The afterlife of industrialization: flows and transformations in Kyrgyzstan

D i s s e r t a t i o n

zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades
Doktor der Philosophie
in der Philosophischen Fakultät
der Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

vorgelegt
von
Gulzat, Baialieva
aus
Shamaldy-Sai (Kirgisistan)

2023

To all Kyrgyzstanis, my ancestors, families and my children

Бул илимий монографияны Кыргызстандагы элиме, урук-туугандарга, ата журтума, тайларыма, кайын журтума, бир туугандарыма, ата-энеме, жолдошума жана балдарыма арнайм.

Thesis title: Afterlife of industrialization: flows and transformations in Kyrgyzstan

Table of Contents

Table of Figures

Figure 4.2: Ahmatjan Aba's 'kitchen' at the river bank. Source: Baialieva, Tendik village 2018.

Figure 4.3: Ahmatjan Aba's future forest of poplars on the Naryn River. Source: Baialieva, Tendik village 2018.

Figure 4.4: A map of Shamaldy-Sai and its villages along the Naryn River. OpenStreetMap contributors (2022). Retrieved from https://planet.openstreetmap.org.

Figure 4.5: Image of the Crystal plant. Source: Shared by a respondent from Kyzyl-Alma in WhatsApp communication on 18 June 2021.

Figure 5.1: The new arterial road connecting Shamaldy-Sai to the Bishkek-Osh highway. This road was laid through cotton fields in 2000–2001 as an extension of Kyrgyzstan Street, the town's major thoroughfare. ©OpenStreetMap contributors.

Figure 5.2: The Kyrgyzstan Street thoroughfare at the edge of the Shamaldy-Sai bazaar. Source: Baialieva, fieldwork 2019.

Figure 5.3: An iconic monument to Lenin in the Shamaldy-Sai town centre on Lenin Street. The stairs and edges are painted in Kyrgyz patterns. Source: Bialieva, fieldwork 2018.

Figure 5.4: Large concrete barriers served to wall factories and other state facilities off from the rest of the built environment. These are seldom removed despite the end of state control and central planning. Source: Baialieva, Shamaldy-Sai bazaar, 2018.

Figure 5.5: A slogan on the fence in the industrial zone reads: 'Greetings to the fraternal communist and workers' parties—combat vanguard, the working class and all workers'. Source: Baialieva, Shamaldy-Sai, 2019.

Figure 5.6: A slogan on the fence in the industrial zone reads: 'Long live Lenin's Komsomol–the loyal assistant and reserve of the Communist Party'. Source: Baialieva, Shamaldy-Sai, 2019.

Figure 5.6: Graffiti on the Naryn River embankment reads 'I love you, Shamaldy-Sai'. Source: Toma Pieu, Shamaldy-Sai, 2018.

Figure 5.7: Fences of the Soviet kindergarten 'Teremok' (name from the Russian fairy-tale) which was abandoned in the 1990s. It was reconstructed in early 2000 and is now called 'Umut', which means 'Hope' in Kyrgyz. Source: Baialieva, Shamaldy-Sai, 2019.

Figure 5.8: Celebration of the Fatherland Day in the House of Culture. The chair of the Woman's Council, Sabira Chargynova (my mother) presenting military personnel stationed in Shamaldy-Sai with the traditional Kyrgyz 'kalpak' (men's headgear) Source: Shamaldy-Sai WhatsApp group, 23.02.2022.

Acknowledgements

and my relatives Janeta, Timur, Jyldyz Bayalieva, Arina, Maksim and thank them all for their constant support. I also thank my uncles and aunts, the Baialievs and the Chargynovs and my supportive in-laws, the Kutmanalievs and the Mukashevs. Care packages, jokes, and moral support sent from a distance all helped me keep my bearings towards completing my research work.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the role of my three kids, Aybike, Aykut and Ayluna, for whose sake I did not give up and became a multifunctional person. Thanks to their love and endless demands to stop working at night, including on weekends, I have a constant search for a balance between life, work, study and research. I could not have completed this dissertation without the love and support of my kids and husband, who provided stimulating discussions as well as distractions. I am grateful to my partner-comrade-colleague-husband Joldon for his patience, warmth, love and humour.

Note on Transliteration

Transliteration of both Russian and Kyrgyz words follows the standard Library of Congress transliteration system, without diacritics. Exceptions are the words and terms that already have established English spellings (e.g., Kyrgyzstan, <u>bayan, ayal, ayil, uyat</u>), and for ease of pronunciation with recurring personal names (e.g., Aliya, Ayana). For the Kyrgyz language I use the same system with the following additions:

Ң = NG ng as in 'evening'.

Ɵ = Ö Pronounced like a German 'ö'.

Y = Ü Pronounced like a German 'ü'.

Ж = J a hard 'J' as in 'joke'.

I use Russian words in *italics* (*etazhnye doma*) and Kyrgyz with <u>underlining</u> (<u>joldor</u>). When a word is both *italicized and underlined*, it indicates that the form contextually could be considered both Russian and Kyrgyz (e.g. <u>*poselok, kollektiv*</u>).

Chapter 1. Introduction

Figure1. A view of the town of Shamaldy-Sai, overlooking the asphalt road past the Uch-Kurgan power plant on the Naryn River. Photo taken from the highest point inside the hydropower by Baialieva, 2016.

This dissertation examines layered transformations in a town in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, as it has experienced the process of industrial restructuring and social change since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. Through the lens of six critical events—the collapse of the Soviet order, significant infrastructure changes, delineation of new territorial borders, Islamization and the emergence of new media technologies—this study traces the transformative dynamics in the town's post-industrial, post-Soviet development.

More concretely, I examine a kaleidoscope of inter-related themes in Shamaldy-Sai, a locality that was a 'high-socialist' community constructing socialism in the thrall of utopian visions (Thrift 2004, Schwenkel 2020). The research objective is to examine how local

communities have responded to major post-Soviet transformations and the ongoing flows of ideas, practices, and information that confront them. A small town, Shamaldy-Sai represents not only a deindustrialized periphery but is also a border town nestled on the transboundary Naryn River, itself the site of a 'cascade' of strategic hydropower plants. It is the place where the project of Soviet modernity unfolded in the 1950s and 1970s, promising a stable future — one in which, since the 1990s, after the collapse of industry and the Soviet regime, local communities have been left disoriented.

The riverside town

Shamaldy-Sai was constructed in the 1950s along the Naryn River, a tributary of the Syr Darya (river), which rises in the Tian Shan mountains of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and flows through one of the most densely populated areas in the region, the Ferghana Valley, and then on through the steppe for hundreds of kilometres, draining eventually into the Aral Sea. The Naryn–Syr Darya river system is the longest in Central Asia. However, the course of this once mighty river system was fundamentally altered by a series of dams erected in the Soviet era. In the wake of this dam building and massive irrigation in the second half of the twentieth century, the amount of water reaching the Aral Sea has greatly diminished.

These dams and irrigations systems were the brainchild of Soviet ministries and agencies, which sought to harness every drop of the river's energy and exploit its waters on a more 'rational' basis. Central Asia needed electricity in order to industrialize and modernize. But electrification and cotton monoculture were not locally devised schemes to meet the basic needs of the residents of the Fergana Valley. Instead, these goals were part of Soviet policy designed to buttress the region as a bedrock of the industrial development of the entire USSR.

Today Shamaldy-Sai exists as a living relic of these grand Soviet schemes and engineering marvels. But alongside the prosperity derived from the river-dependent hydropower, agriculture and trade as part of the USSR's legacy, Shamaldy-Sai bears

the post-Soviet scars of abandoned industrial plants and rundown infrastructure. In Kyrgyzstan, like in other post-production zones globally, the industrial enterprises built in the middle of the 20th century ceased to operate by its end. In their place, we often find shrinking towns, scarred by the ruins of factories and abandoned tailing pits. There are many such places at the margins of Central Asian countries, far from the 'sight' of the state.

As in many Central Asian regions today, there is an acute problem with access to drinking water in Shamaldy-Sai and its surroundings. In most cases, the problem lies with the infrastructure and organization of the water supply. Residents of the settlement are used to regular failures and disconnections of piped water. For years, once a week (on Wednesdays), the mains water to the town has been shut off for the day. The municipality says this is part of the routine maintenance system to 'clean the waterworks'.

Indeed, the water system requires major remedial work. The supply network was installed in 1957 and only in the central sections of Shamaldy-Sai. Today, it has deteriorated almost completely. Nowadays, unfiltered drinking water comes directly from the Naryn River. The residents have different views on water quality. Many do not know whether the water is purified. Since many neighbouring villages are not provided with water, they are forced to supply their households by fetching it in flagons or buckets directly from the Naryn River. In the 1990s, in Tendik, which is a district village of Shamaldy-Sai, residents used carrying poles to transport water; now, donkeys or even cars are used. For household water use, wells are drilled in the courtyards, and 'hauz' (traditional small water tanks) are dug.

At the same time, some places have appropriated post-industrial elements for contemporary use, allowing certain Soviet practices to be retained and woven into the present through a process I call 'slow prosperity'. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, and despite the closure of local factories in the 1990s, Shamaldy-Sai found a way to develop and overcome the economic distress and now serves as a significant regional hub, serving five other villages. Thus, established as a temporary settlement to house

dam workers as well as to establish the ground in the construction of the future giant Toktogul hydropower, it lives on and continues to expand.

1.1. 'There was nothing but wind in Shamaldy-Sai'

Many locals say that life in Shamaldy-Sai appeared only with the start of the Soviet electrification project. Begun in 1956 as a temporary settlement to house dam workers and the facilities needed for plant construction (concrete pouring, metalworks and the like), the settlement was referred to unofficially as 'NarynGES' meaning the 'hydropower on the Naryn River'. NarynGES was populated by dam workers from many different countries, geologists, water engineers and other applied specialists. Initially managed from Tashkent, the capital city of Uzbek SSR, the technical and financial departments that oversaw hydropower developments and the construction of towns along the river were relocated to Uch-Kurgan, a city in Uzbekistan just 15 kilometres away from the dam. But, while the plant was later officially renamed Uch-Kurgan GES for this reason, Shamaldy-Sai (and the plant) continued to be known locally as 'NarynGES'.

In Kyrgyz, 'Shamaldy-Sai' means 'windy valley'. Older residents recount that the force of the wind in this valley could lift a horse and rider right up off the ground. Even now, strong winds sometimes tear down electrical wires and trees, although this is unusual in the area. Echoing a Soviet discourse on bringing life and modernization to a 'no man's land', residents are convinced that there was once 'nothing but wind in Shamaldy-Sai' before the dam construction began. Many emphasize that it was 'deserted', and there were 'no traces of humans' at this time. But was this really the case?

Indeed, the development of large-scale urban life began with the dam's construction in 1956. But if we were to travel back to this place before the hydro projects in the region began, we would see rail lines traversing the fields toward what would become the entrance to the settlement (indeed, these can still be seen today in Shamaldy-Sai). The now-abandoned railway station of 'Shamaldy-Sai' was built on the Tash-Kumyr–Uch-Kurgan railway line in 1936. Once in a while, goods train with carriages carrying coal or iron [still?] passes over them. There are also barracks from that period that have partially

survived and are still in use. So, contrary to what is locally recalled, *there were* 'traces of humans' before the construction of the hydropower plant.

Moreover, we have the oral histories of the Jediger tribe and local battles in the 18th and 19th centuries. According to the oral history of local hero Bazyl Baatyr, there was a ford on the Naryn River at Shamaldy-Sai. People stopped here with their livestock and made camp for the night. The tribes of the left bank, in particular the Jediger, crossed the river at what would become Shamaldy-Sai to reach the Uzbek bazaars. The inhabitants of the right bank—the Saruu tribes and natives of Talas—crossed the river here to participate in Jediger celebrations and gatherings (Umetaliev 2010).

1.2. Soviet high modernity unfolding

But, as we have noted, the development of urban life began in connection with the construction of the dam in 1956. Such construction sites were called 'All-Union shock construction projects' (*vsesoiuznaia udarnaia stroika*) or sometimes 'Komsomol shock construction projects' (*komsomolskaia udarnaia stroika*) due to the association with the Soviet communist student brigades or Komsomol. These grand 'construction projects of communism' were flagships of Soviet industrialization and a 'highly modernist vision of the rational exploitation of resources' (Féaux de la Croix 2016, 32). Kotkin (1995) draws on the Soviet construction site of the Magnitogorsk iron and steelworks (one of the flagships of the first Five Year Plan in 1930–1932) as a case study. In so doing, he has weaved together the discourses of Soviet subjectivity and the welfare state to show Stalinism not just as a political system but *also as a way of life*.

Below are some lyrics of 'My Address is the Soviet Union', which became a very popular Soviet pop song in the 1970s:

> My address does not have
> A house number and street name,
> My address is the Soviet Union.
> You, the telegraph symbols–dots and dashes

Can find me at the construction sites.

[Lyrics from the famous song 'My Address is the Soviet Union' by the band 'Samotzvety, 1973]

And indeed, for older generations of Shamaldy-Sai residents, the early days of 'NarynGES' were *a distinct way of life* and are remembered as a formative part of their lived experience. They have regularly shared the music video of 'My Address is the Soviet Union'[1] and its lyrics on online platforms. The song and the memories it invokes bring on waves of nostalgia. As the song suggests, older residents remember how their families from far away—in Ukraine, say, or Russia—would send them packages and letters posted with their name and just 'NarynGES' as the postal address.

This song depicts the Soviet Union as a collective, common home for everyone. As the lyrics show, construction sites had a unique role throughout the USSR. The idea in the song that one could send a telegraph to find a person 'at the construction site' is not lyrical fantasy. It was literally true. Soviet industrial sites were often situated in peripheral, remote places, and the street names and numbers did not fix their location. The name of the construction site was enough for the post to find the intended recipient.

As the centrality of this song shows, the industrial life of 'Soviet man', who worked selflessly for the development of the USSR, gives rise to questions of *temporality* and *place-making.* How was industrial labour understood, and what memories do those Soviet workers now have of the construction sites in Central Asia? How have the Soviet ways of living taken on new roles and support the current resilience of the town? These and other questions related to hydropower construction in the 1950s on the Naryn River are explored in Chapter 3.

---

[1] Samotsvetu. *Moi Adres Sovetskii Soiuz*, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_x10yGBJs2k.

1.3. At the crossing of seven roads—'*toguz joldun tomunda*'

I myself was born and grew up in this small industrial town, which locals refer to simply as 'poselok Shamaldy-Sai'. And 'poselok' refers to the towns built along the river during the course of the dam-construction period in Soviet Central Asia. As the first plant to be built on the transboundary Naryn River, the Uch-Kurgan dam is referred to as the eldest of the Naryn hydropower cascade. When construction peaked in the 1960s, the Uch-Kurgan GES —designed to produce 180 MW of electrical energy per year — was considered a 'major scale' hydroelectric power plant, although now it is among the minor ones in the country.

Once designed for only 3,000 people, Shamaldy-Sai now accommodates over 18,000. At the intersection of several regions and located on the border with Uzbekistan, the town has profited as a trade hub. The success of the former industrial town—as the locals themselves call it—can be put down to its location 'at the crossing of seven roads' (toguz joldun tomunda). Once a site of transboundary hustle and bustle between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in the era of industrialization in Soviet Central Asia, since the demarcation (and later militarization) of the international border between the two countries in 1991, Shamaldy-Sai has 'turned Kyrgyzward'. Now it has stronger trade and road connections with Kyrgyzstan's three southern regions: Aksy, Nooken and Ala-Buka.
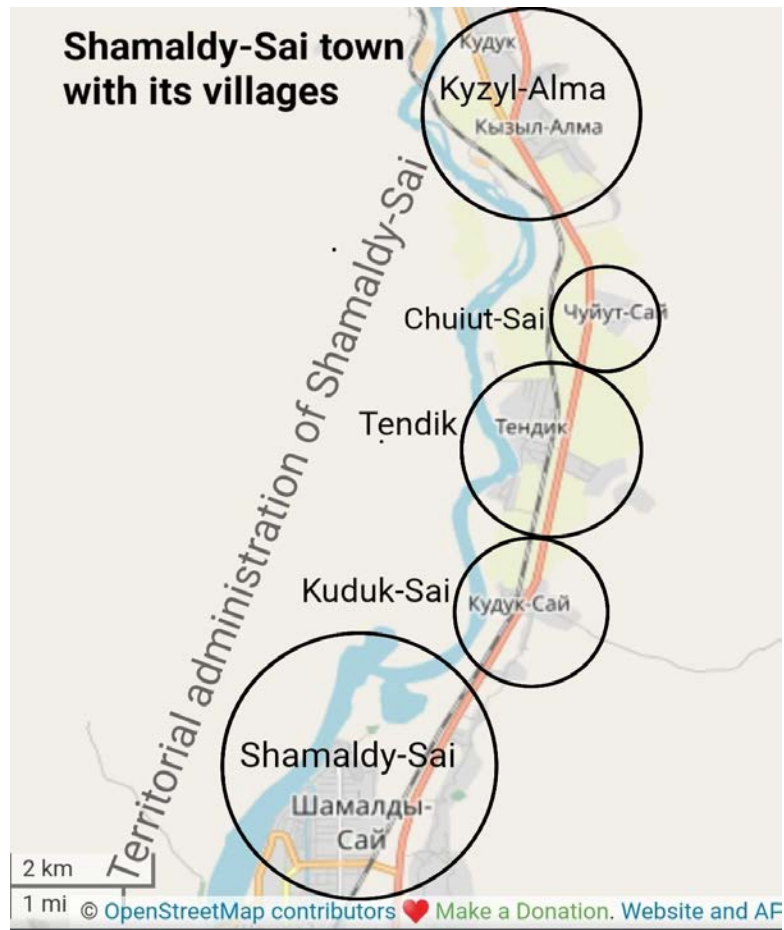
Figure 4.4. A map of Shamaldy-Sai and its villages along the Naryn River. OpenStreetMap contributors (2022). Retrieved from https://planet.openstreetmap.org.

Shamaldy-Sai is fascinating as a case study not only of industrial transformation against a backdrop of post-Soviet developments. It is also a case study in *transformation through processes of bordering*. In 2003, the town became home to two crucial military units, the Kyrgyzstan special forces (*NatzGvardiya*) and the border guards (*Chegara Kyzmaty*). Today, men in military attire in the streets of Shamaldy-Sai are ubiquitous. In Shamaldy-Sai —located geographically in the remote Ferghana Valley — the fortified border guards, tanks, and armoured vehicles are a visible presence of the central state in what might otherwise seem a peripheral area.

19

However, these national symbols are not the only actors performing state and territorial unity in the borderlands — the borderland people are also key actors. Studying Shamaldy-Sai as a border town contributes to the existing literature by offering a closer look at the dynamics of border materialization not from the state perspective but from the border people themselves. The *poselok* was once closely connected to the nearby Uzbek city of Uch-Kurgan, which — as mentioned — is where the administration and logistics of dam construction were relocated in the 1960s. Road communications with Uzbekistan ran first along the railroad tracks from the branch station Shamaldy-Sai–Uch-Kurgan, second along the highway (through the location called 'Hlop-punkt', a cotton collection centre), and third, over the bridge across the Naryn at the village of Kyzyl-Jar. The famous Uch-Kurgan bazaar was another critical point of connection between people on both sides of the border, including myself and my family, as will be detailed in Chapter 6. Seemingly eternal ties, familial relations and fraternal feelings were affected when the border became much more rigid after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Examining the evolution of borders in Shamaldy-Sai —as this study does — matters because it shows how the *militarization of borders becomes routinized*. Today, the once novel and rather curious appearance of military and border guard units walking the streets of transboundary Shamaldy-Sai has become a routine and self-evident phenomenon. Abandoned Soviet buildings—the former vocational school №108 and kindergarten—are now used to house soldiers, and the Soviet public transport depot (*avtobaza*) was repurposed as the local headquarters of the military units. These sites, as well as the hydroelectric power plants, are now specially guarded areas.

This thesis also shows how 'borders' are not a single unity and are experienced differently in various spaces and at different times. For example, despite Shamaldy-Sai's newfound status as a locus of bordering practice, it is not nearly as conflict-ridden as anyone familiar with the border histories of post-Soviet Central Asia might expect. With independence came gradual border work on the demarcation of territories and border controls. International training assistance and funding supported the increased presence of military and border guards. Yet unlike the southern part of the Ferghana Valley, which has many

undelimited territories and conflict zones, there are no disputed territories in Shamaldy-Sai.

However, this is not to say that bordering has been pain-free. In 2000, due to religious extremism and the so-called 'Batken events', the Uzbekistani government ripped up the road to Uch-Kurgan, erected a border and blocked the road. The Naryn bridge was dismantled in the late 1990s, and Shamaldy-Sai was wholly disconnected from Uzbekistan. Cross-border families endured difficult years of separation. They had to make difficult decisions about whether to stay or migrate to reunite with their relatives.

1.4. Research questions and conceptual framework

The manuscript brings together two notions — 'transformation' and 'flows'. In so doing, it considers *continuity* in the movements of people, resources and ideas. Intensification in the movement—or *flows*—of people, objects, information, ideas, capital, and power across borders is not a characteristic of post-Soviet space alone but the entire world in the era of globalization. Using the cases of changing relationships in Shamaldy-Sai I argue that post-Soviet (or, more accurately, post-post-Soviet) space consists of layers of interdependent practices, events and actions that are not always territorialized. Instead, flows of lived experience, legacies, and, in recent decades, growing dialogue with 'the global' continue to guide the region in innovating as it moves into the future.

More concretely, it examines post-industrial renewal in a place where the legacies of post-socialism endure. In conducting the research, I have found that in post-Soviet spaces like Shamaldy-Sai and its surrounding villages, transformation never entails complete and radical change—a total rupture with the past. Instead, *changes are layered*—the old is not eliminated but instead reappropriated and reinterpreted as newer patterns and ways of doing are laid on top of it. Post-socialism's visible elements (symbols, signs, architecture) and practices (celebrations, work values) continue to evolve into new forms that suit present needs and circumstances. And while the cultural meaning of the older socialist artefacts and rituals may change, their material and social traces never

disappear entirely. Therefore, this dissertation presents an *ethnographic account of life after industrialization and post-Soviet appropriations*, drawing on autoethnography, participant-observation, archival and digital methods.

Against this backdrop, the thesis seeks to answer the following questions:

> How do residents of deindustrialized places reconfigure and reimagine new materialities?
> How do memory and place-making intersect with (de)industrialization?
> What is the role of temporality in such developments, and how is it perceived and questioned in post-Soviet space?

The study addresses these questions in an attempt to shed much-needed light on contemporary post-Soviet and deindustrialized zones.

I tackle the Shamaldy-Sai case as a microcosm of important transformations in the context of deindustrialization and border and environmentalism issues. Drawing on the ideas of place-making and transformed society I explore in the thesis how deindustrialized sites can actuate new kinds of socialities and alternative ways of envisioning the future. Complex overarching research requires in-depth fieldwork into communal responses to socio-cultural processes, which are open-ended.

Looking at the Shamaldy-Sai area, I explore how the transformations and movements of tangible and intangible things such as humans, objects, ideas and information are negotiated. By examining the social dynamics of everyday life in Shamaldy-Sai, I grasp how local communities navigate significant and often disruptive events affecting their lives: environmental change, border-making, religious revival, informality and use of new media. In adopting this anthropological perspective, I draw conceptually on the notions of *post-Soviet transformations* and *flows*.

Post-Soviet transformations

Thirty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly independent republics, including the Central Asian states, are still often referred to as 'post-Soviet'. However, there are diverse academic debates about this epithet, and while some call for its continued use, others feel it ought to be abandoned. The region's 30-year independent development has been described as 'transition' (Burawoy and Verdery 1999), 'bardak' or chaos (Nazpary 2002), and as one 'transformation phase', among others (Pétric 2005, Buyandelgeriyn 2008, Silova and Niyozov 2020). The literature of the later period of post-Sovietness includes studies of geopolitical tensions (Reeves 2012, Fehlings and Karrar 2020), political power struggles and inequality (Beyer and Finke 2019) and globalized Islam (Roy 2004, Chaudet 2006, Montgomery and Heathershaw 2016). I write about this in more detail in chapter 5, which focuses on the local post-Soviet legacies and appropriations of Soviet practices.

While I agree with some views that the region has turned to a new *non-Soviet phase* and it is a time to drop the term 'post-Soviet'[2]*,* I find it useful in many ways, and I adopt the category here in a temporal and geographical sense and not just as a legacy of the previous regime. Thus, in doing so, I do not seek to automatically impose an association to or a one-directional continuation of the previous Soviet way of life. On the contrary, the old regime, the pre-Soviet and the Soviet, have left their imprints in certain local practices, thus forming 'layered legacies' (Schmidt et al. 2021). The epithet 'post-Soviet' is also helpful in a prescriptive sense. Substantively, I include an additional semantic meaning and understand 'post-Soviet' as an assemblage of different local legacies as well as global influences and innovations.

Through examining the major developments of Shamaldy-Sai in the last few decades, such as industrial decline, new prosperity and bordering, we can see how it is still shaped by the Soviet past, with its reformatted social institutions and networks. Chapter 5 analyses materials such as industrial buildings, award (*gramota*) and immaterial elements of the Soviet legacy and their local appropriation. Such multi-layered local practices,

---

[2] https://www.calvertjournal.com/features/show/13044/30-years-independence-ussr-term-post-soviet-use

where women are the main actors, still play a prominent role in current events. Thus, post-Soviet Shamaldy-Sai conveys a collage of events, and layers of legacies that reinforce, interact with and contradict each other in complex ways and can have hugely different consequences in different local contexts.

Flows

As mentioned, the thesis draws heavily on the notion of 'flows' in its close association with transformations and circulations, which are subject to frictions, discontinuities and complications. A focus on flows and responses to the changes fills a gap in the previous research that has predominantly focused on the shrinking, empty and ghost towns and provides a new approach to studying transformed societies. 'Flow' points to all the fluxes and circulations in which human becoming unfolds. It is about not only tangible but also intangible mobility of ideas, information and norms. The flow of these things is intertwined and travels simultaneously across time and space. Flows within a transformed society, such as the post-Soviet Shamaldy-Sai region, enable us to trace the social and material exchanges through which the new world comes into being. These exchanges or flows can be seen as the resilience of local Shamaldy-Sai society.

Shamaldy-Sai's specific movements and circulations convey fractures and interruptions in the context of major societal transformations, migration and the rise of new media. The 'flow' concept is useful in showing the layered transformations and movements. I am aware that the notion of 'flow' has obscure connotations as a concept across disciplines, and its metaphoric use has limits: 'when you take an intellectual ride on a metaphor, it is important that you know where to get off. If for some purposes, you find it useful to think about culture as flow, then, no need to believe it is a substance you can pour into bottles' (Hannerz 2000: 6).

The anthropological approach to the metaphor of flows is about negotiated movements rather than one-way and generalized processes (Féaux de la Croix 2011). The metaphor of flows derived from water is not just a fluid and smooth motion but has particular movements and forces. Flows of water shape the ground as it runs (Tsing 2000), water gushes in unexpected turbulences (Hannerz 2011). The idea of *flows* must not be

understood primarily as a metaphor for translocal mobilities and globalization processes.

Thus, I conceptualize flows as a multi-directional current and circulations of humans, objects and practices. Through the notion of flows, the thesis proposes to trace, unfold and investigate various transformative and creative ways to tackle the local impacts. The snapshots of flows within, from, and to Shamaldy-Sai present a comprehensive picture of micro-scale engagement with the movements of people, ideas and resources in place-making, community-building and environmental management.

1.5. Overview of the chapters

The remainder of the thesis proceeds as follows. The next chapter presents a comprehensive methodology and details of the research design. The following chapters, in turn, offer a detailed look at some concrete aspects of transformation and flow in post-Soviet Shamaldy-Sai.

The empirical thesis chapters discuss the complex processes of post-industrial transition, 'slow prosperity' and orientation to a new reality. What are the significant transformations and flows in the post-Soviet space? What is the role of women in maintaining and building community? How do we understand the rise of Islam and the veiling movement from the women's perspective? How have new technologies and social media affected informal networks in the context of migration?

In addressing these questions, the chapters reveal and study the significant transformations in the region, and each contains an ethnographic account driven by a single unifying line of inquiry: how have significant changes been addressed locally?

Chapter 3 is an extended version of earlier research, the partial results of which have been published by Baialieva and Roberts (2021). In this chapter, I investigate the critical role of the labour force adjacent to the power plant and the impact of the ambitious Soviet hydropower projects on human lives.

Some dam workers gained decades of experience and highly specialized technical and engineering skills, but in Central Asia, the bulk of physical labour was carried out by far more significant numbers of farmers and herders assigned or drawn to the site from collective farms and distant mountain villages. The experiences of the latter group, the silent majority, rarely appear in any detail in scholarly treatment, with the notable exception of Artemy Kalinovsky's (2018) *Laboratory of Socialist Development*, in which the voices of dam workers assigned to build the Nurek dam, in the south of Tajikistan, figure prominently. Nevertheless, recent critical contributions have advanced our understanding of the role native labour was supposed to play in (re)-forming Soviet citizens – the social engineering component of environmental engineering, as it were. The native component of the workforce at the Naryn–Syr Darya dam sites assumed a gradually more prominent role in a notable progression between the late 1940s and the early 1970s.

Beyond the grandiose but myopic engineering projects seeking to make the Naryn–Syr Darya a perfectly regulated 'organic machine', there were many thousands of local and semi-local people whose sense of place and connection to the landscape being altered was vastly different to that of those directing the process. What did those who undertook the physical labour of diverting rivers and building dams make of the process? In what terms did they understand their contribution? In striving to recover the voices and values of dam workers, whose collective identity should not be assumed, the data collected seeks to shed light on the grey areas between voluntary and forced labour, understandings of nature and human responsibility towards it.

The chapter 4 "The transformed environment and 'slow violence'" deals with the everyday challenges at the lower Naryn River and applies concepts of *envirotechnical* systems (Pritchard 2011) and *slow violence* (Nixon 2012). I look at the interaction between the river system, people and their adaptation as an envirotechnical regime. Within this complex envirotechnical regime, I mention regular water cut-offs and the invisible, untold story of Kyzyl-Alma communities living alongside toxic industrial residues. I contend that deindustrialization and pollution, as well as malnutrition and poverty, are *'interconnected'*

forms of *slow violence.* These processes are relatively invisible but cause serious harm to vulnerable people, destroying their lives over time.

This chapter also investigates how built systems are sustained and managed by local communities. Shamaldy-Sai's envirotechnical regimes include people like my water-managing uncle, technologies and deindustrial landscapes with toxicity as in the Kyzyl-Alma community, which together define, construct and maintain the established pot-Soviet environmental systems. Applying the concept of 'slow violence', I show how locals act as environmental managers and strive to improve their lives. The abandoned deindustrialized zone, which carries tonnes of untreated harmful chemicals, is a form of violence towards the environment and communities. The cases of a regime actor like my uncle or the Arzykan Eje family demonstrate the risks and threat factors associated with 'the environmentalism of the poor'.

In chapter 5, in reverse to Nixon's (2011) 'slow violence' discussed in chapter 4 on environmental risks, I use the term *slow prosperity* to show post-Soviet performativity and communal relationships in sustaining success after deindustrialization. Furthermore, I demonstrate that through novel adaptations of the Soviet legacy, the people have Shamaldy-Sai have creatively tailored elements of the past to build a prosperous present and hopeful future.

In so doing, I look at life after industrialization in Shamaldy-Sai not only through visible material objects but also through invisible communal, social formations and connections. I examine the legacy of the industrial past, its innovative continuation and local adaptation. Instead of studying overrepresented objects like Lenin's monument and the ruins of factories, I look at the less known and understudied Soviet objects incorporated into everyday life, such as the local appropriation of concrete fences. How does the town endure the post-Soviet and deindustrial transformations? How have they influenced Shamaldy-Sai, which could overcome the economic distress and now serve five other villages?

Using ethnographic accounts of post-industrial social networks such as informal organizations, the Soviet-style collectivity of people acting as a group (*kollektiv*),

celebrations and post-Soviet symbolic practices such as giving certificates, awards, I argue that the post-Soviet practices are related to the industrial past (examined in chapter 3) and turned the deindustrialization into a success story with strong communal participation. The chapter is divided into three parts, which analyse the enduring Soviet objects and practices and their use in the present from different angles. The novel adaptations of some post-Soviet practices incorporate new Islamic forms of social support (religious transformation from a gender perspective is discussed in chapter 7). Alongside the social practices, this chapter examines material and symbolic objects such as the use of Soviet enterprise fences and awards-giving (*nagrajdenie gramotami*).

Chapter 6 presents another important flow of post-Soviet challenges - the transformed borders. By looking at how the region reworked the international boundaries in this chapter I show border transformations and geographical reorientation in Shamaldy-Sai. Although throughout the Soviet period in Central Asia, the international boundaries existed on maps as physical lines, they were imaginary, symbolic and multiple. There are border studies, outside the Central Asian region, which look at interactions rather than focusing on conflict. In the academic literature, the majority of border studies on Central Asia focus primarily on dynamics of *conflict*, *tension*, and interstate violence. Secondly, they are predominantly studied from the geopolitical, legal, security and international relations perspectives. However, certain elements of such 'peaceful' cases may shed light on the dynamics of vulnerability in other problematic places. Thus, the current chapter contributes to the study of international boundaries in two dimensions: by presenting (auto)ethnography and local perceptions and experiences and secondly, by presenting flows of events and assemblage of boundary transformations where borders have been fixed to a certain extent peacefully.

In chapter 7, I explore how some veiled women in the Shamaldy-Sai region navigate their adopted religious markers in constructing their new (religious) identities within the context of tensions between traditionalism, the Soviet 'campaign for women's emancipation', conceptions of 'modernity', and the influence of wider political Islamic communities, gender and veiling controversies.

In analysing the discourses around the emergence of women's Islamic veiling, I examine different paths that women take in their choice to wear a *hijab*. Such choices are not always a product of pressure from the family (although they can be). Instead, they are also individual choices that reflect women's desire to take ownership of their own lives and morality. Thus, I show that veiling does not represent a monolithic response to globalized Islam but can result from the interaction of quite different structural factors – on the one hand, female empowerment, 'modernity', and on the other, patriarchal domination.

I also describe attitudes to veiling as reflecting generational conflicts in Kyrgyzstan, feelings of collectivity and difference. As the empirical findings show, many younger women choose the hijab over traditional alternatives to find a vision of the future away from the colonial past and uncertain postcolonial present.

In chapter 8, I look at informality mediated by new technologies, and as the bodily and spatial relationship between people and the state and various services change, available online, and now people from teachers to doctors can be contacted via WhatsApp if you have the right relations, when earlier it used to be phone calls or knocking on doors.

Besides, it illustrates how the above relationship becomes more visible for everyday participants (and researchers) as new semi-public and informal spaces emerge in the multiple WhatsApp groups, the most commonly used platform in Kyrgyzstan. Finally, I contribute to the literature on new media and informality by tracing these informal networks by asking how informal access to public resources works along with intergenerational dynamics (elderly people, intergenerational solidarity, gendered division of responsibilities and support).

How does this work through lateral support (exchange of services) networks involving groupmates (*odnoklassniki*) and other social networks, especially when state institutions are weak? Asking these questions, I explore how smartphones and new technologies empower Shamaldy-Sai residents (including those engaged in seasonal labour migration) to access public services through informal networking. This is especially practised among young Shamaldy-Sai residents in both Kyrgyzstan and Russia. By using smartphones,

people help each other in times of need (to expedite access to public resources), share information about possible, reliable networks, 'acquaintances' (*taanyshtar, svyazi*), recommend reliable networks to each other and prioritize these networks over others. The dissertation closes with a concluding chapter 9 that draws together the findings and identifies avenues for future research.

Chapter 2. Methodology

2.1. Ways of knowing

Using a combination of methods—including autoethnography, participant observation, archival research, oral history, songs, published memoirs, qualitative interviews, and digital anthropology—this thesis reveals multi-layered practices and the changing social and environmental sensitivities (such as in water management and religion). I was born here and belong to the community. Although I left my hometown of Shamaldy-Sai after high school, my parents, relatives, classmates still live there, and I visit twice a year, staying for a few months with my family. Even prior to my current PhD project on Shamaldy-Sai, I have drawn on my personal connection to this place as part of my professional research. Since 2006, I have therefore carried dual roles as a 'compatriot' (jerdesh) and as a professional researcher. I find it an overlooked place that has the potential to shed new light on certain societal constraints and controversial topics.

I used several methods to collect and analyse the data in my dissertation. Triangulating different ways of collecting information helped to manage several challenges related to inquiry, including subjectivity, objectivity, and self-reflexivity. Such triangulation was especially important to balance my personal accounts and roles I have. I am not only a member of society and a scholar but also a daughter, granddaughter, classmate, friend, neighbour, guest, 'compatriot' and 'native daughter' (bizdin kyz). In undertaking the research, I applied the methods of qualitative interviews, oral history, archival research, participant observation autoethnography, native and digital anthropology.

2.2. Interviews and oral history

As a method, the qualitative in-depth interview can facilitate exploration of how discourses and relationships work and how they are narrated (Rosalind and Holland 2013). However, in-depth interviews are inherently not replicable because they are more than a method, 'they are a social interaction with many elements coming into play' (Mason 2002, 1). These include the role of a researcher and the location and context within which the interview takes place. The in-depth interviews and oral history interviews took place in a

combination of the three languages spoken by the older generations in Shamaldy-Sai: Russian, Uzbek and Kyrgyz. My grandfather was a Kyrgyz language teacher who came to the Soviet village from Aksy in 1957. One day, he was expelled from school based on a statement from a 'denouncer' that he was 'anti-Soviet and a nationalist'. I never met my grandfather, but I know the memories and difficulties of his life from the stories of my grandmother and my matrilineal kin.

My respondents who took part in the early construction of the town remember my grandfather and shared intimate stories such as how he tried to teach them how to handle documents and improve the financial literacy of the Kyrgyz newcomers. In 1956 most of the Uzbek and Kyrgyz labourers were young, did not speak Russian, and could not manage the Soviet bureaucracy. These memories and narratives were collected through oral history methods. Oral history, which predates the written word[3], is an advantageous method when the text is limited, and there is a gap between memory, history and voices (Assmann 2006, Peniston-Bird 2010). Oral histories of elder dam workers revealed interesting insights about their social mobility and nature of dam work during the Soviet Union (discussed in chapter 3). The elderly dam workers (*GES* kuruuchular, *gidrostroiteli*) whom I interviewed all participated in the dam and town construction from 1956. They are now 80-90 years old.

In total, there are 12 recorded and 7 unrecorded (note-taken) oral history interviews. The average duration of oral history interviews ranges from 1.5 to 3 hours. I was able to interview all remaining sixteen residents who were involved in dam construction work from 1956 onwards and another twelve current workers at the hydropower plant.

I recorded dam workers' stories, focusing mainly on the dam work dynamics and dam workers' memories. To gather information and collect contextual data on other dimensions of Shamaldy-Sai's transformation, such as post-Soviet practices, flows of religious observance, migration and informal networks, I undertook 64 qualitative interviews. In total, I spent 20 months of fieldwork in the riverine communities in Shamaldy-Sai, including its surrounding villages, in 2012 and again in 2016–2019. My

---

[3] Some oral histories can be found in the form of books.

autoethnographic narratives include observations and knowledge from pre-PhD research periods, and where this is so, I indicate it explicitly.

Archival materials helped to reconstruct the years and facts of river diversion, phases of turbines' launch and other technical data. I was also able to find the local newspaper on the Soviet construction of 'Ogni Naryna' in the Central Archive in Bishkek and some scanned excerpts from the website Karakulcy.[4] The site newspapers circulated locally were certainly far more candid and detailed in discussing problems on-site—work accidents, poor living conditions, theft and embezzlement—than were the All-Union newspapers, which tended to cover only the dams' major positive milestones.

In addition to collect historic photos, dam memories and to triangulate different inquiries within my research focus, I used a combination of methods. Mostly it was a mix of participant observation, interviews and digital ethnography. The phenomenon of Kyrgyz women's veiling in the context of religious revival has been the subject of contentious debates in the Kyrgyz[5] community, including polarized views and misunderstandings, which have prevented fruitful dialogue between opponents and supporters. I was able to glean information during casual chats and dinnertime conversations but also arranged in-depth interviews to draw out contextual data.

My respondents included newly veiling women aged 18-50 of Kyrgyz and Uzbek ethnicity from different socio-educational backgrounds. My main sites for recruiting contacts were women Muslim circles (taalim) and other associations which bring these women together. The conversations and interviews were facilitated by my existing extensive contacts in these circles. I was able to establish strong connections with several Muslim women activists as well. Through them, I expanded my network.In examining flows of religious practices and the decision to adopt veiling, I interviewed 25 women from different Islamic groups (Tablighi Jamaat, 'Hizb-ut-Tahrir', Wahabi). All of them were veiled and had

---

[4] 'Sait Kara-Kultzev'. Accessed 6 March 2022. http://karakulcy.narod.ru/history.html.

[5] by the term Kyrgyz when referring to the society and people I mean 'Kyrgyzstani' unless specified, for example in the meaning of a language or type of ethnic outfit.

different experiences with the headwear; four of them later stopped wearing hijab due to disapproval from family and school. In addition, I conducted semi-structured interviews with seven women who acknowledge Islam but do not follow any revivalist group. Besides attending weekly Muslim gatherings (baian) required by the Tablighi rules, I was able to go to their houses and interact with them in their everyday lives. I participated in many aspects of their daily lives, such as shopping, cooking, visiting their relatives and other regular routines.
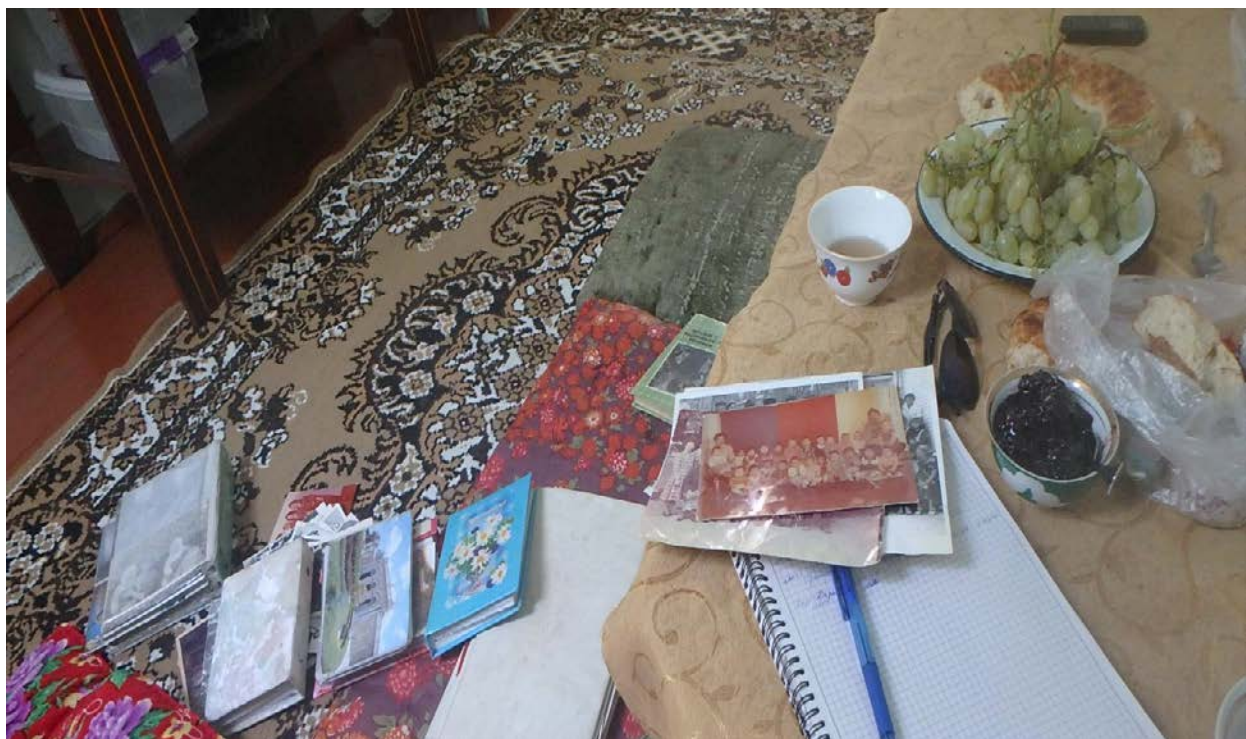
Figure 2.1. Oral history interview. The respondent is sharing stories while showing family albums, Shamaldy-Sai. Source: Baialieva fieldwork 2018.

During my final fieldwork in 2019, I revisited the old dam builders I had interviewed earlier. The passing of respondents I had spent hours with, whose stories, emotions I had witnessed, and whose pictures I had taken was difficult to accept. I also engaged with a newer cluster of Shamaldy-Sai residents, those who did not take part in the creation of the town, who moved after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They do not care about

Lenin's bust monument in the centre of the village in contrast to the elder residents who cannot imagine their Shamaldy-Sai without 'Lenin'.

When I explored the border aspects, I worked closely with the municipality and my relatives who have leading part in these institutions which helped me navigate the post-Soviet territorial-administrative documents of Shamaldy-Sai. The management and headquarters of the Jalal-Abad oblast border army (Upravlenie pogranichnoi Slujby Jalal-Abadskoi Oblasti) was established in the area in 2003. It was decided to deploy it in Shamaldy-Sai. In the beginning, it was a materially very hard process when the national army was weak, the border army was absent and just being created, the budget did not have the necessary funds.

