victory for one candidate (2001: 35). Schoeberlein-Engel also highlights irregularities in the electoral process, “Opposition supporters were harassed and their homes attacked, and the government prevented opposition campaigners from working in some districts. On election day, there were numerous balloting irregularities, with poll-watchers kept from the polls by government officials and campaign organizers” (Schoeberlein-Engel 1994: 35).

Between these elections at the end of 1991 and March of the following year, tensions between the governing Communist Party and the opposition parties grew immensely. Nabiev appeared unable to gain strong control over the country. Schoeberlein-Engel opines that the problem really lay with Nabiev’s ineptitude and the Communist Party’s general lack of mandate having won the election:

“Wise leadership of a country in crisis would have sought national reconciliation, but given the Communist unwillingness to bring the opposition into the political process and their clear determination to avoid fair elections, the opposition and its
constituencies were left with no apparent constitutional means for achieving their legitimate aspirations” (1994: 36).

Akiner offers evidence from some of Nabiev’s colleagues that Nabiev tried to work together with Khudonazarov but that talks between the two failed. But she also notes that Khudonazarov denies ever having been contacted by Nabiev (2001: 36). Whatever the case, in December 1991, Badakhshan declared independence. In February 1992, James Baker, then US Secretary of State, visited Tajikistan and, refusing to meet with any opposition leaders, met with Nabiev. It is believed that Baker told Nabiev that he would have US support should the Communist party work to resist perceived Islamic fundamentalist and Iranian influences (Akiner 2001: 36). This support, along with the support of the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), gave Nabiev the confidence to move against the opposition.

March 1992 marked a defining moment that led to spontaneous protests. The speaker of Parliament, Kenjayev (a Leninabadi) issued an address live on state television critiquing the (Pamiri) head of the MVD, Navjuvanov, for “exceeding his authority” (Akiner 2001: 36). Akbarzadeh recounts:

“Kenjaev’s barrage of insults was aimed not just at the person of Navjuvanov, but at the whole population of Badakhshon [sic] (also known as Pamiris), to whom Navjuvanov belonged. According to an eyewitness account Kenjaev questioned the validity of Navjuvanov’s Tajik nationality and accused him of systematically discriminating against Uzbeks in the MVD” (1996: 1111).

Pamiris spontaneously protested this perceived insult against their collective pride, and the demonstration expanded to include all those who were anti-Russian, anti-government, pro-opposition and pro-Islamist. Nabiev fired Navjuvanov and Kenjaev resigned on 22 April but Kenjaev was named the head of the Tajik KGB two days later. The next month, Kulyabis responded with a pro-government, pro-constitution and anti-Islamist demonstration. At the end of April, a third demonstration formed in the capital city, this one comprised of ‘Youth of Dushanbe’ – including many of the ‘mafia’ (Akiner 2001: 37).

The demonstrations continued for months. Nabiye, to try to stop them, created a ‘National Guard’ by distributing 2000 machine guns to his supporters.¹³⁰ Fighting broke out from 1-10 May, stopped by intervention from the Russian army. Since the opposition had been better organized than the government, they emerged from the skirmish with a

¹³⁰ Tajikistan had no national army after independence. Other Central Asian states formed their militaries using those Soviet army officials who belonged to the state’s titular nationalism. But because of the Afghan war, a large majority of the military based in Tajikistan were Slavs (Akiner 2001: 37).
coalition government; Nabiyev remained in power, but the opposition parties formed one-third of ministerial posts (Akiner 2001: 37). The protests ended in mid-May and the fighting moved out of Dushanbe and into the south (Kulyab). As a part of this, the opposition forces blocked the road to Kulyab. Humanitarian aid was airlifted into Kulyab from Leninabad. Gorno-Badakhshan ended up suffering as well since the road to Kulyab is the first part of the road from Dushanbe to Khorog.