Local support from my research participants was crucial in the initial phase. I interviewed local leaders, the former head of the town municipality who participated in the early formation of the border guard, visited the headquarters, and met the head of the border army. I also took part in the commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the Border Army's settlement in Shamaldy-Sai, which was not intended for the general public. To ensure that information about the composition of the border guards, the types of heavy equipment and the number of military transports being deployed was not leaked, the event was subject to restricted access (*zakrytoe meropriyatie*). The commemoration included a display of the arsenal, tanks, speeches, awards, and a tea party.

During my fieldwork, I engaged in many social activities, including working at my parent's retail shop, teaching English, working at the dam museum, and organising community events and other workshops in the framework of a larger research project, 'Social life of the Naryn-Syr Darya river'. This included organizing a so-called 'flash study' workshop "Knowing the Naryn river"[6], where international scholars had the opportunity to visit Shamaldy-Sai and exhibition-related events. As a participating observer, I was able to go inside the hydropower plant and its dam museum. It is a highly secure facility in which

---

[6] The goal of this five day workshop was a transdisciplinary investigation of the Naryn and the river town of Shamaldy Sai in southern Kyrgyzstan.This event was funded by the Volkswagen Foundation and hosted by our bigger project 'Social Life of a River: environmental histories, social worlds and conflict resolution along the Naryn-Syr Darya'.

external visitors are not normally allowed to visit or remain as volunteer researchers. However, my personal connection with the director of the Uch-Kurgan GES and the head of the museum allowed me to work inside the hydropower station archive every day from 6.30 a.m. to 4 p.m. for 3 days. I was given the paper-based permit to enter (*propusk*) and engage with the dam museum. The archive contained exclusively technical architectural documentation of the schemes and descriptions of the turbines and other equipment.

It provided a chance to see how GES workers perform, how they describe their work and how they perceive the town. It was illuminating to observe how they work as a team without saying a word. Apart from the mechanical noises of machinery in the workshop, the creaking sounds of machinery, turbines, and metal creaks, no human voices are heard. It is rare to hear a planned team instruction from the foreman about the shift or the completed plan. The entire team collaborated without talking and in harmony with each other. The head of the mechanical department would note everything on paper, fill in required documentation and move on to the next task without saying a word. The five or six people in the brigade would check the pressure and record data, including the electricity and water supply norms. Each has their respective function and carries out their task in detail, only occasionally recording figures and ticking off boxes on paper. During the lunch break, there was an opportunity to chat. As Sapar, a senior mechanic, commented during lunch in the canteen of the Uch-Kurgan GES:

> What you saw today, we do it every day. It is repetitive work, and I am doing it in an automated mode. It may seem boring for you, but it is a very responsible and exciting job for us. Moreover, I know that a whole town depends on how well we can handle the task. So it is for our people (el), families and the country. We don't have any margin for error (*ne imeem pravo na oshibku*).

As we can see, the hydropower workers have a strong sense of vocation, responsibility and feel proud of their work. As some of them commented, they can see the result of their work everywhere—in water running from the taps, the lights in the town and the houses. They feel proud that they can always feel and see the output of their work and the effect

that it has. The very idea that their work is located under flowing water also makes them feel special.
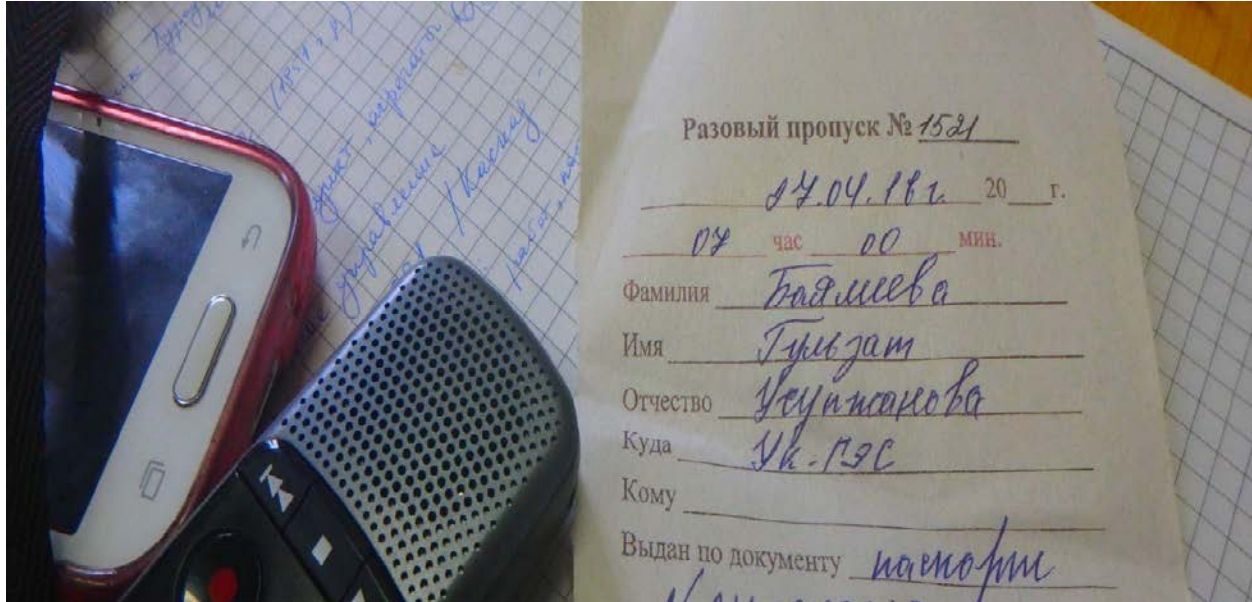
Figure 2.2. Permit from the head of hydropower to enter the Uch-Kurgan hydropower on the name of Gulzat Baialieva. Shamaldy-Sai. Source: Baialieva fieldwork 2016.

I find it important and instructional to engage deeply with the methodological approaches and debates in the literature that influenced my research design. I benefited and contributed a lot from autoethnographic techniques combined with participant observation both in online and offline contexts. It was impossible to bypass the method of autoethnography and not go into my own personal narratives, feelings and experiences. In the following sections, I will elaborate on these methods and the evocative points and conceptual debates. I should stress once again that I was born and raised in Shamaldy-Sai, a place to which I return regularly, stay linked via social media, and come to research since I left in 1998. It is a place where my parents, relatives and the community members I grew up with continue to live. Therefore, I continue to be connected to the field. For this, I stay keen and negotiate with ongoing dilemmas from an insider and outsider perspective.

2.3. Autoethnography and digital space

Intensive discussion of the turn toward reflexivity and autoethnography in scholarly writing emerged in the 1970s. These debates concerned the issues of power and the crisis of representation in ethnographic life writing (Clifford and Marcus 2010, Reed-Danahay 1997, 2001, 2017). As a method of inquiry, autoethnography has main fundamental issues and controversies related to insider versus outsider perspectives, objectivity, self-reflexivity and writing. It was narrowly defined as 'insider ethnography', implying the study of the society of which the researcher is a member (Hayano, 1979). Taking this further, Agassi (1969) provided an introduction and an important overview of the approach's underlying premises, stating that each person is the authority on their own experience.

The main objective in applying autoethnography is to recreate the researcher's experience in a reflexive way. As a method, autoethnography includes characteristics of ethnography combined with autobiography. It is generally distinguished from autobiography by its focus on experiences within the researcher's life and particular forms of analysis that illuminate wider societal and cultural aspects. Autoethnography can be a very difficult undertaking as it raises questions about representation, balance and ethics (Wall 2008). Today as Ellingson and Ellis (2008, 449) point out, 'the meanings and applications of autoethnography have evolved in a manner that makes precise definition difficult'. I applied this method to deal with the portion of my autoethnographic inights that 'are highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experience (...) for the purposes of extending sociological understanding' (Sparkes 2000, 21).

Using autobiographical accounts and personal narratives is at the intersection of both the personal and the societal, making a unique contribution to social science (Laslett 1999). Autoethnography as a method presents a favourable condition to overcome representation issues (Neumann 2010). It is important to discuss the researcher's position in the work as they focus primarily on writing that incorporates autobiographical and personal narratives (Tedlock 1991). Researchers become co-participants by engaging with the storyline morally, emotionally, evocatively and intellectually (Ellis and Bochner 2000).

Ethnographers live through the studied events and retroactively engage with the narrated stories in a self-reflexive way. In the CIS countries, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, the autoethnographic approach in social scientific writing is not widely applied (Kostyushev 2017). For this reason, there is no development of a theoretical language of description in this methodological direction. Autoethnography is complex in that it has an evocative direction relying on metaphors of emotional and authentic representation of cultural realities through the autobiographical genre.[7]

There is criticism of this method of inquiry, and as Sparkes has stated: 'The emergence of autoethnography and narratives of self … has not been trouble-free, and their status as proper research remains problematic' (2000, 22). One of the most recurrent problems and critics in accepting autoethnography as a valuable research method is its strong focus on self, introspective and individualised narratives.

Another concern in autoethnography relates to ethical dilemmas (De Soto et al. 2000). Researchers face the issues of 'relational ethics' as they may not only implicate themselves with their autoethnographic work[8] but also their intimate surroundings, including members of studied groups (Ellis et al. 2011). For instance, I tell stories not only of abstract Shamaldy-Sai residents but of my close, intimate others. If my respondent shares information and mentions his or her teacher, who is my neighbour, this person is implicated by an overall picture of who is who to whom. It is difficult to mask such mentions and roles without changing the meaning and purpose of the story. This is similar to some people easily identifiable in the studied communities, such as the town mayor, officials, and my close relatives. I did not include such data to avoid the risk of identification, although the majority of them gave permission to use their original names. In all

---

[7] For more information about the relationship between fieldwork and the self of the ethnographer see Collins (2013); for topics of embodiment, interpersonal relationships, issues of authority and representation see Coffey (1999); for more about arguments for autoethnography as primarily a method that entails self-writing see Allen-Collinson and Hockey (2005), Ellis et al. (2011).

[8] Wall (2008) discusses anxiety-producing questions about how to represent the self and others in the autoethnographic work. She claims that using this technique gives a learning experience that is different from traditional ethnography and social science. It is alternative conceptions about truth, reality, and applied method that is required to support the autoethnographic turn.

interviews, I used pseudonyms for my interlocutors, excluding my direct relatives, families, and officials.

Autoethnographers' interpersonal ties with their participants complicate relational ethics because research participants should not be regarded, obviously, as impersonal 'subjects' only to be mined for data. Through the tight and long-term research process, ethnographers often become friends, and participants may have high expectations of and develop long-term relationships from such connections. Ethical issues affiliated with friendship or, as in my case, family and communal ties are an important part of the research process and even the output of my research. I feel obliged to share my thoughts and work with people implicated in my research. This allows my respondents to respond and feel about what is written about, so they can talk back to how they have been represented. As a native anthropologist and autoethnographer or any other good ethnographer, I feel a great responsibility not only to represent 'correctly' but also to protect the research participants by altering recognizable characteristics where needed. These are highly important ethical concerns I carry as a researcher. Even after my research is completed, which makes me different from non-native ethnographers, I continue to live, stay in close contact, maintain and value relationships with the community of study.

Another methodological tool that enriches fieldwork is participant observation in the studied society by taking field notes of cultural happenings and others' engagement with these events (Geertz 1973). The autobiographical technique combined with participant observation, note-taking and vocabulary of fieldnotes makes hyper-reflexivity valuable, transforming information into an authentic study (Chang 2008, Campbell 2016, Ottenberg 2019). For example, being a participant observer while working as a retailer (*prodavetz*) at my parents' shop, I was able to chat with the customers, other retailers and sellers in the bazaar. I also attended the Uch-Kurgan GES museum for five days to work with the archival materials there, took notes and pictures from inside and had in-depth conversations with the dam workers.

Figure 2.3. A sidewalk to the bazaar and my parents' shop where I worked and observed town life in Shamaldy-Sai. Source: Baialieva fieldwork 2016.

Participant observation is a way of 'being-in-the-world', and 'all social research is a form of participant observation because we cannot study the social world without being a part of it' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983, 249). In examining the questions of multi-layered transformation in Shamaldy-Sai, my being a participant and observer in the bazaar life, dam museum, religious gatherings, and digital online groups provided context and greatly helped generate data. In a rapidly highly digitizing world, the domain of interaction is not limited to one specific place and following our research participants means we may join the digital landscape.

Digital space

Triangulation is an important part of data collection and analysis. I used multiple methods in examining a wider range of Shamaldy-Sai's social issues and transformative ways of development. Participant observation is illuminating for studying online posts, communication, and blogs on the public digital domain (Allen 2017, Atkinson and

Hammersley 1994). It allows for easy access and direct communication without asking for the permission required to enter the dam museum or conduct interviews. Digital observation is also useful because the researcher can access the participants' sphere, study different contexts, and strengthen personal contact in a way that may not be accessible to other methods of analysis (Pink 2015). As a participant observer, the researcher can ask clarifying questions, get a better sense of social interaction and emotional experiences, and establish a holistic view of the data (chapters 5 and 8 deal with blended online and offline interaction).

As recent innovations, smartphones have spread quite quickly, transforming communication throughout the world, which has prompted us to reconsider new digital methods of inquiry (Horst and Miller 2020). Mobile telecommunications technologies have had dramatic effects on many regions and played an especially important role among migrants and low-income populations in countries such as Kyrgyzstan. This changed the communication style and affected informal networks in the places which have moved from no phone to smartphones. Participant observation in the close messenger groups such as WhatsApp revealed the central role of communication in helping Shamaldy-Sai people spread across different places and stay connected.

In the era of new media technologies, participant observation challenges two primary domains: 'online' and 'offline'. The first concerns researchers who conduct research wholly in the digital landscape —that is, entirely in cyberspace. And the second is about those who examine behaviour and use of new media technologies by their respondents not limited to the online domain only but contextualised in the offline world as well. In studying the use of digital technologies such as smartphones and the internet by Shamaldy-Sai residents, I stay in an immersive cohabitation blending the 'virtual' and 'real' worlds (Bluteau 2021). Being a participating observer in such a blended space helps maintain communication and provide a wider context (Baker 2013). My native community already got used to my role as a researcher, and it relieved me from the problems of finding contacts or making my respondents talk. They felt that they should help me obtain the 'right' knowledge and are confident that the representation of their lives would be 'correct' (*tuura*), and I would not 'make them embarrassed' (bizdi uyat kylbait).

2.4. Native anthropology

As a native anthropologist whose family participated in the making of Shamaldy-Sai, and whose grandfather participated in building the Uch-Kurgan dam and the town, I was able to access and interview all the remaining sixteen elderly residents involved in dam construction work and town creation from 1956 onwards. As mentioned earlier, many elements come into play in the social interaction that is the qualitative interview.

These include the role of a researcher and the location and context within which the interview takes place. As an 'insider', my identity gave me the preconditioned status of 'native daughter/girl', 'our daughter/girl' (bizdin kyz, ozubuzdun kyz). As 'one of them', this gave me privileged access since, as an insider, they would show me respect, trust and support. On the other hand, some of them would object to anonymity and ask for their names and opinions to be widely written and not anonymized.

At the same time, I was an outside researcher representing the abstract 'Western' academic world and perceived to be producing and spreading knowledge for the 'external world'. These dual statuses —as insider and outsider —did not contradict but complemented each other. Most of my research participants felt obliged[9] to support me extensively by providing information; on the other hand, some expected me to bring in certain development intervention projects, such as repairs to water infrastructure. As they believed I have these connections and could or should bring such resources as a matter of course.

Narayan (1993) questions the essence of the binaries between native non-native, insider-outsider views of anthropologists. Even if such distinctions are archaic, methodological issues do remain. For example, I both gained and lost from having multiple belongings. As a girl born to the same community, I am perceived as 'one of them', on the other hand my belonging to the family who take leading positions in local municipalities potentially

---

[9] not only because I was a *local, native* daughter but also a member of a family who take leading positions in municipality

create tension and some level of mistrust. People could have fear that it is likely that information they share with me may find its way back to the community via family. At the same time as someone who studies and lives abroad, I am an outsider to some extent. Still, even if I may look and behave differently (influenced by my life abroad), I am aware of ongoing debates, possess the local habits and understand the internal issues. I can be a 'halfie' as Lila Abu-Lughod has put it (1991).

But I prefer to stick to the more neutral term *local* for the native anthropologist conceptualized by Kuwayama (2004). He argues that the word *native* for anthropologists is abstract and contains various meanings. In a post-colonial sense or the changed scholarly practice of native anthropology, he proposes distinguishing the terms: 'Local anthropologists are, therefore, native only in a secondary sense of the word. Yet, they are part of the larger society under observation and have common interests with the people being studied' (2004, 21). My 'local' fellows (jerdeshter), those who are also research participants, appreciate that there is someone from their group to put down history, represent the society and take care of the town's social issues. As a result, people were willing to talk to me more; some approached me seeking to be interviewed and share their stories. My participants perceived this as an opportunity to voice their experience, and they tried to provide me with as much information as possible.

However, this implicated some constraints because I was concerned that high expectations and strong trust might lead to disappointment and other negative outcomes. For instance, as a researcher, it is difficult to approach members of the banned Islamic groups and for me as the researcher is potentially dangerous[10] to have contacts with people the regime deems a threat. This is almost impossible unless you are connected to them through a well-trusted person from this organization[11]. Since Yntymak, a neighbouring village, is a popular place to accommodate Islamist groups, I included this organization's female branch in my survey of religious transformations. Due to its activity, it is considered extremist and legally banned; members are basically mute in the wider

---

[10] https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-lets-scholar-accused-of-espionage-leave-country

[11] This fieldwork was conducted within another project on religion and secularism before I joined Tübingen University in 2017.

community. However, locals know who belongs to what religious groups, which spreads by word of mouth. Informally local HuT members are not perceived as outcasts as they have kin and communal relations across the area.

After I was connected to one of them who introduced herself as a 'secretary' (*katchy*), I was able to interview a couple of HuT female activists. They refused to be recorded and wanted to be completely anonymized, including the place they belong to. I knew them from childhood, and they trusted me, understanding that I am studying general religious revival and constraints in Shamaldy-Sai. However, one day they stopped picking up my phone calls and distanced themselves from me because they assumed I might be affiliated with the state structures. Even if I ensured anonymity would be kept, and the project was not state-controlled, they remained hesitant. So they were open and willing to be researched in my capacity to be an 'insider' or 'native girl' (ozubuzdun kyz), but not in the capacity of an outside researcher.

These insights are important for every native anthropologist. Consequently, anthropologists of home have a fluidity of identity as the researcher is seen as both an insider and an outsider (Forster 2012). There can be a problem of reflexivity, such as seeing familiar things as strange, but there is also the issue of how the interviewees perceive native researchers. Some of the interviewees expected that I would already know the events described in minute detail and would share their own feelings. They described events in a scattered manner and often shared private, confidential information in their stories. For ethical reasons, such details have been omitted.

Figure 2.4. My grandmother Patilla is turning off the radio as I come to continue recording her oral histories in Tendik village. Source: Baialieva fieldwork 2018.

2.5. Digital anthropology

While selecting the design and functions of the online site that I created on the 'Odnoklassniki' platform, I decided to make it focused. The pre-determined name and group type helped avoid including random people who have no relationship to Shamaldy-Sai. However, it required my close attention and work on the technical functions. I did this through two main strategies. First, I gave the platform a name recognizable to the insiders and set it up as a closed group. This meant members had to wait for my approval to join the group.
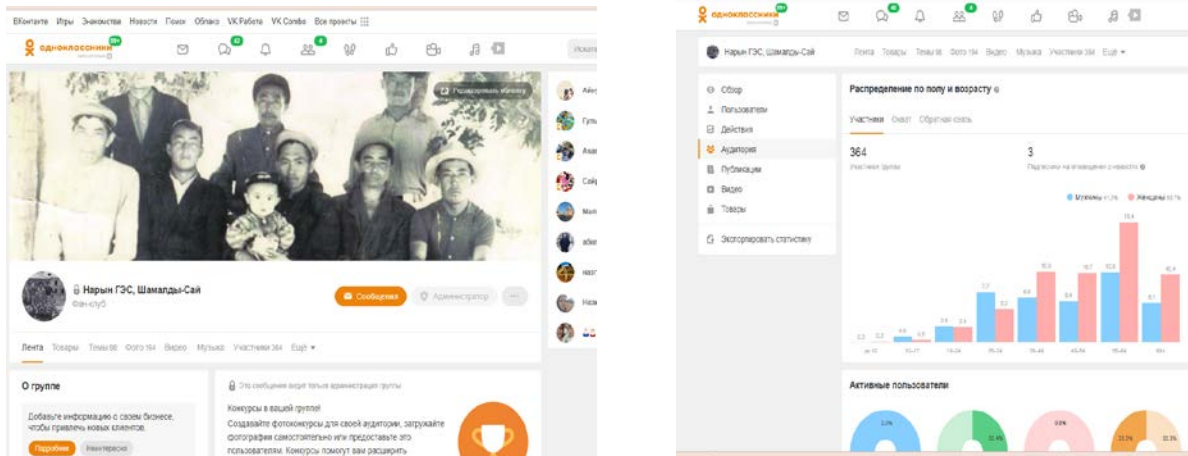
Figure 2.5. Screenshot of main page and statistics of the online group 'NarynGES, Shamaldy-Sai' managed by Gulzat Baialieva on Odnoklassniki platform. Accessed on 15.11.2021

The 'Odnoklassniki' platform

Methodologically, ethnographic fieldwork and the relationships between researchers and respondents need to be redesigned for the digitalized world. The use of media anthropology as a method, in particular digital ethnography, has been necessary since the beginning of my doctoral programme in 2015 on several important counts.

Media scholars write extensively on the role of media and communication in the formation of social interaction. Ito, Okabe and Misa Matsuda (2005) argued a decade ago that the mobile phone is one of the most 'personal', 'portable' and 'pedestrian' gadgets. They are devices that not only enhance relationships with other people but the most intimate forms of everyday digital media (Fortunati, 2002). From the conceptual perspective, questions like how digitally mediated relationships can be approached ethnographically remain open, calling for authors' reflection. There is a need for methodological rethinking and transformation as well. Unlike other media scholars, digital anthropologists conduct lengthy, open-ended field studies in which media artefacts and practices are only one part of the social world (Miller 2018).

Doing digital ethnography adds socio-cultural complexity to the understanding of media communications, meanings and perceptions, for instance, through social formations and

cultural forms (Peterson 2003, Postill 2009, Pink 2016, Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2017).

The users of Odnoklassniki typically share their old photos, write nostalgic comments and discuss certain events from the past. This very reason induced me to reach people who once lived in Shamaldy-Sai who, for different reasons, had left the town. Primarily the aim was to attract those residents who lived in the town from its first establishment (i.e., 1956). This was when Shamaldy-Sai mobilised dam workers and initiated the construction of the town and, later, the first hydropower plant on the Naryn River. Due to changes in the place and constant flows of people coming and leaving Shamaldy-Sai, the settlement is described differently by different people. There is a dearth of published materials about the social and cultural aspects of the early years of the Kyrgyz Soviet industrial sites, especially about Shamaldy-Sai.

Besides the newspaper articles and archival propaganda materials, it was important to reconstruct how the place looked, how it was remembered and how its environment has changed. In addition to narratives collected personally from the older residents still living in Shamaldy-Sai, I used the Odnoklassniki platform to reach respondents who had left the town for different reasons. In 2015 for research purposes, I created a group page devoted to Shamaldy-Sai. It is a closed group, akin to a fan page. The name for it was intentionally chosen in a way that it attracts exactly those who used to work and live there in its first industrial phase. In searching for their old friends, classmates or towns, users usually type the names they remember, like maiden names for female friends or the old Soviet names for the towns and villages they lived in. Later most of the Soviet toponymic names were changed in Central Asia in favour of authentic local styles. Taking into account the ethical issues, the description of the group contains information that this page is created to collect information for the sake of research.

As a creator of the online page, I get the statistical data and can see the dynamics of the group. The data is available in numbers and percentages as an image and in an Excel file as well. It is possible to see the structure of the users (age, sex), frequency of visits, and location. Of 2,714 users, half of them access the internet via mobile. The

largest number of the subscribers (67.7%) accessed the group page from Russia, with the smallest number (2.8%) from Kazakhstan. Among the discussion types (video, themes, posts, pictures), photo discussion is the most popular (55.7%). The data also enables you to make adjustments in the course thematic moderation. This is discussed in details in chapter 8.

Shamaldy-Sai is a post-socialist township followed by deindustrialization where mobility is ingrained in the locals' way of life. In Soviet times, the region's population migrated from one Soviet construction site to another, and during the period since independence in 1991, mass labour migration has emerged as a key dynamic (Russia being the main host country for labour migrants from Shamaldy-Sai). For this reason, it was important to develop a methodology and take into account methods that would engage the broad, mobile population of Shamaldy-Sai. I benefited greatly from creating and managing an online platform on the social online platform called 'NarynGES, Shamaldy-Sai'. Furthermore, the pandemic dictated and reinforced the need to use online technology for researchers and ordinary people alike, starting with children. The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted livelihoods and small business enterprises and changed the pattern of social interaction[12]. The government-imposed lockdowns, shutdowns, social distancing and closed borders forced humans to physically distance themselves from each other.

Pandemic measures created new implications for everyday relationships and social interaction. The virtual networks of Shamaldy-Sai groups served as informal connections between people (chapters 5 and 8). Smartphones played a strong role as a regulatory device and nurtured a sense of people's experience as social beings at a collective level. Anthropology's use of media technologies indeed requires a lot of time and skill. Although digital anthropology is a young subdiscipline with no long theoretical history, it has already produced a burgeoning literature (Boyer 2012, Pink et al. 2016, Geismar and Knox 2021).

They also allow access and explore the semi-public platforms such as messengers like WhatsApp, Imo, Telegram (Miller et al., 2016). Relationship between virtual space, including smartphone practices (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012, Miller, 2019).

---

[12] I continued my digital research unil 2021 although formal fieldwork at the 'offline' site ended in 2019.

Different social and personal perceptions between participant and interviewer can influence the power relationship in the interview. Class, status, and gender affect power relations, but age and ethnicity are also salient. Methods of digital anthropology help to examine public digital environments and social media such as Russian sites similar to Facebook - *Odnoklassniki* and *VKontakte*.

Transcription

I used several digital recorders and an installed phone recorder on my smartphone for interviews and oral histories. External USB drives with enough memory are crucial. Another important element is a quiet place with minimal noise around. The quality of my recorded interviews varies significantly, which complicated the transcribing process. It is also extremely important to invest in microphones and find as quiet a place as possible. In most cases, my interviews were not recorded at all upon the respondents' request, and I relied on notetaking and photographs. It made transcription practice longer to rewind and catch the original words. For certain clean interviews with minimal noise, I used the Express Scribe software.

Another important aspect of the transcription practice was the language issue. I have extensive experience in conducting unstructured interviews and making transcriptions. But I never did so in the Uzbek language or in a mixture of Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Russian[13] at the same time. It is quite common for the residents to mix the languages and use narrower dialects for certain words. For sensitive topics such as informalities, the names of the villages are not explicit or were omitted.

Positionality

Writing this methodology section poses some challenges because it is hard to separate my knowledge and the encounters with people in my hometown that have occurred beyond my PhD life. It is also difficult to ascribe a precise date to my personal accounts as I have been engaged with the community throughout my life. I recorded sad family stories that deal with the losses and hardships in the early days of the town's construction.

---

[13] I speak all these three languages.

This includes mistreatment of technical equipment which would cut the finger or hand or the victimhood of my grandfather, who was a teacher and came to Shamaldy-Sai in 1957 to teach the Kyrgyz language.

I heard such intimate, sorrowful stories and unspoken narratives about the early industrialization of Shamaldy-Sai but could not expand on them due to a lack of further information. Other cases made me a vulnerable observer with objective and subjective views related to various life dynamics. Three of the elder residents with whom I had conducted oral history interviews died through the research process. This made it hard to listen to their interviews and transcribe the data since I had developed close ties with them. It is still hard to realize that I can never again meet, talk, discuss and joke with my uncles and grandmother, who were the key respondents and main characters in the thesis. Still, I have recorded several hours long videos and interviews with them.

To analyse the recorded data and follow its integrity was not easy. It was hard to hold back the tears and deal with my emotions while working on the text, which preserves the lives and stories of deceased people. In contrast to Behar (1996), who owns up to her touching subjective and compelling reminiscences and uses it to her advantage, I found it extremely difficult to balance these emotions. This was even more challenging in the context of a pandemic when you cannot fly to Kyrgyzstan and be with your family.

As a researcher, I have the privilege of having been able to engage with them closer. However, this lays bare the other side of the coin. I have been often in a vulnerable condition living thousands of kilometres away from my parents, relatives and native community. I was unable to attend the funerals of my grandmother and uncles due to financial and other constraints. It was difficult at some moments to concentrate and continue writing about the deceased family members.

Chapter 3. The historical context: transforming the river, making the town[14]

3.1. Dam building and social mobility

Soviet dam projects—including the Uch-Kurgan hydropower plant in Shamaldy-Sai on the Naryn river—mobilized a large labour force. Undertaken in the context of a global boom in large dam construction, driven in part by Cold War competition (McNeill and Unger 2010), each of these dam projects mobilized a vast labour force. The labour force comprised both experienced and highly specialized workers, as well as larger numbers of unskilled workers, assigned to the site from collective farms or distant mountain villages. The top-down story of water management in Soviet Central Asia—in terms of macroeconomic policy, institutional hubris and ministerial competition between industry and agriculture needs—has been well detailed in recent publications by Peterson (2019), Obertreis (2017) and Teichmann (2009).

---

[14] This chapter is an extended version of the research on the flows of the dam builders and transformation of the Naryn river; the partial results of the work have been published in the research paper 'Memories of Social Mobility and Environmental Change' (Baialieva and Roberts 2021).

Figure 3.1. Dam builders on holiday in Shamaldy-Sai, 1959. My grandfather is holding my mother on his lap. Source: Baialieva's family album.

Some dam workers gained decades of experience and had highly specialized technical and engineering skills, but in Central Asia, the bulk of physical labour was carried out by far more significant numbers of farmers and seasonal herders assigned or drawn to the site from collective farms and distant mountain villages. Nevertheless, important recent contributions have advanced the understanding of the role native labour was supposed to play in (re)-forming Soviet citizens—the social engineering component of environmental engineering.

The native component of the workforce at the dam sites assumed a gradually more prominent role in a notable progression in the 1970s. Beyond the grandiose but myopic

engineering projects seeking to make of the Naryn–Syr Darya[15] a perfectly regulated 'organic machine' (White 2001), there were many thousands of local and semi-local people whose sense of place and connection to the landscape being altered was very different to that of those directing the process. How was the river transformed? What did those who undertook the physical labour of diverting rivers and building dams make of the process? In what terms did they understand their contribution? In striving to recover the voices and values of dam workers, whose collective identity or 'groupedness' should not be assumed, this chapter seeks to shed light on the grey areas between voluntary and forced labour, nature-human responsibility and understandings of flows as a circulation of humans, objects and practices.

Figure 3.2. A dam builder who lives in the ex-barracks draws a cognitive map of pre-dammed Shamaldy-Sai. Source: Baialieva fieldwork 2017.

---

[15] Considered together, the Syr Darya and its major tributary, the Naryn, form the longest river in Central Asia. With a source in the Tien Shan mountains, the Naryn-Syr Darya eventually flows through one of the most densely populated areas in the region, the Ferghana Valley, and then on through the steppe for hundreds of kilometres, into the Aral Sea.   you already said some of this in intro, no?

The voices of ordinary dam workers, who worked on projects initiated in the 1950s, are undeniably difficult to recover, and interviews collected decades later present distinct interpretive challenges. But the effort is worthwhile, as the impressions formed by those who interacted closely with the riverine environment over many years are uniquely valuable. Traditional knowledge about relationships with nature in Central Asia emphasises[16] that water has agency and personhood and places particular value on the purity of running water. Across Central Asia, springs are often regarded as holy places, commanding the utmost respect.[17] Thus, even while the Soviet vision of modernization by 'conquering' nature predominated, some local dam builders felt a responsibility to water. This discourse cannot be heard frequently, but in the course of intimate conversations about the legacy of construction projects on the river, emotions of sorrow, sadness and regret slip through.

---

[16] Several Kyrgyz proverbs emphasise the power and importance of water: the phrase 'water can interrogate' emphasises taking responsibility for water, as do other sayings like 'Don't spit in drinking water', 'Water is the head of life', 'Don't neglect water; it has a soul'.

[17] The Scientific and Cultural Center 'Aigine' in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) documents local traditional knowledge and practices showing the human-nature relationship, where nature has its own voice. 'Aigine – Cultural Research Center'. Accessed 17 February 2022. https://aigine.kg/?page_id=11262&lang=en.

Figure 3.3. A married couple of dam builders sharing their work memories in Shamaldy-Sai.
Source: Baialieva fieldwork 2016.

The physical aspects of the river most often recalled and mentioned in conversation as having changed are its colour, temperature and speed. Respondents recall the river as it ran past the Shamaldy-Sai site as a grey, silty, turbulent and fast-flowing river that would freeze in winter but warm up in summer. Today, following the construction of a cascade of dams, the Naryn river appears turquoise in colour, pacified in demeanour; it never freezes and is very cold all year round. Whereas today, the colour spectrum of the Naryn varies from emerald to turquoise blue, former dam workers and old residents remember it as greyish and polluted. Loaded with so much sediment that water gathered in buckets had to be left to settle until a thick layer of earth and stones appeared at the bottom. At 807 kilometres, the Naryn is the longest river in Kyrgyzstan and is formed by the confluence of the Big and Small Naryn rivers, both originating in the glaciers of the Central Tien Shan. The river is fed by glacier melt and high-altitude tributaries, flowing through narrow gorges. The flood period is between May to August, with maximum flows

registered in June and July. In the upper reaches, the river freezes in some places, while in the lower reaches, it does not freeze.

3.2. Uch-Kurgan GES — the first Hydroelectric Power Plant of its kind on the Naryn River

Uch-Kurgan hydropower station (built in Uzbek SSR between 1956 and 1962) was the first of its kind constructed on the Naryn River. Across the border in Kyrgyzstan, the Central Asian branch of the Soviet Hydropower Institute (SAOGIDEP) began researching the basin of the Naryn River, the main tributary of the Syr Darya, in the 1930s. Studies concluded that the Naryn had the potential to accommodate a cascade of no fewer than 22 hydroelectric stations, with a total capacity of 5.9 to 7.5 million kW. The first dam in the series, the Uch-Kurgan power station, was built at a site known as Shamaldy-Sai (Windy Valley) beginning in 1956. The place shown in the archival photos (Figure 3.4) is described as the Uch-Kurgan power station in the Uzbek SSR. Some elderly respondents interviewed reported not noticing the nominal switch of the territory from the Uzbek to Kyrgyz SSR when the official border between the two republics was modified. They pointed out that 'brotherly peoples had common interests to build communism'[18], so it did not matter to them whether the site was on Uzbek or Kyrgyz territory.

---

[18] This discourse of the 'friendship of peoples' is still used in different contexts such as ethnic conflicts, conflict management and peace-building (Megoran and Rakhmatullaev 2022).

Figure 3.4. Laying the diversion channel route on the Naryn river for the future Uch-Kurgan hydropower plant. Uzbek SSR. 1957. Source: Photograph No 0-42870, TsGA KFFD RUz.

'No trace of man'

As explained above, Shamaldy-Sai means 'windy valley'. . Local memories are strikingly in tune with the Soviet discourse of civilization brought to the 'no man's land', through which a 'desert area' was enhanced and modernized. Residents are adamant that there was nothing but wind in Shamaldy-Sai and emphasise the area's emptiness—there were 'no traces of man' before the dam's construction. Indeed, urbanization in the area was connected to the electrification project and began in 1956. However, a walk along the fields at the entrance to the town reveals railroad tracks that, while no longer in operation, still exist. An abandoned railway station of the same name, Shamaldy-Sai (built in 1936), a stop on the Tash-Kumyr to Uch-Kurgan line, preceded the dam construction by a full twenty years. Even some of the barracks built for the railway workers remain (and are inhabited).

Going further back, the oral tales of battles fought by the Jediger tribe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries describe the river in this area. Despite there many 'traces of man' at the site, the Soviet discourses of modernization and electrification of an 'empty space' dominate.

In 1956, extensive construction work was initiated, including creating ancillary buildings, a service area, and material base. The river was blocked and diverted in January 1959, prompting the excavating work in the pit (_kotlvan_). From this period, the volume of work at the site expanded dramatically, mobilizing thousands of people of different ethnicities. If the skilled specialists (mostly Russians and Russian-speaking others) were redeployed from recently concluded dam construction projects elsewhere, most of the unskilled labourers were drawn from nearby Uzbek and Kyrgyz settlements. The task was not only to build the first-ever dam and hydropower plant on the Naryn river but also to create a new township.

Although it was supposed to be a temporary dam workers' town (_gorodok gidrostroitelei_) for 3,000 inhabitants, Shamaldy-Sai turned into a well-connected hub settlement with more than 15,000 residents. Technically and infrastructurally, the initial dam work project did not consider that the temporary settlement might continue and indeed grow over time. This has caused problems with the building maintenance, water supply, sanitation and plumbing system. However, the highly mobile local population, characterized by sharp inward and outward migratory flows, finds ways to sustain, innovate and prosper.

Living conditions

Рюкзаки за спиной	Backpacks on the back
На попутной машине	In a hitchhiker's car
Привезли нас с тобой	brought you and me
Строить ГЭС на Нарыне,	To build a hydropower plant on the Naryn,
А вокруг - ни души,	And there's not a soul around,
Только наши палатки,	Only our tents,
Да поют камыши	And the reeds are singing
Про свои неполадки.	About their troubles.

– Ivan Zaborovskii, one of the first workers of the Toktogul dam
(Source:http://karakulcy.narod.ru/history/Ocherk1.html)

The lyrics of Zabarovskii's song quoted above and the descriptions of the region as 'backwards' and 'uninhabited' in Soviet literature on hydropower[19] reflects how the area was seen and narrated in the media, as a place full of nothing but reeds, mosquitoes, snakes and lizards. Impassable, mud-locked roads, a 'no man's land'. These were familiar tropes used to highlight the difficulties of construction projects in the Kyrgyz SSR caused by a combination of natural (topographical, climactic) and human inadequacies. The scale of these difficulties was only matched by the size of the ambitions to turn these deserted, drylands into a green paradise with modern conveniences.

Aksakal Baltabaev, interviewed in 2016, came to the Uch-Kurgan site in 1956:

I came from Uzbekistan. I didn't know where we were going to build the power plant. I didn't even have a clear notion of what a power plant was. We were told we would build a big GES to generate electricity. It was very windy here. We lived in tents made from reeds which often took off with the winds. When

---

[19] On Soviet hydro energy management and the Soviet industry-driven modernization in Kyrgyz SSSR see Belyakov 2018, Kamchybekov 1964, Mamatkanov 1976, Volodin 2004; on the Soviet ethnography of coal-mining industry see Mambetalieva 1968. great that you are using Soviet-era sources!

it got colder, we moved to a *vagon* [metal train carriage or modified transport containr also used as mobile homes]. In another *vagon*, there was a *stolovaya* (canteen). The cook, Tetya (Auntie) Masha, worked with her daughter and son. She took care of all of us and cooked very well. But that lasted only until the first houses were built in Shamaldy-Sai. What you see now was totally absent when I came here. It was totally empty. Now we have a big town with nice houses.

All respondents who came in the early years have similar stories. They lived, for a while, in tents constructed from reeds or sailcloth or in the metal train carriages called *vagonchiki*. Meanwhile, new houses were being built in Shamaldy-Sai, two kilometres away from the dam site. The construction of a new town for dam workers took place at breakneck speed, and until it was completed, the riverbanks were filled with tents, referred to as the 'tent settlement' (*palatochnyi gorodok*). In recalling these times, former dam workers acknowledge that living conditions in the tents and train carriages were harsh, but also remember it being fun. Mostly, they appreciated that they had meals prepared for them. They were also given special uniforms and warm work clothes 'fufaika' to wear.

'Planned as a temporary town'

If the hydrologists and engineers had higher education and experience in other construction sites, newly recruited labourers lacked relevant experience and rarely spoke any Russian. Labourers mostly worked with simple hand tools, often their own, brought with them from their collective farms. They passed their days digging ditches, and canals, laying a new course for the diverted river and excavating the bottom of the future 'sea' (reservoir). Some of them came to the site just for seasonal work, intending to earn some money and then leave.

Figure 3.5. Construction workers at the beer shop in Shamaldy-Sai in 1959. From the left: my grandfather Turaly holding my mother, uncle Makambai and uncle Orozbai. Source: Baialieva's family album.

Respondents interviewed in 2016–17 explained that the material incentives, and the pride and joy they took in the work, made many of them want to stay forever. In stories gathered a quarter of a century after the fall of the USSR, the first dam workers and hydro specialists fondly recalled how their salaries were always much higher in this sector than anywhere else in the country. They recalled with nostalgia how their meals were all provided, and they were given tickets entitling them to stay free of charge in resorts and sanatoria. They enjoyed better access to scarce products and consumer goods – even to clothes from Moscow.[20] Here is a quote from an interview with Baltabaev, who came to the Uch-Kurgan site in 1956:

---

[20] On the phenomenon of *moskovskoe obespechenie*, or 'Moscow provisioning', and the nostalgia it inspires in the post-Soviet period, see Madeleine Reeves, *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014)

Wages were paid regularly. We were paid weekly in cash. In the beginning, it was lots of paperwork to get your salary, to count working hours. We were bad at that, but people there were helping us. When I got my first payment, I was amazed. You would never get such money with [animal] husbandry or agriculture.

Among the first buildings constructed with great urgency were a hostel for the teenage and young adult Komsomol (Communist Youth League) members, a *stolovaya* or canteen, a bathhouse and the prefabricated wooden houses commonly known as *dosha* (from the word *doshatyi*, wooden). Although the wooden houses were considered a temporary solution, some housing stock was later supplemented, rather than replaced, by brick and concrete multi-storey apartment blocks, containing between two and ten flats each. And while these were also intended to be temporary, they are inhabited to this day and, in some cases, are being expanded and renovated. In total, 42 multi-storey buildings went up in the Shamaldy-Sai settlement, beginning in 1957.

Shamaldy-Sai was planned as a temporary town. When Shamaldy-Sai deployed the first aide, it had only tents and tracks. the? Poselok then was built but to serve only several years. A group of paratroopers changed here all the time. First, one platoon will arrive. After a few months, they are gone, another platoon arrives.

[Askar Ake, Interview in Shamaldy-Sai, August 2018]

At this moment of the interview, when Askar Ake was describing a war-like situation, I asked him to clarify the terms. He explained that a team of workers and different specialists were referred to as paratroopers (*desantniki*). These martial terms —platoon, deploy, aide (*razvertyvanie, desantniki, vzvod*) — confused me initially since they connote war and not civil engineering. Askar ake calmly and confidently assured me that the execution of five-year plans looked like a war.

Askar ake began his career as a mechanic in 1965, rising through the ranks to become the head of the Uch-Kurgan GES in the late 1980s. Now he is retired and is considered a respected and honourable citizen of the *poselok*[21] Shamaldy-Sai. He was one of my primary respondents, who could talk hours and hours about his work and life in Shamlady-Sai. According to Askar ake, Shamaldy-Sai was designed to last long enough for the dam to be completed, when everyone would move on to the new town built for workers at Kara-Kul. Kara-Kul *poselok* was another Soviet project to deploy dam workers and hydro specialists to construct Toktogul HPP. Shamaldy-Sai's residential zones were planned with a maximum capacity of 3,000 inhabitants. It was entirely designed and envisaged from outside by the SAOGIDP (the Central Asian Department for Hydro projects) in Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent. Only later was planning and management moved to Uch-Kurgan. Askar ake explained that only the centre of the village is connected to the sewerage system and the centralised water supply. He continued: 'The houses built have already served their time and need to be demolished and rebuilt.' Most of the multi-storeyed buildings are in very poor condition and are experiencing severe difficulties when a regular water or power cut-off occurs.

Built temporarily and for a maximum of 3,000 people, the settlement now has around 15,000 inhabitants, including other subordinated villages. The *poselok* itself and its central zones, houses and multi-storeyed buildings designed by Soviet architectural planners are now a patchwork of structures in various states of (dis)repair. In many houses, the sewage pipes have been interrupted. Many of the water pipes have been cut off due to a malfunction. But this is not immediately visible or registered in the municipality. The authorities prefer to keep quiet about it. There is no extra money in the budget to carry out reconstruction and review infrastructure services for the public. There are many such

---

[21] Poselok is used widely by locals in reference to Shamaldy-Sai both in Kyrgyz and Uzbek languages. It is a Russian shortened name for 'poselok gorodskogo tipa' which is literally translated as 'an urban type of settlement' or township. Such category for the settlements was established during the Soviet Union and is still common today. Poselok townships used to have different categories: *rabochiy* (workers town), *dachnyi* (for summer houses), *kurortnyi* (resort-based town) and '*poselok gidro-stroitelei*' or workers town such as Shamaldy-Sai (town for builders of hydropower). The determining factors for a settlement to become a workers town were its location, the prospect of building an industrial enterprise near the settlement, the proximity of transport routes, and the number of inhabitants. Being located on the bank of the Naryn River with several hydroelectric power stations planned, Shamaldy-Sai was designed to be a town for builders of hydro-structures. I think you should put this explanation in your intro chapter.

settlements across the entire post-Soviet space. Resources were devoted to constructing these settlements, but apparently little thought was given to how they would be maintained and developed over time or overcrowding dealt with. The Soviet Union does not exist anymore and each political unit has to deal with unforeseen population developments and town enlargement. Thus residents left to find solutions and work to maintain and patch up the crumbling structures themselves as best they can.

'I didn't plan to stay here forever'

> I did not want to go to work on a *kolkhoz*[22] or *sovkhoz*[23] and so decided to stay here. I wanted to earn money, to help my parents and get married. But I didn't plan to stay here forever. Every year I planned to move back to my village in Uzbekistan. I was 16 years old then, and now I am 87. Every year I planned to go back. But now you see my big house, my yard. All my children were born here. My grandchildren are around here. How can I leave all this and move?

> [retired dam worker, veteran of labour Baltabaev, Interview in Shamaldy-Sai 2016]

Many of the mobilised workers regarded the Soviet construction sites as temporary places of residence and, according to them, did not plan to stay in one such place. When the construction of factories and houses was completed, they moved to other nearby similar projects. After the erection of Uch-Kurgan GES and Shamaldy-Sai poselok, the next nearby socialists projects were building poselok Kara-Kul, Toktogul hydropower plant, Kurp-Sai hydropower plant and other industrial projects. Many elderly respondents recall each time they set a goal to return to their native land, to the places where they were born.

> I was only 15 years old (in 1956) when I came here to help my uncle, a manual labourer (*raznorabochiy*), in a dam pit (*kotlovan*). There was no electricity, no houses. It was an uninhabited field (<u>een talaa</u>), a desert (<u>chöl</u>) with no trace of

---

[22] Collective farm.

[23] Soviet-era state farm.

people—only human-sized lizards (<u>kemer</u>), snakes, giant mosquitos, strong winds and dirty water in Naryn … Since then, every year I have planned to go back (<u>ana ketem, myna ketem</u>) to the village where I was born and grew up but [laughing]… as you can see, I am still here.

<div align="right">[Absatar aka, Interview in Shamaldy-Sai, March 2017]</div>

This interview with Absatar aka, a 76-year-old former Uzbek activist and currently a Veteran of Labour (<u>emgek ardageri</u>), was one of the longest among my interviews with elderly residents of Shamaldy-Sai. Like most long-time residents, he speaks three languages—Russian, Uzbek, and Kyrgyz. As he spoke to me, he stressed the 'uniqueness' of Shamaldy-Sai and its long-term 'transformation into an unimaginable town' (<u>oigo kelbegen shaarchaga ailandy</u>). As Shamaldy-Sai rose as an urban-type settlement (*poselok*), Absatar aka grew with it. Initially arriving as a 15-year-old seasonal labourer, he would only return once or twice a year to earn cash and then return to his home village of Uichi in Uzbekistan.

He married when he was 17 to his remote cousin and started to think about abandoning this seasonal construction work in Shamaldy-Sai. His parents wanted him to return to continue agriculture and stay close to his family. On the other hand, they all agreed that he could not earn the same amount anywhere in the village as his dam work paid. The strong intrinsic reason he could not leave the dam work was the cash he earned from his job. By the time he was 21 and a father of two children, he had learnt Russian, got a qualification of a bulldozer driver, and had his own brigade of workers. His wife and children continued to live in Uzbekistan for six years until his wife became pregnant with their third child.

Every year, as his quote above tells us, he makes plans to leave and return to his place of birth in Uzbekistan. However, he no longer has the ties with Uichi that he did as a young man, although he does keep in touch with his extended family there. Thus, although he ironically says that he will go back one day to his Uzbek hometown, he is settled in Shamaldy-Sai and also calls it 'home'.

3.3. Two homes

This tendency to give thought to return and to call two places 'home' is not new for Shamaldy-Sai residents. Although most of the elderly people in the city have lived here for 50–60 years, they still mention being 'from' their birthplaces and refer to themselves as pioneers or native Shamaldy-Saians (birinchilerden bolup kelgenbiz). By 'pioneers', they mean that they or their parents contributed to creating the settlement and constructing the dam and the hydropower plant. It has a strong connotation with a stronger sense of a right to the place. The sentiments of pride and being included are strengthened by excluding others. Nevertheless, the residents who predominantly migrated at the end of the 1950s do not have one explicitly articulated place which they can call 'home'. Instead, they have more than one place they imagine as 'theirs' (menin jerim, bizdin jer).

During the interviews, the dam workers, who are all above 70 years old, were willing to specify their places of origin as 'native places' (tuulup oskon jeribiz). For most of their lives, they lived in Shamaldy-Sai, contributing to its creation and development. They are full of pride that they have been involved in constructing this hydropower, houses, and the town. Still, almost all older residents expressed that they wish to return to their 'homes' one day. Thus, they have two spaces they imagine themselves in. One is a place where they feel obliged to return because their parents and ancestors belong there. However, it is not easy for them to leave what they have earned and achieved. They explained that they still stay in Shamaldy-Sai because of the extension of their family, education of children, and gaining properties. At the same time, they consider Shamaldy-Sai also as a 'home' (jashagan jeribiz), and they feel proud to build the town.

Children of some of the interviewed old residents are also aware of two 'homes' and have the option to stay here or go back to their ancestors. When going deeper into conversations about 'home', a few want at least to be buried in their places of birth. Most wish to avoid burdening their children and instead seem resigned to being buried in Shamaldy-Sai graveyards. Parents prioritize their children's convenience in visiting parents' graveyards nearby rather than crossing the borders to Uzbekistan or driving hundreds of kilometres away to the relatives they do not know well. Even though they

perceive both Shamaldy-Sai and a place where they originally came from as 'home', they have dilemmas about where to get buried. Thus, imagining two places as homes typical for migrants all over the world[24] remains stronger among the 'first cohort' of Shamaldy-Sai residents.

In contrast, younger generations have a secure sense of belonging to the *poselok* and identify themselves as natives (*mestnye*). They do not go into detail about where their ancestors come from and their' parents' background. The youth stress the fact that they were born in the area (<u>bul jakta tuulgam</u>), and it belongs to them (<u>ushul menin jerim</u>).

Locating labour

By the time construction began at Shamaldy-Sai in 1956, many hydropower projects had already been completed in other Soviet republics. According to the established routine, a mass mobilisation of workers was organised, a contingent of young volunteers arrived from the Communist Youth League (*Komsomol*), and the river was diverted. The first cohort of 500 young men and women was sent to Shamaldy-Sai in 1959 (Mamatkanov et al. 1976, 61). This number later doubled, peaking at 2,000 workers. Specialist workers, including water engineers, hydropower specialists, assemblers, experienced bulldozer and crane drivers, were dispatched to the site from recently completed hydropower plants across the Soviet Union. As a highly educated water specialist, Nasyrov took no part in manual labour. During the interview in 2017, the retired chief engineer recalls the early days of the work as follows:

> When one construction project was complete, there was always another waiting. The Uch-Kurgan hydropower station was fortunate to welcome such experienced specialists and young enthusiasts. Shamaldy-Sai or NarynGES was declared a shock-Komsomol construction site, and they recruited the best young people to grow from here. Nevertheless, Uch-Kurgan had its own natural challenges. It was the first hydropower project on the Naryn River, built in an uninhabited valley. Local people had not mastered the Russian language,

---

[24] Espinoza-Herold, M.M., & Contini, R.M. (2017). *Living in Two Homes: Integration, Identity and Education of Transnational Migrants in a Globalized World.*

unlike locals in other sites in Russia. Yet, nothing about this caused major problems. Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kyrgyz were all hard-working. They attended special evening courses and obtained specialisations. They learnt to drive bulldozers. Some of them continued their education and became high-level workers.

The engineer Nasyrov could recite the names of the other hydropower dam projects that his colleagues had worked on: Kahovsk, Bratsk, Dnepr, Volgogradskaya, Kuibyshev, Farhad, Nurek, and so on. The workforce at Uch-Kurgan already knew where they would be needed next, and soon they would head to Toktogul. The Naryn River was blocked and diverted in January 1959, and from that point on, the site boiled over with feverish activity, mobilising thousands of people of different ethnicities with the promise of social mobility. As mentioned above, while the skilled specialists (mostly Russians or Russian speakers of other ethnicities) were redeployed from dam sites elsewhere, most unskilled labourers were drawn from nearby Uzbek and Kyrgyz settlements. The temporary dam workers' town intended for 3,000 inhabitants (*gorodok gidrostroitelei*) at Shamaldy-Sai, has subsequently grown into a well-connected settlement of more than 15,000 residents.

Central Asian workers who made their homes in the area valued the opportunities for promotion offered by construction work. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, intensive evening courses for drillers, concrete workers, bulldozers and crane operators were offered. Every inexperienced labourer had a chance to learn the Russian language for free and gain the advanced technical skills necessary for construction. Later, technical colleges and branches of the Polytechnic Institute began to open, where one could obtain a high-skill specialization. Dam building required drillers, concrete workers, masons, drivers of Kamaz lorries, and bulldozers and crane operators. Within a short period, the local education system allowed the construction site to produce skilled labourers. The opportunities for upward mobility extended beyond any one construction site, as experienced workers were also able to migrate to other hydropower projects, avoiding periods of unemployment. My respondents recall with pride their promotion from ordinary electrician to electrical fitter of the highest grade, from engineer to senior foreman and so on.

Figure 3.6. A view of Shamaldy-Sai from the highest point of the Uch-Kurgan hydropower plant. Source: Baialieva fieldwork 2016.

According to the memories and stories of the first dam workers and hydro specialists, as mentioned earlier, the payment was always much higher in this sector than anywhere else in the country. They were provided food, were given tickets for resorts and sanatoriums. hey had privileged access to harder-to-find commodities, such as clothes from Moscow.

How dam work is remembered

My older respondents who built the dam and the town put much stress on the hard physical efforts they put into making the Soviet All-Union project happen. They are proud of it. They have clear memories of how their becoming a part of the Soviet grand-project in Shamaldy-Sai changed their lives forever. Industrialization, machine production, and technological advancement introduced new values. If pre-industrial work had different conceptions of time and space with blended rhythms in the waking hours, industrial and post-industrial work was governed by clock time and created a clear divide between 'work' and 'life', and 'public' and 'private'.

The Soviet system propagated the view that hard work day and night was the way to a bright future and the realisation of communism. From the narratives of the aged dam workers, such propaganda is echoed in their memories. Although they did hard physical work to build their future, they were happy, as we can see from Topchu ake's memories shared during the interview in 2017:

> I loved my job. It was very difficult, very hard. We invested our force (*küch*)[25] and didn't realize how much labour we were giving. We did the physical work, which is clearly visible [in the form of the hydropower plant]. I used to wake up early in the morning and walk through wind, snow, and rain to reach the trench. There we could meet new people from other countries, the skilled people were helping us and explaining what to do. When there was no manual work, we would be sent back home. I did not like that. It was boring not to work. I was longing for the start of work during the weekends too. I used to go to work as I go to some celebrations. We worked for the sake of our common future.

In the early phase of the dam's construction—which involved excavating the reservoir— the seasonal dam builders were hired without formal work contracts. They were employed as wage labourers and received cash money. They were registered weekly, fixing the working hours and getting paid. The average age of labourers was 17-20 years-old unskilled, young enthusiastic 'Komsomols' with ideal images of work. They expected to get status, provision and money. As Baltamurzaev recalls in an interview in 2016, he did not have a clear idea of what kind of work is expected from them and what GES means:

> I heard about the NarynGES when I was finishing my school in Ala-Buka [Kyrgyzstan]. We knew that it would bring electricity and also create well-paying jobs. We had no idea how the Naryn GES looked, but I wanted to go and work. It was a scorching and empty desert, and there was no work to start

---

[25] This word in Kyrgyz has a broad meaning and can convey 'energy', 'force' and 'labour power'.

yet when I arrived. I came with the '*Komsomol putyovka*'[26] to participate in the work. I wanted to earn money to get married. My life has changed totally for good.

He had a vague idea that the construction site paid cash on a weekly basis. He was able to get a Komsomol ticket and get hired. Baltamurzaev, born in 1936, participated in the ditch digging and errand work on a pit. He started his first job as a manual worker (*rabochiy*) in 1956 and had a successful career path onwards, and was the head of the machine shop by the time he retired.

Gramota - recognition of work

Every respondent emphasized the state awards and medals they received for their work. It was a valuable and important practice that showed a willingness to recognize the value of labour. The awards and certificates (*pochetnaya gramota, pohvalnyi list*) were mainly issued on special occasions, such as the Anniversary of the October Revolution or the Anniversary of Electrification. Rashid Ake (born in 1932) worked as a ditch worker in 1956, then as a builder and lorry driver. He is one of the respected older residents (aksakal) in Shamaldy-Sai. During our interview in 2016, he sounded bitter, proud and nostalgic about Soviet internationalism. He showed me his extensive collection of Soviet awards.

The system of award-giving has a legacy in today's Shamaldy-Sai, which I explore in greater detail in chapter 5. During our interview, Rashid ake expressed his view that the younger generation does not care about his hard work and does not know that he contributed to the building of the town:

> Uzbeks and Kyrgyzs were few; most of the workers were Russians and Tatars, the team leaders and prominent figures were mainly professional Russians, some Germans, Koreans and Jews. Kyrgyzs and Uzbeks were labourers (*chernorabochiy, raznorabochiy*). We learnt Russian and had evening courses

---

[26] Given it was a Komsomol Students All-Union Strike Construction "Komsomolskaya Vsesoyuznaya Udarnaya Stroika", the workers had to be Komsomol and/or a member of the communist party, were hired based on their "Komsomol putevka" (trade union ticket for work).

in technical education. It was very interesting. But I learnt most things by doing. If you could advance from training, you could have a better job, but I liked my job as a cement worker. I like heavy physical work. They liked me for being professional. I received many awards and certificates of honour (*gramota*). Now they have no value, and no one cares about how much we did for the town. I feel very proud for my generation; what we did was for the next generation (<u>muun</u>).

3.4. From the Uch-Kurgan GES to the Toktogul giant

Dam building was almost constant on the Naryn-Syr Darya river system, with rarely more than a few months' pause between the completion of one project and the start of the next, while others overlapped. A young labourer mobilised in her late teens to work on the first Soviet Central Asian project (the Farkhad GES in Tajikistan) would not have reached retirement age by the time the last gigantic obstruction to the river (Toktogul GES in Kyrgyzstan) was put in place 33 years later.[27] In fact, many workers did move on from one project to another, gradually accumulating experience (and sometimes accolades). By focusing on the workers' daily on-site experiences, their living conditions, and interactions with the natural environment, we seek fresh insights into how human communities were made and remade, even as the river and the non-human lives who depended upon it were gradually transformed.

The Uch-Kurgan powerplant was a necessary precursor to the more ambitious energy-giant of Toktogul, with its reservoir, also referred to as the 'Kyrgyz hand-made Sea'. The dam built in the Toktogul valley was the furthest upstream and the largest yet attempted in the river system: a wall of concrete 215 metres high, forming a reservoir of 284 square kilometres and stretching 65 kilometres across. The high-voltage transmission lines previously built as far as the Uch-Kurgan site were extended all the way to the new construction site, where damming work began in 1962. Some 35,000 people were

---

[27] By integrating data from four dams in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Flora Roberts and I, in a co-authored paper, bring the focus 'downwards' to the perspective of those assigned to bring the 'imperial desert dreams' to reality and look at the questions: how did the dam workers themselves experience these projects? How did they relate to the river they were called upon to transform? do you need this?

displaced by the reservoir – more than for any other dam built in the Naryn–Syr Darya river basin. The displaced communities were resettled around the perimeter of the reservoir, where it was hillier and the soil poorer and more expensive to irrigate. Although there were no mass anti-dam protests at the time, Kyrgyz authorities did lobby All-Union agencies behind the scenes for a better deal for the displaced communities (Moritz 2019). The degree of ambivalence about the flooding of the valley is reflected in the documentary film 'Naryn Diary', directed by Vidugiris in 1971.[28]

Other dams were built on the Naryn–Syr Darya river basin, none further upstream than Toktogul[29] and several further downstream in Kazakhstan. But the dam projects we focus on here are representative of those completed on rivers across the region, and the Soviet Union at large, in the quarter-century between the late 1940s and the early 1970s. Competing agendas determined the dam sites, which tended to reflect an uneasy compromise between the needs of power generation and agriculture. Both activities required the capacity to store vast quantities of water, but the schedules for its release were hard to reconcile.

3.5. Labour against nature?

At this distance, it is hard to reconstruct accurately how the average labourer on a Naryn–Syr Darya dam site felt about their work at the time and in what terms, if at all, they thought about what they were doing to the river. Predictably, when interviewed for official publications, workers spoke of great pride in their work, and censorship practices notwithstanding, there is no good reason to doubt that their pride was often genuine. The workers interviewed in the press expressed confidence that their labour was contributing to raising living standards for the community as a whole, and their subsequent experiences would substantially corroborate this view. Whether in press interviews at the

[28] 'Narynskii dnevnik', documentary film written and directed by Al'gimantas Vidugiris, 1971, is available on youtube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9RM5COMUBo

[29] A new series of dams upstream from Toktogul, the Kambarata-1 and Kambarata- 2 dams, have been planned for some time, but as of 2022 have not been completed. For the background on these projects, see Jeanne Féaux de la Croix and Mohira Suyarkulova, 'The Rogun complex: Public roles and historic experiences of dam-building in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan', in Alain Cariou (ed.) Water in Central Asia: Contemporary Issues and Challenges. Cahiers d'Asie Centrale 25 (2015): 103–132.

time of construction or in fieldwork interviews collected decades later, ordinary workers seldom reflected explicitly on how their labour transformed the river environment and neighbouring ecosystem.

This is not necessarily unusual. In a book-length oral history of the construction of Hoover Dam, compiled from many dozens of extensive and detailed interviews, the Columbia River is hardly mentioned at all. The workers – uprooted by the Great Depression – had no prior connection to the river. Moreover, the workers' settlement (Boulder City) was some distance away, and most of the exhausting physical labour saw the workers interact with concrete, rock, bulldozers, jackhammers, tunnels, grit, and dust – but very little water. By contrast, the Central Asian dam workers interviewed had spent decades living in riverbank settlements within sight of the fruits of their labour. Long before the dams on the river system produced electricity or irrigated fields, the local Party organisations and the site leadership organised celebratory public gatherings and carefully timed media blitzes to create a sense of anticipation and fan popular enthusiasm.

The engineer Bernadskii[30] explains:

> Dam builders [*gidrostroiteli*] have a nice tradition of marking the separate stages of construction: ... the first concrete … setting the first turbine in motion and so forth, but the most solemn and celebrated occasion is the day on which the course of the river is first blocked. At Kairakkum, this took place on April 6, 1956 ... They did not announce the day of the blocking in the press, but in Central Asia, the local communication channel 'uzun kulak' (long ear) still holds sway, and the rumour spread, drawing people from far and wide who wished to witness the single combat between man and nature. Among them, there were many ak-sakals – white-bearded old men, several of whom came on their donkeys from the mountains…[and] some people whispering 'there is no such power that could halt the run of the [Syr-] Darya'. But mankind, armed with

[30] Bernardskii. 'Kairakkum', p 5. June 1984.

technology, after seven hours of intense work blocked the old course of the river (at 7:00 a.m.) and directed its waters to a newly prepared route.

The Russian engineer's recollections hint at the sensations and range of emotions inspired by the plan to block the river's path – elderly men, ak-sakals, representing entire communities, travelling down from their mountain villages to witness this extraordinary event, depicted by Bernadskii as a 'single combat between man and nature'.

In a similar vein further upstream, local (Russophone) resident and Party activist V. Pol'skaia wrote a memoir about her life and work in Kara-Kul, the settlement built to accommodate the workers of the Toktogul dam, and described the river diversion at Toktogul in January 1966 as follows:

> The day of the river diversion was declared a labour holiday (*trudovoi prazdnik*). Most people wanted to be present at this celebration of labour. But where could they all be accommodated when the water was swelling and surging upwards, heavy vehicles were moving forth and back, throwing their cargo into the river? It is dangerous. The administration should be here today. For the 'spectators', metal fences were welded onto the slope itself. Ak-sakals (elderly community leaders) and the best schoolchildren were invited, as well as divers charged with monitoring the flow of the river into the tunnel built by the best construction workers. Ice slurry (shuga in Russian) was floating along the river. It was freezing. The river stopped in confusion; its level began to rise and reached the threshold of the entrance portal of the bypass tunnel. The way into the tunnel of the river was cleared, and at first, it was uncertain whether to flow in, but then, faster and faster, it rushed into its unusual new course. We erupted in jubilation! We all threw up our hats! This was an indescribable sense

of human strength and ability! Nature obediently did what her people kindly asked her to do and laid out a new smooth path for the river.[31]

Although by no means her primary focus, Pol'skaia's writing includes descriptions of the natural setting in which the Toktogul dam project took shape. In snowy and frosty winters, the snow that fell to the surface of the water did not melt but rather stuck together in lumps, piles, masses, creating the icy slush called *shuga* in Russian. As a result, *shuga* drifts along on the surface of the river, where it is joined by more borne along by the river's tributaries. Before the formation of the reservoir, the river accumulated big slush masses, reaching a thickness of a few metres.

In the winters of 1966 and 1969, the depth of this *shuga* layer reached nine metres. This caused dangerous blockages and obstructions and caused small bridges to be demolished. In 1969, the builders were ordered to save the bridges by blowing up the *shuga* with explosives. One bridge, in particular, was vital for the construction site and the highway connecting the two main cities in the Kyrgyz republic – Frunze and Osh. Later, the bridge that served the hydropower plant's operating staff was modified to have a higher clearance, and another new large bridge for the transport highway was built downstream. Once the Toktogul reservoir was filled, such measures were no longer necessary, as any *shuga* that forms accumulates there and melts.[32]

Very few locals we spoke to were old enough to be able to recall the blocking of the Naryn. Baltamurzaev, a bulldozer driver at that time, was one of the few who shared his memories. He remembers the truck drivers, busy throwing boulders into the water. Only the workers were at the site that day, and they all worried about how the river would behave. Would it overfill, overpour, flow through the mass of rocks, or find the new route in the diversion canal that had been prepared for it? In recounting the story, Baltamurzaev's memories seemed to transport him back to that time, and he said with

---

[31] Pol'skaia, V. 'Ocherk 6. Ocherki o stroitelstve Kaskada Totogulskih GES'. Accessed 17 February 2022. http://karakulcy.narod.ru/history/Ocherk6.html. I got to know her quite well, put some of her poetry in my thesis. Maybe cross-ref?

[32] Ibid.

tones of regret that 'nature should not have been disturbed'. At the climactic moment, when the river's course was obstructed, he felt scared and used his inner voice to beg an apology from the river for what they were doing. He explained that water has a special meaning for the Kyrgyz and Uzbek people, who consider it a gift from Heaven.

At the same time, he seemed to soothe himself by his assertion that everything was done for the sake of development and to bring better living conditions. He remains proud of his work and says that the results are in front of him. Whenever he turns on the light, he associates the ease of electricity with his work on the dam. Whenever he passes the dam and the power station, he feels proud and accomplished.

Another of the dam workers interviewed, Abdurashid ake, was present when the old course of the Naryn river was blocked. He had started work as a (*kotlovan*) digger and worked for the dam construction from 1956 until 1964. As Abdurashid ake explained, if he had been able to attend evening courses and gained technical skills, he would have been able to stay for longer and continue his career at the power station as a skilled, well-paid worker. As it was, he was married at the time, living with his family and small children in another village 25 kilometres away. Every workday, he had to walk or cycle from his village to the construction site. His inability to speak Russian limited him, and he remained classed as an unskilled labourer, leaving the construction site in 1964 to continue cattle breeding in the mountains. He did acquire a small plot of land outside Shamaldy-Sai and built himself a house there so he could return and have his children educated in the workers' town.

His memories of the early years, when the dam workers' town was born, remain both vivid and warm to this day, despite his awareness that 'no one recognises' the harsh manual labour he contributed for the sake of 'better future'. There was a moment in Abdurashid ake's story when he gave a deep sigh, looked sorrowful and said, after a long pause:

> Every time I drive by the Uch-Kurgan GES (hydropower station, in Russian), I feel proud of myself that we made it real. I did that work. However, there is another painful part of that work. There is a sad part of what we have done. We were fighting against nature, and we were interrupting nature's laws. My

heart ached when the stones and blocks were thrown into the river. The roar of the stones, the specialized machines, the confused flow of the river all struck me from the inside. We were interrupting nature. I felt sorry and asked the Heavens for forgiveness.

3.6. The river is dammed

There are important continuities across the dam projects, as one might well expect, not least because so many of those involved—from ditch diggers to engineers and administrators—worked on more than one of these projects. For example, over-reliance on inadequate temporary housing for newly arrived workers persisted over time, but so did the haste with which the first steps were taken to educate and entertain the workers. Another constant was the tendency for structures built at high speed, and conceived of as temporary, to gain permanence within the landscape as if by happenstance or necessity, much as many of the workers, who initially had planned to make some money and leave, ended up staying for decades and building families. The reliance on prize-giving, number crunching and upbeat reporting, whether in the form of site newspapers or the radio sets with which each individual dorm room was reportedly equipped, was yet another through line.

However, the elements of progress, in the form of administrative changes made between projects, seem at least as important. As sources as diverse as the local Party newspapers and interviews make clear, many collective farmers and remote villagers jumped at the chance to enjoy the higher wages and higher standard of living offered to industrial workers in new towns. The Uch-Kurgan power station made a greater push than the earlier hydropower projects in other Central Asian republics to mobilise and publicise the volunteer labour provided by the Communist Youth League.

The labour deployed to build the dams came in many forms, and labour conditions had a clear, although not always predictable, impact on workers' understanding of their contribution and their assessment of the project. The emphasis on skilled workers with particular profiles led to an unusually high representation of non-locals, a demographic pattern that was suddenly and sharply reversed after the fall of the USSR. As we have

seen, for Shamaldy-Sai, no permanent settlement much beyond what was required to maintain the site was initially envisioned, and yet it eventually became an attractive and desirable place to work and raise a family. The experience of working to dam the Naryn river often profoundly transformed the individual lives of workers who acquired new skills (and often a fresh sense of purpose) and adopted new ways of life. Still, the effects of their labour echoed far beyond their respective communities.

Residents of Shamaldy-Sai mobilised to work on the dam have varying perspectives on the town and its relationship to the Naryn River. The settlement continues to grow and develop in the twenty-first century, but, as an enviro-technical system, it is evident that the dammed river also transforms steadily. Local residents note and describe visible variations in the water quantity, as well as changes in the river's colour and composition. Several respondents noted an increase in water pollution and a gradual increase in reed growth and sediment accumulation. Photos of the Naryn river uploaded to the social media group 'Naryn GES/Shamaldy-Sai' have given rise to lively discussions and strong reactions. Some residents and former residents who were around in the 1970s fondly remember how they used to skate on the Naryn River, which froze solid during the winter. Younger group members responded with incredulity, hardly believing that this happened on the same river they know, which has never once frozen over, since the 1980s.

Those who left the area before the larger, upstream hydropower projects were built have trouble believing that the river never freezes[33], nor can they believe it no longer has the persistently grey colour they were used to. Loss of the rich sediment, which has since been trapped further upstream, causes the river to appear turquoise green in more recent photos. Online discussions about the appearance and behaviour of the river reflect a degree of unease over the changes brought about by man's labour, which find their most intense and searing expression in the words of the elderly dam workers reported above.

---

[33] Many of my research participants, including hydropower engineers, attributed this to the emergence of several dams and hydroelectric plants on the river. The fact that it is not freezing, according to them, is due to fast undercurrents. The colder temperatures are connected to chemical and physical processes which, due to the infinitely rotating wheels of the turbines where the water comes in from deep water, the surface does not heat up easily.

The words of Abdurashid aka eloquently express his continuing struggle to reconcile the feelings of both shame and pride triggered, even decades later, by catching sight of the dam. His words clarify his pride in the construction project itself and the improvements it brought to residents' quality of life and shame at the assault on nature he took part in.

In the next chapter, I show how the transformed river has become an enviro-technical system and how the local residents sustain water infrastructure and the post-industrial lives along the lower Naryn River.

Chapter 4. The transformed environment and 'slow violence'

4.1. The transformed river

This chapter draws on the transformed river to examine the everyday challenges experienced in the region of the lower Naryn River. Using the concepts of *envirotechnical regime* (Pritchard 2011) and *slow violence* (Nixon 2012), I look at the interaction between the river system, people and their adaptation as an envirotechnical regime. Within this complex envirotechnical regime, I focus on regular water cut-offs and the invisible, untold stories of Kyzyl-Alma communities[34] living alongside toxic residues. Applying the concept of 'slow violence', I show how locals act as environmental managers as they strive to fix and maintain environment. Deindustrialization, pollution, malnutrition and poverty are forms of *slow violence*. These processes are relatively hidden but cause serious harm to vulnerable people, destroying their lives over time. The cases of a regime actor like my uncle or the Arzykan Eje family from the abandoned settlement of Kyzyl-Alma demonstrate the risks and threat factors associated with the 'enviro-technical' regime of the river (Pritchard 2011). Thus, local people attempt to create accountability and relieve environmental threats by playing the role of local regime actors and environmental managers.

All these interactions with the river system (its historical context is shown in Chapter 3), which is both natural and technological, can be seen from Pritchard's perspective as '*envirotechnical regimes*'. In this chapter, I do not go into great detail about the role of donors, the post-Soviet challenges of the water sector and hydro-politics.[35] Nevertheless, to see how the envirotechnical system was laid, I present a brief technical portrait of the river. I discussed industrialization, the damming of the Naryn River and the making of the town in Chapter 3. After giving the technological background and a current flow of work,

---

[34] which is a part of Shamaldy-Sai

[35] On water problems, cooperation and the role of donors, see Abdullaev and Atabaeva (2012), Dukhovny (2011, 2017) and Dukhovny et al. (2016).

I further accentuate how ponderous the river is, given that along a 30 km stretch alone, it accommodates several dams, hydropower plants and industrial enterprises.

Pritchard's (2011) analysis of the transboundary Rhône River uses the concept of 'envirotechnical' formations, manifested in systems, regimes and landscapes. To understand this chain of envirotechnical relationships, she proposes to combine the environmental history and the history of technology to 'treat *both* nature and technology critically without resorting to the determinism, reductionism, or realism of early work in both fields' (Pritchard 2011, 14). This approach explores the deep history and development of the river system and its regimes. The concept of *envirotechnical* highlights 'the "nature" of technology, or the ways non-human nature affords material constraints to technological development and use. Pritchard sees technology as natural and nature as technological in a way that [a] 'river's flow may be harnessed to turn waterwheels, spin turbines, and cool nuclear reactors (ibid, 11).

Thus, natural resources and ecological processes can simultaneously be technological. As a result, the corollary expands 'technology' further, not to mention who (or even what) might be included as a technological actor' (Pritchard 2011, 22). In her comprehensive and detailed Introduction, she shows how to approach the nature–society–technology triad[36] without falling into technological or environmental determinism. Examining the Rhône River, she further explains that nature–technology-human differentiation is a matter of perspective. This reinforces the point mentioned above, namely that human things and even technology are natural and environmental processes are technological (e.g. irrigation, electricity generation, and access to water).

The technopolitical and envirotechnical aspects we glean from Pritchard's impressive biography of the Rhône are echoed in the Naryn-Syr Darya River, which has undergone a wide variety of development even within its own basin. Before attaching certain concepts or limiting to certain prescriptions, we should step into the representational

---

[36] On infrastructure, ecology and the techno-politics of nature, see McCully (2001), Mitchell (2002), Tsing (2015), and Larkin (2013).

dimension of how the Naryn was (and still is) treated within its environmental systems and regimes. In approaching the Naryn River as envirotechnical by revealing its managed environment, I follow Pritchard's idea that envirotechnical regimes are 'the institutions, people, ideologies, technologies, and landscapes that together define, justify, build, and maintain a particular envirotechnical system as normative' (2011, 23).

The becoming of Shamaldy-Sai and the erection of the hydroelectric plants in the past, which I examine in Chapter 2, lie along what Pritchard calls 'envirotechnical systems'. The latter term is 'largely descriptive—that is, it *describes* the particular features of embedded ecological and technological systems—[while] envirotechnical regimes are the *prescriptive, instrumental* formulation and use of those systems by groups or institutions for specific ends' (2011, 23). In this chapter, I look at how those built systems are sustained and managed by local communities. Shamaldy-Sai's envirotechnical regimes include people (like my uncle) and industrial elements (like water technology and infrastructure), which *together* define, construct and maintain the established pot-Soviet environmental systems.

Traditional Kyrgyz relationships with the environment indicate that nature has its own agency. Personification is seen in the different Kyrgyz proverbs and cultural practices regarding water and the certain actions and intentions ascribed to nature, such as the 'Naryn River will eat you up' (*Naryn jep ketet*), 'flowing water causes no harm' (*akkan suuda aram jok*), 'flowing water carries away bad dreams' (Feaux 2021)[37]. There are many other local beliefs and customs related to water that I do not explore here. People believe that water has ears and can materialize human aspirations, and so are comfortable confiding their dreams and hopes in flowing water. Indigenous knowledge, proverbs, and rituals related to the water and the river are explicit indicators of how nature is subjectivized.

---

[37] Intensive research on the agency of nature in Central Asia is currently underway in the Kyrgyzstan-based 'Aigine Cultural-Research Center' (Aitpaeva and Samakov 2017) and the Uzbek ethnologist Ashirov (Ashirov 2020).

4.2. Envirotechnical regimes and *'slow violence'*

The pollution of water, air, and land, degradation of pastures, and the melting of glaciers are complex and systematic environmental changes that are 'critical challenges of our time' (Nixon 2013, 3). Considering it as an environmental regime, I explore the challenges of environmentalism in the Kyzyl-Alma township next to Tendik village. The now-abandoned deindustrialized zone, which carries tonnes of harmful essence, is a form of violence towards the environment and local communities. However, it is violence not in its conventional form; rather, it is *slow violence* that 'occurs gradually and out of sight; a delayed destruction often dispersed across time and space' (ibid, 2).

These ideas are captured in Nixon's study *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. The book takes on the challenge of amplifying the degrading effects of this 'delayed' and 'dispersed' destruction. The community in Kyzyl-Alma lacks not only such voices but also the political salience needed to recruit significant outrage beyond the local area.

There are meaningful online platforms in the Kyrgyz media space where eco-problems in Kyrgyzstan are highlighted. Examples include the Facebook page EkoSoc[38], the YouTube channel Ecostan[39] on the degraded ecology of Kyrgyzstan, the eco-map[40] with marked locations, where a specific site is indicated with a description of the current environmental problem. Many eco-activists and movements educate and call for self-organization, but they concentrate mainly on bigger cities and controversial cases such as the gold-mining company 'Kumtor'. The people of Kyzyl-Alma are vulnerable in many ways. For example, the mothballed silicon and chip-making plant discussed in detail below, first built in the 1980s, which still stores 80 tonnes of trichlorosilane (a toxic industrial chemical), is a problem overlooked by the state. Trichlorosilane reacts violently with water, steam and moisture. It releases heat and flammable and corrosive gases in air such as Hydrogen and Hydrogen. The toxic substance - Trichlorosilane - can cause

---

[38] https://www.facebook.com/ecosoc.Kyrgyzstan/
[39] https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgwRGfx2p0LD3ryyBrfbEAw
[40] https://ecomap.kg/

headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain[41]. I see this (largely ignored) exposure to environmental risks as a form of *slow violence* to the community of Kyzyl-Alma. *Slow violence* occurs when people are forced to live in uncertainty and poverty, creating a high risk of environmental damage.

But how is it understood by the communities concerned? What are their actions and reactions? The following sections discuss instrumental envirotechnical regimes and examine how technology and nature are sustained by the local people. I present a technological portrait of the river and an ethnography of the main envirotechnical vulnerabilities such as degraded water infrastructure, water cut-offs, toxic residues, and how they are dealt with.

4.3. The Naryn as an envirotechnical river

In summer 2018, I paid a visit to the home of my uncle Ahmatjan Aba[42] and his family, who live in Tendik village, not far from Shamaldy-Sai. As it turned out, he was not at home, and his wife informed me that he was staying temporarily at a worksite on the Naryn River. We bought some drinks and bread, took a hot *plov* (traditional rice dish) cooked by his wife and drove to his worksite. He was very happy to see us as he and I had not seen each other for a year or two. With pride, he shared many details about his work, his duties, and the potential of the Naryn River and its future. Ahmatjan Aba was standing on the bank of the river and continued introducing me into his work life:

> See the reeds over there? It [that part of the river] used to be deep, and the current would carry everything away. Now it's turning into a swampy place. The Naryn is on borrowed time (ubakyt-saaty chekteluu); the water flow is unstable, the river keeps decreasing. I've already planted poplars (terek). They're growing fast. I will keep planting so that a forest will grow in the future. Since the river is shrinking, let the trees take its place.

---

[41] 'ICSC 0591 - TRICHLOROSILANE'. Accessed 13 April 2022.
https://www.ilo.org/dyn/icsc/showcard.display?p_card_id=0591&p_edit=&p_version=2&p_lang=en.
[42] 'Aba' means patrilineal uncle in the southern dialect of the Kyrgyz language

While showing his workplace, my uncle, a former shepherd and tractor driver, raised several problems. Although he did not directly refer to it as climate change, he stressed the rapid change in the Naryn River. Ahmatjan Aba observed that it is only on the surface level that the river seems wide and full of water. In reality, there is little water. He added that glaciers are melting (eerip jatat), and the silted bottom, which is the direct effect of damming, gives the illusion that the river is full of water.

Ahmatjan is a native of Tendik, 20km from Shamaldy-Sai. During the USSR, this village was used for agriculture and had a vegetable depot[43] (*ovoshnaia baza*). In addition to cotton, onions, cucumbers, tomatoes, maize, watermelons, melons, and rice were grown in the fields (and still are). The village is habitually called Jyiyrmanchy (in Kyrgyz), but in Soviet times it was also called Dvadtzatyi in Russian, which means 'the Twentieth' (i.e., twenty kilometres from the zero point of the railroad).

During the Soviet Union, my uncle worked as the leading tractor driver. After the USSR's collapse in 1991, he farmed and grew rice, then melon, watermelons and onions. He could not continue farming due to regional problems with irrigation of arable land and a lack of energy as he is tired and retired (his grown-up children have migrated to Russia for work). He decided to get a job at a pumping station, a workplace seen as undesirable by other workers because of the poor living conditions and low wages. Working as a water manager (suugatchy) at the pumping station, he indeed earned a paltry wage.

---

[43] Fruit and vegetable depots were part of the state system of food supply under the planned economy.

Figure 4.1. Ahmatjan Aba on the Naryn River fixing the water motor to distribute water for irrigation. Source: Baialieva, Tendik village 2018.

On this summer day, a loudly running motor drew water from the river and distributed it through pipes across the fields for irrigation purposes. I could see the thick, rusty metal pipes were welded in various places. Somewhere through the pipes, water was gushing through passageways. In great torrents, water gushed down the hilly bank of the river, where reeds and tall flowering grasses grow beautifully. My uncle told me that he had to maintain this old structure himself, and in the summer, at peak irrigation, he relocated to the site for the entire season. Day and night, he would regulate the water flow, the engine, and monitor the operation of the old pumping motor. Ahmatjan Aba was proud of his job, which provided water to thousands of hectares of land around the village of Tendik. He sounded enthusiastic and added that he manually maintains this technological and natural system. He also mentioned he is not paid for his overtime hours and extra work he does to keep the whole system ticking along.

Ahmatjan Aba explained that anyways there is no other work, and for years, he got used to his current job. However, he maintains a very profound sense of duty, and before he

started his work as a <u>suugatchy</u> (water manager), he was an experienced tractor driver, mechanic and farmer. Nowadays, the occupation of *suugatchy* is institutionalized. In its traditional understanding, the role—the workers have been known in Central Asia as '*mirabs*'—has disappeared from the region. More insights on the historical and contemporary state of *mirabs* can be seen from the exhibition video material developed by the Uzbek ethnologist Adkham Ashirov. As it is described in his work:

> The closest parallel today are municipal workers who perform the duties of '*mirabs*' these days. Traditionally, 'mirabs' controlled the flow of water through irrigation canals and ditches, making sure that crops and green areas/pasture were watered on time. Canals running through the village also cooled down the area during hot summers. *Mirabs* also monitored the timely cleaning of the irrigation canals and sustainable use of water. Skills for this vocation and position were passed down through generations in some families...[44]

In the case of my uncle, although his water management work forms a part of the state structure, the municipality paid very little attention to it. He had to take care of an overloaded, outdated network of water pipes and pump motors. Money for this was never allocated in a timely manner, and many distributors like my uncle have had to find ways to solve all sorts of problems on their own, notably urgent fixes for minor but regular breakdowns.

When I had a conversation with him in 2017, Ahmatjan Aba seemed happy that I was visiting him at his worksite. He described his work and life, which have been bound together in the last decade:

> I am always lying there, enjoying the sound of the water, the generator. I already know very well when it can go wrong. The main problem is an inadequate supply of electricity. I can fix the rest myself. I know where to put the oil, where the wires are badly aligned. It would be nice to have the motor,

---

[44] Ferghana. Three River Stories of the Naryn-Syrdarya. Accessed 17 February 2022. http://en.syr-darya.org/archives/244.

and some of the pipes replaced completely. They are already of poor quality. No money for that, as always .... I just wish I was paid on time. I earn pennies (az alam–*kopeiki*), but it's better than nothing.

The problems consist mainly of short but constant malfunctioning of the entire mechanism. The land on the riverbank where his small station is located under a single shed was trampled. Reeds were growing on the sides. There is no need for anyone to staff this station around the clock in seasons other than spring and summer. But the peak and most important period is during heavy irrigation in the summer. Then, Ahmatjan Aba brings a cot and staffs the station to monitor falls in water flows, mechanical failures and to keep the motor running at all times.

When I went to visit him at lunchtime, I saw that there were old coats and sheepskin with fur (talpak) laid out on the ground. But as it turned out, this was not incidental, as he was using these as a mattress since he was sleeping directly on the ground. He did not want to spoil the bedding (töshök, körpöchö) from home and wanted to be in the embrace of nature (*t*abiyattyn koinunda) in clean (taza) form. There were also large stones with soot on the ground. Nearby was a small oblong can (*bidon*), a pot covered with a clay plate (tabak, pronounced as ta-u-ak), a metal kettle to boil water, a teapot to make tea and a jar of salt.

Figure 4.2. Ahmatjan Aba's 'kitchen' at the river bank. Source: Baialieva, Tendik village 2018.

When I got interested in such a still life and started taking photos of it, he called it, in his usual joking manner, his 'kitchen', the kind one would scarcely find anywhere else in the whole world. To alleviate the sweltering heat, he watered the path with a hose attached to one of the pipes. He proudly pointed to the poplar trees, which he had planted and were growing along the river. Although my uncle was living in poor economic conditions, he was not discouraged and kept a great sense of humour. He was positive and enjoyed life. It was the last time I saw him. He passed away the next year of liver disease (hepatitis).

Adverse working conditions, precarity, poverty, and poor nutrition cause slow violence to the body in the context of the 'environmentalism of the poor'. These envirotechnical regimes impact people, and the tragic case of Ahmatjan Aba and his precarious role in maintaining the system is one of the examples of the post-Soviet 'environmentalism of

the poor'. Still, my uncle's trees continue to grow and bear witness to the life of the envirotechnical Naryn River.

Figure 4.3. Ahmatjan Aba's future forest of poplars on the Naryn River. Source: Baialieva, Tendik village 2018.

4.4. Water cut-offs

On Tuesday night in the summer of 2016, my mother and I came to Shamaldy-Sai after a long trip from Bishkek. The morning after my arrival, I was awakened by the conversation of my parents. Half-awake, I could not really make out what their dispute was about, but I heard them arguing. Later I realized that they were quarrelling about getting water as my dad had forgotten to fill the buckets before the water was shut off.

My mom reminded him (loudly) that she needed water that was 'clean and flowing'[45] (akkan suu) for her purifying ritual (bashyna suu ailandyryp). This ritual is important for my family as it is for most other Central Asian peoples. My mother-in-law also does this whenever we come back from abroad. It is performed for a close person before they enter the house; the belief is that the flowing, clean water can wash away the negative, heavy aura that has accumulated outside the home and cleanse the person. Before entering the home, a cup of clean water is held over the visitor's head (usually by the eldest in the family), and he or she pours in three cycles around the person's head clockwise. The visitor then spits into the water three times. The water is then poured under a tree or somewhere else away from foot traffic. In the past, my grandmother would perform this ritual for any family member coming back from a long trip. Now it falls to my mom, and to her, it is important that the water is clean.

This is the rule, although it had been broken on this occasion. I had already entered the house late on Tuesday night without any ritual as we were all tired. Cheered up by their childish but serious quarrel, I got up to give them a good morning hug and greet my dad properly. My mom hastily rushed to the stove, poured the remaining water in the kettle into a big bowl (chyny) and performed the ritual. Now I was welcomed, cleansed, and purified.