In July 1992, leaders of all parties met in Khorog to agree on a cease-fire, proposing to free hostages and disarm militias but the summit had little effect and fighting continued (Akiner 2001: 38). Schoeberlein-Engels notes that in these early years of the war “the Gharmi and Pamiri opposition supporters developed a notorious reputation for robbing and killing, which was carried out in part on the basis of these regional criteria” (40).

On 7 September 1992, Nabiyev resigned. An anti-Communist youth group captured him while he was trying to escape to Leninabad from Dushanbe. Akbarsho Iskanderov, a Pamiri, became acting president. Abdumalik Abdullojonov, from Leninabad, assumed the role of Prime Minister. Iskanadrov tried unsuccessfully to negotiate with the Communists but his attempts proved unsuccessful (Scheoberlein-Engel 1994: 41).

Meanwhile, Dushanbe dissolved into “anarchy” (Akiner 2001: 38). Pro-communist insurgents from all sides ransacked the city, killing, looting and raping. Militias based in Kulyab and Uzbeks linked to the speaker of the parliament who had spoken on TV against the MKD began an ‘ethnic cleansing’ campaign of Pamiris and Karateginis (Akiner 2001: 39). In Schoeberlein-Engel’s words: “a mopping-up operation included air and artillery assaults on villages and house-to-house searches to liquidate anyone suspected of anti-Communist sympathies, usually on no grounds other than their regional background” (1994: 41).

In November 1992, the pro-Communist insurgents placed Dushanbe under siege using artillery from the Russian army and with the support of both the Russian and Uzbekistan Armies (Schoeberlein-Engel 1994: 41). It is widely acknowledged that it is largely due to

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131 While regions were more important than ethnicity or religion during the civil war, not all people living in each region were completely unified with common interests. A diversity of allegiances was visible, especially at the beginning of the conflict. In 1991, for instance, Davlat Khudonazarov was candidate for president, pushing for a united Tajikistan; Atabek Amirbekov was pushing for Badakhshi autonomy with La’l-i-Badakhshan; and Shodi Shabdolov was the leader of the Communist Party. All three were Pamiris. Akiner stresses that while power can be based in a particular region, it is not regional identity that drove the group. However, Schoeberlein-Engel notes for the later years of the war: “After the slaughter, torture, and rape, it will be very difficult to convince the young men [of the anti-Communist opposition] that all Kolabi and Communists are not their blood enemies” (Scheoberlein-Engel 1994: 46).
foreign support that the Communists maintained power. Schoeberlein-Engel, whose article is more supportive of the opposition project than of the Communists,\textsuperscript{132} opines that Russia, Europe and the US supported the Communists because they preferred stability over justice and because of their constant fear of what he calls “an imagined fundamentalist danger” (1994: 42).

In mid-November, the coalition parliament held a session in Leninabad at which Emomali Rahmon (unknown at the time) became head of state. Akiner (2001) describes Rahmon, who continues to be head of state today, as “a gawky figure, awkward in the presence of ‘elder statesmen’” (2001: 52). His inexperience led many to think that the Communist party leadership would easily manipulate him but once in power, he quickly began to establish his rule. He established economic and diplomatic links with Russia, CIS members and other regional powers like Iran, China, India, Pakistan and Turkey as well as other Arab countries and spoke to the UN General Assembly.

When Schoeberlein-Engel wrote his account, at around this point of the civil war, he noted: “the Pamir region is now de facto almost completely autonomous, though heavily dependent on outside aid” (1994: 43). But soon after Rahmon took over control, his government rescinded the autonomy of Badakhshan. Rahmon also banned the opposition, controlled the media, brought Islamic institutions under state control and created an official army. Once in clear control of the state, Rahmon began to focus attention on Karategin, many of whose residents escaped to Afghanistan where they created the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), headed by Said Abdullo Nuri. At this point, the UTO took precedence as the primary opposition to the governing Communist Party.\textsuperscript{133} Having

\textsuperscript{132} He opines that the opposition’s aims were “to challenge the Communists on legitimate political issues related to justice, democratic institutions, social welfare, the economy, cultural freedoms, and the environment, among others” whereas those already in power were eager to retain a system that worked to their benefit and feared being criminally held accountable should the political and economic system become more democratic (Schoeberlein-Engel 1994: 32).