My mom explained the source of the quarrel and the need to fill the buckets before the Wednesday shutoff of the mains. On Wednesdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. the mains into the town are completely shut off, and there is no running water. The results are clear. I went out to have a walk in the yard of my parents' house. In a year, it had changed

---

[45] Flowing water (*akkan suu*) has a special philosophy and symbolic resonance in Kyrgyz oral tradition and rituals as it is considered purer and cleaner. After a bad dream or nightmare, one should quietly whisper the negative parts of the dream into flowing water and wish for a positive outcome. Running water is believed to carry away negative imaginings and visions. Another belief about running water is "*akkan suunun aramy jok*," which means "flowing water causes no harm". This aphorism is a usual response to questions about water quality. There is also a whole genre in oral poetry and ballad songs about *akkan suu*. [Gulzat, you'll know that the *akyndar* often sung about this and it might be worth your citing an extract. I think Barpy had a fitting poem with 'akkan suu' as the refrain. Might add to things here?

drastically; half of the vineyard, almond and fig trees had dried up. In the yard, large barrels and buckets stood everywhere, empty of course since my dad had forgotten to fill them up on Tuesday. After breakfast, we decided to go together to fetch water from the canal.

Our house in Shamaldy-Sai is located right next to the canal (the Left Bank Canal or LBK of the Naryn River). Until the mid-1990s, there were no problems accessing the canal. Across the road behind our garden, we used to be able to reach the bank of the canal in a few short minutes. It was easy to see how much the water level had risen in the canal and to spot people resting on the canal in those days. Now all this road is fenced off with high concrete fences, and even bypassing them now makes it impossible to have picnics and swim as before. Today, it is impossible to see people, especially women and girls, bathing, even in the scorching heat. This is due not only to the fences and new developments but also to the changing temperature of the water, which remains very cold even in summer. It is also due to changes in social norms due to re-Islamisation, which do not encourage swimming in public places. I discuss the religious transformation and its gender dimension in Chapter 7.

As a kid, I learnt to swim in that canal. As teenagers, we organized picnics and parties on the canal banks. When land privatization began, the banks of the canal were taken, and new houses started to emerge there. In the early 2000s, the canal banks were fenced, and new cafes and beer shops sprung up. Previously accessible and public, the canal was transformed by these new structures, and brick walls and fences parcelled it off and blocked access. Water ownership operates not only at the corporate level but also on an individual private level and is structured by accounting technologies and profits (Bakker 2010, Muehlebach 2012, Bresnihan 2016).

On this hot, dry, sunny Wednesday, we made our way — buckets in hand — to the canal, bypassing the shore-side houses and reaching our destination in 10–15 minutes. There were some teenagers and small children fetching water from the canal into various vessels: kettles, pots, and buckets. Their clothes were wet either from being splashed with water or from sweat. Kids looked mindful of the current and the small rolling stones

and went farther from the shore, searching for the really clean water. It was evident that they were skilled at fetching[46] water from the canal, although it is dangerous for children. According to locals, there have already been recent incidents of kids drowning. The next day I observed that my parents and almost every house with a garden were literally flooding their gardens and yard. This is because the hoses are not shut to water the plants or soil (day or night). Water pressure in the faucets is very weak because almost every household with a yard and gardens adopts the same strategy to make the most of the available water before Wednesday rolls around again.

The breakdown of infrastructure, mismanagement of garbage dumps, polluted water, electricity cuts, and toxic threats are the most salient environmental concerns in the region. For twenty years, towns like Shamaldy-Sai and Kyzyl-Alma have been exposed to regular mains shutoffs. In 2009 and 2010, there was nationwide energy rationing to save water in the Toktogul reservoir, which fell to a critically low level. During those years of energy and water crisis, Bishkek and other bigger cities saw planned electricity and water cuts just once a week. However, in the lower Naryn River area, which accommodates several hydropower plants, the electricity and water were cut off daily from midnight to 7 a.m. In the last ten years, this crisis has eased. However, in certain towns today, there is still a planned water and electricity cut a few times a week in Kyzyl-Alma and once a week in Shamaldy-Sai. The formal explanation is that once a week, the water system undergoes maintenance and cleaning work (*remontno-ochistitelnye raboty*).

After a while, the locals were indignant about how many years it was taking to finish such maintenance works and why no permanent fix had been found. Nowadays, many are convinced that planned shutdowns are related to saving water, which is in short supply and is said to be illegally (and illicitly) sold to Uzbekistan. I heard such urban legends from most of my respondents. Now, the locals are used to the weekly water cuts, which have been happening for twenty years. They are quite well adapted and manage their everyday lives despite technical failures. Families stock up on the right amount of water as much

---

[46] mainly poor families who can afford bought bottled water or drive to the river by car fetch water

as possible, and shops are stocked with varieties of bottled water, from half a litre to 50 litres, including a 'holy' *zamzam* water. However, store-bought, standing water does not always conform to the Kyrgyz concept of flowing water (akkan suu) that, as mentioned above, incarnates water (Féaux de la Croix 2021). Although the water in the kettle she used was standing still, it suited the ritual because apparently, it had been filled with flowing tap water the day before. Thus, local people find ways to solve their daily needs and even cultural performances such as rituals despite the disrupted water supply system. There have been important shifts in hydro regimes in the post-Soviet period, and new complex governance structures have been established.

The problem of sharing water resources in transboundary rivers is acute in the countries of Central Asia (Abdullaev and Rakhmatullaev 2015). The breakdown of economic and inter-agency ties between the former Soviet republics has led to a decline in the extraction of fuel resources (Dukhovny and Ziganshina 2011). In addition, changes in the political-economic situation and ecological regime in the region made the sovereign states seek to use water resources primarily in their own national interests and find ways to improve water governance (Abdullaev and Mollinga 2010, Bichsel 2009).

The high hydrological dependency between the countries is characterized by ineffective management and unequal distribution of water resources.[47] In Kyrgyzstan, the lack of modern technology and the need for a steady increase in food and industrial output to feed a rapidly growing population has led to the failure of energy and water supplies. The deterioration of irrigation facilities and water-saving systems has also created acute water shortages, both in rural areas and in the industrial centres and foothills. Hence the well-functioning mode of operation, outdated water infrastructure and unreliable supply of energy resources have started failing and are unable to improve the degraded system.

---

[47] For more on water related health problems in Central Asia, See Bekturganov et al. (2016). On water as a vital cultural substance in Kyrgyzstan, see Bunn (2013) and Féaux de la Croix (2011, 2016). On dam-building, see Féaux de la Croix Suyarkulova (2015), Florin (2019), and Kuban (2021).

Local people, on the other hand, are left to find solutions to everyday problems, not only in terms of subsistence and survival but also in terms of maintaining the envirotechnical regime. In the context of the deterioration of the hydropower plants and accompanying structures, there are frequent failures in electricity supply and the supply of drinking water, which comes directly from the Naryn River. Furthermore, the lack of sanitation and lack of clean tap water is problematic and adds to the vulnerability and environmentalism of the poor.

Technical structure of the GES work

In the area where I am researching transformation processes along the Naryn River, there are three hydroelectric power plants (gidroelektrostantziya, GES): Uch-Kurgan, Tash-Komur, and Shamaldy-Sai. Their construction began in different years under the Soviet Union. The first construction site on the Naryn River was the Uch-Kurgan GES, constructed by the Naryngidroenergostroy department of the Central Asian branch of the large Soviet Institute 'SAO Gidroproekt' (Tashkent) in 1956–1962. Then, in the same section of the Naryn River in 1981, construction of the Tash-Kumyr GES began. Five years later, in February 1986, yet another hydro plant, Shamaldy-Sai GES, was launched on the river. The Uch-Kurgan GES consists of a hydropower plant building, bottom and turbine spillways, an earthen dam, and irrigation towers for the BNK (Big Namangan Canal) and the LBK (Left Bank Canal). Tash-Kumyr GES is located on the border of the Nooken and Aksy districts of the Jalal-Abad oblast. This hydroelectric complex includes a reservoir, a dam, deep and surface spillways, three turbine conduits, the main plant building and a 220 kV open switchgear. And the third, Shamaldy-Sai GES, is located 14 km downstream from the Tash-Kumyr GES. The design installed capacity is 240 MW. The first unit was put into operation in 1992, and the last third in 1996. The Shamaldy-Sai hydropower complex includes a reservoir, a dam, a hydropower plant building, bottom and turbine spillways.

However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, many planned works at these construction sites on the Naryn River stopped when the funds for construction and reconstruction work dried up. As a result, the government of the Kyrgyz Republic adopted a decree on 13

April 1994[48] about the measures to organize the further repairs and construction of hydropower plants. The same year, an important institution, PSGES (Enterprise for GES under Construction), was established to maintain all hydropower-related construction and repairs. It has been based on the Tash-Kumyr, Shamaldy-Sai and Kambar-Ata hydropower plants still under construction.

The Uch-Kurgan GES, which was part of the Toktogul GES Cascade, later began to break down and required huge repair work. The turbines, which were exclusively made specifically for the Uch-Kurgan GES in Soviet Russia (Leningrad), could not be replaced, and the reconstruction required particular attention. Of the four units, only one is fully operational. In 2002 the Uch-Kurgan GES management was removed from the Toktogul Cascade and was transferred to the PSGES. The main reason for this reform was the large amount of work required on Uch-Kurgan's reconstruction. The Uch-Kurgan GES— once the most powerful hydropower on the Naryn River, as described in a Soviet propaganda documentary[49]—has become weak and perpetually in need of repair.

Today, the PSGES technically maintains these three hydropower plants on the lower Naryn, including the Public Utility Company (Kombinat Kommunalnogo Predpriyatiya, KKP) of Shamaldy-Sai. However, it takes institutional resources and individual human resources to maintain the river life on a daily basis, as shown in the aforementioned case of water access problems and toxic residues in Kyzyl-Alma (discussed below). Indeed, it takes the commitment of people like Ahmatjan Aba— who had to watch, repair and monitor the water supply day and night in the summer — to ensure that there was no short-circuiting or bursting of water in the worn-out pipes. As mentioned earlier, the vulnerabilities in the system, such as degraded infrastructure and problems in water and energy management, create local water scarcity and environmental risks on the micro-

---

[48] Elektricheskie stantzii. 'Kaskad Tash-Kumyrskix GES'. Accessed 17 February 2022. http://www.energo-es.kg/ru/o-kompanii/filialy/kaskad-tash-kumyrskikh-ges/.

[49] Video showing the construction process of the Uch-Kurgan GES, featuring Russian audio-commentary. British Pathé. *The Soch Kurgansk Hydro Power Station (1961)*, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vNFu_1HTpw.

level. The struggles of the Kyzyl-Alma settlement discussed in the next section adds to the literature on *slow violence,* introducing new cases of "environmentalism of the poor".

In addition to powerful hydro facilities such as hydropower stations or more invisible technologies such as engine and pumping stations that provide irrigation, there are former industrial areas with mothballed factories along the lower Naryn near Kyzyl-Alma. These contain untreated toxic residues and represent a potential environmental disaster waiting to happen.

4.5. Living alongside the toxic residues

In the summer of 2011, after visiting my parents, where I also conducted my field research, I went to visit my aunt in the nearby village of Kyzyl-Alma. That year, her son, who had migrated to Russia to work, died. I had not been to her house since childhood, and when I went, I saw a completely different picture than I remembered. On the way, I witnessed many abandoned houses, dried up trees, and some of the buildings in ruins. The metal frames were rusted, and the roads cracked and overgrown in places.

As we drove through the scorching heat of the summer along this gloomy landscape, it seemed to me we were going nowhere. Passing by empty houses, I asked my mother, 'what happened to the township, and where are the people?' That year, I was researching a different project examining religion; environmental life after industrialization was not my focus. Still, I was intrigued. My mother explained that unlike our town in Kyzyl-Alma, there was no other livelihood besides abandoned factories, no bazaar, and many people had left searching for work.

We visited our widowed aunt, and we grieved with her over her son, after which my father recited the Quran commemorating my cousin. My aunt blamed herself for not taking care of her son, who had just finished school and gone to work on a construction site. Left a widow without a job after the plant closed, she worked wherever she could. She did odd jobs, scrubbed floors at school, and took home orders to sew clothes. My aunt was alone and in great despair. She had grown old. Pointing to her summer chintz dress, she said she could no longer go outside in such open clothes because of skin problems. She began

to show white spots that looked like psoriasis and suggested it was due to their microclimate and local radiation coming from the ruined plant. She had suggested we stay the night but then quickly changed her mind:

> You better not spend the night here, still with a small child. I'd rather come to see you tomorrow in Shamaldy-Sai. We have strong radiation and 'heavy air' (<u>aba oor</u>) here. We are used to it; your aunt is a *temir katyn* [iron woman][50] [laughs]... When a group of tourists from Japan[51] came to our region, their special sensor devices showed high radioactivity. They had to rush and turn back [laughs].

> [Conversation with my aunt, Kyzyl-Alma, summer 2011]

As in many deindustrialized areas, the Kyzyl-Alma settlement has ruins of factories and abandoned houses. Kyzyl-Alma residents are vulnerable in many respects, including, as mentioned before, in the way the state fails to take responsibility for cleaning up the mothballed chemical plant that stores the 80 tonnes of dangerous trichlorosilane[52]. This exposure to environmental risks is a form of '*slow violence'* that occurs gradually and out of sight (Nixon 2013,1). It happens when people are made to live with uncertainty and poverty, creating a high risk of environmental harm. But how do the communities perceive this, and what are their actions and reactions? These questions I address in the following sections.

---

[50] In Kyrgyz, *temir katyn* describes a woman who is resilient, dogged, and indefatigable. The image became popular following release of the Soviet-Uzbek film "Temir Xotin" in 1990, which features a character who works tirelessly around the clock and is never defeated.

[51] I heard about the story with the Japanese and their sensors many times from different local people. However, I never came across the original source and the true story behind this anecdote. The local residents not only of Kyzyl-Alma, but also of Tash-Kumyr and Shamaldy-Sai recount the story when talking about air quality and radiation.

[52] You can see a medical report on the effects of trichlorosilane here: Park CW, Kim SH, Lee SH, Kim S, Nho WY. Exposure to an accidental trichlorosilane spill: three case reports. Clin Exp Emerg Med. 2022 Sep;9(3):262-265. doi: 10.15441/ceem.20.149. Epub 2022 Jul 8. PMID: 35793790; PMCID: PMC9561193.

Deindustrialization and the 'environmentalism of the poor'

Environmental struggles in poor countries have developed quite differently than those in the rich nations of North America or Western Europe (Guha 2000). The difference in the environmentalism of the Global South is explained in terms of post-materialist values such as quality of life (Guha and Martínez Alier 1997; Guha 2000). The poor are often seen to be more motivated by social aspects and basic survival than by valuing the environment itself. However, Guha (2002) emphasizes the relationship between poverty and environmental degradation and argues that the poor have an intrinsic motivation to sustain their environment because they often rely directly on the land and its natural resources. When survival and well-being are at stake, environmental destruction intensifies poverty and poses more threats and dangers. Guha (2002) argues that the environmentalism of the poor in the Global South is a step ahead of the Global North because it simultaneously demands social justice.

Yet, it is often difficult for vulnerable communities like that of my aunt's family in Kyzyl-Alma to be involved in environmental activism. In the case of Kyrgyzstan's peripheral deindustrialized zones, the poor face the risk of toxic pollution and are totally neglected by the state. The effects of such environmental and industrial degradation fall upon the indigenous population and vulnerable communities like in Kyzyl - Alma (Anand et al. 2018, Larkin 2008, Wooden 2017). The abandoned settlement of Kyzyl-Alma is not maintained, and the toxic waste and the mothballed chemical plant are not managed. Nobody from the 'top' effectively responds to the looming eco-catastrophe.

'A major environmental disaster is brewing here'

I kept hearing various stories about toxic waste in Kyzyl-Alma, and another decisive encounter in this area occurred early in 2021 on Facebook. It further evolved my relationship with the fieldwork and provoked a closer examination of the Kyzyl-Alma community, their reactions, and their perceptions of pollution.

The case of the secretive, now mothballed, 'Crystal' plant resonated through Kyrgyz social media in early 2021. A post with the pictures of the corroded container storing 80

tonnes of trichlorosilane was made by an eco-photographer in Kyrgyzstan, Vlad Ushakov, on Facebook. The Facebook post reads[53]:

> "A major environmental disaster is brewing here. There are 80 tonnes of toxic trichlorosilane in the warehouses of a half-destroyed, bankrupt company near Tash-Kumyr, which is susceptible to corrosion. The gas corrodes concrete and reinforcements, and even small droplets on the skin are at least fraught with a very painful and poorly healing chemical burn; large quantities can cause severe injuries, up to separation of muscle tissue from bones. Coming soon on www.ecomap.kg"

It attracted the general public's attention, and there were about 300 reposts. One comment below the original post likened the situation to that in Lebanon in 2020:

> In Beirut, they kept storing [the toxic chemicals at the harbour warehouse] until they ended up in a bad way (*hranili, hranili i dohranilis[54]*). Our authorities are too busy now to think of the catastrophe. Don't you know that no one has ever cared about the people?
> [Comment below the Ushakov Facebook post, 11.01.2021]

The above commentary comparing the Kyrgyz plant with the explosion in Beirut in 2020 was expressed several times outside Facebook as well by local residents.

Many commenters did not even know where the plant was exactly, what to do about the problem, and why nothing was being addressed or covered anywhere. These strong images evoked emotions from the internet users and exposed the state of the plant[55] in the Kyzyl-Alma village next to Tash-Kumyr town. While this was a sensation for the

---

[53] 'Facebook'. Accessed 13 April 2022. https://www.facebook.com/photo.kg/posts/10222119687492687.

[54] literally translated as "(they) stored, stored, stored and stored", idiomatically this structure means that an excessive act leads to unpleasant consequences.

[55]

https://kaktus.media/doc/379288_jiteli_kyzyl_almy:_zavod_bankrot_kristall_prodali_kitaycam_kto_reshit_nashi_pr oblemy.html

general audience of the country, locals like my aunt Arzykan Eje have long been aware of this disaster and have been learning how to live with it.

The Crystal plant in Kyzyl-Alma

The construction of the plant to produce quartz deposits, mono silicon wafers, plates and chips began in 1985 along the transboundary Naryn River. The enterprise was privatized after independence and went through allegations of corruption and litigation. As a result, the industrial zone is subject to many urban myths. My aunt Arzykan had worked here and said that talking about activities and events inside the plant was forbidden. Nevertheless, she liked working there because, in the late 1980s, the Crystal plant was the new star in the Tash-Kumyr industrial zone, and employees enjoyed a certain celebrity status in working for this 'secret' enterprise. She reported that workers were regularly given a dose of vodka and fermented *kefir* to detoxify the body. 'Pure vodka was given to cleanse us from inside', added my aunt, joking that nevertheless she stayed away from alcoholism. Her husband died a year after being hired as a construction worker: she suspects it was related to toxicity in the plant. According to her, there were two other rapid deaths with similar causes – cirrhosis of the liver.

Almost 1,000 workers, according to the local activists, toiled in hazardous conditions at this facility before its closure. Concentrations of chemicals in the workshops where they worked allegedly caused enormous damage to their health. However, despite years in court, workers at the plant are still not able to obtain a *l'gotnaya spravka* (extra benefits letter[56]) acknowledging this.

The factory did not last long, leaving the residents of Kyzyl-Alma to wander in search of income. People began migrating en masse. This once promising zone has now 'burned out' and will continue to keep 'secrets' in its store of dangerous substances. All the locals know that Crystal stores toxic and super-hazardous substances in a seismically active

---

[56] It contains information on where, when and in which position the person worked, and specifies the occupational code. It also records the special working conditions that give entitlement to a state pension on preferential terms and at preferential rates.

zone. With a deep sigh and a shrug of the shoulders, they continue on with their daily lives just a couple of kilometres away from where this 'major environmental disaster is brewing'.

Just like my aunt, local residents talk about the quality of the air, the 'radiation' as 'heavy air' (*abasy oor*). The air quality or air pollution is perceived mainly in the context of headaches because of bad sleep caused by radiation. It is also explained by the supposedly radioactive reddish mountain 'Krokodilovaya Gora' (crocodile mountain) which is a part of the 'natural' environment and the abandoned industrial zone.

4.6. Letters of hope

Kyzyl-Alma was provisioned through the industrial zone where the Crystal plant was situated. When the company in charge of the plant, which was responsible for sewage, heating, and garbage disposal, went bankrupt in 2010, the city's municipal services did not move Kyzyl-Alma onto the Tash-Kumyr city's balance sheet. As a result, the settlement first lost heating, then its hot water supply. A year later, the sewage system pipes began to corrode, and dirty sewage water just flowed outside along the roads, seeping near people's houses and the school. Located just 100–150 metres from the Naryn River, Kyzyl-Alma has water problems like many nearby villages. This is a country-level problem and goes beyond the balance sheet issues. As mentioned earlier, the water shortage and infrastructure breakdown are a different degree of disengagement.

However, being neglected by the municipal authorities, Kyzyl-Alma faces a double problem and lacks primary services in basic sanitation, garbage disposal and water supply. Another dramatic reality is how residents survive in accessing water, which is supplied only two hours a day. There are also regular electricity cuts, and locals note disparagingly how water reservoirs and hydropower stations that are so close they can be seen from the village still cannot guarantee water and electricity supplies for all. Consequently, locals' focal demands are a clean water supply, regular electricity, proper sewage and waste disposal. Radiation risks and toxic residues in the industrial zones are seen as part of the background and are less of a priority than primary needs. Residents do worry about toxic cisterns in the Crystal plant; however other risks are foregrounded

in their appeals and communication strategy with the top decision-makers and the presidents. During an interview via a WhatsApp call on 15 June 2021 with one of the activists, she told me that the country had seen presidents come and go, yet not a single problem in Kyzyl-Alma had been solved. She added that their appeals were addressed to all kinds of top officials, including all presidents. The residents feel abandoned and ignored by the state, but they remain hopeful.

In a letter of appeal[57] to President Sooronbai Jeenbekov in summer 2018 signed by 91 residents of the Kyzyl-Alma settlement, the locals wrote:

> Before the presidential election, you came to our town and promised to help us. We voted for you in the hope that you would change life not only in big cities but also help the regions and small towns like ours …. Water, waste, electricity cuts, economic stagnation [are the big problems]. Water is not disinfected; the water is supplied directly from the river, which leads to intestinal diseases and hepatitis, especially in the autumn.

The letter continues, describing the 'terrible' environmental and economic problems, including unemployment. Residents express their aspirations for the future in terms of new infrastructure projects and a hope that the Crystal plant will come back online. 'Active hopes' are also articulated in various forms of collective petition, including video appeals and efforts to bring these issues to the public via forums and open discussions (Macy and Johnstone 2012). Local activists have written hundreds of letters addressing officials, from the mayor to governors, from ministers to the presidents.

The industrial enterprises on the Crystal plant territory are officially bankrupt nowadays, and there is no concrete name or corporation to blame; there seems no one clearly responsible for addressing the social and environmental concerns. At the same time, the plant was formally in charge of maintaining the infrastructure of Kyzyl-Alma with 2,500

---

[57] '"Net vody, gaza, sveta". Selchane obratilis k Jeenbekovu v god razvitiya regionov'. Accessed 17 February 2022.
https://kaktus.media/doc/377376_net_vody_gaza_sveta._selchane_obratilis_k_jeenbekovy_v_god_razvitiia_regionov.html.

residents, who are now left high and dry. Some locals see the 'bankruptcy' of the plant as suspicious and as the management's strategy to shed itself of responsibility. As one resident told me, 'no plant, no responsibility; no one to blame and no one to make demands on' (private online communication with some of Kyzyl-Alma residents in 2020).

Even if residents have other more urgent survival concerns, they still seek environmental justice. Kyzyl-Alma residents' environmentalism lies in the dozens in public videos, hundreds of letters of appeal written to presidents over dozens of years. The active residents of Kyzyl-Alma such as teachers and ex-workers of 'Crystal' have been trying to hold the plant owners and authorities accountable for many years. Since they first demanded the state step in to mitigate their ruined post-industrial life in a literally toxic environment, the government in Bishkek has changed four times. However, they stay active and keep writing letters of hope to the state.

Those who do not have other means to leave the zone with toxic cisterns, which they believe may disrupt one day, remain in an uncertain environment. They hope for social and environmental justice one day when their letters finally 'work'. They are searching as best they can for ways to continue living side by side with the environmental and infrastructural challenges. Local activists are not reconciled; they continue to protest but in their own ways. For a small settlement that is practically abandoned to fend for itself, this problem is integrated into a complex of other problems.

People who take care of their lives and their loved ones have to decide which problem to solve first. Living alongside 80 tonnes of toxicity, the neglected Kyzyl-Alma residents continue to strive for accountability and to address environmental threats acting as local environmental managers. Thus even if the Naryn River is perceived as a resource, its envirotechnical systems are sustained by social relations and the maintenance of the environment. The envirotechnical landscape of the lower Naryn shows how the river has become a part of a 'technology' environment, one that local people attempt to co-manage.

Chapter 5. Post-Soviet practices: *slow prosperity*

The legacy of the industrial past continues through innovation and local adaptation. I propose to look at life after industrialization in Shamaldy-Sai not only through visible material objects but also through communal connections and social formations. Along with the well-known post-Soviet artefacts—like monuments to Lenin or derelict mothballed factories—I look at the less known and understudied Soviet objects that have been incorporated into everyday life, including the monolithic concrete barriers and fences that served to wall factories and other state facilities off from the rest of the built environment. Not limiting my focus to the tangible material legacies of the past, in this chapter, I explore enduring intangible Soviet practices—informal organizations, collective action (*kollektiv*), celebrations and awards.

5.1. A post-Soviet life of objects and practices

This chapter examines life after industrialization in Shamaldy-Sai and looks at the everyday post-Soviet practices. Soviet industrial enterprises in Shamaldy-Sai, such as the concrete plant (*betonzavod*), the wood plant, the auto depot (*avtobaza*), and the hydro-steel construction plant, were mothballed, but the buildings remained in place to steadily corrode and fall into disrepair. At the same time, many have been appropriated for contemporary use, allowing certain Soviet practices to be retained and woven into the present. How does the town endure the post-Soviet and deindustrialized configurations? How have they influenced Shamaldy-Sai, which was able to overcome the economic distress and now serves five other villages? What is the spatial reconfiguration of the area?

Using ethnographic accounts on post-industrial social networks such as informal organizations, the Soviet-style collectivity of people acting as a group (*kollektiv*), celebrations and post-Soviet symbolic practices such as giving certificates and awards, I argue that the post-Soviet practices have consonances with the industrial past (examined

in Chapter 3) and turned deindustrialization into a success story through robust communal participation.

Inverting Nixon's (2011) concept of 'slow violence' (discussed in Chapter 4 on environmental risks), I adopt, in this chapter, the term 'slow prosperity' to shed light on the role of post-Soviet performativity and communal relationships in sustaining success after deindustrialization. If 'slow violence' has a historic cause, an event in the past (Chernobyl, toxic spill-over effects and so on) that has deleterious long-term effects, the 'slow prosperity' comes from a set of several events and novel adaptations. I demonstrate that the community of Shamaldy-Sai drew purposefully on the Soviet legacy, creatively adapting it in novel ways to ensure well-being. These novel adaptations of certain post-Soviet practices incorporate new Islamic forms of social support (religious transformation from a gender perspective is discussed in Chapter 7). Alongside social practices, this chapter examines material and symbolic objects such as the use of Soviet enterprise fences and award-giving (*nagrady*).

5.2 Legacies and new orientations

Since 2001, the main route into Shamaldy-Sai from the strategic Osh-Bishkek highway, which connects Kyrgyzstan's southern and northern regions, has been a 500-metre arterial road built on the initiative of the local administration. The now 20-year-old arterial, which runs through former cotton fields, replaced the traditional road, which—at 2.5 km and traversing the town's industrial zone—was five times as long. It is now rarely used and needs repair. As shown in Chapter 6 on international borders, new roads have become part and parcel of geographic reorientation and are crucial for internal development and improved connections between the regions. Thus transforming Shamaldy-Sai by providing high mobility and strong social networks.

Figure 5.1. The new arterial road connecting Shamaldy-Sai to the Bishkek-Osh highway. This road was laid through cotton fields in 2000–2001 as an extension of Kyrgyzstan Street, the town's major thoroughfare. ©OpenStreetMap contributors.

At the entrance to Shamaldy-Sai on the busy Kyrgyzstan Street (*Kirgizskaia*) thoroughfare, rusting objects such as metal signs with Soviet slogans praising labour, friendship and peace can be seen. Multi-story Soviet houses with wooden trim can also be seen on the sides of the street. These old houses, which locals call Finnish (*finskii*), were built for temporary use, and some of them have been reconstructed for commercial use.

Alongside these objects from the past, which locals may no longer notice, new buildings appear every year. Whenever I arrive in Shamaldy-Sai to visit my parents, the first thing that catches my eye are the new buildings and construction sites. Like many other post-Soviet urban spaces, Shamaldy-Sai's Soviet-era buildings are undergoing intense reconstruction and being replaced by shops, beauty salons, restaurants and banks (Buchli 2007, Laszczkowski 2018). In addition, the Kirgizskaia thoroughfare, the busiest in town, continues to grow and serves as a hub for nearby regions. Gradually, now abandoned and dilapidated houses are being transformed into shopping malls, pizzerias and fancy sushi bars.

Figure 5.2. The Kyrgyzstan Street thoroughfare at the edge of the Shamaldy-Sai bazaar. Source: Baialieva, fieldwork 2019.

Abandonment and ruins do not always mean emptiness or the end of life; under certain circumstances, they acquire new development. Likewise, new projects do not necessarily mean prosperity and development and may soon become ruins. Good examples are Kyrgyzstan's grand, mixed-use cultural-scientific complexes of the 2000s, such as 'Manas Ayily'[58] in Bishkek and 'Aalam Ordo'[59] in Issyk-Kul, which are today overgrown and in a deplorable state. Like the ghost towns of China, such spectacular spaces blur boundaries

---

[58] 'Vo chto prevratilsya "Manas Ayily"! Etnographicheskii kompleks obeshali vosstanovit'. Accessed 21 February 2022. https://kaktus.media/doc/396420_vo_chto_prevratilsia_manas_ayyly_etnograficheskiy_kompleks_poobeshali_vosstanovit_foto.html.

[59] Mokrenko, Anastasia. 'Pugayushaya dostoprimechatelnost. Kompleks "Aalam Ordo" na Issyk-Kule razrushaetsya'. 24.kg, 5 April 2021. https://24.kg/agent_024/188808_pugayushchaya_dostoprimechatelnost_kompleks_aalam_ordo_naissyik-kule_razrushaetsya/.

between construction and destruction and raise questions about speculative urbanization and ruin in urban development (Woodworth 2020).

In Shamaldy-Sai, industrial and material objects from Soviet times live on. Many remain in ruins, especially those in the industrial zone, and are essentially isolated and unused. However, those located in the town centre— such as the the metallic stand illustrating hammer and sickle, fist, the monument *Stella* summoning peace (the word "peace" is written on the *Stella* in several languages, and the Lenin Monument (pictured in Figure 5.3)—are iconic objects and infrastructural memorials of the past.

Figure 5.3. An iconic monument to Lenin in the Shamaldy-Sai town centre on Lenin Street. The stairs and edges are painted in Kyrgyz patterns. Source: Bialieva, fieldwork 2018.

In this chapter, I use enduring post-industrial objects and practices to study Soviet legacies and understand 'life after industry'. Deindustrialization in Shamaldy-Sai has had a peculiar character. The town was not mono-industrial, although the primary industrial output was hydropower, and the largest industrial facility was a hydropower station. However, because the first hydropower station on the Naryn River—Uch-Kurgan GES—

was built here (and served as a prototype for the entire GES system on the Naryn river), this area served as a production springboard for the construction of subsequent stations, including the Toktogul hydro-giant.

For this reason, Shamaldy-Sai initially had several important industrial enterprises, which were needed for the construction of local roads and other infrastructure and to support the core energy production centres along the river. Several factories produced concrete, asphalt, reinforced concrete blocks, and hydro-steel, and there was a wood processing factory, a recycling yard, and many other facilities. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, these enterprises ceased to function, heralding significant economic and social change. The process of deindustrialization aused a complete cessation of the factories' industrial activity (except for the hydropower plants) and a sharp reduction in the number of industrial workers employed in Shamaldy-Sai.

However, in the subsequent years and despite all the post-Soviet upheavals after the closure of borders, Shamaldy-Say found a new development path that drew on the organizational skills and legacies of the industrial past. However, this legacy should not be understood as an unchanging continuation of the past but instead as renewal through a sequence of novel adaptations. The modern and thriving development of the city can only be explained by the activities of motivated civic actors and a community that continues to artfully combine the Soviet past with present post-Soviet realities.

As a whole, in the following chapters, I apply the commonly used term 'post-Soviet', meaning the period after the collapse of the USSR. But I do not use the prefix 'post' in an automatic way and instead seek to problematize in the analysis. The conceptual and semantic meanings in the studies of something that is 'post' at some point provokes the 'afterology' debate (Sahlins 1999, 406, Hann and Hart 2011). The following section provides a brief overview of the problematization of the term 'post-Soviet' and how I approach it in the Shamaldy-Sai context.

What is 'post-Soviet'?

There are heated and contentious debates on the use of the concept 'post-Soviet', which is overused to (mis)represent Soviet affects and personality, thereby offering a pathologized version of 'Homo Sovieticus' (*sovok*). Jeremy Morris (2021) has recently reflected on the conceptual paradigms concerning the terms 'post-Soviet', 'post-socialism', and 'Homo Sovieticus'. In so doing, he highlights several functions of the term 'Homo Sovieticus' which

> builds on the idealised, abstract image of a "liberal self" and market democracy; … [and] promotes the study of the Soviet Union, contemporary Russia and other East European societies as deviant and pathological, instead of looking at the actually existing mechanisms of social and cultural reproduction.[60]

Another camp opposes using the term 'post-Soviet' at all, arguing that in lingering[61] as a concept, it is now 'a burden which holds nations back while trying to shape their own different presents and future'. These debates have been significantly heightened in the run-up to the thirtieth anniversary of independence in 2021. Similarly, Wakhstein—a sociologist—argues that 'post-Soviet' is neither a concept nor a theory and has become little more than a cliché.[62]

These discussions echo the long-term debates on yet another term: 'post socialism'. More than a decade of sustained analytical critique of the conceptual value of the term 'has brought no theoretical advance' (Hann 2006, p. 5). Müller (2019), whose use of the term

---

[60] Morris, J., 2021. Laying Homo Sovieticus to rest, Part I: who are you calling bydlo?. [online] Postsocialism. Available at: <https://postsocialism.org/2021/08/06/laying-homo-sovieticus-to-rest-part-1-who-are-you-calling-bydlo/> [Accessed 23 August 2021].

[61] Paula Erizanu, R., 2021. 30 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, is it time to finally stop using the term 'post-Soviet'?. [online] The Calvert Journal. Available at: <https://www.calvertjournal.com/features/show/13044/30-years-independence-ussr-term-post-soviet-use?fbclid=IwAR1jC2J_oojCCu0B0TOmleaab5rZkLMcsnpmGZqdFR2QB1gHQN2K7Z5Q3Y4> [Accessed 19 August 2021].

[62] Bojovich, M., 2021.

'post-socialism' recalls many of the themes showcased in the popular satirical film 'Goodbye, Lenin!', theorizes that the term was meant as provisional and has now reached its end. He asserts that this concept:

> obstructs rather than liberates; a term that ties us to the past rather than taking us towards the future; that tethers us to a territory rather than helping us deterritorialize; that reflects an uneven power to produce what counts as valid knowledge (2019, 5).

Thus, while some hold to a categorical rejection of the term,[63] others claim that the material legacy of post-socialism deserves a separate field in geography (Ferenčuhová 2016a). However, I support the idea that there is no homogenous concept and there are 'multiple postsocialisms' (Benovska 2014:96). Therefore, given that the Soviet Union was a formative experience for millions of people who remain alive today, the term is, therefore, useful in describing the transformation of politics, culture, and society at least in the post-Soviet space (Morris 2021).

The concept should account for multiple connections and should not be territorialized. The concepts *post-Soviet and post-socialist* commit to 'being-with in a world of simultaneous interconnection and ontological difference' (Chari 2016:792). Practically speaking, when I use the terms post-socialist and post-Soviet, I do so primarily as temporal markers that denote the consequences of an *uncertain transition* from the USSR and enduring post-Soviet practices (Burawoy and Verdery 1999). Another approach in the term use[64] is a decolonial paradigm grounded in restoring memories, local histories in a complex interplay with, a response and a resistance to modernity (Tlostanova 2015, 2018, 2022).

The use of the concepts of decoloniality and decolonization is widespread. On social media platforms, active users from academia write posts on the topic, debating the

---

[63] Postsocialism. 'Research Papers', 22 January 2015. https://postsocialism.org/research/.

[64] To read more on postcolonialism and postsocialism see Chari and Verdery 2009, Tulbure 2009, Giordano et al. 2014, Berdahl and Bunzl 2010; and on the notions of the post-Soviet see Aron 2011, Mamedov and Shatalova 2016, Upchurch et al 2015.

problematic nature of the terms. Abashin, a renowned Russian anthropologist who uses Facebook as an active discussion platform, often reflects on the themes of decoloniality. He states that complete liberation from coloniality and modernity, 'if they go together', is utopian, and they should be re-appropriated, reinterpreted, re-coded (Abashin 2022). Following this discussion, I analyse the post-Soviet practices (symbolic, social) as local re-appropriation.

5.3. The planning of the town

The most visible physical remnants of Soviet development are architectural objects (administrative buildings, residential houses), monuments and former industrial enterprises. However, there are also familiar, everyday objects that belong to Soviet development that often go unnoticed and do not always attract the attention of researchers. They include the aforementioned concrete barriers and fences, discussed in much more detail below, embedded into the urban post-Soviet landscape. In this section, after presenting a brief schematic picture of the Shamaldy-Sai town layout, I explore that town plan as a tangible legacy of the Soviet past. Despite being planned externally for different technical purposes, these material elements have been appropriated locally and adapted for various uses from technical to moral and social.

Street planning and the growth of the town

The Soviet State Planning Committee (*Gosplan*) determined construction projects and was responsible for planning how the republics would be developed economically, how raw materials would be delivered to industry and how industrial production and other outputs would be distributed. Moscow's external planning created a fractured and hierarchical space, not only technically and economically but also socially (Kassymbekova 2016, Pianciola 2017). In Shamaldy-Sai, the construction of housing (barracks, multi-story houses, two-apartment, six-apartment condominiums) with different conditions and distances to workplaces also structurally divided the population. The industrial area and the residential centre of the city were separated into central, peripheral areas, and the housing estates were formed accordingly. In the prestigious streets located parallel and perpendicular to the town's main Lenin Street, houses had extensive

gardens, private baths, sheds and toilets, and a bathroom inside the house. They were given to the specialists and employees in high positions in Shamaldy-Sai's administration and industrial enterprises.

Along the main thoroughfare, which back then was Lenin Street, were a House of Culture (*Dom Kultury* or *Klub*), canteen (*stolovaya*), central park, school and multi-story houses. The latter, built between 1957 and 1959, were offered to young families and builders of the settlement, free of charge. Some of the elder residents I spoke to recounted how they refused these free apartments because the arrangement ruled out practices central to a traditional Kyrgyz or Uzbek household, such as keeping cattle, cooking meat, pilaf, and baking traditional tandyr (oven-baked) flatbread (*lepeshka*). Instead, they chose to live further away in barrack houses with an enclosed courtyard, which was their priority. Next in the hierarchy, at the edges of the central streets, were barrack houses, which stood next to each other (that consisted of six or nine flats). The ordinary workers (builders, teachers, service personnel) lived there. Further on are the micro-districts in the eastern, western, and northern parts of Shamaldy-Sai, which local people refer to as the 'Paris' part of town. These houses away from the centre were inhabited mainly by ordinary workers of factories and hydroelectric power plants.

This is the overall structural scheme of the town, which, although planned from the outside, had a social dynamic from the inside. The prestigiousness of the districts and the preferences of where and how to live changed in the context of the post-Soviet development of the town. New houses and cottages sprang up on the site of former cotton fields at the edges of the town. Designed for 3,000 residents and built temporarily, the town is growing. Today Shamaldy-Sai has more than 15,000 people living on its territory. According to the 'State Concept for the Development of Small Towns and Urban Settlements of the Kyrgyz Republic' of 31 December 2001 approved by Resolution No. 843 of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, measures were put in place 'supporting towns that are in decline' so that smaller urban settings should serve bigger towns as satellites. Despite its growth and prosperity, Shamaldy-Sai was not given such status so that the neighbouring mining town Tash-Kumyr could maintain its town status. This

causes tensions between residents of Shamaldy-Sai who want to become independent from Tash-Komur, which is economically depressed.

Post-Soviet material objects

The features of socialism under rapid industrialization and a state monopoly over planning and city-making created a characteristic urban system (Sxelenyi 1996). Therefore, the subsequent deindustrialization affected most cities dependent on industrial complexes and infrastructure. Eventually, formerly industrial objects came to be understood as legacies of the degeneration of urban processes rooted in the decline of industry and population, loss of jobs, and environmental change. Economic decline scarred all spheres of the city's lives, communal organizational practices and economic involution or shrinkage (Burawoy et al. 2000). The strategies of involution arise when the collapse of established industry opens a space for more dynamic activities such as trade and services. These material and socio-economic strategies enable the residents of shrinking cities to survive in post-industrial spaces like Shamaldy-Sai.

The remnants of the industrial epoch in urban spaces are not just physical traces of past economic failure. They can be readily appropriated for new purposes by humans and non-humans alike. They can provide a habitat for plants and animals or a place for impromptu raves, artistic plays or sightseeing (Zukin 1995, Edensor 2005, Mah 2012). As shown in Figure 5.4 above, the concrete fences erected decades ago have their own *accent*. As the historian Ali Igmen (2012) wrote in his book *Speaking Soviet with an Accent*, Soviet modernization efforts left room for traditional aspects of culture. In the case of the physical built environment, local communities do not only appropriate physical remnants and situate themselves in history but also use them to imagine urban futures. Therefore, as I will show the post-Soviet material objects retain local and global accents.

Figure 5.4. Large concrete barriers served to wall factories and other state facilities off from the rest of the built environment. These are seldom removed despite the end of state control and central planning. Source: Baialieva, Shamaldy-Sai bazaar, 2018.

5.4. 'Beton Zabor': Concrete industrial barriers and fences

As in any Soviet industrial township, the architectural construction of Shamaldy-Sai was planned from the outside. It was similar to many high-socialist settlements built in the 1950s throughout the Soviet Union (Morrison and Schwartz 2003). And like many others, it incorporated an integral part of Soviet architecture from the 1970s: concrete barriers and fences—known locally as *betonzabor* in both Kyrgyz and Uzbek. The concrete fence is officially known as the 'PO-2 fence slab' and was designed in the 1970s by Soviet architect Boris Lachman, who received a bronze medal for his efforts at the All-Union Exhibition of Economic Achievements.[65] In some reports, it is referred to as the 'Lachman fence'.

Although there was no private property under socialism and all property was considered public, the Soviet enterprises and industrial complexes were fenced. Barriers or fences were used inside the towns and cities to protect kindergartens, schools and other Soviet institutions. Of course, the question arises: protecting them *from whom*?

---

[65] 'Boris Lachman: v SSSR status arxitektora byl dovolno vysokim', 24 June 2017. https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3332175.

119

Figure 5.5. A slogan on the fence in the industrial zone reads: 'Greetings to the fraternal communist and workers' parties—combat vanguard, the working class and all workers'. Source: Baialieva, Shamaldy-Sai, 2019.

As one of my respondents commented, these monolithic heavy concrete fences were a marker of state property. In other words, they were dividing objects guarding the state enterprises against 'intrusion' from the public. In Shamaldy-Sai, concrete fences can be seen in many public places: in the central stadium, around the hospital, the kindergarten, the school and, of course, the ruins of factories and industrial plants. They were erected both inside the town and on the outskirts of the settlement, where the factories were located (the industrial zone).

Figure 5.6. A slogan on the fence in the industrial zone reads: 'Long live Lenin's Komsomol–the loyal assistant and reserve of the Communist Party'. Source: Baialieva, Shamaldy-Sai, 2019

Thus, these giant structures—that varied only slightly in design from one to the next—served as a readily identifiable marker of the state in Soviet times. In other words, they were never used for fencing off private property, a vegetable garden or a house. Instead, they emerged as icons of Soviet industry and the (post-)Soviet visual landscape. Furthermore, the space on these giant grey structures fulfilled a propaganda function as a canvas for communist and patriotic graffiti slogans (such as in Figures 5.5 and 5.6), which were an integral part of the Soviet industrial landscape. Slogans and motto texts were neatly stencilled on these fences. The texts of the slogans recall labour exploits, hopes for a better future, and praise the party, the combat vanguard (the Komsomol), and the working class. They still decorate the fences on the outskirts of Shamaldy-Sai, which indicates that the paint was of good quality and has not rubbed off over the years. Nevertheless, people quickly became accustomed and stopped noticing them.

Around these grey fences, however, there was not always the same grey and concrete life. These fences often have the most mundane and practical functions because people appropriate them for their own purposes. For example, a Soviet *beton zabor* provides excellent shade in sunny weather, so adults and children, especially in the early years of the settlement, when there were no trees yet, would gather under these fence panels to socialize and play. Children and men especially like to play traditional games (e.g., 'Ordo',

played by men with <u>chuko</u> made from the knee bones of sheep, cow) in the shade of the fences. Teenagers then and now leave messages such as 'Masha+Ivan is Love' or 'Altuha was Here', or 'Class 8a is the best!'. 'Tsoi is alive!'—an emotive, all-Soviet text devoted to the deceased singer Tsoi—can still be found on the surface of some of these concrete fences.

The written texts on a *betonzabor*, which can be compared to today's social media, could be negative and contain hate speech shaming someone (wh.re, b.tch). Although negative texts are soon erased, or other texts are written over them. In some cases, texts appear in languages from abroad, connecting them to the global fascination with urbanity. Such integration of street art or subcultural graffiti do not undermine authenticity and can be an example of 'alternative heritage' (Merrill 2015).

Figure 5.6. Graffiti on the Naryn River embankment reads 'I love you, Shamaldy-Sai'. Source: Toma Pieu, Shamaldy-Sai, 2018.

The use of the barriers as a kind of 'social media platform' is just one of the more extended social uses they have been appropriated for both in the past and today. Beyond the social uses for recreation mentioned above, they are also appropriated for household use in practical ways. For example, people can use these massive and steady structures, grounded firmly in the soil, to clean and ventilate carpets and traditional blankets in sunny weather. Thus, these post-Soviet objects, primarily designed to separate the technical from the human, were adapted to local uses and have broader social functions.

Figure 5.7. Fences of the Soviet kindergarten 'Teremok' (name from the Russian fairy-tale) which was abandoned in the 1990s. It was reconstructed in early 2000 and is now called 'Umut', which means 'Hope' in Kyrgyz. Source: Baialieva, Shamaldy-Sai, 2019.

As described in the previous section, material structures inherited from the Soviet past, like industrial concrete fences, have merged into everyday life in a way that is scarcely noticed or commented upon. A notable example is the monument to Lenin in the centre of Shamaldy-Sai, which serves as an organizational space to host large-scale town public events. The monument stands on a spacious, elevated platform with wide stairs on the front and back sides. The place, situated between the administration and the House of Culture (*Klub*), is nowadays referred to simply as 'Lenin'—events are held, or people

arrange to meet 'by Lenin' or 'near Lenin'. Younger generations adopt and recognize such reference points without necessarily even knowing who Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov was. The raised platform at the bust serves as a rostrum for congratulatory speeches during parades and public celebrations. Although changed in form and content, the mass parades with balloons and marching work collectives are still held on 9 May (Victory Day) and 31 August (Independence Day). In this way, the industrial and Soviet legacy can be traced not only in physical things but also in the templates of older social practices carried through to the present by town residents who draw on them, repurposed for the specific circumstances of post-Soviet life.

Today, life in the formerly socialist Shamaldy-Sai is very active and self-organized due to its active citizens. This section provides insights into the town's active informal networks and social organizations.

5.5. Informal social networks

Every year, when I visit my parents in Shamaldy-Sai, I spend a certain amount of time in their shop helping out. Around 2010, I started noticing an organizing spirit among the traders and market workers. The first years of the post-Soviet transition saw people oriented toward more individual survival strategies and reliance on a close circle of friends and family. However, by the early 2000s, having endured over a decade of wrenching economic and social change, the entrepreneurial communities had expanded their networks of trusted relationships and created a robust system of collective organization.

Union of Entrepreneurs (Ishkerler Uiumu)

The most active entrepreneurs (ishkerler), who have been in the trade sector for a long time, have organized an informal Union of Entrepreneurs (Ishkerler Uiumu). Institutionally speaking, this recalls the official 'trade union' of the Soviet era. Soviet enterprises were

not only production units; they also created favourable conditions for the work collective[66] and communal sociability (Ashwin 1999, Lonkila and Salmi 2005). The Soviet work-based community was 'the focus of almost every aspect of the social existence of its employees' (Clarke 1999, 57 *cited in* Siegelbaum 2004).

My mom was the head of the Soviet Trade Union in Shamaldy-Sai from 1988 until the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Both of my parents now form part of the leadership of the self-organized post-Soviet Ishkerler Uiumu, which can be compared to a trade union whose members organize to fight for their collective interests. Its members are former workers of Soviet factories, industrial enterprises and Soviet institutions such as trading warehouses, public diners (*stolovaya*) and "Gastronom" — the Soviet grocery stores, who had to turn to the newly established markets and bazaars to survive. They initially decided to organize as a collective to solve their work-related problems against a backdrop of uncertain and insecure post-Soviet taxation, infrastructure (market restructuring) and legal disorder (often, the same piece of property was sold to several persons in the privatization process). They approached the country's state agencies and relevant administrative institutions as a group in search of redress to ongoing concerns and engaged in collective action, such as joint letters and petitions. After successes as a commercial collective, the Union of Entrepreneurs has continued to expand as the peak body for traders and commercial businesses.

Today this Union "Ishkerler Uiumu" remains very active and, over a period of more than ten years, has become a significant and respected community in Shamaldy-Sai. In times of pandemic or other significant events in the city, it is the private trade workers who mobilize in the first place and contribute whatever clothes, food, or money they can afford. There is no standard sum or requirement, and it is entirely voluntarily. However, everyone tries to get engaged.

---

[66] The Soviet work collective has been extensively examined from the perspective of gender, wage and social networks (Ashwin 1999a, 2000; Burawoy & Krotov, 1993; Clément, 2003; Morrison and Schwartz, 2003; Piipponen, 2004).

The Union of Entrepreneurs has gained much experience in raising money for medical treatment, for example, when someone needs an expensive operation or other material support for families who are in desperate need. Other active citizens also get involved in self-mobilization and assist in sustaining social connection. They are neighbourhood street leaders (*kocho bashchy*) who collect the sums needed to contribute to the quality maintenance of the town. In addition, the Union of Entrepreneurs cooperates with the local administration. They hold parties and distribute gifts on Older People's Day in October and Children's Day in June. In addition to these holidays, other old Soviet holidays, especially those in May (Labour Day and Victory Day), are important in Shamaldy-Sai.

Enduring Soviet holidays adapted to new circumstances

Ironically, certain Soviet holidays adapted to new circumstances and endured in the post-Soviet Shamaldy-Sai. On 1 May for Labour Day, members of the entrepreneurs' union organize a banquet in a restaurant (a kind of corporate party). The locals have dubbed it 'Ishkerler Kunu' ('Entrepreneurs' Day'). On other holidays—'Border Guard Day' and the old Soviet holiday 'Den Zashitnika' ('Defender's Day') in February—local women's organizations have introduced a new tradition called '*Apam japkan nan*' ('mother-baked bread'). At these annual events, women activists bring homemade food, bread, drinks and pilaf to the military and border guards at the outpost. These women's organizations also initiate award-giving (*gramota*) and prepare small gifts (socks, towels, caps, or perfume) for the military servants.

Figure 5.8. Celebration of the Fatherland Day in the House of Culture. The chair of the Woman's Council, Sabira Chargynova (my mother) presenting military personnel stationed in Shamaldy-Sai with the traditional Kyrgyz 'kalpak' (men's headgear) Source: Shamaldy-Sai WhatsApp group, 23.02.2022.

In 2018, on the initiative of my parents, some of the most active leaders in the village formed the 'Nur' ('Light') charity. It includes representatives of the administration and other public organizations of Shamaldy-Sai. This social cooperation and mutual support of residents and former colleagues (from Soviet factories, kindergartens, schools, and hospitals) is the main engine of the successful economic and social life of the town.

Accustomed to the Soviet order and labour collective organizing social events, such as Subbotniks (the Soviet practice of volunteer unpaid work on weekends) and Soviet holidays, civic activists have adapted old, familiar local practices into new global ones. For example, marathons for the treatment of seriously ill people, donations and money collection can be translated through Islamic concepts like *sadaqah-fitr* (a charitable

donation commonly made by Muslims before the holiday Eid at the end of Ramadan). Mutual support can be translated as a traditional concept of good deeds (soop) and, at the same time, a new Islamic idea of '*Allanyn yraazychylygyna*' (for the pleasure of God). The parallels to religious ideas and practices matter because Islamic forms of social interaction have enjoyed a renaissance among younger generations and are very important to them. I discuss the role of new religious relationships and Islamic connections in Chapter 6.

Women's social networks

In addition to the informal association of entrepreneurs, there are three active women's organizations in Shamaldy-Sai. They are the Women's Council (Aialdar Keneshi or Jensovet, the old Russian term from Soviet times, which is still also used by Kyrgyz speakers today), which dates back to the Soviet period and mainly deals with girls, women and family-related problems. Other women's networks are the Union of Hero Mother ('Baatyr Eneler') and 'Aruuzat', a women's union ('Aialdar Uiumu'). These three organizations are closely linked, and their activities overlap on certain issues with the Ishkerler Uiumu as well.

The most active of these women's organizations is the 'Jensovet'[67] headed by Sabira Chargynova, my mother. It includes ten other active women working in all economic spheres of Shamaldy-Sai. The informal organizations are closely interconnected and cooperate with each other. They share large groups on social media, groups on WhatsApp channels. In Shamaldy-Sai, they regularly organize a banquet party every spring ('Jaz Mayramy'), and for New Year - a Soviet-style collective party 'Goluboi Ogonek'.

Although in new content and form, many of these social structures are a continuation of the past Soviet order. Communal sociality takes place through restructured Soviet holidays, common activities and informal connections with each other. The collective

---

[67] For more on the role of the Women's Council during and after the Soviet Union, see Kameneva (2014).

solidarity and the organizational nature of these networks, mainly consisting of women, became especially vivid during the COVID-19 crisis as well.

Women's role in the COVID-19 pandemic

Local women's organizations in Shamaldy-Sai played a crucial role in response to the COVID-19 crisis by organizing charity campaigns. By mid-April 2020, more than 80% of the world's countries had introduced strict measures to combat the spread of the disease. The economic impact has been enormous, with severe negative consequences in developing countries. The COVID-19 is also a sociocultural problem that affects the social order and disturbs everyday life.

Shamaldy-Sai, like the whole world, faced the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted local livelihoods and small business enterprises and changed the form of social lives. The government-imposed lockdowns, shutdowns, social distancing, and closed borders forced humans to physically distance themselves from each other. The measures created new implications for everyday relationships and social interaction. The virus and its social meaning taught people to renegotiate with the world. In Shamaldy-Sai, it created a powerful sense of community, especially when the first cases were identified in late April 2020.

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic on 11 March 2020, and Kyrgyzstan declared a state of emergency from 25 March to 10 May 2020. Later, a curfew was introduced, with no public transport or taxi services permitted. The first cases of infection were recorded in mid-March, and the Kyrgyz authorities restricted the movement of people and suspended all businesses. With the lifting of the strict quarantine in June, the epidemiological situation in Kyrgyzstan deteriorated. At the beginning of July, it became clear that the Kyrgyz healthcare system was failing to cope with a new outbreak of the virus. Although the hospitals had been prepared, they were quickly overcrowded; ambulances could not make all the calls and X-ray appointments necessary for diagnosis were not accessible. Women, children, and vulnerable people such as those working without social protection in the informal economy were hit hardest. The state of emergency, which was lifted in May 2020, resulted in the complete paralysis

of the economy, and even at the time of writing, Shamaldy-Sai's small businesses are in a very precarious situation.

The Kyrgyz Ministry of Health published two types of statistics on mortality daily— one for COVID-19 and the other for non-hospital pneumonia. The WHO warned that some coronavirus cases might be being misdiagnosed as pneumonia. As a result, the Ministry of Health decided to combine these data when the number of deaths from pneumonia was already four times higher than for COVID-19. The day after the statistics were combined in July, the number of reported cases almost doubled, and the number of reported deaths increased by a factor of four and a half.

Like most other communities, there were people in Shamaldy-Sai who refused to accept the reality of the pandemic, and who saw the virus as a hoax, a 'fabricated, invented biopolitical weapon'. Therefore, it is essential to examine the medical side of the virus and its social implications, how it is shaped culturally, and how it is experienced in different communities. However, this is not the aim of this section, and instead, I highlight the role of local organizations in mutual support and sustaining life during the crisis. Many women activists went to incredible lengths to help at the local level during the pandemic which I show in the next section.

Local responses to COVID-19

The aforementioned local charity foundation 'Nur' strongly supported the Shamaldy-Sai community during the pandemic, as did (trans)communal networks and the migrant community via GoFundMe, a crowdfunding platform. The first rapid reaction to help poor families was initiated by 'Nur' and local activists who organized campaigns to distribute food and clothes between April and May 2020 (during the peak lockdown). Additionally, they were able to collect funds and purchase two disinfectant tunnels for the doctors. In August, the team raised one million Kyrgyz soms (around US$12,000) to equip the Shamaldy-Sai hospital with a new X-ray machine.

These pandemic-related acts of solidarity demonstrate not only a massive lack of trust in governmental responses but also the centrality of human relationships, rapid support and trust in effective, locally organized crisis responses. Smartphones, especially during

hardship, were crucial, forming an interactive space in which information could be accessed and help offered. The virtual networks of Shamaldy-Sai groups served as informal connections between people and acted as a form of 'e-governance'. And this networked activity nurtured people's sense of being social beings working hand-in-hand toward a common purpose. Therefore, despite the pandemic having urged self-isolation and distancing, it also fostered closeness and unity. The outbreak in Shamaldy-Sai, as in many other places in the world, has opened a space for people to confront challenges together and to see one another anew in the process. It likewise created a new way of knowing and feeling life and even death.

This civic engagement in Shamaldy-Sai is an important reflection of development and participation in different forms of mutual aid. At the same time, it shows that Shamaldy-Sai residents, through their efforts, can address complex problems and promote improvement and development against a backdrop of economic insecurity and decaying infrastructure. At the same time, the novel coronavirus was a rather novel challenge for the community in Shamaldy-Sai (as elsewhere) and something that scarcely reflected the routinized aspects of daily life, however challenging.

In the following section, I turn into more routinized dynamics and show how Shamaldy-Sai's collective performs in everyday life. It allows us to observe how the activities of informal organizations sustain the remnants of Soviet public celebrations even as they reinterpret and reinvent them for changed circumstances.

The post-Soviet kollektiv

The informal social networks and adapted local celebrations provide strong social ties and support. In everyday life, Shamaldy-Sai's communal sociability or *kollektiv* is performed through enduring patterns of labour relations held over from Soviet times. The *kollektiv*, which in Kyrgyz culture has a traditional equivalent, the *jamaat* (which in Kyrgyz literally means 'society' and is also used in a religious context), has significant social, economic and political functions. Adopted from the Soviet system and adapted to new realities in Shamaldy-Sai, various social services and benefits (aid, food, housing) are

mediated through these informal social organizations. In the context of being a peripheral town that is out of sight for the 'centre', there is often no other option to access these services and benefits.

5.6. Symbolic practices

During my interviews with the old residents and former industrial workers, almost every respondent, when talking about their work lives, highlighted the type of medals, awards, or certificates of appreciation (*gramota*) they had received. The giving of such personally addressed certificates—which are either rectangular, like the kind of "award certificate" many organizations in the West hand out, often to school children or workshop participants, or diploma-style letters of commendation—was commonplace across the Soviet Union.

From the Soviet industrial past to the post-Soviet present in Shamaldy-Sai, the granting and receiving of awards has been a central and highly valued practice. The award ceremonies are public events and are thus crucial status markers and a recognition of the individual or a group and their involvement in the social event.

> *Town mayor (ayil okmotu)*: We must award and give certificates to all the participants after the comic workshop.
> *Me*: Certificates of what, to whom? It is just a drawing workshop, not a competition.
> *Town mayor*: The children and especially their parents will expect a document from us and from you. We could at least give the children *gramota* [letters of achievement] signed and stamped.
> [Personal communication, 20.08.2020]

This is an excerpt from a conversation with the municipal head of Shamaldy-Sai before a drawing workshop on 29 August 2020. I was coordinating a children's art workshop in collaboration with local schools and the town hall, which was part of our exhibition project 'Naryn-Syr Darya: three stories of the river'. When discussing the logistical details, the

issue of awards came up. As a representative of a German university, the local organizers wanted me to ask the institution to give *gramota*—personal certificates—to all participants, including teachers and the local administration.

After I explained that this was an independent project from the university and that there was no such practice of issuing stamped letters for outside projects, we decided to omit this part. And in case the need arose, the local organizers would order and print *gramotas* themselves. In addition, drinks, food and sweets before and after the event were taken into account, and the children were given stationery. As foreseen and despite the fact that the head of the village explained that it was just a creative experiment with children, the next day, the children and their parents expressed a desire to receive letters of commendation which could be displayed in homes or workplaces. And within two days, the local administration, headed by Saadakan Aidarbekova and my mom on behalf of the charitable foundation ordered these cherished papers.

The paper certificates are symbolic capital and can serve as currency in a moral economy. In my conversation with my mother about the significance of her dozens of *gramotas* and medals, she highlighted how awards mark one's hard work and communal service. During the 2020 pandemic, the WhatsApp chat groups for the 'Ishkerler' ('Entrepreneurs') and the 'Nur' charity became very active. The members of the groups (schoolteachers, doctors, business people, and homemakers) discussed how to help the community and were mobilizing other active residents. When the harsh months of the lockdowns were behind them, the leaders of these networks were given awards from various institutions, from informal organizations to the regional administration of Tash-Kumyr and Jalal-Abad.

Figure 5.9. Screenshot from Shamaldy-Sai' online group. 'Nur' charity members, doctors and women activists receive several letters of commendation from the Jalal-Abad regional administration. Source: Shamaldy-Sai WhatsApp group, 21.09.2020

Syilyk eesin tabat–An award found its owner

On 10 March 2021, my mom was called to Bishkek by the Kyrgyz Parliament and awarded an official certificate and a medal. Her active contribution to Shamaldy-Sai's life was visible on social media, which the regional and country-level governments monitor. She felt tremendously honoured at this moment, and in her excitement, she sent an audio message to our family group. Later she made a post on Facebook about this official award and also shared her feelings in the WhatsApp group as well:

> The difficult years of the 1990s came to my mind when I was awarded an official Certificate of Merit (*Ardak gramota*) and a badge (*znachok*) by the Kyrgyz government, naming me 'the Best Entrepreneur'. Those years saw the dissolution of the Soviet Union. We were so short of money; everyone was experiencing hardship. Then the word 'commerce' (*kommertziya*) appeared. We went to Bishkek, and at that time, the open-air market was held in the stadium. We bought 20 women's sweaters with the same design to bring back with us to sell locally. It was a beautiful sweater with a picture of a bird. At that time, there was a big bazaar day in Kyzyl-Jar on Fridays. So my husband and I decided to head there and get involved in *kommertziya*, spreading the sweaters out on carton boxes [for people to buy].

At that time, many Kyrgyz people felt ashamed with such work as there was social opprobrium associated with selling things in the bazaar (Spector 2017). This is explained in the post as well. My mother continued:

> We were so ashamed. The bazaar was extremely crowded. We were standing on the side where people were entering the bazaar, and occasionally, friends and acquaintances would walk by. We hid that we were selling goods there and pretended that we were waiting for someone. After two weeks had passed, my husband said that as a woman, I would make a better seller so that I should

stand there alone. I had no choice. Although I was embarrassed, I had to go there every Friday and sell clothes we had bought in Bishkek and Kara-Suu. Little by little, I got used to it. I am thankful today and see that those days offered us the chance to move ahead (*aldyga jylganga shart tuzdu*).

Given the embarrassment people felt in those first years about selling goods in public, it was brave of my mother to share her feelings so publicly and indicates that people now are less ashamed and, in fact, feel proud of having overcome the difficulties of those early, post-independence years. Indeed, those who took up *kommertziya*[68] in those days are self-sufficient and wealthier people now.

The early years of market opening after the collapse of the USSR are recalled and mentioned by other chat users as well. 'We contributed to the country standing on its feet' (*olkonun butuna turushuna salym koshtuk*) and the Kyrgyz proverb 'An award found its owner' (*syilyk eesin tapty*) are common phrases that accompany photos from award-giving ceremonies shared in Shamaldy-Sai's WhatsApp group. My mom's related emotional messages are new 'sentiments of disenchantment' and post-socialist desires for state care and belonging (Schwenkel 2020). Such attention from the Kyrgyz government of the role of a micro-scale 'entrepreneur' was a recognition and displayed an achievement.

Gramota as symbolic capital

Giving awards and issuing *gramotas* is a post-Soviet practice, and today in Shamaldy-Sai, such symbolic forms of written documents persist and are very popular. However, a *gramota* is not just a Soviet legacy of displaying achievements, but it is a symbolic capital in relationships (Bourdieu 1986). Bourdieu introduced the concept of symbolic capital, distinguishing it from economic capital, as well as cultural and social capital. Thus, beyond economic capital—money and land—which has long been the subject of Marxist theory, there are other forms that are also unequally distributed. Cultural capital includes education, specifically the prestige of the educational institution from which a person

---

[68]More on informal trade and market in Central Asia see Fehlings and Karrar 2020, 2022.

graduates and the demand for the qualification awarded by it on the labour market, as well as other cultural attributes, such as refined taste or skills. Social capital is one's networks, while symbolic capital is one's reputation. A person who has gained recognition or fame has more resources to achieve his or her goals than someone who is not popular (Bourdieu 1986).

According to Bourdieu, almost all forms of capital (less so cultural capital) are fungible to some degree in that they can be converted from one to another. Thus, possessing symbolic capital, it is possible to move up the social ladder, thereby acquiring social capital as well. Individuals with more capital will behave differently than those with less. Medals, certificates of merit, badges, and warrants are not just things to encourage work or participation (Frey and Gallus 2017). These symbolic awards give a sense of involvement in the social events of the community. They have a powerful effect and, in paper form, capture the moment of involvement in a communal event. *Gramota,* similar to the sphere of consumption, is not only a matter of acquisition but can also be a more socially moralising economic practice (Humphrey 2002). The symbolic awards and other performative forms of reward gives a person a sense of importance, value, worthiness, and recognition of their achievements by others. These practices provide status markers and different affiliations to specific groups.

The post-industrial material, social and symbolic legacies show 'the present as fundamentally intertwined with and even dependent on sensitivities generated in the past' (Muehlebach 2011:62). Appropriated interactions and yearnings of the socialist period shape urban spatial configurations and subjectivities. Soviet personhood has been affected by changing economic statuses and societal roles, producing a particular moral economy with money, dignity, and health at stake (Verdery 2003, Stenning 2005, Russo and Linkon 2005, Keskula 2012). Thus, the Post-soviet societies have struggled to create their new livelihood, new worlds of value (Humphrey 2002). Industrial decline and job losses have pushed people to take up what Burawoy calls mechanisms of involution. Employing individual survival strategies, post-Soviet workers have relied more on themselves and the close circle of their families and friends. After losing their privileged

status as pillars of Soviet industry and modernity, to survive, they relied on the spontaneous market or agriculture (garden plots in house yards) instead of the industrial workplace.

As Ashwin (1999, 169) claims, these survival strategies have been pursued 'not through the social relations of the work collective but through the networks of family and friends, which are in most cases independent of the social relations of the immediate work collective'. However, in the case of Shamaldy-Sai, these networks are not limited to the family and the friends only. The post-Soviet trade and market relationships became an element of social connectedness and spatial organization. The social connections and support are extended to the wider collective based on business and civil activism.

The Soviet-era urban forms and cityscapes with the concrete and monotonous buildings made cities of the Soviet territories appear similar. The deindustrial places should be approached not as natural settings but as socially produced spaces. They are a combination of 'material and social practices and [are] symbolic representations of these practices' (Mah 2012, 12). Urban spaces with industrial decline have living memory with no 'clear break with the industrial past' (ibid, 73). The residents keep strong social memories and live with the prolonged previous impressions. In Shamaldy-Sai, although the industrial zone lies on the outskirts, its other extensive structural elements, such as *betonzabor,* stretch into the town. They are partially ruined, partially appropriated are not mere post-Soviet physical symbols and aesthetic artefacts but a lived process. They have a continuous and adapted use in the present and perhaps will have new implications for the future. These concrete fences are not just physical and static objects; they are a complex ensemble of social, cultural, and aesthetic practices.

Ruination and post-industrial old buildings often denote the reversal of development (Benett 2021). However, new projects of modernity and development can manifest themselves or prompt decay and abandonment as in the examples of ruined grand cultural centers 'Aalam Ordo' and 'Manas Ayily' which were meant to be "the center of the universe". In the case of Shamaldy-Sai, some old industrial objects are renewed and

lead to prosperous redevelopments. In the light of alternative ideas of the good life, local communities live a life that is not only 'habitable' but also attractive (Morris 2016). This can be seen as *slow prosperity*, which in combination with post-Soviet practices, novel adaptations, performativity, and global connectivity brought Shamaldy-Sai development and hopes.

As mentioned at the top of the chapter, *slow prosperity* inverts Rob Nixon's (2011) notion of *slow violence*, which I drew on in Chapter 4, an idea that highlights how some environmental issues remain out of sight and are not represented in media and politics. As these concerns do not get wider attention or drawn into political debates, they pose risks and put local communities into vulnerable conditions. Thus, remaining an underrepresented environmental concern, the fundamental problem of *slow violence* is a representational bias. This fits well with the case of Kyzyl-Alma village, a few kilometres away from Shamaldy-Sai, which I discuss in Chapter 4. However, these two terms differ, and slow prosperity speaks to steady post-Soviet social, symbolic and economic progress gains rather than steadily accreting challenges as in *slow violence*.

In contrast to the underrepresentation of environmental challenges, there is an overrepresentation of 'ruination' and negative cases of deindustrialization. By suggesting the category of *slow prosperity*, I argue that untold success stories of deindustrialization can point to the channels through which people seek a good and happy life. In some instances of deindustrialization*, slow prosperity* is an assemblage of progressive communal relationships such as social networks and performativity like recognition through *gramotas*, awards constructed from the past, continued to the present and projected into the future.

Abovementioned women's organizations play an important role in mediating controversial cases of new practices such as donning new Islamic headscarves, hijab and niqab (shown in Chapter 7 on religion). Although it may look harmonious and the work is indeed well organized, there are limitations in these activities. For example, they cannot take care of everyone individually all the time but try to delegate and parcel out the tasks, such as arranging care for elderly people who have no relatives. Moreover, some people are

likely alienated from these networks, mainly those who come for seasonal work or who moved recently and have a low-profile life.

In the case of Shamaldy-Sai, *slow prosperity* is seen not only through communal relationships but also through the built environment (the restructuring of Soviet houses and repurposing of *betonzabor*) and a regional reorientation that assisted in addressing the border crisis as presented in the next chapter. This turned Shamaldy-Sai into an economic hub for many towns and oblasts in the area. Moreover, it is through the interplay of post-socialist, post-Soviet institutional memories and enduring practices that assisted the town in maintaining economic and social connections.

Chapter 6. Transformed borders and reorientation

As a post-socialist, post-industrial border town Shamaldy-Sai can be described as a social laboratory, one that has undergone various transformations over the last hundred years. Labour veteran Askar Ake's description of dam building in 1956 (discussed in chapter 3) has reflections on the wording in the post-independent border militarization in the 2000s. He used military words when he was going into details of industrialization in Shamaldy-Sai. These words like platoon, deploy, aide (*razvertyvanie, desantniki, vzvod*) connotated warfare. The so-called striking construction (*udarnaia stroika*) had to be fulfilled before the actual planned time and go beyond the planned project (*perevypolnenie*). Askar Ake in a calm and confident manner assured that the execution of five-year plans looked like a war. This chapter analyses another thread of change: social interactions within the border regions and how these affect the everyday materialization of borders as social processes. What do we know about the borders, where do they lie, how are they felt, how are they perceived and defined locally? How do the residents describe their everyday life before and after the borders appeared? How have closed roads affected relationships (e.g., cross-border marriages)? Asking these questions to look at the flows of international boundaries, this current chapter examines perceptions and local interactions with the emergent border and transformed infrastructure, (dis)connectedness. I first lay out an (auto)ethnography and share how I perceived the borders. Furthermore, as a next step, emphasis is put on the lived experience of the local communities.

Although inter-republican boundaries existed on maps as physical lines throughout the Soviet period, they were imaginary, symbolic and multiple. In the academic literature, the majority of border studies on Central Asia focus, first and foremost, on dynamics of

conflict, tension, and interstate violence.[69] Second, borders are studied primarily from geopolitical, legal, security and international relations perspectives. For this reason, the attention of experts, scholars and journalists alike tends to focus disproportionately on cases of cross-border conflict and violence. Cases that share the same history, regime and demography — but where there is no direct conflict or violence — are often ignored. However, there are elements of such 'peaceful' cases that can shed much-needed light on the dynamics of vulnerability in other problematic places.

Thus, I attempt to contribute to the study of international boundaries in two respects. First, it presents (auto)ethnography of border perceptions and experiences. Second, it details flows of events and an assemblage of boundary transformations where borders have been fixed to a certain extent peacefully.

6.1. Approaching the borderland

In the autumn of 1997, my classmates and I decided to take a road trip to Uch-Korgon, a town in Uzbekistan on the border with Kyrgyzstan. One of our friends had borrowed his father's imported (*inomarka*) car, quite a status symbol at the time, and wanted to show off in front of the other youngsters. We were three girls from the same class and three boys from different schools. We knew each other well but were not close friends. It was daytime in the afternoon after school when the boys greeted us and asked if we wanted to join them on a road trip. Spontaneously, we decided to jump in the car and head to Uch-Korgon for a lunch of shashlik (a dish of skewered and grilled cubes of meat, similar to *shish kebab*). The borders were gradually shutting down at this time, and while Uzbek soldiers were present at the borders, they were relaxed. Therefore, the crossing was not problematic. We went via the outskirts area known as 'Vosmoi Kilometr' (Eighth Kilometer) by road and in 15 minutes were in Uzbekistan. It takes about 5 minutes by car from the city centre of Shamaldy-Sai to get to 'Vosmoi Kilometr' (alternately called Segizinchi in Kyrgyz). From there to get to Uzbekstan's Uch-Korgon city it used to take around 10 minutes.

---

[69] There are border studies, outside the Central Asian region, which explore *interactions* rather than *focusing on conflict*. Examples include, Scott 2020, Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr 2007; Blake 2000.

When we arrived, the Uch-Korgon bazaar was half empty and very quiet. Unlike the weekends, when it was a buzzing hive of activity, there were very few places open serving shashlik for lunch. This impromptu road trip turned out to be the last time I drove by asphalt road across town to Uch-Korgon on the Uzbek side, which up until that point had been an extension of the Shamaldy-Sai community on the Kyrgyz side of the border. Later on, I made several other visits to the town, but on those occasions, I took the Kyzyl-Jar bridge (which was itself later destroyed in early 2000s[70] in the wake of new international boundary politics between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, as will be elaborated in more detail below).

Altogether, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan share a border of 1,378 km, of which 1,170 km (85%) was resolved and ratified in a 2017 border agreement. Even today, 5% of the international border between the two countries remains unresolved.[71]

---

[70] I could not find a concrete date when the Uzbek side started destroying the Kyzyl-Jar Bridge.
[71] https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan-i-uzbekistan-namereny-za-tri-mesyatsa-reshit-vse-voprosy-po-granitsam/31148892.html.

Figure 6.1. Map of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. OpenStreetMap contributors (2021). Retrieved from https://planet.openstreetmap.org.
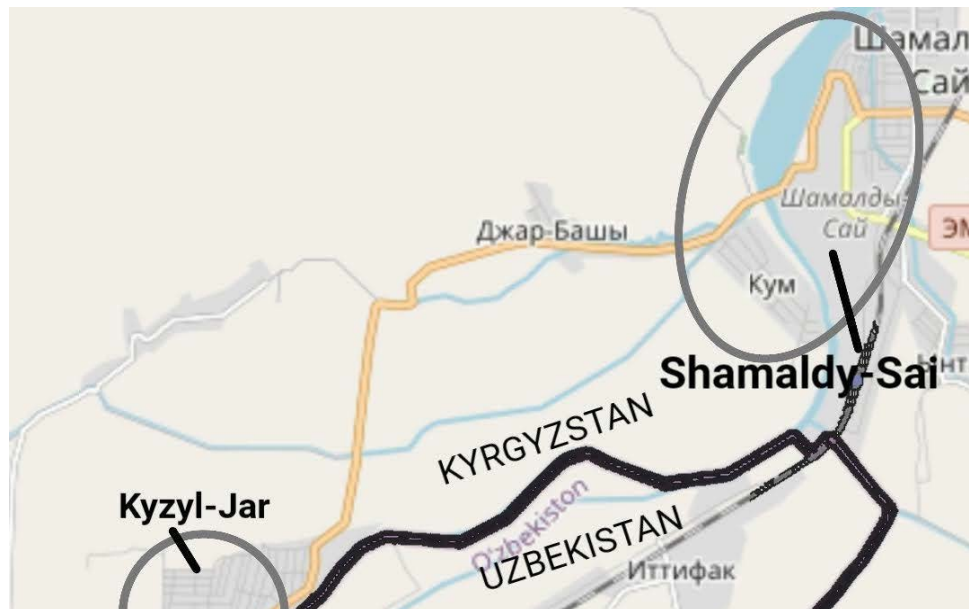
Figure 6.2. Map of Shamaldy-Sai at the border between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. OpenStreetMap contributors (2021). Retrieved from https://planet.openstreetmap.org.

Shamaldy-Sai as Bordertown

Today the outskirts of Shamaldy-Sai formally divided[72] as Nooken and Aksy region includes former Soviet collective farms (*kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz*) and vegetable bases (*ovoshnaya baza*), which are now called villages (*aiyl okmotu*). Interestingly, Shamaldy-Sai, which in Soviet times was directly subordinate (*oblastnoe podchinenie*) to the Jalal-Abad Oblast, has no regional affiliation, unlike many towns and villages. Thus, it belongs to neither the Aksy nor the Nooken regions. Its nominal-territorial status creates antagonistic relations with the town of Tash-Kumyr. As mentioned, the main headquarters of the Jalal-Abad Oblast Border Guard and National Army is located in Shamaldy-Sai. The military forces are now housed in abandoned Soviet buildings:

---

[72] In the Soviet period Shamaldy-Sai had a special status and was subordinated directly to the Oblast, today administratively the town belongs to the bigger Tash-Komur town.

technical college (*uchilishe*) #108, the old kindergarten, and the fleet depot (*avtobaza*).

In referring to Shamaldy-Sai in this chapter, I mean a whole border region, including the town's administrative territories. I do not limit the current research to the town residents only and include those of Shamaldy-Sai village (a small village with the same name), and the villages of Tendik, Kuduk-Sai, Kashkulak, Chuiut-Sai, Kyzyl-Alma. The interviewed respondents, including my relatives, come from these villages. Shamaldy-Sai is the most economically developed town in the region. Thus, it is a hub for the other settlements, and the entire region's social and economic life is concentrated around its bazaars, cafes, and social services (including several kindergartens, schools and banks), as well as parks, discos and other recreation facilities. Thus, when I talk about Shamaldy-Sai, I mean its border zone and accompanying villages.

Border zones or borderlands are conceptualized as geographically defined zones on each side of a border. Due to their changeable nature, borderlands act like 'an accordion that contracts and expands to the pressures of social, economic and political developments on both sides of the border' (Baud and van Schendel 1997, 225). As borderland settlements, the Shamaldy-Sai and Uch-Korgon communities are located quite a distance from the centre of their respective countries. Yet the communities have remained in close contact with each other across the boundaries for decades and, in so doing, have produced a distinctive cross-border culture. Many locals, including my father, uncles and aunts, went to study in Namangan, Uch-Korgon and even far-away Tashkent before the emergence of international borders. To get medical treatment, local residents used to go to Shakavtar and other Uzbek health centres.

In the academic literature, border theories have, for the most part, derived from studies of *international* borders and, until recently, disproportionate attention was focused on the US–Mexico and EU borders (Chalfin 2010, Horstman 2008, Romero 2008, Donnan and Wilson 2001, 2012, Lechevalier and Wielgohs 2013, Green 2013). Studies of borderlands have traditionally examined borders from a geopolitical perspective — typically through the lens of international relations and state policy — and have tended to focus on conflicts and tensions (Wastl-Walter 2016, Newman 2016). However, the study of interstate

boundaries *as social processes* began to expand significantly in the 1990s, with a wave of new ethnographic research. This period saw the disintegration of the USSR on the one hand, and European Union enlargement, the emergence of internal EU borders, as well as expanding transnational people movements and other forms of large-scale migration, on the other (Berdahl 1999, Jansen 2013, Pelkmans 2006, Gielis and Van Houtum 2012).

Still, even until the early 2000s, the predominant focus remained, as mentioned, the US –Mexico border and EU borders. Moreover, the bulk of the border literature continues to focus on spatiality and how borders function and to a less extent on their emergence and everyday materialization. How borders come to work, how they form and materialize, and their fluidity are important in categorizing their analytic meaning (Reeves 2014; Zartman 2010, Megoran 2005, 2017). Alongside the limited focus on the temporality of borders, how they appear or disappear is not well examined. This, I argue, reflects the disproportionate concern with conflict and tension across borders and the preoccupation of scholars in viewing borders through the lens of interstate violence and security (Holsti 1991, Hensel 1996, Vasquez 2009, Gavrilis 2008), or economic integration and trade (Russett & Oneal 2001, Barbieri 2002).

To date, ethnographic studies of local border communities have been scarce and scant attention has been paid to the development of cross-border relations at the local level, especially to the study of non-conflict border areas. However, in the last ten years, this has changed and not only has the scope and diversity of case studies expanded globally, but a significant number of ethnographic studies have emerged (Freeman 2020, Vila 2000, 2003; Hastings and Wilson 1999, Wilson and Hastings Donnan 2012). In this chapter, I seek to contribute to this growing literature, focusing on *borders as a processual, open-ended project.*

Boundaries signify the formal territorial units of the international state system. Geographically and politically, the notions of international boundaries and borders can be distinguished by their extension and work (Nijhoff 2008). As Megoran (2012, 465) writes about international boundaries, they are 'invisible vertical planes delimiting the horizontal extent of states'. Thus, he distinguishes *boundaries* from international *borders*, describing the latter as:

the institutional paraphernalia and practices associated with managing and policing boundaries, such as customs checkpoints and passport controls, and markers like fences, stones, signposts, and barriers. Borders are thus the spaces of division and interchange created or influenced physically and socially by the presence of an international boundary (Megoran 2012, 465).

In the last ten years, several important studies have been conducted on the social aspects of rural borders in the Ferghana Valley (Reeves 2014, Megoran 2017, Murzakulova 2018). Whether called boundaries, borderlines, frontiers or borders, the demarcated areas form a 'space around a line, the place where state meets society' (Zartman 2010, 1). Post-Soviet Central Asian borders present a particularly complex picture of different reconfigurations. In the case of Shamaldy-Sai —located geographically in the remote Ferghana Valley — the fortified border guards, tanks, and armoured vehicles are a visible presence of the central state in what might otherwise seem a peripheral area. In 2003, Shamaldy-Sai was chosen as a headquarters for the military structure and border army of the entire Jalal-Abad region (oblast). As a result, the town became home to two crucial military units: the Special Forces (NatsGvardia) and the Border Guards (Chegara Kyzmaty). Today, men in military attire are ubiquitous in Shamaldy-Sai.

But these national symbols of the monopoly of violence are not the only actors performing state and territorial unity in the borderlands — the borderland people themselves are key actors too. Borders are not a single unity and are experienced differently in various spaces and at different times. Thus, studying Shamaldy-Sai as a border town contributes to the existing literature by offering a closer look at the dynamics of border materialization not from the state perspective but from that of the border people themselves.

Unlike the southern edge of Fergana, which Madeleine Reeves (2014) calls a "messy, complex, contested" zone, the border area of Shamaldy-Sai–Uch-Korgon on the Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan border in the northern Ferghana Valley is not a zone of contestation. There are no disputed territories, exclaves, or enclaves. Yet, the new order that arose after the delimitation of frontiers, the improvised closure and opening of border posts, and changes in physical infrastructure (bridge and road communications) did — and continue to — disturb life and affect interactions. The borderland complexities, as

shown in the case of Shamaldy-Sai, have gradually become a habitual and integrative part of daily life for the local people.

Central Asian Borders

Disputes and disagreements over the post-Soviet border regime in Central Asia result in regular border conflicts (Tabyshalieva 2001; Megoran 2002, 2006, 2007, 2012a, 2012b; Megoran et al. 2005, Koichiev 2001). Today, 30 years after Central Asian states became independent after the breakup of the USSR, territorial boundaries are still to be completely ratified. Ongoing territorial disputes mean that governments and international organizations have developed special monitoring applications and maps that indicate so-called 'conflict-prone zones' (*konfliktogennye zony*). The marking of such zones with red flags indicates that residents, often armed with sticks and stones, regularly resort to clashes in those areas. Such habitual border conflicts are predominant in the most densely populated parts of the Fergana Valley, which contain exclaves and enclaves.

On 28 April 2021, a long-standing border dispute along the Kyrgyz-Tajik border flared up again and escalated into violent Kyrgyz-Tajik clashes that claimed 55 lives; 40,000 people on the Kyrgyz side were forced to flee their homes. This was the first time a local border dispute had escalated to the extent that the armies of both countries had to get involved. On 29 April, soldiers from both sides began exchanging fire. The same day, the authorities began cross-border negotiations that managed, in the end, to freeze the conflict, but the border between the two countries remains closed at the time of writing. Several border-related armed conflicts have flared up between other countries in the post-Soviet space, including Russia and Georgia, Russia and Ukraine, and Armenia and Azerbaijan, to name just a few.

The densely populated Ferghana valley — 'the heart of Central Asia' — is shared between three countries, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan (Starr 2011). Once renowned for its centuries of ethnic diversity, cosmopolitan exchange, and agricultural wealth, the area is now notorious for inter-ethnic clashes and political struggles between countries. The early Soviet national-territorial demarcation (*national'no-territorialnoe razmejevanie*) created

such a smeared picture for the puzzle in some areas that the pieces do not fit together today (Asankanov 1996). Yet, the tone and shades of these pieces have been changing and do not correspond to the picture drawn on the paper of late 1920s. Today, the Ferghana Valley is known for its *chess-like* (*shahmatnye*) contentious borders and *never-resolving (*chechilbegen*)* delimitation and demarcation problems between the neighbouring ex-Soviet states. Moreover, the unresolved territorial disputes between these three countries are inevitably drawn into everyday casual conflicts (*bytovye konflikty*).

The repetitive disputes over land, water and grazing pastures, mainly in Batken (Batken oblast) and Ala-Buka (Jalal-Abad Oblast), have given rise to idiomatic expressions kairadan janjal (conflicts again)*,* chek arada chyr (disputes at the border*),* topolon dagy bashtaldy (clashes started again) around which a whole genre of satire has developed - chychalatkan chek ara satiralary[73] *(satire about burning border issues) in Kyrgyz public discourse. One such satire on Youtube has some 1.5 million views. The scene begins in the early morning when an Uzbek farmer, Khusanboy, takes a signpost "Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan" and decides to move it, increasing Uzbek territory. He knows that everyone in Kyrgyzstan is still asleep at this early hour, and he reckons no one will notice. Having moved some distance, he grows bolder and moves the sign further still, steadily shrinking Kyrgyz territory as he goes. Satisfied, he sets to work in the fields. A Kyrgyz shepherd, Satybaldy, arrives and notices that the sign has moved. He mutters how the scoundrel Uzbeks always take the land away whenever one's back is turned. While it portrays Satybaldy as lazy and fatalistic, it casts Khusanboy as predatory, entrepreneurial and Uzbek territory as well-kept and ploughed, with excellent roads and modern infrastructure. Then, having already moved the land border 'while no one was looking', Khusanboy is shown bribing the feckless Satybaldy for yet another slice of Kyrgyz land. The satire ends with the cry of the soul that the Kyrgyz are so corrupted and demoralized that they are willing to sell off their ancestral lands for a few pennies. Satybaldy embodies the authorities in this skit.

---

[73] Super Tamashalar (2018)*: Kyrgyz chek aralar* [YouTube video] Available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/c/SuperTamashalar/search>. [Accessed 28/07/2021]

Other satires similarly mock the authorities and emphasize spinelessness (<u>erki jok</u>) and corruption. One favourite target is the army's conduct on the borders, which is often mocked as farcical shadowboxing. In one satire of the military, soldiers, lacking the necessary arsenal and weapons, are shown emerging from their barracks wearing tin lids for helmets and brandishing ladles, knives and kitchen utensils. It turns out that they also do not know how to shoot and look to a newly recruited soldier from Batken to teach them how. Such satires are designed to show the poor conditions of military service and the authorities' neglect and ignorance of border problems. Moreover, the satires underscore how it falls upon the locals to defend the integrity of the country themselves and that even elderly pensioners are roped into service at times, brandishing sticks, stones, and handfuls of soil (<u>kaltak, kasiak, charap zhan</u>). These words are pronounced in the Batken dialect, highlighting the region that is now the most conflict-ridden. Despite its obvious criticism of the government's failures in border regulations, this genre has been used to promote peacemaking (Megoran 2017).

Figure 6.3. Screenshot of a satirical scene[74] at the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border performed by two famous Kyrgyz satirists (<u>kuudul</u>), Tynar and Boronchu. Source: <<u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Itj_FyEpZz0</u>>. [Accessed 20/07/2021]

The change in Kyrgyz regime in 2020 also affected border structures. In November 2020, a decree was passed to shift the Border Guard (which had more autonomy before) to the State Committee of National Security (GKNB) led by K. Tashiev. These decrees served the purpose - as a new government repeatedly argued - to designate the military work.[75] Therefore, the Ministry of Defence, which was dissolved in 2014 and integrated into the General Staff of the Armed Forces, was revived in 2020 to reinforce national borders. The April 2021 dispute on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border, as mentioned, turned into armed conflict and had the most violent outcomes on the Kyrgyz side, leading to deaths and temporarily forced migration.