\textsuperscript{133} It is important to note that by 1992, the Communist Party was no longer advocating Marxism-Leninism but was focused more simply on secularist principles that separated state and religion. It is this principle that attracted Western support as they saw the Communist Party as keeping more closely with Western concepts of democracy than Rastokhez, the Democratic Party or the UTO (Akiner 2001: 41). Schoeberlein-Engel, writing before the UTO became the primary opposition group, insists that the opposition did not have a mandate of instituting Islamic governance. “It is difficult to explain why Western observers were overwhelmingly inclined to suspect the sincerity of the Tajikistan democrats, and accept the Communist version of the Islamic movement. Undoubtedly, part of the explanation is the essentially racist notion that non-European society is poorly suited to democracy, as well as the demonization of Islam that has been so successfully promoted by political forces in the West. The conservatives in Central Asia have made note of this Western fear of Islam and have been making good use of it” (Schoeberlein-Engel 1994: 32).
created a government-in-exile, the UTO began fighting from Afghanistan. In July 1993, they attacked a Russian border post. Fighting continued until 1994 but became more localized and seasonal. Neither side succeeded in gaining too much ground. By late 1995, the country was still separated into the government-controlled south (Kulyob), the opposition in Karategin-Darwaz (Tavildara), and the rest of the country in control of local leaders. By the late 1990s, Rahmon began to be regarded – or at least tolerated – as a credible leader for the nation (Akiner 2001: 52-3). He remains in power today.

The civil war came to an end with a series of peace talks between the two main parties, Rahmon’s government and Nuri’s government-in-exile:

**Civil War Talks** (Akiner 2001: 54-5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-19 April 1994</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>-In the presence of the UN, Afghanistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia Uzbekistan, and unofficially the USA.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Agenda for future talks established.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18-28 June 1994</td>
<td>Tehran</td>
<td>-All previous parties present, except the Uzbeks and with the addition of the CSCE.</td>
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<td>-Temporary cease-fire agreed, took effect 20 October.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 Oct-1 Nov 1994</td>
<td>Islamabad</td>
<td>-All present except the Uzbeks.</td>
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<td>-Exchanged prisoners</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Developed plan to extend cease-fire but not followed</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 1995</td>
<td>Kabul</td>
<td>-Situation in Tajikistan deteriorated, so Rahmon flew to Kabul to meet Nuri for first face-to-face discussions.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Extended cease-fire</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 1995</td>
<td>Tehran</td>
<td>-Established mutual understanding that resolution to war necessary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 1995 –</td>
<td>Tehran</td>
<td>-Continuous talks, but fighting continued with major attacks by both sides</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 1996</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 1996</td>
<td>Khos Deh,</td>
<td>-Rahmon returned to Afghanistan for further talks with Nuri</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date Range</td>
<td>Location</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 January – 21 February 1997</td>
<td>Tehran and Meshed</td>
<td>Cease-fire restored that was maintained thereafter</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 January – 21 February 1997</td>
<td>Tehran and Meshed</td>
<td>Protocols signed including powers and functions of the National Commission for Reconciliation (NCR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 February – 8 March 1997</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>Protocol on Military Issues signed, establishing disarmament and reintegration of opposition militia into government units</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 April – 28 May 1997</td>
<td>Tehran</td>
<td>Established reform of national and local government with a 30% UTO quota and the lifting of restrictions on opposition parties</td>
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<tr>
<td>27 June 1997</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan signed</td>
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Appendix III: Structure of the AKDN

Structure of the AKDN (akdn.org).
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