These contentious borders, mainly in the south of Ferghana Valley, remain unresolved (*neopisannye*). The Valley is seen through a biased lens due to the several disputed territories, enclaves and exclaves that have somehow come to represent the region. Other boundaries and borders in the Valley receive much less scrutiny. For example, the international boundaries in the northern part of the Ferghana Valley in the Kyrgyz regions of Nooken, Aksy, Chatkal, and Ala-Buka are also densely populated and border the oblasts of Andijan and Namangan on the Uzbekistan side. The extent of cross-border tension varies, and some regions such as Chatkal and Ala-Buka witness regular clashes at the border. However, most of the borders remain calm, and their work has become normalized some 30 years after the appearance of physical borders between the states. In this chapter, Shamaldy-Sai, which also lies in the upper north of the Ferghana Valley, represents the understudied case. It shows the arbitrary nature of national boundaries and the experiential and structural impact that the physical erection of borders has on local communities.

---

[74] Super Tamashalar*:Tynar and Boronchu//Kyrgyz Ozbek chegarasy/Bul Satiraga Yilash kerek* [youtube video] Available at: <<u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Itj_FyEpZz0</u>>. [Accessed 20/07/2021]

[75] <u>https://ru.sputnik.kg/politics/20210201/1051303118/kyrgyzstan-zhaparov-minoborony-pravitelstvo.html</u>

6.2. *Becomings* of borders

In the process of fixing Central Asia's new boundaries, Shamaldy-Sai faced a new reality in becoming a border town. This chapter explores the changing perceptions of the borders and normalization of bordered life in Shamaldy-Sai. It shows that the creation of *borders* out of territorial *boundaries* is not a clear-cut, linear coming into being but rather a '*becoming with'* (Harraway 2008). In the remainder of the chapter, I examine borderlands and the construction of borders (auto)ethnographically from the perspective of the local community in Shamaldy-Sai. Borders are not just lines on a map or those delineating the boundaries of territories between countries. They are the lines *crossing through human experience* (their mobility, familial ties) and non-humans that affect infrastructure (bridges, roads) as well as nature (agriculture, grazing cattle). They impact daily life, as in the case of Shamaldy-Sai; borders become an integral and habitual part of life.

The appearance of check posts closure of transport networks is not an isolated process. New interstate boundaries as a social fact affect the everyday life of rural residents of the border area. The community residents play an essential role in new international borders taking material forms. In the next section, I provide a historical overview and the nature of studying local borders.

6. 3. New international boundaries

The new international boundaries of Central Asia took shape after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. However, as the outcome of the Soviet national-territorial delimitation, their 'biography' begins in October 1924 (Asankanov 1996, Abashin 2007, Megoran 2012). Before 1924, there were no borders in the Ferghana region and the five "stans" as we know them today did not exist. There was no prior history of independent statehood, and the Central Asian national borders was formed between 1924 and 1927 through multiple processes of re- and (de)materialization that continued throughout the Soviet and post-Soviet periods (Megoran 2012, Reeves 2018). Soviet central economic planning designed the borderlands so that infrastructure could be shared and transport and irrigation networks were interdependent. For example, The Uch-Korgon GES (presented extensively in chapter 3 and 4) on the Naryn River in Shamaldy-Sai was built

by Tashkent Saogidroproekt. Up to the 1980s, the Uzbek town of Uch-Korgon served the dam workers as an administrative and educational centre. The Cotton Point (Hlop.punkt) in Shamaldy-Sai was interconnected with the Oil Factory in Uzbekistan, a few kilometres away. Such shared economic networks, including gas and electricity, impacted cross-boundary dynamics.

Traditional markets (bazaars) were another critical connecting point and hub in border regions. For example, as shown in Figure 6.4, the town of Shamaldy-Sai and Uch-Korgon city in Uzbekistan are connected via the Naryn River (bridge), two roads and an old railroad (which does not undertake passenger transport).

Figure 6.4. Map of Shamaldy-Sai town (Kyrgyzstan) and Uch-Korgon city (Uzbekistan). Available at: http://www.google.com/earth/index.html [Accessed 10 June 2021]

Such interdependent networks, highly complex borderland with a chess-like land posed problems in the materialization of borderwork in the early years of independence. Although some border posts were established, their control was weak, as we saw in the recounting at the top of the chapter of the road trip I made with my classmates to eat shashlik in Uzbekistan. Armed clashes between Islamic militants and the armed forces of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 1999–2000[76] resulted in a reorganization of Kyrgyzstan's border service, motivating it to begin building a new system of border security. This period? was given an informal name, "Batken events" (*Batkenskie sobytia*) and was attached to the 1999–2000 clashes, which became synonymous with calls to tighten the borders between the neighbouring countries. The Batken events thereby triggered an acceleration of the militarization of the borders in Central Asia.

While Shamaldy-Sai is not in the Batken Oblast and belongs to the Jalal-Abad Oblast, being so close to Uzbekistan, it was considered an ideal place to station a border army that would serve the entire Jalal-Abad oblast. Thus, in October-November 1999, Batken border guard detachments were formed. The formation of the border protection system came at a difficult time for the Kyrgyz Republic. The country was experiencing severe economic hardship, which made it challenging to finance a complex and expensive military reorganization at the border. This came amidst a roiling 'border crisis' between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, characterised by significant violence and cross-border tensions (Megoran 2004). On 31 August 2002, a unified Border Guard Service of the Kyrgyz Republic was established. On 13 August 2003, based on decrees issued by the president of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Chuysky, Talassky and Djalal-Abadsky frontier detachments were developed. However, the checkpoints could be easily be evaded, and even later, from 2010 to 2015, when border regimes were tightened even further, certain borders remained porous.

---

[76] Armed clashes in the Batken district of the Osh province of Kyrgyzstan between the militants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the armed forces of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 1999-2000 became known as the "Batken events" (*Batken okuyalary*).

During my field research in 2016, I went out to work in my parents' clothing shop, which is located in one of the arcade passages leading into the central bazaar. In summer, trade is usually slow, with few customers in the shop. At such times, I would go out to the aisle, where vendors of vegetables, greens and bakery products were located along the pavement. When I went out to talk to some of the traders, one guy came up to us, and I recognised him as an old Uzbek neighbour, Shavkat. He told me that he had settled in Uch-Korgon a long time before, had children and shared that he wanted to open a shop in the Shamaldy-Sai bazaar to sell samosas. Shavkat added that his sister, Mohira, was visiting Shamaldy-Sai from Tashkent. He was in a hurry and said we would talk in more detail later when he returned from Uch-Korgon in an hour and a half. He had to take something home to Uch-Korgon and return to Shamaldy-Sai to help his mother with household chores. I was surprised at first, as — given the reality of closed roads and new routes to Uzbekistan — it takes an hour to drive to Uch-Korgon and back. I asked him about it and whether back roads were still in use. He smiled and said that locals still used all the old routes. We said our goodbyes, and he went on his way.

Later that evening, I went to visit his mother. She was alone with Mohira, her eldest daughter, whom I also had not seen in years. Then, Shavkat called from Uch-Korgon and said that some urgent business had come up and he had gone to Namangan. I joked that I would wait for him so he could tell me all the ways to get to the Uch-Korgon bazaar, which was still home to all my vivid childhood memories and dreams. To enter Uzbek territory legally from Shamaldy-Sai, today you have to go to the border checkpoint Madaniyat (about 40 minutes from Shamaldy-Sai) and from there drive on to Uch-Korgon (another 40 minutes). If the border is not congested, the road takes about an hour and a half in one direction and the same time back. As a result, assuming a smooth trip there and back, it would have taken our neighbour at least three hours through the checkpoint, but much less time (and without document checks) through the "back entrance".

At Shavkat's mother's house, Mohira and I reminisced about our distant childhoods and youthful dreams. She complained that she had lost touch with old acquaintances and friends because of the closed roads. Of course, she recalled, she occasionally corresponded with school friends on Odnoklassniki, an online platform, much like

Facebook. She reserved her harshest criticism for the brutal border closure in 2005, when she could not even enter Kyrgyzstan to attend her father's funeral. At that time, she recalled, she prayed at the border, wept, and tried to see her father off at a distance for his last journey. At that time, she said, even the 'black entrance' (*chernyi vhod)* were tightly controlled, and it was impossible to cross the border for any reason.

Mohira went on to explain that they had gradually started keeping track of when the border loosening started and even the subtle differences in how they could negotiate to get through and with whom. She added that Shavkat was not always as active in coming to Kyrgyzstan and leaving for Uzbekistan as at the time of my visit. At one time, men attempting to cross the border were closely scrutinised, with border guards often requesting documents that were impossible to procure, in the process generating more opportunities for grift and bribery; often, they would simply refuse to let the men cross the border. At those times, Shavkat would send his wife in his place, and she would tell the border guards she was visiting family or tending to other household matters. When the borders were heavily controlled, it was easier for women to get through and negotiate with the male border guards. Mohira attributed this to the Uzbeks' respectful attitude towards women and the assumption that women are usually above suspicion. As she recalled, women were often in charge of transporting valuable goods such as gold jewellery across the border to sell them in Kyrgyzstan, where such items fetch a higher price than in Uzbekistan. Locals were well aware of where the 'black posts' (*chernyi vhod*) in the border were and where it was safe and unsafe to cross. In this way, the *border was gendered*, with women finding it easier than men to negotiate with border guards, develop trade relations, and undertake smuggling.

The Shamaldy-Sai Border Zone and its Historical and Present Links with Uzbekistan

Before the appearance of international boundaries, the Shamaldy-Sai region had three nearby transport networks that connected it to Uzbekistan in a matter of minutes, therefore creating an 'easy proximity' for locals who wished to travel to and from. The first was the railway (which no longer carries passengers and only serves freight traffic). The

second was the asphalt road on the left side of the Naryn river through the small settlement of Vosmoi Kilometr, and the third was the Kyzyl-Jar bridge on the right side of the river through Kyzyl-Jar village. However, as the previous discussion has hinted at, there are both legal and illegal ways of getting across the border.

After a period of border politics in the wake of the demarcation of the international border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgystan, this 'easy proximity' is no more. Now, the 'official' route to Uzbekistan is via Osh-Bishkek in the direction of the town of Madaniyat (65 km), where the checkpoint there was opened after Uzbek President Karimov's regime change in 2016. This is closer than during Karimov's regime when to cross the border, local families had to travel 140 km to the nearest checkpoint, which was in Osh. Contrast this with the 8-kilometre, 15-minute car ride me and my friends took in 1997.

Moreover, whenever the borders close due to internal or inter-state tensions, it is impossible to get to Uzbekistan. It is often a lever of pressure for the countries which parallels the Russian migrant policy and Covid travel permissions. Thus, the borders are not static; they are half-open, always threatening to close at any moment. Travel restrictions are also constantly in flux. Sometimes, one must show a certified invitation from the house committee (*dom.kom*) or prove kinship or a relationship to someone on the Uzbek side. At other times, border checks involve complex visa processing, and at other times still, they are routine and fast. Today, crossing the border is easier, but several years ago, from 2005 to 2015, at the height of the tensions, when borders were closed more often than they were open, it was difficult to get into Uzbekistan, even when all 'official' requirements were met. Kyrgyzstan was much easier to get into.

6. 4. Where do borders lie?

The word 'border' is conveyed differently in the local languages — *chek ara* (Kyrgyz), *chegara* (Uzbek) and *granitza* (Russian). Before the 1990s, whichever language one spoke, the term was seldom heard in Shamaldy-Sai. It is pretty much a post-Soviet phenomenon that emerged when border people realized they needed a way to describe where one country ended and the other began. Yet, this does not mean that Kyrgyz Soviet

Shamaldy-Sai and Uzbek Soviet Uch-Korgon were indistinct. When I was growing up, I knew exactly where the boundaries of my town ended, and a new space started, but this was not felt as a territorial demarcation. Nor was it a distinction based on the Uzbek language, which was widely spoken in my town too. Nor was it a reflection of different clothing styles, such as the traditional Uzbek dress (allas koinok) or hat (dopu), which are visible markers. They were widely seen in Shamaldy-Sai as well.

Where I did begin to feel boundaries was when I entered deep inside the Uch-Korgon bazaar. Produce and groceries not available in the Soviet state shops (*gastronom*) of Kyrgyzstan — such as melons hanging in woven baskets and various herbs and spices with their unmistakable aroma — marked the fact that I had entered a new space. This is how I knew I was in Uzbekistan. While, as mentioned, the distinction was not based on the Uzbek language, boundaries were marked out by language in other ways. In Shamaldy-Sai, shops and bazaars featured handwritten price-tags (*tzennik*) in the Uzbek language. In my town of Uch-Korgon, public texts were only ever written in Russian. These were the symbols and markers that made it clear to me that I was in Uzbekistan. It is these little details of my memories that carve the subtle distinctions between Uch-Korgon and Shamaldy-Sai in my mind. In general, cross-border life was intertwined and connected through a whole host of relationships.

In the post-Soviet lexicon, the terms *chegara* and *post* (border, checkpoint) connote different meanings. This lexicon speaks directly to formal practices and experiences. Other words metaphorically express the experience of new borders and how this created a disconnect between Uch-Korgon and Shamaldy-Sai. When discussing *borderization* against a backdrop of severed networks (social, economic, infrastructural) between the two countries, locals use words like 'road' and 'bridge'. Thus, phrases like 'when the roads closed' or 'when the bridge was destroyed' (joldor jabylganda, kopuro buzulganda) are evocative phrases that locals use to describe what happened when borders were erected.

Prior to the appearance of physical territorial borders (in the form of barbed-wire razor fences through dug out roads and destroyed bridges), people did not know — and had no reason to know — where the international boundaries lay. Uzbekistan across the

bridge was simply called 'the other side' (*narky bet*). My memories of the connectedness of two countries in the late 1980 and early 1990s when I was growing up

in Shamaldy-Sai are utterly discordant compared to the highly borderized experience of the 2000s.

Fig. 6.5. Razor barbed wire fences in Kyzyl-Tuu dividing Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Source: Baialieva, Kyzyl-Tuu village 2019

Figure 6.5 shows a barbed razor-wire fence along the highway on the left side of Shamaldy-Sai (Kyzyl-Tuu village). To the locals, including my parents, relatives and other respondents I conversed with in the process of my fieldwork, seeing the physical manifestation of these borders has become entirely normal. For me, someone who has not lived in the area for some time, the sheer physicality of this separation always takes some time to (re)adjust to. Through (auto)ethnographic accounts, I locate how the borders were perceived as they arose in the 2000s and show how they emerged as imagined constructs.

Before bordered life - 'narky bet'

I should clarify that when I was growing up, I had only a vague idea about territorial integrity and national citizenship. It was only after 1991, when schools began to include extracurricular subjects to discuss independence, the national anthem, currency and what was then popularly known as 'national ideology', that I began to form an idea of the word 'Kyrgyzstan' and new words, such as 'state', 'independence', 'sovereignty', and the like. In this regard, in describing my memories of life before the new physical international boundaries, I reach back to my understanding of Kyrgyzstan back then as Shamaldy-Sai or already home, the familiar, the understandable, the everyday.

The Kyzyl-Jar Bridge separates the two bazaars, the Kyrgyz and the Uzbek. In the Kyrgyz bazaar, one found mostly dairy products, mare's milk, cattle, livestock tools and some clothes. In the Uzbek part, almost everything was available — carpets, gold, silk threads, shiny trinkets and other household utensils — conjuring images of those old Orientalist stories describing the East. Kyrgyz people called the Uzbek side of the bridge *narky bet* ('the other side of the river'). In the Uzbek part of the bazaar, prices were lower. When I was a child, I would often travel to *narky bet* with my parents, my aunt or grandmother. In high school, it was a place I would go to with classmates. The main difference of *narky bet* was the food; teahouses were well developed there, and the tea delicious (and cheaper). Also, you could find pastries and wonderful homemade sweets (*koroz kant*). Apart from delicious, cheap, hot food (*shish kebab*, *shorpo*, *manti*, *chickpeas*), there was a variety of fruits and vegetables in the Uzbek bazaar. One could spend a long time describing the colourful, noisy hustle and bustle of the place and the rich aromas wafting from the many spices and sweets in the bazaar. I was often tempted to pick up some beautiful bling or item of jewellery or collect groceries there, which were simply not available in the Soviet shops on the Kyrgyz side.

Connectedness

In 1998, I left my hometown Shamaldy-Sai, where my parents still live, for the capital city Bishkek to study. Thus, I was not present as the physical boundaries between Uzbek and Kyrgyz territories started to take form in the 2000s. Certainly, my parents kept us informed

about various events at the border while we were away. However, by all accounts, I did not pay much heed to their emotional recounting of how things were changing, as I was not prepared for the visceral experience on my return.

An example is the impact of the destruction of the Kyzyl-Jar Bridge, the product of the aforementioned border politics between the two countries in the 2000s. Local traders, including my parents, had to resort to using ropes to transport their goods. One of the most memorable and saddest stories that my parents shared was about a woman who fell into the river and died. She was a merchant, and when she first passed her large bags with the goods which she was going to sell in Kyrgyz part. Then she was about to cross the broken part of the bridge held by ropes tied there. She lost her balance and fell down on the rocky edges of the river. Similar memories can be found in an unpublished dissertation by Kochumkulova (2007), a Kyrgyz cultural anthropologist. Kochumkulova is from Kyzyl-Jar and has written extensively on the evolving relationships and lives of the Kyrgyz herders in Uzbekistan. Writing about the role of the Kyzyl-Jar bazaar and the bridge closure, she notes how it affected the market economy and how locals, predominantly women, left the state sector and took up commerce (2007, 74):

> [I]t took the Kyrgyz people of Kyzyl-Jar some time to adjust to the new market economy. But the market economy, like everywhere in the former Soviet Union, forced many local Kyrgyz, mostly women, to take up commerce, which meant going to the city of Urumqi in Xinjiang, in northwestern China to buy goods and sell them in local bazaars…For the first couple of years these women were quite successful with their business, unfortunately, their lives ended tragically on their way back from China. Their bus fell over a cliff killing almost all of the women in it and leaving a few survivors. After that, people stopped going to China from Kyzyl-Jar, and they brought goods from other neighboring main bazaars of Kara-Suu, Osh province, and Bishkek.

In narrating the bridge story, she writes:

> Eventually, the Uzbek government completely shut down the bridge by destroying it to the level that no one could cross. Several people, mostly

160

Uzbeks, died accidentally by trying to cross the dangerous bridge, which had many large holes and broken parts. (2007:72)

Although such tragic cases occurred in the first years of border militarization and violent, the later years became somewhat more peaceful. However, in speaking of the Shamaldy-Sai borderization as 'non-violent' compared to other areas, I am not trying to minimize the harm and damage of the initial period. By also looking at the later 'peaceful' years, I show how local communities adjusted border-related *slow violence* to normalized new realities.

Figure 6.6. Bridge connecting Kyrgyz and Uzbek bazaars. The picture is taken from the Kyrgyz side. The Uzbek side was called '*narky bet'* (the other side) by the Kyrgyz. Source: Baialieva, Kyzyl-Jar 2015.

In Figure 6.6, you can see a picture of the Kyzyl-Jar bridge which is built relatively high, and the Naryn river flows very fast across big rocky stones under it. However, after the death of the woman trader mentioned above, the border guards from the Uzbek side cordoned that part off, so the crossing was no longer possible.

In the early 2000s (I do not remember the exact year), on one of my trips back from Bishkent to Shamaldy-Sai, I was made aware for the first time in my life where Kyrgyzstan ended and where Uzbekistan began on a visit to a classmate of my mother who lived in

the countryside (outside Shamaldy-Sai) in the aforementioned area known as 'Vosmoi Kilometr'.

I knew that borders had emerged, and it was impossible to go to Uzbekistan, but I asked mom anyways if we could get closer to steal a glimpse of the bazaar that held so many memories for me. Mom agreed but suggested we walk to the border, which surprised me since I expected to go there by car, given the bazaar was just a few kilometres away. To my great surprise, what was once an uninterrupted asphalt road (*Segizinchi* in Kyrgyz, *Sakizinchi* in Uzbek) leading to Uch-Korgon and its bazaar was now severed. Uzbekistan, I discovered that day, did not begin at the bazaar as I had always imagined but rather behind the houses of Vosmoi Kilometr, where my mother's classmate lived. Instead of an asphalt road, what now lay before me was a huge dug trench mixed in with broken asphalt enclosed behind stretched barbed wire. The once perfectly smooth road had been dug up and cordoned off right next to the homes of our acquaintances (*see Figure 6.7*). This physical materialization of bordering struck me so viscerally because I had traversed the open road so often as a child without a single thought that I was ever 'crossing a boundary'.

Figure 6.7. Dug out asphalt road in Vosmoi Kilometr, former Shamaldy-Sai - Uch-Korgon transport road. Source: Baialieva, Segizinchi 2019.

6. 5. Disconnectedness (joldor jabylganda)

Only the residents themselves could describe the effects of this bordering on their everyday lives. At this time, I was a student in Bishkent and did not live in Shamaldy-Sai full-time. Still, I would pick up many painful stories of disconnectedness from parents and relatives — but also classmates, friends, and neighbours — whenever I was in touch by email or phone. Some of my Uzbek-Kyrgyz relatives were also making decisions about their citizenship and were moving to Uzbekistan since it was no longer easy to maintain interethnic familial relations across borders. Crossing the border in most cases during border crises (which erupted at different times between 1999 and 2015) was almost impossible. My mom's perceptions of borders are also connected with the bridge, and the borderization is described metaphorically with the phrase 'when the roads closed' (*joldor jabylganda*):

> I felt borders when the bridge was destroyed and the roads were closed (*kopuro buzulup, joldor jabylganda*). It was painful and very strange to see a bridge but not be able to cross over it, a bridge you had walked with your parents to the weekly bazaar, which was now broken (*buzuldu*). I couldn't believe it. When I went to Kyzyl-Jar, I went closer to the river. I stood by the bridge, and the memories floated before my eyes. Moments of my childhood, walking with my dad across the massive asphalt bridge, seeing hundreds of moving legs in front of me. The fast-flowing Naryn river below the bridge … I didn't understand why the roads were closed. How would we [Kyrgyz and Uzbek people] harm each other (*biri-biribizge emne zyian keltirmek elek*)? [Sabira Chargynova (my mother), phone interview, 2020]

She continued, justifying the territorial delimitation by explaining it through the lens of the state:

It was necessary to put up borders for the sake of sovereignty (*suverenduu olko bolush uchun chek arany bekemdesh kerek ele*); there was no other way (*arga jok*). Now we are used to the closed roads (*joldor jabyk turganyna konduk*). It affected trade, friendship, families, Kyrgyz-Uzbek relationships. But it was necessary then [referring to the militant attack in 1999]. On the other hand, now we can sleep peacefully because the soldiers stand guard (*tynch uktai alabyz soldattar kaitaryshkanda*).

Alongside the evident regret and sorrow, these lines recount aspects of nationhood, sovereignty and safety that are obvious from residents' perceptions today. Anara Eje[77], my mom's classmate who lives just beside the border, narrates her perceptions of the new borders:

I felt the border (*chek ara emne ekenin*) when military forces arrived here in the 2000s. I don't remember exactly. It was related to the Taliban and Batken. Until the roads closed (joldor jabylganga cheyin), we did not feel what it [a border] really is. Out of the whole oblast, they [authorities] decided to bring the armed forces and border guards here [Shamaldy-Sai]. I feel proud [about that]. [Anar eje, personal interview, 2019]

She continued talking about safety, noting that when borders are tight and well protected, it is good for both sides to stay calm. Today after more than 20 years of border materialization and rematerialization, community residents, although admitting the pain when the roads were closed, perceive the *new borders as necessary*. As Madeleine Reeves wrote in her in-depth ethnographic analysis of the southern borders of the Ferghana Valley, the process is neither homogeneous nor straightforward. The new international borders 'come to take on material form in daily life: in practices of narration, of classification, of mapping; in the building or dismantling of infrastructure; in mundane

---

[77] Eje - is a honorific term in Kyrgyz used for older women.

and exceptional enactments of exclusion and belonging' (Reeves 2014, 6). Another respondent recounted how the bordering affected her family as follows:

> My husband is from Uzbekistan [an ethnic Uzbek]. The road closures shut down access to family activities. This is how we gradually became estranged from our relatives. When his uncle died in Yashik [in Uzbekistan], we went to the border, where there was a checkpoint. My husband felt anxious whether we could get through the border. I was allowed through; he was not. The border police caught some small things in the documents. Depending on their mood, they always did this; they decided who would be allowed through and who would not. I had to go to the funeral alone. My husband could not cross and stayed; we were shocked. I did not know many people among his Uzbek relatives. Since then, we have lost almost all our connections. I am not even talking about birthdays or weddings here; we even stopped attending funerals [A wife from an interethnic family. Personal interview, 2017]

Cross-border trade and eco-technical inspection

On a territory of 398 square meters, the former *sovkhoz* (Soviet state farm) of 'Dostuk' ('Friendship') has a total population of 10,200. Local livelihoods depend on agriculture, livestock and the remittances of labour migrants. The Soviet state farm 'Yntymak' (Unity) was renamed into Dostuk village. In the period of privatization in 1994, here agricultural land was given to community residents in the form of allotments. This area has two major problems: inefficient water canals and barriers to cross-border trade. Given ineffective water management and degraded infrastructure, there are significant water losses estimated at 40%, according to the head of Dostuk village, Z. Mamasadykov (personal interview in 2018). Located in a border region of Shamaldy-Sai, this area engages in many transboundary trade relationships. The Dostuk, Kyzyl-Tuu farmers (dyikandar) face problems when it comes to selling their agricultural goods. Under the tightened sanitary and epidemic requirements between the countries, the farmers' produce cannot be tested, documented, and exported appropriately as there is no facility for eco-technical inspection (*ekotexinspektziya*) in the region. They must drive to the north of the country

(around 9-10 hours) to get their produce inspected and exported to Uzbekistan, which is only a few minutes' drive from their farms. In 2015, hundreds of tons of cucumbers and tomatoes remained unsold in the trucks and the fields for this reason. Local farmers stress the necessity of easing eco-technical inspection of the goods at the border. Yet the issue remains unaddressed.[78]

6.6. A geographic reorientation

The volatility of borders and arbitrary regulations for crossing checkpoints, both for people and freight traffic, has become an expected and familiar occurrence. People keep their ears open and learn from each other about the current requirements at the border rather than wait for news from official sources. Borders are also gendered (given the limited space and scope in this chapter, the gender aspect cannot be addressed in any more detail). According to my interviewees, it is easier for female travellers to cross the border and negotiate with border guards. Although the borders have disconnected countries and border regions, local communities know and share ways to interact. They remain active participants in border work and influence the updating or obsolescence of border rules.

The new international borders not only restructure the local infrastructure but also rearrange and reorient geographical flows. In the Shamaldy-Sai border region, new destinations within the country opened up after the closure of roads to Uzbekistan, with which not only infrastructure but also higher education and medical services were closely tied. But with the destruction of roads and the bridge, this was no longer possible. Locals started looking for new geographical reference points. They began to go to the new branches of educational institutions in Kochkor-Ata, Kara-Kul, Jalal-Abad in Kyrgyzstan for education. More people began to go to the Kyrgyz towns of Karavan and Kochkor-Ata

---

[78] On 11 March, 2021, an official meeting between the presidents of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan was held in Tashkent. Sadyr Zhaparov and Shavkat Mirziyoyev agreed to resolve the problems of crossing the borders along with the delimitation and demarcation of certain sections of the state borders. The presidents discussed the facilitation of border-crossing conditions between the two countries and cooperation in the fight against smuggling as well as improving the *ekotehinspektziya* (cross-border eco-inspection of the goods). https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan-i-uzbekistan-namereny-za-tri-mesyatsa-reshit-vse-voprosy-po-granitsam/31148892.html

for medical treatment. Improvements in existing roads and construction of new ones connected with other Kyrgyzstani oblast and regions also contributed to this.

In 1999-2000,[79] the head (*glava poselka*) of Shamaldy-Say, Anaraly Chargynov, raised an initiative to build a new road that would directly connect with the strategic Bishkek-Osh highway. And a new road was built through the fields and across the railway, instead of the old road, which also faced the main highway (from the side of 'Vosmoi Kilometr'). Thus the shortest and straightest road became a continuation of the central bazaar street called *Kirgiskaya* (literally, 'Kyrgyz'). The same street leads to the canal, further into the industrial zone and across the Naryn River connects the two other border regions of the oblast, Aksy and Ala-Buka. The new road, linking the regions and provinces of the country, has helped Shamaldy-Say become a hub and accumulate money through the flow of people, traffic, and goods. Thus, the new national borders are a geographical restructuring of relations, with a redefinition of spatial solutions to relationships. By separating the border towns between the two countries, the borders have given rise to new development within the country. The new development is a *becoming with* other elements, events and conditions. It is the impermanence and fluidity of new boundaries, which are not just a linear *becoming* and isolation.

The lines defining the country's territory on maps are hard to feel unless there are specific visible posts, signs or symbols. I do not remember there being a sign with the name of the country somewhere on the road to Uch-Korgon. But if you head to Uch-Korgon from Kyzyl-Jar across the bridge (from the right-bank side of Shamaldy-Sai), there are no marks or the name of the town of Uch-Korgon, which begins just beyond the bridge. So, when the borders were nominal when I was a schoolgirl, I did not understand where one country ended, and another began. However, I was aware that the familiar and the homely ceased to be such as soon as I got to Uch-Korgon, Namangan, or when we visited

---

[79] This was also a period when the first deployments of border guards started arriving in Shamaldy-Sai. As the mayor of Shamaldy-Sai said in the interview it was very hard to accommodate them due to the country's financial problems. Local residents directly assisted the newly arrived military servants with food, blankets and first essential support. They were accommodated in the abandoned kindergarten and technical college (*sadik v mikrashke, uchilishe*), and to this day the ties between local communities and military personnel are very tight.

relatives in Uzbekistan. Almost every Saturday or Sunday, we went to Uch-Korgon with my parents. It was a family holiday and a plus to buy things we did not have in the local shops and bazaars. On these trips, I felt that we were going to another space. We got there in two ways — either by bus to the Kyzyl-Jhar bazaar and the bridge leading directly to Uch-Korgon or by shuttle taxi through 'Vosmoi Kilometr'. With their interdependent transport networks and economic infrastructure, these two towns were 'integrated borderlands' in which organizational and logistical practices were merged, and borderlanders existed as members of a single society (Martinez 1994).

Thus, international boundaries[80] are preconditions for international borders to come to work. Borders are an assemblage of flows composed of different events — regime change, internal tensions, interethnic clashes, and economic cooperation, among others — producing boundaries. The barbed wire fences, highly securitized, checkpoints do not stop moving and do not create complete isolation as 'the world is a knot in motion' (Haraway 2003, 6). People find ways of connecting, if not within the old flow, then in a new one. In the case of Shamaldy-Sai, the disconnectedness with Uzbekistan resulted in a new connectedness with other regions in Kyrgyzstan. The closed transport network to Uzbekistan opened up new connectivity with other regions in Kyrgyzstan.

---

[80] Although the boundaries appear today as 'normal', they are social constructions (Diener 2010).This is the main thrust of the whole chapter - you show exactly this construction and normalization, no? I would take this into the main text, early on.

Chapter 7. Religious transformations: women's veiling

7.1. Transformative religion

Previous chapters have focused on the complexity of the reconfigurations entailed in Shamaldy-Sai's post-Soviet transformation, the novel adaptation of long-established practices under new circumstances and new international borders as a fundamental geographic reorientation for the people of the area. Building on the idea developed in chapter 5 about layered post-Soviet transformations in Shamaldy-Sai, in the present chapter[81], I analyse the aspects of religious change. Layered transformations are like collages and do not reflect a *linear becoming* but instead a *becoming with* other elements, events and conditions (as discussed in chapter 6).

Kyrgyz secularists see the new religiosity and visual markers of Islam which are new and 'foreign' as a return to old Islamic practices and a restoration of pre-Soviet patterns of religious observance. However, the observed practices do not reflect some clear-cut 'return to the past' but are instead religious flows layered by multiple local and global connections and flows that very much reflect the present. While Shamaldy-Sai is a transformed, post-industrial space in which pre-Soviet practices carried over from the past are observed alongside newer post-Soviet ones, the area remains subject to constant flows of novel developments, occurrences and information. Therefore, enduring practices from the past are not straightforward legacies of a bygone era but are appropriated locally through purposive action and adapted in novel ways to suit new circumstances as also shown in cases of post-Soviet 'gramota' cases in chapter 7.

The veiling practice in Kyrgyzstan sparked contentious debates in the early 2000s. By using the terms veiling, Islamic headscarf, hijab and veil, I refer to the practice of some Muslim women in Shamaldy-Sai, as in Kyrgyzstan as a whole, to cover their hair and neck

---

[81] This chapter is an extended version of earlier research into religious transformation in Shamaldy-Sai from the perspective of the new veiling movement in the region. The partial results of that work have been published by Baialieva (2021) in 'Beyond Post-Soviet: Layered Legacies and Transformations in Central Asia' (Schmidt et al. 2021)

in public. Modern Islamic garments vary in many ways, including how headscarves are worn, the choice of colour and fabric, and how head coverings are combined with the other aspects of dress in public, including whether one wears a full cloak or a slim, baggy blouse with a long skirt or loose or tight pants.

Today most of the heat has come out of debates over veiling, and discussions on the topic are more temperate than in the 2000s. Nevertheless, the polarized views and misunderstandings arising from these debates define how dressing and acting are perceived (and received) in public space, both for Muslims who veil and those who do not. Thus, the issue of women donning *hijab* has emerged as a promising avenue of research to explore aspects of Islamic revival and observed tensions between different social groups in post-Soviet contexts.

The current chapter looks at the ways in which some veiled women in the Shamaldy-Sai region navigate their adopted religious markers in constructing new (religious) identities against a backdrop of tension between traditionalism, the Soviet 'campaign for women's emancipation', conceptions of 'modernity', and the influence of wider political Islamic communities. I draw on Olivier Roy's conceptual frameworks for approaching 'modernity' and political Islam (Roy 2010) to demonstrate how different discourses about the meaning of veiling have emerged, based on gender, social group, and identity politics. Beyond studying what people say about veiling, the chapter also sheds much-needed light on what veiling represents to ..?

To be more specific, I present an ethnographic study of cases from Shamaldy-Sai and neighbouring villages Yntymak, Dostuk, Bazyl-Ata, Kyzyl-Jar. In examining the religious transformation through Islamic veiling, I closely interacted with the women who donned *hijabs*. The participants were women aged between 18 and 50 years of Kyrgyz and Uzbek ethnicity and from different socio-educational backgrounds. I connected with these women primarily through religious circles and other local social associations that bring women together. Besides attending weekly Muslim gatherings called '*bayan*' (preaching) and '*taalim*' (listening to the Quran and *hadith*) required by the Tablighi movement rules,

I was able to go to women's homes and interact with them in their everyday lives (Balcı 2015, Toktogulova 2014).

Based on this ethnographic case study of the Islamic veiling movement, the chapter examines the individualization of veiling and examines *hijab* practices in post-Soviet Shamaldy-Sai and its environs from 2012 to 2020. By looking closely at veiling in the area, I observe it as a new practice distinct from wearing traditional headwear or '*jooluk*[82]'. In some instances, veiling simply appropriates older practices of donning headscarves, albeit in different ways that reflect present circumstances. Thus, I argue that veiling can represent both an *act of religious devotion*, modesty, and piety and *a marker of belonging* to a 'new' global Muslim identity. Overall, the findings show that veiling is not a monolithic response to 'modernity' or globalized Islam but instead reflects the interaction of quite different structural factors—female empowerment and 'modernity', on the one hand, and patriarchal domination, on the other.

7.2. Gendered religion

After Kyrgyzstan achieved independence from the USSR in 1991, religious practice increased in importance and transformed into more expressive forms of religiosity. In that context, controversial gendered symbols of religious identity emerged in the public sphere. By the 2000s, several Islamic movements—such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Nurcular, the Tablighi Jamaat and others—had been localized in post-Soviet Central Asia (Balcı 2003, 2015). The issue of women's veiling became a central aspect of the Islamic revival but also sparked tension in a region navigating a challenging post-Soviet path. Confronting frequent, varied criticism of the *hijab*, veiled women in Kyrgyzstan compete for their right to be in urban space and challenge existing claims on the city (Nasritdinov and Esenamanova 2018).

English language academic publications released on contemporary *hijab* issues tend to deconstruct previously accepted views on Muslim women as victims. The commonly

---

[82]*Jooluk* is a Kyrgyz women's traditional headscarf worn like bandana with the neck open.

perceived public interpretations of the *hijab* range from ideas about Muslim women's moral imprisonment, subjugation, modesty, and devotion to God to conflicting emotions and 'fashion' statements (Tarlo and Moors 2013). Still, many fail to realize that quite many veiled women are embracing their religion as a means through which they can express gender identity, power, and creativity (Laruelle 2018).

There are various approaches in this regard, including the so-called 'Islamic feminists' (Ahmed 1992, Mernissi 1987). If Islamic feminism relates veiling to oppressive practices and patriarchal interpretations of the Quran, 'liberal feminists' argue that women's new veiling is a form of protest and symbolism that emerges from tense subcultural dilemmas, involving elements of resistance and acquiescence (MacLeod 1992). Ethnographic studies of women's veiling in the Middle East reveal concepts of women's subjectivity, agency and resistance as connected to the decision to veil (Abu-Lughod 2016, Mahmood 2012). European intolerance, political debates and court cases around various 'headscarf affairs' have also been discussed (Joppke 2012, Roy 2004). A good corpus of literature exists regarding the veiling trends and signifiers mainly researched in the Middle East and Europe. However, their insights cannot be fully transferred to the veiling processes in the post-Soviet region and Central Asian religious landscape.

Despite seventy years of the Soviet atheist agenda—with official restrictions on religious beliefs and practice—Central Asians' identity as Muslims was not eradicated (Hann and Pelkmans 2009, Louw 2007, Privratsky 2001). Soviet policies saw women as the 'keystone of a closed family system' and were motivated to liberate women to advance their agenda (Roy 2000, 79). Yet, the double project of emancipating Central Asians from patriarchy and religion was experienced differently across the region.

The Soviet atheism campaigns in Central Asia were extreme cases of categorical secularization of society. Within these campaigns, Muslim identity became intrinsically tied up with national identity and politics and clothing came to 'speak volumes' (Roy 2000, Khalid 2007, Suyarkulova 2016). There is anecdotal evidence that some Central Asians even defined themselves as 'atheist Muslims'. In some senses, contemporary Central

Asian governments have continued Soviet practice, conducting repressive measures against political Islam and attempting to remove religious symbols from the public sphere.

'Orongondor': covered women

About two decades ago, the word *hijab* was not used in Shamaldy-Sai and its neighbouring villages. The same was true in Kyrgyzstan as a whole. However, in 2020, the word has become widely accepted and is even celebrated on a global International Headscarves (*Jooluk/Hijab*) Day, held annually on 1 February. Religious organizations and communities such as Mutakallim[83] and some well-known Islamic clothing designers and activists, such as Aliya Akylbekova, organize celebrations with *hijab* fashion shows. On this day, well-known bloggers exhibit varieties of headscarves, how to tie them and how to combine them with national clothing. In Shamaldy-Sai, veiled women gather in cafes in the daytime and organize religious mini-parties. In addition to celebrating Islamic headscarves, competitions and festivals are held, mainly in Bishkek, such as the Muslim Fashion Show and the Muslim Fashion Festival.

A couple of decades ago, a new type of headgear started to become popular in the area, but many locals in Shamaldy-Sai remained quite sceptical and generally eschewed the word 'hijab' itself (McBrien 2017). A couple of excerpts from my interviews in Shamaldy-Sai in 2012–2013 show how the new type of veiling was received and that the word hijab was not typical:

> How can you simply look at those covered women (<u>orongon</u>)? We need to explain things to them and make them take off their strange headcloth. If they really want to be modest and observe Islam, they can do it without wrapping themselves. I also read the Quran; I also love Allah. But I wear only the *jooluk* (traditional headscarf), which covers my head and hair. I don't like it when our young, silly Kyrgyz women prefer this different type of *jooluk* and see themselves like Arab women.

---

[83] 'Mutakallim'. Accessed 18 February 2022.
http://mutakallim.kg/%d0%b3%d0%bb%d0%b0%d0%b2%d0%bd%d0%b0%d1%8f-%d1%81%d1%82%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%86%d0%b0/.

Most of my classmates started wearing these headscarves. It is funny; they look like swaddled babies. By hiding their beauty, they display their ugliness. Can you imagine you or me swaddling our faces like a new-born baby? It is terrible, and they are wrong. [Nazira, Personal Interview, Shamaldy-Sai 2013]

The new headwear was described with gestures toward the head and face, indicating that these interlocutors see the headscarves worn like a shroud. In addition, words like 'covering', 'swathing' and 'wrapping up' (jamynyp aldy, chumkongon, oronup aldy) were used to connote the new veiling practice. These action verbs around the *hijab* were used extensively two decades ago and still are used (mainly by unveiled women) to imply negative connotations. In this sense, veiling is seen as backward, infantilizing and a form of subordination.

However, almost 20 years have passed since the first arrivals of new Islamic influences on clothing. Today the representations are much less homogenous. Julie McBrien, an anthropologist, studied veiling practices in Bazar-Korgon village (50 km away from Shamaldy-Sai) and has described the process as a way for a woman to 'creat[e] herself as a modern individual through, within, and in reaction to "Western," "Soviet," and "Islamic" normative frameworks' (2017, 128). Analysing flows of religion and fashion this chapter shows how veiling movement is an open-ended process against a backdrop of ongoing tensions between traditionalism, the Soviet past of women's emancipation, conceptions of 'modernity', and the influence of wider political Islamic communities.

7.3. Islam in public space

After the disintegration of the former USSR, Central Asian Muslims experienced a relatively free space for open conversation about faith and religious practice (McBrien 2017). As a result, general interpretations of Islam—which emphasized regular prayer, covered forms of dress, and mosque attendance—expanded within the community and interacted with interpretations in the wider Islamic world (Khalid 2007). Yet, the newly

independent national governments continued to restrict the influence of Islam in the public sphere.

In July 2016, a public messaging campaign depicting images of women, religion and tradition in Kyrgyzstan in public space emerged. This is shown in Figure 7.1., which depicts a rather provocative billboard depicting images of Kyrgyz women in various types of clothing.

Figure 7.1 The billboard 'Poor people, where are we going?' appeared in cities of Kyrgyzstan in 2016. Image courtesy: Azattyk, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/27872844.html

Such billboards appeared on the major streets of the capital city Bishkek and some other large cities. Via three stylized images, the billboard depicts the purported transition of women's clothing in Kyrgyz society from traditional (read: authentic) forms to more recent ones, the implication being that the latter are imported and problematic. The text on the banner reads *'Kairan elim, kaida baratabyz?'* ('Poor people, where are we going?'). The first image to the left of the billboard depicts smiling, happy women wearing 'Elechek', a traditional Kyrgyz headdress. The middle image depicts a group of women looking submissive with faces half-covered by *hijabs*. The final image on the right shows a

collection of barely indistinguishable figures in the black Islamic *niqab*, completely covered and—by implication—entirely dis-appeared in terms of their individual identities.

The banners were promoted by the private education sector and financed by the administration of the then president of Kyrgyzstan, Almazbek Atambayev. At the time, President Atambayev commented[84] that the billboards were meant as a warning for the Kyrgyz people to choose the right path, asserting that Kyrgyzstan did not need foreign culture and religion.

Nasritdinov and Esenamanova (2018) draw on the billboards as an example in their exploration of how religiousness and secularity of urban space are contested in Kyrgyzstan. They write:

> Muslim women wearing the hijab have become very visible and influential urban actors with their own claims to the city. At the next level of complexity, Muslim women do not represent one homogenous group, but a large variety of Islamic influences—all with their own unique visual appearance and competing claims for the city (2018, 258).

Put differently, the new veiling process in Kyrgyz society is a departure from traditional 'jooluk' and, indeed, 'Western' or Soviet styles of clothing and signifies a self-aware form of personal and social change.

Since the 2000s, the number of veiled women has grown rapidly in Shamaldy-Sai (as it has in Kyrgyzstan overall). Other gendered visual markers of religion include men growing long beards and wearing long, dress-like shirts that reach the feet or below the knees. Like in many European states, religious veiling in the Muslim Central Asian region has

---

[84] Radio Azattyk Radio Liberty Kyrgyz Service. 'Bannery "Kairan elim, kajda baratabyz?" nachali vyveshivat po vsei respublike'. Accessed 18 February 2022. https://rus.azattyk.org/a/27872844.html.

engendered hostile reactions[85] and legal bans[86] from local and national governments.[87] However, the degree to which the *hijab* is restricted across the region varies. For example, in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, wearing the *hijab* (although not the traditional *jooluk*-style headscarves) is banned in secular educational institutions, while in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the *hijab* remains legal, even as there have been attempts to prohibit this in public schools and workplaces.

Deterritorialization of religion

For ardent secularists and most state officials, the *hijab* is something alien and imported. They see it as belonging to a 'foreign culture'. At various points since 1991, presidents in all five Central Asian republics have explicitly expressed their opposition to *hijabs* (Human Rights Watch 2020). Re-interpretation of Islam and awareness of 'true' religious practices are being proselytized through social media, the internet, leaflets, translated mini-books, mp3s and other material in the Kyrgyz and Russian languages. In Shamaldy-Sai, this is also promoted through regular gatherings held by local religious leaders, regular Islamic talks and circles, door-to-door preaching (*davaat*), Tablighi women's religious gatherings (*taalim*, *masturat*) and many other on- and offline ways and means.

As mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, Olivier Roy's theoretical notions of deterritorialization of religion offer an excellent basis for analysing the phenomenon of religious veiling and gender identity in the post-Soviet Kyrgyz context. In his book *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways* (2010), Roy examined deterritorialization and deculturation of religion against a backdrop of expanding market neoliberalism and globalization. It is a process of deculturation in which individuals

---

[85] Grigorenko, V. 'V Kyrgyzstane Devochku v Platke Ne Puskayut v Shkolu. |to Zakonno?' Vecherniy Bishkek, 2018.
https://www.vb.kg/doc/374233_v_kyrgyzstane_devochky_v_platke_ne_pyskaut_v_shkoly._eto_zakonno.html. please translate titles like this for non-Russian speakers

[86] Bahram, M. 'Refworld | TAJIKISTAN: Hijab-Wearing and Beards Ban Continues'. Refworld, 2018. https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bbc57974.html.

[87] Zhursin, Zhanagul, and Farangis Najibullah. 'The Hijab Debate Intensifies As School Starts In Kazakhstan'. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 2019, sec. Kazakhstan. https://www.rferl.org/a/the-hijab-debate-intensifies-as-school-starts-in-kazakhstan/30148088.html.

undergo 'conversion' within their existing or ascribed religion and enter a new social and religious space as 'reformatted believers'. Moreover, in distancing themselves from traditional cultural communities, the converted take on fundamentally new ideas about 'modernity' and tradition. In the process, the 'reformatted believers' craft an autonomous realm of personal agency and 'reconstruct themselves in a space that is no longer territorial and is therefore no longer subject to politics' (Roy 2010, 2).

This new space explicitly disavows and disrupts connections with local traditional cultures and established forms of religiosity, which the new believers cast as 'neo-paganism' (Roy 2010). In forsaking popular and traditional forms of Islamic religiosity, these 'reformatted believers' adopt what they consider 'pure Islam'. Donning the headscarf is an integral part of this process (Roy 2010, 2). Specifically, it signifies an act of conversion within the woman's ascribed religion, albeit in its 'proper' and 'pure' form. Established cultural norms are forsaken to 'salvage the purity of faith' and 'religion turns inwards toward identity' through the use of outward religious markers (ibid,142).

Turning to the Islamic headscarves, newly veiled women contribute to the visibility of Islam and play an essential role in creating a sense of religious community. Most (but by no means all) newly veiled women in Kyrgyzstan hail from the well-educated, middle-class urban sector and from less well-educated rural communities where there is greater patriarchal subjugation. Therefore, there are different paths to religious conversion and the choice of veiling. As Olivier Roy (2010, 190) argues:

> Formatting then can occur as part of various strategies, both top-down and bottom-up … It can take place within a 'liberal' or conversely a 'fundamentalist' perspective, since … fundamentalism can also be the expression of 'modernity' through deculturation.

Women generally join the veiling movement on their own account, and veiled Kyrgyz women are active in the management of the religious community. For example, the

Muslim women's NGO 'Mutakalim'[88] managed to prevent the adoption of a new law on veil prohibitions through regular meetings, picketing and protests.

In addition, Muslim women activists organize educational circles. There is a new phenomenon of women 'dawaatchis' of Tablighi in Shamaldy-Sai proselytizing and preaching Islam, however different from men's 'davaat'. 'Davaat' involves travelling from one place to another and not only to preach but for personal improvement and development (Toktogulova2014, Nasritdinov 2018, Stephan-Emmrich and Schröder 2018). Furthermore, Islamic community-building is thriving online, and there are several active social media groups, an Islamic Fitness App[89] and other fashionable Islamic developments on the internet that veiled women in Shamaldy-Sai participate in. Another notable inspiration for newly veiled women are local Kyrgyz celebrities and bloggers who promote the *hijab* and Islamic fashion.

Schools and hijabs

No decree by the Ministry of Education prohibits *hijabs,* but local school principals set out their own regulations. A small number of schools do not intervene in clothing choices, leaving it up to individuals. However, the majority of secondary schools in both rural and urban areas in Kyrgyzstan ban Islamic headscarves. School principals justify the ban arguing that the school regulations (*shkolnyi ustav*) do not allow them. When I talked with the female directors of three schools in Shamaldy-Sai, they said that girls are expected to dress appropriately and follow the school's dress code:

> I know that there is no law banning *hijabs*, but I uphold the school regulations. According to our school regulations, which the Regional Justice Department sets, the school uniform is clearly described. For boys, it is a light top or shirt and dark pants or trousers. For girls, it is similar—a light blouse, dark skirt and the hair tied back neatly with a white bow. There is nothing [in the guidelines] about headscarves or *hijabs*. That's why I do not allow schoolgirls to cover

---

[88] https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstan-the-quiet-success-of-an-islamic-womans-group

[89] 'Fitja' is a fitness application for Muslim women, https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.spalmalo.fitjab&hl=gsw&gl=US

themselves. Their task is to study, not to pray. I do not care about how they dress beyond the school gates. What I require is that students follow the school regulations on the uniform. That's all!' [Amina, 57-year-old school director, Shamaldy-Sai 2013]

During my fieldwork in May 2012,[90] I witnessed cases where parents and the school principal argued over the dress regulations and their interpretation. For example, three teenage girls (one 14 years old, the others 15) were not admitted to the school because they were wearing *hijabs*. The school director gave the students an ultimatum—either they removed their headscarves, or they would not be allowed to continue studying at the school. As a result, they stopped attending school for some time. Later, the parents and relatives decided to clear up the situation so the girls could return to the classroom.

In some rural areas in Kyrgyzstan, local informal organizations get involved in civic conflicts to try and solve the issue before it goes to court. Thus, the Informal Court of Elders[91] (Aksakaldar Sotu), which used to be partially integrated into the official court system, the district police (*uchastkovyi*) and Women's Council (*Jensovet*) often act as mediators. In addition, the local municipal administration usually provides a space for 'hearings' where the conflicting parties and mediators from the local organizations meet.

Returning to the case of the schoolgirls mentioned before, the 'hearing' did not last long. The director —a figure used to speaking in public and commanding an audience—justified her decision on the grounds that she could not simply break school regulations and allow the girls to wear items not prescribed in the regulations (e.g., *hijab*). However, the girls' parents were not so experienced in speaking in public or presenting arguments. As a result, they mainly sat silent and looked uncomfortable. Representatives of the Aksakaldar Sotu, Jensovet and district police shared the same opinion as the school director regarding the proper school uniform. Despite their difficulties in presenting their points of view, the girls' parents clearly disagreed with the committee's ideas of what it

---

[90] A decade later, the public schools' positions on *hijab* controversies remain essentially unchanged.

[91] For more on the role of the Kyrgyz 'court of elders', see Beyer (2006) and Sadyrbek (2017).

meant for girls to be dressed 'properly'. It was evident that no compromise would be achieved because the 'officials' sounded dominant, and the opposite side was scarcely participating in the discussion. In the beginning, they tried to refer to religion, morality and the freedom to choose how to dress, but they could not stand against the oratory skills of the committee. In the end, the parents came up with the idea that the girls should decide. Two girls agreed to remove their headscarves inside the school and put them back on once outside; another girl resisted. She said she preferred to stay at home rather than take off her *hijab*.

A striking point here is that the 'oppression' and denial of women's education often come from secularists, not religious parents and schoolteachers. Informal organizations such as the Jensovet and Aksakaldar Sotu act as mediating actors in official expressions of 'deculturation'. The role of these organizations and their place in community-building is discussed in chapter 5.

Covering the head: 'jooluk' vs hijab

The traditional moral code requires all married or elderly Kyrgyz women to cover their heads with a traditional headcloth (jooluk), which is part of traditional Kyrgyz clothing. It is worn tied at the back of the neck and remains a feature of women's outfits outside the major urban centres. Most frequently worn by older women, the scarf is widely interpreted as traditional and Central Asian. Even though these traditional headscarves could also close around the head, hair and neck if tied up correctly, the 'new Muslim women' who veil mostly prefer an 'imported' cloth in the form of the *hijab*, which is worn to realize spiritual aims and appear modest. In donning the *hijab*, such new veilers refer to its Islamic textual foundations.

There is a distinct generational divide in the experience of the post-Soviet reformatting of religion. Young women were the first to adopt the *hijab*; mothers generally followed later. The young see the older generation as damaged by the Soviet-era value system, which bequeathed the current economic and spiritual aimlessness. To the young, restoring spiritual sustenance and dedication to religious values presents hope for a better future. Since traditional headwear is available that could satisfy the religious modesty function,

181

the explicit choice of women in post-Soviet Shamaldy-Sai to don the *hijab* has analytical purchase. It can be seen as a search for a new religious identity free from the long-established negative associations of backwardness that are tied to the *jooluk*.

7.4. A new veiling as an 'alternative modernity'

For some women who have freely decided to don the *hijab*, veiling signifies their individual autonomy as well as a symbolic break with the local past and Soviet identities. However, other women wear the *hijab* because their community expects it, and they cannot resist conservative values and communal control. In such cases, veiling indicates a decision made *for the woman* by parents or even a mother-in-law concerned with the family's reputation or by a husband controlling his wife's dress.

I now turn to some concrete examples of women's attitudes towards veiling in post-socialist Kyrgyzstan. The purpose is to shed light on the meaning veiling has for them and how it connects with their religious and cultural identity and relations with their traditional environment.

The individualization of the hijab

Today as opposed to 2012, translocal flow of Islamic views, traditional Kyrgyz elements and constructive polemics are woven together, making *hijabs* less confrontational. As a result, active proponents like Nurgul are emerging. She is a local Muslim activist and online influencer. She owns a beauty salon and a small store selling Islamic apparel at the local bazaar.[92] Nurgul has been wearing hijab for the last three years and has a popular Instagram account where she motivates others and welcomes them to hijab fashion.

Aliya is a 41-year-old labour migrant working as a babysitter in Moscow. She takes care of twin schoolgirls. Before coming to this family, she worked for several years as a shop

---

[92] For more on the Islamic business sector—from high-visibility financial firms to small and medium-sized businesses, all the way down to bazaars and street stalls—see Turaeva and Brose (2020) and Botoeva (2020).

assistant and then as a cleaning lady in one of Yekaterinburg's hospitals. Every year she promises her own four children, who are left with their grandma in Shamaldy-Sai, to come back rich and buy a house. It has been more than ten years since she planned to come back. Aliya is divorced, lives alone, and when she turned 40, she decided to don a hijab. She still lives in Moscow but visits Shamaldy-Sai on occasions. I have known her from childhood as a confident and goal-oriented girl. When she turned 18, she was abducted for marriage. She lived with her husband in his parents' house in Tash-Kumyr. After many years when we met again, she had four children, was divorced, and had migrated to Russia for seasonal work. Her children stay with their grandparents when Aliya is back in Russia.

It is common for Central Asian labour migrants in Russia, including Kyrgyz ones, to leave their families behind since they consider it as seasonal work. People hope that their migration will be short and temporary. Nevertheless, in the majority of cases, migration lasts for years. Labour migrants from the region often cite the aspiration to save money and send remittances home to families and, ideally, invest money in properties in Kyrgyzstan. In her ethnography about a new moral economy of migration, Isabaeva (2011) notes that long absences of family members in migration are 'justified' through the new social functions and benefits those remittances bring (migration, informal networks and new media technologies are discussed in chapter 7).

I kept in contact with Aliya via the online social platform 'Odnoklassniki' (OK) and WhatsApp. To avoid online harassment, most Kyrgyz females on social media platforms prefer to indicate their marital status. Aliya also highlights her familial status on OK with the word 'married' attached to her account name despite being divorced. She explained that a good, devoted Muslim woman is expected to be married, for which she prefers to keep a status of "married" in her social media profile. That is a common strategy, she added. Another common strategy for anonymity among OK users is to conceal their names using random letters or just an initial in the profile name. Some users register accounts that include the names of both the wife and husband. (e.g., 'Marat_Aida').

Aliya recounted to me her experience with the *hijab* via WhatsApp:

The first time I wore a headscarf eight years ago, I really lacked confidence. I knew my veiling (*jamynganym*) would raise questions from my parents and friends. I thought it would be harder in Moscow to find a job in a *hijab* as well. But I really wanted to. I prepared for a long time; I went to the mosque, and I even bought headscarves. I watched educational videos [explaining how and why to wear the hijab] on Odnoklassniki, For sceptical people, there is a great video clip. Watch it! It explains whether wrapped (*orolgon*) or unwrapped candy is hygienic. I had supportive girls. I rented a flat with them, and I liked the way they wore the *hijab* carefully and how they talked about Islam. I felt more comfortable, and once I went out in a *hijab*. I thought everyone was looking at me, and I felt discomfort in front of my old acquaintances. I became timid and afraid of the attention. After a month, I stopped wearing it. But after about six years, I was determined to put it on and keep it on! Now people's attitudes have softened as well. They already understand that there's nothing wrong with it. My parents, who used to be atheists, have also improved their understanding of Islam. [WhatsApp interview with Aliya, 10.08.2019]

Like Aliya, many other interviewed women who donned *hijabs* mentioned the analogy of wrapped candy and hygiene and the foreign video clips with various hashtags[93] that are spread widely that propagate it. Sometimes the metaphor of wrapped chocolate is used instead.

Such videos[94] are recreated on many occasions in the Kyrgyz and Kazakh languages. However, the story is always the same: a man with Muslim attributes (prayer bead, long clothes, and beard) is asked by a stranger why a Muslim woman needs to cover her head with a cloth, be it a *hijab*, a *niqab*, or a *burqa*. The stranger insists: 'You can't see the face properly. It's totally uncomfortable'. The Muslim man draws two candies out of his pocket—one wrapped and the other not—and holds them out in the palm of his hand. As

---

[93] '#VsemirnyiDenPlatka'. Accessed 22 February 2022.
https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/всемирныйденьплатка/.

[94] https://www.youtube.com/shorts/a2Dp8XzyNyo

you might expect, the one without the wrapper has cracked a little, with some debris and crumbs from the pocket stuck to it. The Muslim man beckons the stranger to select one of the candies. The stranger hesitates and chooses the one with the wrapper. In this brief exchange, the point is clear — just as a man would always prefer a clean, wrapped candy as it is more hygienic, so a covered woman is preferable.

The video highlights men's choices and preference for hygiene, cleanliness and pristineness. From the video, it can be assumed that women consider the male perspective on wearing the *hijab*. However, in Aliya's case, she is doing it for herself. She is divorced and insists she does not want to remarry or even have a relationship with a man. As she tells it, her headscarf gives her a kind of autonomy in mobility and freedom both on social media and in real life.

Another divergent case is Zuloiha. She is a young married 17-year-old girl. I met her some months into her marriage. Her husband is a 25-year-old devoted Muslim attending mosque and going on Tablighi Jamaat's daw'at trips. She was unhappy with her marriage. When I saw her first, she looked sad, and I could feel her disenchantment with her destiny. She was a young, inexperienced, shy girl with the free spirit of a teenager. At times Zuloiha sounded as though she had accepted the traditional rules of marriage and her husband's role; at other times, she expressed resistance against these ideals and a couple of times, she mentioned she had attempted to flee her new home.

In contrast, Hadicha was wearing a *hijab* on her own account. She disclosed that no one expected this of her, and no one had pressured her. Her choice was to come to the true path and live a good 'Muslim life'. Although it took her years to stay firm on her decision to wear the Islamic headscarf, she found the strength and, step by step, came to always wear a *hijab* in public. She said that she worried about what her parents, siblings and neighbours would say, how they would react and how she would behave in her new garment.

She did not change her clothes radically. First, she started wearing longer skirts and eschewing pants and jeans. Then, she added long-sleeved blouses and tops. Later she combined both. She said people around her were interested and asked whether she was

getting 'devoted to religion' (*dinge berilip ketti*). She said she did not hide her changed attitudes toward Islam or that she had started regular prayers and learned passages from the Quran. She said in 2019, on the first day she wore a *hijab*, that it did not feel as constraining as she had expected:

> I think people have gotten used to *hijabs* already. Years before, it was perceived negatively, and I did not encourage wearing it. But when I went out of my home in a hijab (*hijabchan*), I was ready to ignore the glances people could give me and possible teasing comments. Luckily, I didn't get these, and I felt very good about myself (*ozumdu jakshy sezdim*). Only some of my friends, relatives and younger neighbours were joking about my new attire. They found it ironic that I now had become a decent girl. I joked that I also take responsibility for their sins and am on a mission to be a role model. Through jokes, I tried to convince them that they should also make a firm decision and cover their naked parts.

The motives and practices of wearing the *hijab*, as we can see, are not homogenized and have individual characteristics. The normalization and integration of Muslim headscarves in Kyrgyz public space over the last few decades have fostered favourable conditions for women to don the *hijab*. As mentioned earlier, until comparatively recently, the *hijab* seemed an alien concept, and local people referred to women donning it in other, often pejorative, terms like 'wrapped', 'bundled up' or 'covered' (*jamyngan, orongon, chumkongon*).

7.5. Different paths

There are different paths to religious practice and veiling in the post-Soviet context, as we see from the backgrounds and structural factors of Aliya's, Zuloiha's and Hadicha's lives. Young women, rather than their parents, were the first adopters of the *hijab* in Shamaldy-Sai (and Kyrgyzstan as a whole). Broader communal control regarding Islam is weak, and the new Islam-oriented moral authority in the Kyrgyz youth is observed to come not from their parents or neighbourhood communities but rather from sources that

are personally, culturally and geographically dispersed. These can include social media, religious books, local mosque gatherings, daw'at-chis, and interaction with the global community of Muslims.

In this way, the Islamic style of clothing affects and signifies a transformation of the 'self'. This is seen in the dynamics of *hijab* practices in Shamaldy-Sai. As we witness from the individual cases, the veiling movement contributes to new social identities, which often contradict and counteract traditional hierarchical relations and mark different standards of morality between the generations. Given that traditional modest headwear is available to 'protect' women's modesty, wearers of the *hijab* can be said to search for a new identity free from established negative associations of backwardness. For them, the *hijab* symbolizes a new spiritual and moral order untarnished by the failed communism of the past and the uncertain present. New Islamic clothing promotes self-discipline and self-consciousness for veiled women; it serves as a bodily reminder to the wearer of her commitment to be a dutiful, modern Muslim woman. *Hijabs* signal a new religious identity, which they navigate to distance from the autochthonous, colonial past and uncertain postcolonial present to provide the foundations for a new promising Muslim society.

This transformative process contributes to a larger picture of social change representing a new historical consciousness and a process of changing subjectivities which resembles the process of new media technologies use and informational flows to be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 8. New media technologies and transformed informality

8.1. Dynamics of informal social networks

Mobile phones have transformed the nature and dynamics of informal social networks worldwide. The new technology—especially the digitalization of state services—helps prevent corruption by allowing older forms of informal social networks and bureaucracy to be bypassed and the state's services access directly. In addition, new technology has the potential to create transparent and efficient ways to access public services. This is usually done by implementing electronic queue systems, online payment platforms, registers and other public services, as well as transparency portals providing access to government data, statistics and state laws and regulations.

In this final substantive chapter[95], I explore the extent to which smartphones and new technologies are empowering Shamaldy-Sai residents (including those engaged in seasonal labour migration) in accessing public services through informal networking. I find that, in times of need, people—including young Shamaldy-Saians still in Kyrgyzstan and those engaged in labour migration in Russia — are increasingly turning to smartphones to help each other expedite access to public resources, share information about potential reliable networks (*taanyshtar, svyazi*), and recommend such networks to each other (in the process, prioritizing these networks over others).

More concretely, this chapter explores how informality—the bodily and spatial relationship between people and the state (and the various services it makes available online)—is mediated (and transformed) by new technologies. I question how digital technologies facilitate lateral support networks (exchange of favours), especially against a backdrop of weak state institutions. For where people would pick up the phone or knock on doors to seek the help of those in their networks—from teachers to doctors—now such contacts

---

[95] This chapter is an extended version of the research on the role of new technologies in the informal networks in Shamaldy-Sai. The partial results of that research have been published by Baialieva and Ismailbekova (2022).

can be accessed via WhatsApp whether one is living in the same town or, in principle, on the other side of the world. In addition, it illustrates how these relationships become more visible for users (and researchers) as new semi-public and informal spaces emerge on social media—especially WhatsApp, by now the most popular messaging app in Kyrgyzstan.

The topic of informality mediated via new technologies was not initially the focus of the thesis. However, as the fieldwork unfolded and during my interactions with Shamaldy-Sai residents, it came up more and more in close conversation. As a result, I started gathering observation and information that formed a separate line of inquiry into socio-cultural processes and mediated practices. Building upon the main idea of the thesis—namely, layered post-Soviet transformations—the central contribution of the chapter is to shed light on how informal access to public resources works alongside the use of new technologies. Specifically, I find that new technologies, mass media and smartphones create a new, largely self-regulating space for informal networks (helped or, in some cases, hindered by algorithms). This phenomenon I call *e-nformality* (electronic informality).

Methodologically the chapter combines traditional research with digital ethnography. The idea of internet ethnography implies that studying virtual spaces is different from studying the 'real' or offline social practices (Kozinets 2010, 2016, Ardévol 2012). Hine's (2000) monograph *Virtual Ethnography* distinguishes between traditional ethnography's primary focus on *territorial location and boundaries* and the emphasis *on flow and connectivity* in the newer digital forms of ethnography. O'Reilly concurs, arguing that the new virtual ethnography challenges assumptions of the ethnographer's 'field site', in that 'instead of thinking in terms of places or locations, our Internet ethnographer looks to connections between things' (O'Reilly 2009, 217).

In combining online and offline ethnographies in this chapter, I am able to draw on a unique vantage point in participating in the same settings and using similar tools for articulation and interaction as the research participants themselves. In so doing, I am able

to shed new light on how networks and social relations are developed and maintained in the context of new media technology.

8.2. Informal networks mediated via new media technology

Several years ago in 2014, I received a call from a former classmate Tahir,[96] a Kyrgyz labour migrant in Russia, whom I had not seen for about 15 years. He had found my number on the Russian social media platform 'Odnoklassniki' ('classmates'[97] in Russian), roughly equivalent to Facebook. He then contacted me via WhatsApp, asking for help. Tahir knew that I had worked for some time at one of the state universities in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. This, it would turn out, was the reason for the call.

After exchanging a few pleasantries, Tahir posed a direct question, one that I did not expect at all: 'How much would the cheapest university diploma cost me? I need it urgently by summer'. Tahir explained that he needed to get hold of a university degree so he could boost his chances of finding a better position in Moscow. The question had me flummoxed, to say the least, although I did have a dim awareness of such informal markets peddling bogus university diplomas, transcripts, and school graduation certificates. I murmured some disconnected sentences advising him to apply for university, letting him know I had not been living in Kyrgyzstan for many years, that his idea was technically against the law, and that I was the wrong person to ask for help.

I never heard back from him. However, two years later, we bumped into one another in Shamaldy-Sai. I jumped at the chance to ask Tahir what he had done about the university qualification. He told me he had 'got' a university degree from one of the provincial universities in Kyrgyzstan, which set him back US$700. He conveyed this information to me in a matter-of-fact way, as if he were explaining the steps one might take to open a bank account or organize a handyman to come and fix a leaky pipe. Tahir added that he

---

[96] I have changed all the names to ensure the anonymity of the research participants. [you said this early on in the thesis, no need to repeat it here)

[97] In Kyrgyz culture, the concept of 'classmates' ('*klasstashtar*') carries weighty significance and plays an important role in informal networks and solidarity groups. You will ref the general literature on informality, in post-sov and CA especially, soon, yes?

had participated in all the state exams, in any case. I wondered how all of this had come about.

As it happened, after I had not been able to help him, Tahir had phoned Batma Eje, a prominent figure in our hometown. Her son, whom Tahir knew well, worked as a university teacher in Kyrgyzstan. Tahir called him up and talked to him over the phone about the situation, asking if there were any risks involved in the deal and how much it would cost. Tahir also needed to know how to pay since he was not physically in Kyrgyzstan but in Russia, urgently searching for 'black' ways to get a formal 'white' paper so he could apply for work as a 'graduate specialist' (in any field), which would significantly boost his career prospects. As it turned out, in the wake of all this back and forth, Tahir managed to acquire a graduate specialization in economics.

Intrigued, I pressed Tahir over a lunch of shashlik for further details about the situation and what had given him the motivation to reach out to me so many years after we had finished high school:

> *Me*: Why did you decide to write to me, and why did you think I could help you?

> *Tahir*: Everyone in the education system is engaged with it [peddling illicit diplomas] because they need to survive; people's salaries just don't cover their bills; they can't make ends meet. They have documents to sell but no money; we have money but no documents. It's a case of supply and demand, you know? …. You came to my mind since I saw you active on "OK". I thought you might understand my situation and be able to help. But you live abroad and don't need money, I realized. Otherwise, you would have helped me, wouldn't you?

> *Me:* How is it possible you didn't even finish school and have no school certificate but could get a university degree?

> *Tahir:* Now I have all of that. Every barber knows (*po sekretu vsemu svetu, vse znayut*) that you can buy anything with good connections. I have a school

certificate as well. No one has gotten hurt or lost anything. I dreamed of studying at the university, but it was difficult for my mother to keep the household going when my dad died. She took me with her to work in Russia. I had to interrupt my schooling, and my education was deferred. But now I have fixed everything.

Tahir studied well but did not finish school because of family hardship. So out of necessity, he migrated to Russia to help his mother make ends meet. He worked in different sectors, from hospitality to construction work to taxi driving in different Russian cities where he has settled. Tahir is married and has children now. He stays connected with his home community in Kyrgyzstan, and he uses a share of his earnings abroad to keep up the maintenance of his parents' house there. Importantly, Tahir expressed the wish to return permanently to his hometown in Kyrgyzstan one day.

Based on Tahir's approach to conveying all of this information and his confident assertion that 'every barber knows' how it all works, it is safe to say that such informal practices in the educational system are fairly commonplace. Similarly, 'supply and demand' underpin an informal market that functions against a backdrop of extensive labour migration and new technologies. Still, people certainly do not disclose this kind of information as a matter of course; it is shared only among trusted groups (Ismailbekova and Baialieva 2022). Although Tahir was thousands of kilometres away from his 'alma mater' in Kyrgyzstan and was not eligible for the documents he obtained, his personal networks—mediated via smartphone—connected him to the services he needed to achieve his objectives.

As a former schoolmate of Tahir (we studied in the same class for nine years) and having a warm relationship with Batma eje, I form part of his network. Where a signature was required, this was provided (on his behalf) through notarized consent (also informally legalized), and all Tahir's documentation were forwarded as photocopies via WhatsApp. Labour migrants seldom use emails or faxes since these require additional skills and are seen as non-secure forms of communication. In contrast, the video and audio functions of WhatsApp and instant messaging give a sense of security and are perceived as a safer way to interact and exchange private inquiries.

Informal markets in the context of migration

Kyrgyzstan's economy depends on the flow of remittances generated by over 1 million citizens working abroad (mostly in Russia). In 2020, the value of remittances officially amounted to 31.3%[98] of Kyrgyzstan's GDP (unofficial figure can be substantially higher). With its demand for foreign labour, Russia remains the leading destination for migrants from Kyrgyzstan. Russia's visa-free migration regime, the extensive knowledge of Russian among the Central Asian population, and a relatively better job market are the main drivers attracting Central Asian workers. According to statistics from the Kyrgyz State Service for Migration in February 2022, 640,000[99] Kyrgyz migrants were registered in the territory of the Russian Federation. Unofficially, more than a million Kyrgyz citizens live in Russia, and a good number have acquired Russian citizenship.

Urinboyev (2017) presents a fascinating ethnographic account of the transnational lives of Uzbek migrants in Russia via smartphones. As he notes, insecurities in the receiving country, together with poor informational and legal support, lead Central Asian migrants to band together to cope:

> [T]he everyday life of Uzbek as well as Tajik and Kyrgyz migrants in Russia is characterized by a constant sense of insecurity, with the threat of exploitation, deportation, police corruption, racism, physical violence, and even death. This total lack of security [has] compelled Central Asian migrants to create informal networks and structures to cope with [risks and uncertainties of] their precarious livelihoods (Urinboyev 2017, 126).

Anti-migration sentiments are evident in ordinary Russians' rhetoric and the mass media. As Jeff Sahadeo (2019, 190) describes, 'nationalist and racist language in the Russian press [drives] street-level tension'.

---

[98] 'Personal Remittances, Received (% of GDP) - Kyrgyz Republic | Data'. Accessed 19 February 2022. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=KG.

[99] 'Statistika po migratzii'. Accessed 19 February 2022. http://ssm.gov.kg/ru/page/39.

Against this backdrop, Central Asian migrants often struggle with socialization and making new friends. Such unfavourable circumstances mean migrants are at pains to find immediate social connections, typically via smartphones that are 'personal, portable, pedestrian' (Mizuko 2006). Given the precarious working conditions, social connection and intensive interaction among migrants becomes essential in the search for reliable, accurate information and social support. Kyrgyz migrants retain close connections with family and community back home and create strong networks with their fellow compatriots in migration, mainly those who hail from the same region or even village.

8.3. Transformed social networks

Many international organizations[100] and agencies are trying to support the fight against corruption and informality through the use of new technologies, including smartphones. At the same time, young people in Kyrgyzstan continue to find creative ways use the new media to get ahead. In the process, through such technology (especially smartphones), they contribute to the spread and reinforcement of digital networks.

Quite unexpectedly, striking differences between the experiences and practices of informality between younger and middle-aged generations meant the generational aspect became a central theme in the present research on the community in post-Soviet Shamaldy-Sai. Certainly, both generations experience insecurity, financial struggles and socio-economic challenges in similar ways. Yet the two groups differ markedly in their approach to informality and corruption. In personal communications with the author in 2019, several young people pointed out that 'informality, even corruption, for us is a normal thing'. They perceive informality and bribery as a 'normal' feature of daily life, albeit a Janus-faced one. For them, informality hinders even as it allows them to pursue other objectives, like establishing careers and accessing services like medical care. In

---

[100]The World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Investment Bank, "Enterprise Surveys – Kyrgyz Republic 2019 Country Profile", 2019; "Enterprise Surveys – Kyrgyz Republic 2019 Country Profile"; World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators, Control of Corruption – Kyrgyzstan, https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?Report_Name=WGI-Table&Id=ceea4d8b; Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (hereafter OCCRP), "No Transparency in Kyrgyzstan's Coronavirus Spending", June 2020

contrast, those generation (middle aged or in their late 40s), whose background is rooted in the Soviet period, sees corruption in a negative light, even though they still practice informality and bribery in their everyday lives.

Young people's intensive use of smartphones becomes apparent when they try to access public services through informal social networks. Middle-aged generations use telephones to communicate with friends and family and complete basic logistical tasks, like booking appointments or making arrangements. Young people, in contrast, use their smartphones less as communications devices and more as a way to build and access densely elaborated digital networks of information and support. In so doing, young generation of Shamaldy-Sai residents draw on a range of social media platforms and forums, including groups on 'Odnoklassniki' and mobile messenger applications such as WhatsApp, to a lesser extent, Telegram. These digital platforms serve as sites of exchange and information sharing that young people can turn to when they need to problem-solve or request advice. This goes beyond their close circles to include 'friends of friends' in the larger network.

Connection via these platforms reflects an underlying logic of mutual benefit through reciprocity, mainly for issues related to the public sector. Through digital networks, young people remain very socially connected and stay closely informed about one another's lives. In the process, they are able to receive news, touch base with important people on a regular basis (even if they move to another place), learn about important events, and glean advice on specific issues.

Informality and new media

In exploring new forms of informal networks, solidarity and informality in post-Soviet Shamaldy-Sai in an age of increasing digitalization, I draw in the first instance on the conceptual approach of Baez-Camargo and Ledeneva (2017). The authors identify patterns of informality and argue that 'most systematically corrupt countries are considered to be just as corrupt now as they were before the anti-corruption interventions' (2017, 1). They also focus on unwritten rules, personal favours and the various ways in which understandings are reached around access to sought after values, all of which

happens outside the formal law, the regular structures of government and other rules-based systems. At the same time, informality must be understood not only as an effort to avoid the formal system. It is also fundamental to the *functioning of the formal system itself*.

Moreover, informality is not understood as just corruption or an aggregate of illegal practices. Drawing on the insights of Polese and colleagues, informality is understood as 'an overarching framework taking into account economic, social, and political practices [that are] far from being relegated to sweatshops and small-scale, ad hoc economic transactions' (Polese et al. 2018, 3). Moreover, it has broad social significance and is embedded in a host of local sociocultural settings (Polese 2021). In terms of discourse and practice, as Ledeneva (2018, 1) observes, informality is

> the world's open secrets, unwritten rules and hidden practices assembled in this project as 'ways of getting things done'. Informal practices may escape articulation in official discourse, but they capture the 'know-how' of what works in their vernacular representation'.

Against this backdrop, as mentioned above, the different generations in post-Soviet Central Asia experience informality very differently. Building on these insights, the following sections explore these generational differences vis-à-vis the experience of informality through the lens of the new social media and digital technologies. I trace informal networks to understand better how digital technology embeds and facilitates informal access to public resources works through lateral support networks in which favours are sought and granted, especially against a backdrop of weak state institutions.

Returning directly to the question of intergenerational experience, I note that the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked a generational pivot point in which the lives of the existing adult population were turned upside down, and newer generations arose who had no experience of the communist system. Alexei Yurchak's (2006) *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* remains a pioneering study on the paradoxes of Soviet life from the perspective of the last Soviet generation. The central paradox Yurchak seeks to address is how the Soviet system could be experienced

by those living under it as stable, even as its collapse came as a surprise (albeit not to everyone).

In this section, I pick up on the question of intergenerational dynamics, looking at both the Soviet and younger generations. Bribery and informality is related to the fact that the younger generation grew up after the collapse of the Soviet Union. While experiencing difficult socio-economic conditions on a par with older generations (scarce jobs, poor educational systems, social upheaval, dim prospects for a stable career, and distrust of the state), younger people have the advantage of seeing the possibility of building a positive future through the use of informal networks and bribery.

Of course, connections were also needed to access goods and services in Soviet times (Rivkin-Fish 2005; Morris and Polese 2014). For this reason, there is continuity between the middle-aged generation and the younger generation in terms of lived experience (Hann et al. 2002). Nevertheless, because of the prospect of future market employment and the higher degree of agency, the youth of today choose to invest more of their energy in learning how to reach out to unacquainted people (or those who are mere 'friends of friends'), deal with such contacts and build connections. Despite this, the older generation also participates (albeit in a different way) in digitalized networks to access state resources.

Diana Ibanez-Tirado's argument (2015) in her article on 'How can I be post-Soviet if I was never Soviet?' explains this tendency very well. She challenges the existing periodization 'Soviet/post-Soviet' by looking at the different experiences of two generations. As she notes, 'alternative temporalities' mean that those (i.e., the young) who never experienced 'Soviet times' have experienced and therefore understand informality in a way that differs markedly from the older generation.

By extending the argument further, the following section analyses how new social media and technologies serve as a lens on how the younger generation has come to experience informality as a 'normal' part of everyday life.

8.4. New technologies and digital platforms

According to Kyrgyzstan's State Communications Agency (SCA), in 2014, 79% of the population had access to the internet, and 50% had access to 3G mobile broadband coverage. As broadband penetration varies significantly across oblasts and regions, mobile coverage is the most affordable way to access the internet. Websites and location-based applications are primarily developed for Russian speakers, with some limited options to change language settings to use the Kyrgyz language. In addition, patterns of internet use in Kyrgyzstan differ little from other countries worldwide and range from recreational and social use to professional applications (Baialieva and Ismailbekova 2022).

As several scholars have noted, mobile technology has played an outsized role in the digital transformation in many developing countries (Larsson and Svensson 2018, Radnitz 2012, Ledeneva 2018, Ismailbekova 2018). It can play a crucial role in empowering migrants in many ways by staying in touch with family members (Thompson 2009). But on the other hand, it can serve as a mechanism of surveillance, as detailed in Kim's (2016) studies on how employers in Paris keep tabs on their migrant nannies. Mobile technology also transforms migration and empowers marginalized migrants, enabling them to be engaged socially, politically and economically (Ruget and Usmanalieva 2019). As the aforementioned study by Urinboyev (2017) shows, Uzbek migrants in Russia remain 'in touch' and 'in the know' via smartphones and use them to create a sense of community and build solidarity.

Shamaldy-Sai residents also actively use two of Kyrgyzstan's most popular social media platforms. The first is 'Odnoklassniki', mentioned before. Much like Facebook, it has all the standard social media features, such as the ability to make a profile or set up group pages, send text messages, upload photos or videos and publicize events. However, its most specific and most used section is the multimedia content. 'OK' users can access different music and videos uploaded on the website, including full-length pirated versions of box-office movies. Users, who are predominantly over 25, visit the website to stay connected with classmates, make new friends and find people from their childhood. Most

people who lived in the Soviet Union and later moved to different countries find 'OK' appealing because they can search for their old friends, former neighbours, teachers, and classmates.

In terms of messaging platforms, WhatsApp has the most users worldwide, followed by Facebook Messenger. Kyrgyzstan is not an exception to this trend. WhatsApp is the most widely used platform in the country, both in urban and rural areas. Features like easy download, free audio and video calls, and real-time messages have elevated it over other instant communication technologies. In addition, many businesses in the Shamaldy-Sai region, including its surrounding villages, have their own WhatsApp number, which they publicize so that customers can reach them directly via the app.

Moreover, many young people nowadays know the above-mentioned apps and spend their time on Instagram, Telegram, Skype, Immo and Zoom (Baialieva and Ismaibekova 2022). These are also important apps that people actively use to share information about different things (sharing photos, music and videos), including some advice and support. Still, WhatsApp has an outsized role in connecting, supporting, and entertaining people because it is easy to learn, use and practise by different generations. Therefore, it significantly affects patterns of social relationships and sustains collective coordination.

In the following sections, I examine different experiences regarding informality through new technologies focusing on the experiences of the local people in Shamaldy-Sai with access to information and their use of technology to rely on informal networks.

Online messengers and culture-based social reciprocity

A close examination of new media technology in the digital era can shed light on particular forms of expression and negotiation of relationships.[101] Families in Shamaldy-Sai, including those who live in other countries like me, have vigorously entrenched group messaging along different lines of relationship and interests. Features like easy

---

[101] For more about classical theories on *homo hierarchicus* and primitive culture, see Dumont (1980) and Tylor (2016). On the interpretation of cultures, see Geertz and Darnton (2017). On systems of kinship, see Radcliffe-Brown (2015). On social structure, see Leach (2006), Barth (1998) and Malinovsky (2015).

download, free audio and video calls, real-time messages made it elevated over other instant communication technologies. The app penetrated various circles, and its functions have been appropriated. Group messaging is another important and practical component that is extensively used among Kyrgyz users. Needless to say, WhatsApp plays a significant role in connecting, supporting and recreating people. It has immense effects on patterns of social relationships and sustains collective coordination, including organizational aspects of social life and mutual support (charity or help dealing with COVID-19).

I observed when WhatsApp became popular in Shamaldy-Sai around 2014. At that time, although living abroad, I was part of an ethnographic project researching the town and considered downloading WhatsApp. By the time I bit the bullet and installed the app in 2015, I was the only person in my family who had not done so. However, my mom was determined and convinced me that WhatsApp would be far more cost-effective than Skype for calling internationally and more straightforward than chatting on Odnoklassniki, which is a web-based platform.

As soon as I opened the app, a new 'virtual Shamaldy-Sai' world opened up for me. In short order, people from my Shamaldy-Sai circles added me to a dozen very popular Shamaldy-Sai WhatsApp groups. The structure of these Kyrgyz WhatsApp groups varies from family ties and communities of interest and ranges from 5 to more than 200 members. While I was added to most of the groups I ended up in by other people, some groups I approached myself, asking to join. I even created a couple of groups myself that included extended family members (cousins, nephews and nieces, and the like).

In this way, it became clear to me very quickly that WhatsApp had become a crucial channel for 'belonging' in the society of my birth and upbringing, which I was also studying in my role as a professional researcher. This 'virtual embodiment' meant I was able to stay in touch with my family and friends in the manner they had decided was best for them, but I could also be plugged in and attest to the sociological aspects of the cultural and technological shifts underway in the digital era.

Social ties and familial relationships via locative applications and social media can be an important source of 'social glue' (Spencer and Pahl 2006). It is unsurprising, then, that new media and cultural systems sometimes clash. I had to learn quickly in interacting with family members via WhatsApp that how I 'presented' on the platform was not just a matter of what I said but what I did not say and even how my digital settings were set up. By the time I joined, most of the Kyrgyz users on WhatsApp had already become *au fait* with the technical settings, but I was a little behind the eight ball in this regard.

Luckily, my cousin Jamal was kind enough to show me the ropes. She also lived abroad and was a member of our large family WhatsApp group, which consisted of 34 people (aunts, uncles, cousins, their wives, husbands, grandchildren). She explained to me that it was better 'to turn off read receipts'. She added that I had better set my status to 'offline' so no one would be able to tell whether I was online or not and if I had read my messages. Jamal also advised not to be an active user as even 'naïve emoticons could be misinterpreted' by the elderly folk in the group.

Jamal also showed me how to determine when a message I had sent had been delivered and seen by the recipient. She explained how 'blue tick marks' show whether your latest message has been read (if the recipient has 'read receipts' turned on) and exactly when that message was delivered and read. She also explained to me that a single grey tick meant the message had not yet been delivered, and two grey tick marks indicate that a message had been delivered but not read.

I followed all of Jamal's instructions, even as I observed how familial relations had become embedded in and expressed through digital structures. In time, I was able to observe how important it was to write back and keep reacting to messages coming from the elderly relatives in the group. This was as important to them as if we were speaking 'face-to-face'. From time to time, angry messages and cross-talk cropped up in the family-based WhatsApp group.

It is worth recounting one example in detail. One day, my aunt Anipa (pseudonym), who is in some way a leader of the kin group, called out her daughter-in-law Lira (pseudonym),

who lives in Russia, for ignoring her messages as soon as they were received and for acting as if she had not seen them (*togotpogoi, okumaksan bolup*). To the entire group, Anipa berated Lira for having read a message 10 minutes beforehand but not responding.

I scrolled up to find the original message and make sense of all the fuss. Finally, I found the source, the reason for Anipa's outburst. Sometime earlier, she had posted a friendly and casual query to the group: 'Hi family, what is everybody up to?' (*Salam, tuugandar! Kim emne kylyp jatat?*). Such general messages sometimes stay unanswered or are responded to by a few group members. Seldom if ever, does everyone respond, and younger kin members are especially likely to remain mute.

Aunt Anipa also noted that this was not the first time. Indeed, on another occasion, something similar occurred. Anipa had sent the group a message about her grandson's grades at school. When, after some time, no one had responded even though half of the group (14 persons) had seen her message (presumably, as indicated by 'read receipts'), she wrote again resentfully asking why people were 'ignoring' her. She used this opportunity to address all the younger members of the family (teens and older) to 'remind' them that Kyrgyz people are always expected to respect older people. It is impolite and unacceptable to neglect one another, she chided. Anipa, a 65-year-old senior family member, appeared to see it as her role to pass on the family rules and invoke age-old 'cultural' models in digital space.

Both cases underscore how digital technology, which never truly 'mirrors' offline social interaction, can lead to feathers being ruffled when established social norms are somehow 'violated' online. Both situations occurred in extended family chat groups, and in both instances, it was a middle-aged Kyrgyz woman who had been 'wronged'. Such women perceive the failure of others to respond as a personal insult and something 'wrong' that transgressed 'how Kyrgyz people should behave toward each other'. For these older ladies, the 'right' thing is not to 'let the words get cold' since 'Kyrgyz people use words to exchange and interact' (*Kyrgyzdar sozdu muzdatpait, jai alyshyp, surashyp turat*). In tight but large family groups on WhatsApp, it is seen as essential to keep in touch regularly. Therefore, imperative and interrogative requests addressed in the plural

form to respond are common: 'Don't just read the messages and stare at the screen—write back in response', 'Are you there? Why don't you write?' (*Karap koiup, okup koiup otura berbei gruppaga jazgyla. Barsynarby, jazyp turbaisynarby*).

Thus, age-old, culturally embedded forms of social reciprocity are insisted upon in digital space, in which few (if any) of the contextual features underpinning social relations offline are present. In digitally mediated social interactions, notably in communities in which hierarchy, deference, and collective solidarity are prized values, there is a 'culture clash' across generations. The younger generation remains mute while parents, older aunts and uncles assume established cultural codes apply online and that the latter's role is to enforce them in digital space.[102]

A portrait of 'Odnoklassniki'

In this section, we return to the 'Odnoklassniki' platform. I offer a brief survey of how digital ethnography worked in practical research, becoming a deep reservoir of observations that allowed me to grasp alternative modes of informal networks among the people of Shamaldy-Sai (both still-resident and those who had gone abroad).

On 'OK', I set up a closed group called 'NarynGES, Shamaldy-Sai', which quickly grew popular and became an opportunity to stay in touch with Shamaldy-Saians who had emigrated abroad. Such emigrants joined the group recognizing the old informal name of the town (the historical background of the name NarynGES is discussed in chapter 3). The group page I manage on OK differs from the expansive online world I experienced when I first set up WhatsApp (as discussed above). It has a different aim and is more about (re)constructing stories and memories about the town. As it is an open-discussion social media platform, the kinds of 'discreet exchanges' Tahir shared with me via WhatsApp (as discussed above) cannot be traced.

---

[102] This had changed to some extent by 2022. Due space limitations, I do not discuss the most recent changes as my close examination of online groups and digitally mediated relationships covers the years 2016–2020.

Figure 8.1. Screenshot of the Shamaldy-Sai group on the Odnoklassniki platform[103] run by Baialieva. Accessed 19 February 2022.

In parallel to my group consisting mainly of emigrants, Russian hydro specialists and ex-Shamaldy-Sai residents, I engaged with online communities set up by other labour migrants. For example, there is an open group on 'OK' called Shamaldy-Sai, which is

---

[103] 'Odnoklassniki'. Accessed 19 February 2022. https://ok.ru/group52852000948306.

extremely broad and is customarily oriented toward concrete information exchange and coordinating important details concerning logistics and travel. For instance, members publish information about upcoming shuttle transports leaving various Russian cities bound for Kyrgyzstan. They also post traditional 'classifieds' (like job announcements or lost and found information) and sometimes organize crowdsourcing for charity or support for needy compatriots.

I have witnessed inquiries among associates and acquaintances (*svyazi*, *znakomye*, taanysh-bilish) in kinship-based Odnoklassniki and WhatsApp groups about renewing passports or getting a Kyrgyz birth certificate for a child born in Russia. However, since 2015, I have seen notable shifts in patterns of informality. Very general online discussions and requests about informal practices and services have attenuated markedly. Instead, strategies have become much 'tighter' and more focused, wherein certain 'nodal' people are sought out for specific requests. Indeed, vital information about accessing informal services is now not something that 'every barber knows', to borrow Tahir's phrase from earlier. Instead, only 'trustworthy and knowledgeable barbers' with established institutional credibility and experience can access such information.

Batma eje is one such 'trustworthy and knowledgeable barber'. With her authority and discrete knowledge (not to mention her worldliness), Batma eje, a former senior school administrator, is a node in the emergent system of access to informal services. It is clear to me from our discussions that she understands how migrants can benefit significantly from such as system, and she justifies its existence on those grounds. She recognizes that it is risky and sup-optimal to produce formal documentation informally. But she does not see it as a practice that causes harm. Unlike other mediators who provide illegal services to migrants in the distance, Batma Eje earns no money but social capital from her mediation work — she simply connects 'knowing' (bilgen kishiler) people.

Moreover, she notes that the task has become much more complicated as control over state institutions has been tightened. According to Batma Eje, it is increasingly only those in senior positions (and their loyal assistants) who can deliver informal services. As a

result, the once standard practice of falsifying documents to assist migrants has become much more difficult.

I have taken the opportunity to casually pose some ethical questions to Batma Eje a couple of times over lunch. As a former teacher, she is a mentor to me and seeking her counsel on important questions is part and parcel of our relationship. In answering my queries, Batma eje remains relaxed, self-assured and thoughtful. She explains that the 'sale' of a birth certificate, school leaving certificate or university degree can be justified in situations where the demand that they be produced is unnecessarily bureaucratic. She notes that people are dealing with forces beyond their control—economic dislocation, political corruption, and a dearth of opportunities at home compared to working abroad. She concludes that at a time when everyone is struggling just to make ends meet, the 'quiet exchange' of resources that allows industrious people to find some stability does no harm against the backdrop of a formal system that is basically dysfunctional.

Besides educational documents, labour migrants commonly request birth certificates. I interviewed one distant kin whose family has Russian and Kyrgyz citizenship. They live in Russia ordinarily but envision a future in which they can return to live in Kyrgyzstan permanently. They also access informal services via mobile phone when they need to update their passports or to ensure a child newly born in Russia is registered in Kyrgyzstan. A child born to Kyrgyz parents in Russia is registered there in the first instance so that the family is eligible for *matkapital*, the Russian state's family benefit.

However, the parents are also navigating a more fundamental challenge. Formalized residence in Russia is a priority among most Kyrgyz migrants, and many become naturalized Russian citizens for that purpose. However, Kyrgyzstan prohibits dual citizenship. Rather than surrender their Kyrgyz citizenship, many families, such as my kin, seek to keep it (unlawfully) and pass it on to their kids, who are already Russian citizens by birth. Thus, the parents seek to have their Kyrgyz passports renewed through informal networks. They use the same networks to obtain birth certificates for their kids to be eligible for Kyrgyz citizenship as well. A child is registered as home-born and is registered in the relevant database in Kyrgyzstan. Based on the birth certificate, a valid passport is

sought for the child, and the family retains its legal ties to the country (albeit through documents obtained illegally).

The duality of online space and the generational divide

The above case studies shed much-needed light on several important aspects of informal networks—namely, their subversive potential and supportive functions, how they promote both a range of tasks (both unlawful and lawful) and the various patterns of sociability and instrumentality they engender (Ledeneva 2018, 9). At the same time, they reinforce much of what I have argued in relation to the way the generations in Shamaldy-Sai experience informality differently in general and online in particular.

More concretely, I contend that there is a tension that predominates in the interviews mentioned above. That tension reflects something more fundamental about what is 'taken online' from a cultural perspective, which in turn reflects differences in what is seen as acceptable in face-to-face contact versus online. Indeed, it relates to why older generations see it as unacceptable to demand personal services using technology. This must be because of the lack of opportunities to deal with informality and various opportunities that elders might otherwise take advantage of and because of the lack of trust in their networks and distrust of government agencies. The core of the informality of the older generation lies in this duality. In all these cases, ideals concerning 'how things should be' according to established rules and customs prevail.

The distinction becomes even more visible when we contrast the attitudes of the different generations. The younger generation is well aware of what the new technologies will mean for them in light of the fact that their whole lives are ahead of them, and they are making decisive choices now that will determine their career and life paths for years to come. For this reason, they are happy to invest the time needed to actively expand their groups, knowing how important they will be in the future. Online networking is interactive but also saves them time. Social messaging platforms like WhatsApp are seen as the 'space' of much social interaction, not merely as a channel to set up such interaction offline.

Moreover, most of the young people I interviewed are apprised of the problematic structural conditions that contextualize their struggles and negotiations. At the same time, they were raised amidst such factors, and they are, in some sense, used to them as 'background conditions'. Our participants highlighted the various slights (petty or otherwise) they encountered when trying to access the formal state or public services. For many of the younger generations, stories of wealthy parents who set their kids up for life are the stuff of popular Netflix dramas and not real life. Meanwhile, government support to help them get ahead through schooling or training is lacking. In response, young people have invested in their social networks long-term, seeing active involvement in a range of extended social networks as the 'least bad' way to hedge for the future and avoid being left out in the cold.

In contrast, the older folks I spoke to expressed some hesitation (discomfort even) about using social media, especially when posing intimate questions, trading favours, or navigating and resolving difficult personal situations. Instead, they use digital technology for entertainment (be it surfing videos on YouTube or watching concerts online), to simply catch up on the news or—as in the case of aunt Anipa and our extended family groups on WhatsApp—communicate with kids or other family members living abroad. Indeed, the most 'digitally advanced' things elders reported feeling comfortable doing online were swapping e-cards, sharing stories or anecdotes about daily life, or exchanging songs or even pirated films.[104]

In my interviews with older people, they emphasized personal relationships, contacts and gratitude for facilitating access to public services. In addition, they stated a preference for reciprocity in long-established ways, saying they would like to reciprocate for what they had personally benefited from through direct gifts such as food, an invitation to a foreign café or gifts. The emphasis was on family and regional identity. In other words, the older generation remains dependent on informal social networks but prefers to vest these with

---

[104] For more on researching digital relationships, see Pink (2016), Horst and Miller (2012), and Da Silva and Correia (2014). On the 'situational' aspects of human social behaviour, see Morey et al. (2012) and Goffman (1982, 1990). For more on the new media in everyday life, see Mizuko (2010), and Horst (2012).

moral connotations, such as a sense of duty, loyalty, reciprocity and the exchange of gifts (food or gratitude).

However, they prefer that this exchange occur physically, without new technologies or social media being the 'space of exchange' itself. For example, they are happy to use WhatsApp to set up a 'real' meeting rather than as a way to organize meetings on video-calling platforms such as Skype or Zoom. Moreover, their gratitude should be something tangible like food. They might, on occasion, trade in favours over the phone, but the expectation is that such favours will be returned or repaid offline.

8.5. Alternative digital temporalities

Digital platforms and mobile phones connect many networks—family members, friends, relatives, team members, and acquaintances—who are not territorially bound to Shamaldy-Sai itself. These new technologies help individuals a great deal, especially when it comes to access to public services, as we see from Tahir and Batma eje's cases. At the same time, while all generations are subject to informality and are privy to the same post-Soviet socio-economic conditions in a 'shared background experience' and, to a significant extent, embrace digital platforms, their experiences of the latter are markedly different.

For younger people operating in the digital realm, the platform itself is a space to exchange information via mobile phones and provide each other with advice, especially for those who need public services (medical care, a document) or who need to approach law enforcement. Moreover, since they are on their phones much of the time, digital platforms are a time-efficient way for younger people to exchange information and gain access to prized values while reinforcing informal networks through regular but intermittent connectivity. Moreover, while such exchanges have been a part of life for people 'forever', in the past, they went on 'under the table' (*pod stolom*). For today's young, information goes out everywhere via the internet. This makes it easier to facilitate informal practices concerning access to public services, mainly around making

appointments, finding influential people, and obtaining and sending needed documents, such as birth certificates, educational credentials and the like.

In distinct contrast, informal practices — while also a central aspect of their lives — are seen in very different terms by those of middle-age and older. As the last generation of the Soviet era, these folks would prefer to see informal practices remain as they were in the past—tangible, personal and grounded in moral frameworks and moral online activism such as spontaneous online demos, flashmobs). The older generations underscore that such exchanges are about obligation, loyalty, and reciprocity. For them, online networks should remain channels for attaining morally desirable ends, even though bribes and favours are inevitably involved.

The normalization of these practices can be observed through the prism of the very different way the younger generation sees and uses digital technology. As Ibanez-Tirado (2019) argues, there are alternative temporalities that shape individual perceptions of informality. Today's younger generations did not experience the 'Soviet times' in which informality was part of the bureaucratic rhythm of life in a stultifying, centrally planned economy. For them, digital space is a way to creatively adapt to a world of constant dynamic change, where informality becomes normalized as a 'positive good' in itself since it is directly connected to the most modern technology available. The older generation has a different understanding of informality, which emerges in the form of a duality—they try to live according to rules and regulations, but when things do not work, they are not so surprised.

New technology and social media are thus central to the post-Soviet experience of layered transformation. The new flow of information and technology goes beyond bureaucracy and government rules; instead, it is an effective way to share information and knowledge about the 'best' or 'most straightforward' way to get ahead. This simplifies communication in informal networks. In addition, people have created social groups to cope effectively with irregularities in the state provision of services. At the same time, they contribute to community-building by getting closer to people, giving money and strengthening connections with state authorities.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

Figure 9.1. Local residents watching a slide presentation about my research on Shamaldy-Sai during the 'flash study' convention. Source: Sabira Chargynova, Shamaldy-Sai 2018.

9.1. 'High-socialist' transformed society

In this thesis, I have investigated a kaleidoscope of different themes in one locality, Shamaldy-Sai, a 'high-socialist' settlement constructed against the backdrop of a utopian vision of development in Soviet Central Asia (Schwenkel 2020). It is a peripheral town where the project of Soviet modernity unfolded from the 1950s to the 1970s, promising a

stable future. However, since the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet regime and the disruption of industry, local communities have been left disoriented. Located along the transboundary Naryn River with its cascade of hydropower plants, the town has confronted infrastructure degradation and environmental challenges. The chapters have analyzed how local communities have responded to major post-Soviet transformations and detailed the continuing flows of ideas, practices and information that shape Shamaldy-Sai today as a deindustrialized periphery and a new border town.

In Figure 9.1. we can see the residents of Shamaldy-Sai sitting inside the Culture of House (locally known as *Klub*) at the welcoming event I organized with the Naryn-Syr Darya team and local activists. The photo was taken during the convention's first official opening day, held on April 26. A total of 317 local residents attended the ceremony. The 'Syr-Darya' team organized the interdisciplinary flash study in cooperation with the local administration and aimed to facilitate contact and goal-oriented engagement between citizens and scientists. As we see in the photo, the faces of the Shamaldy-Sai residents and others who came to the event are diverse. There are military people, women in headscarves, school children and elderly residents. They all play major roles of various kinds in the life of the town and are of equal importance. Despite structural differences and diverse experiences, each resident of Shamaldy-Sai participates in the development of social life, contributing to the circularity of life and events. The constant renewal of ideas and practices makes Shamaldy-Sai's space prosperous in its search for solutions.

Today there are rusty factories on the outskirts of the village, and polluted water flows in the river, with dilapidated water infrastructure, as is the case all over the country. But these tangible signs of deindustrialization do not mean that the quality of life or demography is in decline or people are fleeing. On the contrary, derelict Soviet buildings are being replaced by shiny new retail outlets, and the population is growing; economic conditions and the availability of goods and services speak to the quality of life. Internet cafes, wireless broadband, products imported from America, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Sweden (especially Ikea furniture), pizzerias, sushi bars, cupcakes and other novelties from the outside world can be seen everywhere in the town. Deindustrialization has not led to collapse and decay but a town that instead continues to expand and

develop. This aspect of flourishing amidst deindustrialization sets Shamaldy-Sai apart from neighbouring ex-industrial towns like Kyzyl-Alma, Tash-Kumyr, and Maili-Sai.

By examining radical changes and rapid development such as labour migration, Soviet and post-Soviet practices, the materiality of borders, the arrival of novel Islamic practices and the role of new media, I attempted to take a number of factors into account and put them together to paint a picture of a community thriving against the backdrop of often wrenching change. All the chapters raised distinct issues and entailed different research methods, but they all share the same question and space of inquiry—life after industrialization. Shamaldy-Sai and its surrounding settlements can be seen as a microcosm of how people cope, react, adapt and evolve in the face of rapid socio-economic, political and economic change.

9. 2. Dialogic processes

This dissertation has sought to analyse layered transformations and multi-directional flows in the context of deindustrialization. The case of Shamaldy-Sai can help us to better understand contemporary deindustrialized zones more generally. Rapid social change in post-industrial Kyrgyz towns points to significant continuities and, at the same time, communal innovations in post-Soviet space. By analyzing Shamaldy-Sai's post-Soviet interdependent practices and actions, this thesis has shown their transformative nature and dialogic processes in a globalizing world, such as hijab movements. This thesis examined how the transformations and movements of tangible and intangible things such as industrial heritage, borders, flows of religion, fashion, and information are negotiated. These transformative changes and flows guide the region in innovating and moving into the   future.

In my thesis, I have applied the concepts of *post-Soviet transformations* and *flows* from an anthropological perspective. The category of 'post-Soviet' that I have employed throughout is conceptualized not only in its temporal and geographical sense, nor only as

a legacy of the previous regime but in meaning the multiplicity and confluence with global influences. A close examination of the social dynamics of everyday life in Shamaldy-Sai has shown how local communities navigate through moments of significant transformation such as deindustrialization, environmental change, the evolution of borders, religious revival and digitalization.

The chapters on topics of labour and temporality, 'slow violence' and slow prosperity, religious revival, mobility and new media have focused on how these significant transformations have been addressed locally. Researching both deindustrialization and the new prosperity allows us to comprehend the complexity of post-Soviet transformations. Drawing on the historical context of dam work and industrialization in Shamaldy-Sai, I have shown in chapter 3 how the temporary became permanent. And then, in chapter 5, I show how abstract spaces have been converted into lived places, as in the examples of *gramota* and wall graffiti.

In chapter 4, I have drawn on the transformed river to examine the everyday challenges experienced by communities living along the lower Naryn River. The chapter focused on regular water cut-offs and the invisible, untold stories of communities living alongside toxic residues. Treating such circumstances as an example of 'slow violence', I showed how locals act as environmental managers as they strive to protect their own well-being. Other forms of 'slow violence' and environmentalism are deindustrialization, pollution, malnutrition and poverty. As shown in the case of my uncle who passed away, local people attempt to create accountability and relieve environmental threats by leveraging their roles as local regime actors to act as environmental managers.

However, life after industrialization has also success stories, as shown in chapter 5. I have discussed the Soviet industrial enterprises in Shamaldy-Sai. These were mothballed after 1991 even as the buildings remained in place, steadily corroding and falling into disrepair. At the same time, many have been appropriated for contemporary use, allowing certain Soviet practices to be retained and woven into the present, as in the example of concrete fences (*betonzabor*) and graffiti. Coining the term 'slow prosperity' to describe how locals have thrived in the wake of such transformation, I have shown how

deindustrialized areas have been transformed into 'prosperous' cases through purposive action. Such transformation is not simply a result of changing communal relationships but also reflects adaptation of the built environment (the restructuring of Soviet buildings) and regional reorientation. As a result, Shamaldy-Sai has established itself as an economic hub for many towns and oblasts in the area. I argue that it is the interplay of post-socialist, post-Soviet institutional memories and enduring practices that assisted the town in maintaining economic and social connections.

Further geographical and economic reorientation and new post-Soviet trade and market relationships have restructured social connectedness and spatial organisation, as demonstrated in chapter 5. The research has shown that, adopted from the previous system and adapted to new realities, various social services and benefits (aid, food, housing) in Shamaldy-Sai are mediated through local informal social organizations. Today, social connections and support structures adapted from 'old' socialist practices are extended to the wider collective based on business and civil activism as a base for solidarity. As residents of a peripheral town that is 'out of sight' and thus often 'out of mind' for the 'centre', drawing on informal networks is often the optimal way for people (especially the young) to access services and benefits. These post-Soviet practices — discussed in several chapters — are preconditions that allow for the 'institutional capacity' of informal citizen networks to work, during celebrations, through community-building or in times of crisis (country's border clashes, pandemic Covid-19). While in chapter 5, I focused more on 'high socialist' legacies and how they have been appropriated and repurposed locally, in chapter 6, I engaged more substantially with the materiality of the (relatively new) international border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

In taking up the topic of Shamaldy-Sai as a new bordertown in chapter 6, I demonstrated that the development of post-1991 international boundaries reflects an assemblage of flows, the course of which have been shaped by extraordinary (and often disruptive) events and threads of social, political and infrastructural change. Significant developments in this regard include regime changes, internal tensions, interethnic clashes, and new patterns of transboundary economic cooperation. In addition, the chapter reflected on local interactions and responses to the materialization,

rematerialization and dematerialization of boundaries, drawing on auto-ethnography and home anthropology. In so doing, it showed how barbed wire fences and highly securitized checkpoints slow mobility but do not staunch it, nor do they result in complete separation. Instead, people find ways of connecting, if not within the old flow, then in a new one.

Moreover, the break in the easy connection with Uzbekistan has resulted in a new connectedness with other regions in Kyrgyzstan and opened up new forms of connectivity and exchange. In chapter 7, I take up[this theme to examine another aspect of change in examining flows of information, ideas and people. I drew attention specifically to the highly contested topic of the 'new' Islamic movement, focusing on the relatively new practice of women donning the hijab.

The analysis in Chapter 7 showed that the veiling movement is an open-ended process that unfolds against a backdrop of ongoing tensions between traditionalism, the Soviet legacy of women's emancipation, conceptions of 'modernity', and the influence on local communities of discourses and practices of global political Islam. As the chapter laid bare, the Islamic style of clothing affects and signifies a transformation of the 'self', which is seen in the dynamics of hijab practices in Shamaldy-Sai. The individual cases described in chapter 7 revealed that the veiling movement contributes to new social identities, which often contradict and counteract traditional hierarchical relations and mark different standards of morality between the generations.

The veiling movement cannot be understood as a simple reflection of 'Islamic revival' and a return to traditional forms of 'modesty' for women in the public sphere. Tradition modest headwear (*jooluk*) has long existed and could easily function to 'protect' women's modesty, but this item is not part of the discussion for women donning the hijab. Instead, wearers of the hijab choose this particular item for reasons that go beyond simple modesty, including what it means for their identity. For them, the hijab symbolizes a new spiritual and moral order untarnished by the failed communism of the past and the uncertain present.

The new Islamic clothing promotes self-discipline and self-consciousness and serves as a bodily reminder to the wearer of her commitment to be a dutiful, modern Muslim woman.

217

For many veiled women, adopting modest behavioural codes and a devout lifestyle gives a new sense of mastery over themselves, their lives and their future. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, hijabs signal a new religious identity, which they navigate to distance from the autochthonous, colonial past and uncertain postcolonial present to provide the foundations for a new promising Muslim society.

There is also a clear generational divide in the experience of the post-Soviet reformatting of religion. Young women were the first to adopt the hijab (i.e., before their mothers and aunts). In most cases, young women today see the older generations as having been spoilt and broken by the Soviet-era value system, despite its (formal) emphasis on the emancipation of women and the equality of the sexes.

Such a generational divide can be seen also be seen in the analysis of new media technology and digitalization in Shamaldy-Sai, detailed in Chapter 8. Here, I tackled the issues of informality and the use of smartphones. Yet, territoriality is now 'in flux' as digitizing processes go beyond one physical space, as I showed in chapter 8. The digital Shamaldy-Sai community stays connected worldwide (from Russia to Western Europe, South Korea, Turkey and beyond), but the modes of communication and interaction exhibit peculiar Kyrgyz patterns.

The observations and interviews that I undertook revealed that smartphones have influenced how informal relations and flows of resources are handled. I discovered that established forms of culturally grounded social reciprocity have migrated into digital space and transformed into technology-based relationships. Older cultural patterns and expectations are not abandoned in this most modern of spaces but are in many ways refracted through it as certain voices seek to ensure longstanding cultural norms are adhered to online. Thus, digitally mediated social interactions, notably in communities where collective identities and hierarchies have long mattered, see a merging of culture and technology that is both fascinating and unexpected.

Smartphone-based communication thus supports informal networks' functioning but also changes how such networks work when compared with earlier times. It also creates new optics for accessing public services as digitally mediated informal relationships that go

beyond bureaucracy. Using social media, smartphone apps, and messaging services is an effective way to share information and knowledge about where the best information is to be found and whom to contact. Thus, such new media interaction simplifies the communication of those involved in informal networks. In the context of Kyrgyzstani labour migrants in Russia, this informality serves as an effective way of coping with state irregularities. At the same time, it contributes to the functioning of the state by getting closer to people, giving money, and strengthening connections with state authorities. However, it comes close to tipping over into 'corruption' (or conduct that might be perceived as such). Still, looking at the practical sides of informality in a digital age contributes to the literature.

The transformative process contributes to a larger picture of social change representing a new historical consciousness and a process of shifting subjectivities. Examining the significant and often highly disruptive changes in a deindustrialized post-Soviet region in Kyrgyzstan, I have analyzed life after industrialization, which I argue is an assemblage of different local legacies, and global influences and innovations. From Shamaldy-Sai and its neighbouring villages, we can see how life continues to be shaped by the Soviet past, with its reformatted social institutions and networks. A life after industrialization in Kyrgyzstan, thus, conveys a collage of events and layers of legacies from different phases that interact with (and contradict) each other in complex ways. Still, the deindustrialized zones may have very different consequences in different local contexts. They are related not only to the post-Soviet space but to global currents. These transformative flows are negotiated movements that are not fluid and smooth but have particular unexpected turbulences, such as environmental challenges.

Peripheral bordertown Shamaldy-Sai's life after industrialization offers a comprehensive picture of micro-scale engagement with the intensified flows of information, people and resources. It is about both tangible and intangible flows of ideas, information, and norms. These flows are multi-directional currents and circulations of humans, objects and practices in which human becoming and societal transformation unfold. The transformed

society, such as the Shamaldy-Sai region, enables us to trace the social and material exchanges through which the new world comes into being.

9.3. Limitations and future research

I focused on Kyrgyzstani society only and looked at the small border town in the deindustrialized zone in the south of Kyrgyzstan. Further study is needed to examine other post-industrial zones, especially in studying borders from both sides, comparatively and in tandem.

I would also recommend looking at the agricultural perspective in post-industrial peripheries for future studies and examining their multi-directional flows of resources and knowledge. This perspective can reveal new insights into the adaptation and change of life after industrialisation. For example, many people who previously worked in factories were forced to take up farming after the Soviet industrial units were mothballed, albeit with no knowledge or training in this area. As a result, poor management (e.g., of crop rotation) and problems in marketing the harvest have arisen which I mentioned in chapter 6.

Also, due to time constraints, in studying the religious aspect, my dissertation was limited to the women's veiling movement only. I did not directly examine the male perspective nor the political aspects of Islamisation while studying the flows of religion and fashion in donning the hijab. Many questions remain: How do new religious and political actors mobilize and operate, and how do they change existing socio-cultural practices in post-industrial spaces? For future research, I would point to the need to consider how new Islamic groups are influencing and remaking politics 'from below'. In addition, future studies could address the questions of mobility and extensively examine relationships between various online and offline Islamic communities in the context of labour migration.

Based on the empirical findings, the value of approaching certain topics in non-conventional ways is born out. Thinking creatively in this way promises to shed much-needed light on otherwise hidden or overlooked aspects of post-industrial change. For

instance, as shown in the discussion on the border topic, conflicts should be studied not only through examining violence but also through understanding how peace is made and what comes next. Similarly, deindustrialization should be approached based on the assumption that disruption and disorientation exist alongside success stories and local efforts to craft favourable conditions out of a changing landscape. Last but not least, municipalities and practitioners should consider infrastructural disruption and environmental risks and urgently take action to ensure community well-being.

Glossary

Aba/ava: the honorific for males denoting respect for elders. 'Aba' is used for the patrilineal uncle in the southern dialect of the Kyrgyz language.

Achuu chyndyk: bitter truth.

Aiyl: village, originally a term for a group of *boz üi* moving together.

Aiyl ökmötü: village government/representative body since 1996, consisting of a president (also called the *aiyl ökmötü*), a village council (*aiyl kengesh*) and specialists such as agronomists.

Akkan suuda aram jok: this Kyrgyz saying literally means 'flowing water does no harm'.

Aksakal: literally 'white-beard', male elder. May also participate in the lowest rung of courts, the *aksakaldar sotu.*

Aksakaldar sotu: Informal Court of Elders used to be integrated into the official court system to entrench self-governance.

Akyn: bard, improviser, composer and singer of songs, often accompanies himself on a *komuz.*

Apa: mother, respectful form of address for any elderly woman older than ego.

Ata: father, respectful form of address for any elderly man older than ego.

Bata: blessing.

Baatyr: hero.

Bashyna suu ailandyryp: a purifying ritual. A cup of clean water is held over one's head, and the one who does it is usually the eldest in the family, making three rounds overhead clockwise.

Bizdin kyz: our girl, native daughter.

Chernyi vhod: the so-called 'black entrance' means an illegal border-crossing.

Chöl: desert.

Chyny: traditional tea or soup bowl.

Dinge berilip ketti: devoted to religion.

Dyikan: farmer, peasant.

Een talaa: an uninhabited field.

Ekotexinspektziya: eco-technical inspection.

Eje: older sister, respectful form of address for any woman, related or unrelated, older than ego.

El: people.

Emgek ardageri: labour veteran.

Gorodok gidrostroitelei: dam workers' town.

Hlop.punkt: literally translates as 'cotton point'. The cotton points were located close to the cotton fields (in southern Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan), where the cotton was handed over.

Jailoo: summer pasture, a colloquial term used for any pasture at a distance from permanent settlements.

Jamyngan/orongon/chumkongon: descriptive words for hijab literally translated as 'wrapped', 'covered', usually bear negative connotations.

Jerdesh: countrywoman.

Jooluk: Kyrgyz traditional headscarf worn like a bandana with the neck open.

Kemer: lizard.

Kezerme: Kyrgyz word adapted from the Russian 'kazarma' meaning railroad barracks.

Kollektiv: collectivity of people acting as a group.

Kolkhoz: (Russian) collective farm.

Komsomol: a member of the Communist Youth League in the USSR.

Komsomolskaya Vsesoyuznaya Udarnaya Stroika: Komsomol Students All-Union Strike Construction in the USSR.

Komsomol putyovka: a trade union ticket given to the youth who were mobilized to participate in the work of All-Union Strike Construction in the USSR.

Kotlovan: a pit in the ground for laying the foundations of a structure.

Kuudul: traditional Kyrgyz satirical artist.

Küch: labour, energy, force.

Mazar: holy site, site of pilgrimage and healing.

Muun: generation.

Naryn jep ketet: this Kyrgyz metaphor is literally translated as 'the Naryn river will eat you up' and means the river as being unpredictive and dangerous.

Nizhne-Narynski Kaskad: the cascade of hydropower stations on the lower Naryn River.

Oblast: an administrative division or region in Kyrgyzstan and the former Soviet Union.

Oomin: concluding word to blessings or prayers, expresses agreement.

Ovoshnaya baza: fruit and vegetable depots were part of the state system of food supply under planned economic conditions.

Palatochnyi gorodok: 'tent settlement' during construction.

Piala: traditional round tea cups in Central Asia shaped somewhat like a bowl.

Plov: festive dish of oily rice, carrots and meat, variously spiced.

Pochetnaya gramota: honor award.

Pohvalnyi list: praising paper.

Raion: (Russian) district, administrative unit between village councils (*aiyl ökmötü*) and provinces (*oblast*).

Raznorabochii: A worker who performs various odd jobs that do not require qualifications; a labourer.

Remontno-ochistitelnye raboty: maintenance and cleaning work.

Stolovaya: canteen.

Sanjyra: genealogy counting descent through the male line.

Sovkhoz: (Russian) Soviet-era state farm.

Shkolnyi ustav: school regulations.

Suugatchy or mirab/mirob: a person who distributes water, a traditional profession in Central Asia equivalent to water manager.

Taalim: literally 'education' or 'knowledge'. In the context of religion and the Tablighi Jamaat movement, it is a gathering where Muslims read verses from the Quran and reflect on their stories.

Taanysh-bilish: informal ties and acquaintances.

Tabiyattyn koinunda: in the embrace of nature.

Talpak: a dried and cleaned sheepskin with fur, used as a seat cover.

Territorialyk bashkarmalyk: territorial administration.

Tesme: a rosary.

Töshök, körpöchö: traditional bedding, type of banket filled with cotton or wool.

Tuulup oskon jer: native place.

Uruu: patrilineage, descent line.

Uyat: shame, shameful, disgraceful, dishonour.

Vagon: metal train carriage, also used as temporary housing.

Vsesoiuznaia stroika: the All-Union construction.

Yntymak: cooperation, agreement, good relations.

List of acronyms

DK: acronym for *Dom Kultury* (Russian), House of Culture

GES: *Gidroelektrostantsiya* (Russian), hydroelectric power plant or HPP

Jensovet: *Jenskii Sovet* (Russian), Women's Council practised since the Soviet times, an informal organization of women to solve family and women related problems

KKP: Kombinat Kommunalnogo Predpriyatia (Russian), Public Utility Company

Matkapital: *Materinskii kapital* (Russian), a measure in Russian family policy with the monetary benefit aimed at support of the family with two or more children

PSGES: *Predpriyatie Stroyashihsia GES* (Russian), Enterprise for HPPs under Construction

SAOGIDP: *Sredneaziatskii Otdel Gidroproektov* (Russian), the Central Asian Department for Hydroprojects

UchGES: *Uch-Kurganskaya GES* (Russian), Uch-Kurgan HPP

UPS: Upravlenie Pogranichnoi Sluzhby (Russian), Border Service Management

Bibliography

Abashin, Sergei. 'Facebook'. Accessed 21 February 2022. https://www.facebook.com/sergey.abashin/posts/2451961221601169.

Abashin Sergei. 'Natzionalizmy v Srednei Azii'. *Svobovnaya mysl*, no. 7 (2007). https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=9526844.

Abdullaev, Iskandar, and Shahlo Atabaeva. 'Water Sector in Central Asia: Slow Transformation and Potential for Cooperation'. *International Journal of Sustainable Society* 4, no. 1/2 (2012): 103. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJSSOC.2012.044668.

Abdullaev, Iskandar, and Peter P. Mollinga. 'The Socio-Technical Aspects of Water Management: Emerging Trends at Grass Roots Level in Uzbekistan'. *Water* 2, no. 1 (24 February 2010): 85–100. https://doi.org/10.3390/w2010085.

Abdullaev, Iskandar, and Shavkat Rakhmatullaev. 'Transformation of Water Management in Central Asia: From State-Centric, Hydraulic Mission to Socio-Political Control'. *Environmental Earth Sciences* 73, no. 2 (January 2015): 849–61. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12665-013-2879-9.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 'Locating Ethnography'. *Ethnography* 1, no. 2 (December 2000): 261–67. https://doi.org/10.1177/14661380022230778.

———. *Veiled Sentiments Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Oakland, Calif: University of California Press, 2016.

———. 'Writing against Culture'. In *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, edited by Richard Gabriel Fox. School of American Research Press : Distributed by the University of Washington Press, 1991.

Agassi, Joseph. 'Privileged Access'. *Inquiry* 12, no. 1–4 (January 1969): 420–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/00201746908601563.

Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New ed., 1992.

'Aigine – Cultural Research Center'. Accessed 17 February 2022. https://aigine.kg/?page_id=11262&lang=en.

'Akkan Suu - Yr, Sanat, Terme - Kyrgyzcha - Elbilge'. Accessed 7 March 2022. https://elbilge.ucoz.ru/publ/kyrgyzcha/yr_sanat_terme/akkan_suu/20-1-0-266.

Alexander, Catherine, Victor Buchli, and Caroline Humphrey, eds. *Urban Life in Post-Soviet Asia*. London ; New York: University College London Press, 2007.

Allen, Mike, ed. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2017.

Allen-Collinson, Jacquelyn, and John Hockey. 'Autoethnography: Self-Indulgence or Rigorous Methodology?' In *Philosophy and the Sciences of Exercise, Health and Sport: Critical Perspectives on Research Methods*, edited by M.J. McNamee, 187–202. London: Routledge, 2005.

Allworth, Edward, ed. *Central Asia, 130 Years of Russian Dominance: A Historical Overview*. 3rd ed. Central Asia Book Series. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994.

Alvarez, Robert R. 'The Mexican-Us Border: The Making of an Anthropology of Borderlands'. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, no. 1 (October 1995): 447–70. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.24.100195.002311.

Amoore, Louise. 'Biometric Borders: Governing Mobilities in the War on Terror'. *Political Geography* 25, no. 3 (March 2006): 336–51. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.02.001.

Amoore, Louise, and Alexandra Hall. 'Border Theatre: On the Arts of Security and Resistance'. *Cultural Geographies* 17, no. 3 (July 2010): 299–319. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474010368604.

Anand, Nikhil, Akhil Gupta, and Hannah Appel, eds. *The Promise of Infrastructure*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.

Ardévol, Elisenda. 'Virtual/Visual Ethnography: Methodological Crossroads at the Intersection of Visual and Internet Research'. In *Advances in Visual*

Methodology, by Sarah Pink, 74–94. 1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road, London EC1Y 1SP United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2012. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446250921.n5.

Aron, Leon. 'Everything You Think You Know About the Collapse of the Soviet Union Is Wrong'. *Foreign Policy* (blog). Accessed 9 August 2021. https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/06/20/everything-you-think-you-know-about-the-collapse-of-the-soviet-union-is-wrong/.

Asanbekova, Dzhamilia, Aigul Osmonova, Islambek Abdyldaev, Edilbek Begaliev, Kutman Ashimov, Kanykei Nurmamat kyzy, Omar Narbaev, Salizhan Karimov, and Zhypargul Abdullaeva. 'Political System in the Sovereign Kyrgyzstan'. *Open Journal of Political Science* 11, no. 02 (2021): 266–72. https://doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2021.112018.

Ashirov, Adham. *O'zbek Madaniyatida Suv*. Toshkent, Akademnashr, 2020. https://www.academia.edu/50380791/Ozbek_madaniyatida_suv_Toshkent_Akademnashr_2020_246_bet.

Ashwin, Sarah, ed. *Gender, State, and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*. London ; New York: Routledge, 2000.

———. *Russian Workers: The Anatomy of Patience*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.

Asian Development Bank, ed. *Unlocking the Potential of Railways: A Railway Strategy for CAREC, 2017-2030: Endorsed at the 15th CAREC Ministerial Conference, Islamabad, Pakistan, 26 October 2016*. Mandaluyong City, Metro Manila, Philippines: Asian Development Bank, 2017.

Asryan, Armen, Gulzat Baialieva, Manon Cassara, Andrei Doerre, Jeanne Féaux de la Croix, Filippo Menga, Aibek Samakov, and Andrea Weiss. 'Actors, Approaches and Cooperation Related to Water Management and Natural Hazards under Climate Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus', 20–29. Khorog (Tajikistan): Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, 2018. https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/80897/.

Assmann, Aleida. 'Memory, Individual and Collective'. The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis, 16 March 2006. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199270439.003.0011.

Atkinson, Paul, and Martyn Hammersley. 'Ethnography and Participant Observation'. In *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 248–61. Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc, 1994.

obo. 'Autoethnography'. Accessed 3 March 2022. https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0162.xml.

Baez-Camargo, Claudia, and Alena Ledeneva. 'Where Does Informality Stop and Corruption Begin? Informal Governance and the Public/Private Crossover in Mexico, Russia and Tanzania'. *The Slavonic and East European Review* 95, no. 1 (January 2017): 49–75.

Bahram, M. 'Refworld | TAJIKISTAN: Hijab-Wearing and Beards Ban Continues'. Refworld, 2018. https://www.refworld.org/docid/5bbc57974.html.

Baialieva, Gulzat, and Flora Roberts. 'Memories of Social Mobility and Environmental Change: Dam Builders of the Naryn–Syr Darya'. *Global Environment* 14, no. 2 (1 June 2021): 269–309. https://doi.org/10.3197/ge.2021.140203.

Baker, Sally. 'Conceptualising the Use of Facebook in Ethnographic Research: As Tool, as Data and as Context'. *Ethnography and Education* 8, no. 2 (1 June 2013): 131–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2013.792504.

Bakker, Karen. *Privatizing Water: Governance Failure and the World's Urban Water Crisis*. Cornell University Press, 2010.

Balci, Bayram. 'Fethullah Gu¨len's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and Their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam'. *Religion, State and Society* 31, no. 2 (June 2003): 151–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/09637490308283.

Balcı, Bayram. 'Reviving Central Asia's Religious Ties with the Indian Subcontinent? The Jamaat al Tabligh'. *Religion, State and Society* 43, no. 1 (2 January 2015): 20–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2015.1020140.

Radio Azattyk Radio Liberty Kyrgyz Service. 'Bannery "Kairan elim, kajda baratabyz?" nachali vyveshivat po vsei respublike'. Accessed 18 February 2022. https://rus.azattyk.org/a/27872844.html.

Barber, Sarah, and Corinna M Peniston-Bird. *History beyond the Text a Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*. London; New York: Routledge, 2010.

Barth, Fredrik, ed. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference ; [Essays Presents the Results of a Symposium Held at the University of Bergen, 23rd to 26th February 1967]*. Reissued. Long Grove, Ill: Waveland Press, 1998.

Baud, Michiel, and Willem Van Schendel. 'Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands'. *Journal of World History* 8, no. 2 (1997): 211–42.

'Beginnings 2019 – Three River Stories'. Accessed 12 March 2022. http://en.syr-darya.org/beginnings-2019.

Behar, Ruth. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.

Behnke, Roy H., and North Atlantic Treaty Organization, eds. *The Socio-Economic Causes and Consequences of Desertification in Central Asia*. NATO Science for Peace and Security Series. Dordrecht ; London: Springer, 2008.

Bekturganov, Zakir, Kamshat Tussupova, Ronny Berndtsson, Nagima Sharapatova, Kapar Aryngazin, and Maral Zhanasova. 'Water Related Health Problems in Central Asia—A Review'. *Water* 8, no. 6 (24 May 2016): 219. https://doi.org/10.3390/w8060219.

Belyakov, Yu.P. *First Hydrotechnician of Kyrgyzstan. Collection of Materials*. Moscow-Bishkek: Ridero, 2018.

———. 'New Literature of Kyrgyzstan'. *First Scientists: Hydrologists, Hydrotechnicians and Hydroenergy Specialists of Kyrgyzstan*, 24 July 2017.

Bennett, Mia M. 'The Making of Post-Post-Soviet Ruins: Infrastructure Development and Disintegration in Contemporary Russia'. *International Journal of Urban and*

Regional Research 45, no. 2 (2021): 332–47. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12908.

Benovska, Milena. 'Postsocialism as Rapid Social Change On the Example of Transforming Family and Kinship in Bulgaria'. Accessed 21 February 2022. https://www.academia.edu/23861537/Postsocialism_as_Rapid_Social_Change _On_the_example_of_transforming_family_and_kinship_in_Bulgaria.

Berdahl, Daphne. '"(N)Ostalgie" for the Present: Memory, Longing, and East German Things'. *Ethnos* 64, no. 2 (January 1999): 192–211. https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.1999.9981598.

———. *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 1999.

Berdahl, Daphne, and Matti Bunzl. *On the Social Life of Postsocialism: Memory, Consumption, Germany*. New Anthropologies of Europe. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.

Berg, Bruce L., and Howard Lune. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. 8th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2012.

Bernard, H. Russell. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2013.

Bernardskii. 'Kairakkum'. *P.5*, June 1984.

Beyer, Judith. 'Revitalisation, Invention and Continued Existence of the Kyrgyz *Aksakal* Courts: Listening to Pluralistic Accounts of History'. *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 38, no. 53–54 (January 2006): 141–76. https://doi.org/10.1080/07329113.2006.10756601.

Beyer, Judith, and Peter Finke. 'Practices of Traditionalization in Central Asia'. *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 3 (3 July 2019): 310–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2019.1636766.

Bhattacherjee, Anol and University of Minnesota. *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices.* North Charleston: CreateSpace Independent

Publishing   Platform,   2012.
http://VH7QX3XE2P.search.serialssolutions.com/?V=1.0&L=VH7QX3XE2P&S=
AC_T_B&C=Social%20science%20research%20:%20principles%2C%20metho
ds%2C%20and%20practices&T=marc&tab=BOOKS.

Bichsel, Christine. *Conflict Transformation in Central Asia: Irrigation Disputes in the Ferghana Valley*. Central Asian Studies Series 14. London ; New York: Routledge, 2009.

Bluteau, Joshua M. 'Legitimising Digital Anthropology through Immersive Cohabitation: Becoming an Observing Participant in a Blended Digital Landscape'. *Ethnography* 22, no. 2 (1 June 2021): 267–85. https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138119881165.

Borderscapes: Hidden Geographies and Politics at Territory's Edge. NED-New edition. Vol. 29. University of Minnesota Press, 2007. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttsn8c.

'Boris Lachman: v SSSR status arxitektora byl dovolno vysokim', 24 June 2017. https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3332175.

Botoeva, Aisalkyn. 'Measuring the Unmeasurable? Production & Certification of Halal Goods and Services'. *Sociology of Islam* 8, no. 3–4 (10 December 2020): 364–86. https://doi.org/10.1163/22131418-08030008.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Forms of Capital*. General Sociology, Volume 3. Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 1986.

Boyer, D. 'From Media Anthropology to the Anthropology of Mediation', 411–22, 2012. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446201077.n66.

Brandes, Stanley. 'Ethnographic Autobiographies in American Anthropology'. *Central Issues in Anthropology* 1, no. 2 (November 1979): 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1525/cia.1979.1.2.1.

Briggs, Daniel, Anthony Ellis, Anthony Lloyd, and Luke Telford. 'New Hope or Old Futures in Disguise? Neoliberalism, the Covid-19 Pandemic and the Possibility for Social Change'. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* ahead-

of-print, no. ahead-of-print (1 January 2020). https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-07-2020-0268.

British Pathé. *The Soch Kurgansk Hydro Power Station (1961)*, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vNFu_1HTpw.

Brouwer, Evelien Renate. *Digital Borders and Real Rights: Effective Remedies for Third-Country Nationals in the Schengen Information System*. Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy in Europe, v. 15. Leiden ; Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2008.

Brown, Kate. *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland*. 1. Harvard Univ. Press paperback ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2005.

Brunet-Jailly, Emmanuel. 'Theorizing Borders: An Interdisciplinary Perspective'. *Geopolitics* 10, no. 4 (December 2005): 633–49. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040500318449.

BUCHLI, VICTOR. 'ASTANA: Materiality and the City'. In *Urban Life in Post-Soviet Asia*. UCL Press, 2007.

Bunn, Stephanie J. 'Water as a Vital Substance in Post-Socialist Kyrgyzstan'. *Worldviews* 17, no. 2 (2013): 125–37.

Burawoy, et al., ed. *Global Ethnography: Forces, Connections, and Imaginations in a Postmodern World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

Burawoy, Michael, and Katherine Verdery, eds. *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999.

Buyandelgeriyn, Manduhai. 'Post-Post-Transition Theories: Walking on Multiple Paths'. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 37, no. 1 (1 October 2008): 235–50. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.37.081407.085214.

Campbell, Elaine. 'Exploring Autoethnography as a Method and Methodology in Legal Education Research'. *Asian Journal of Legal Education* 3, no. 1 (1 January 2016): 95–105. https://doi.org/10.1177/2322005815607141.

Chalfin, Brenda. *Neoliberal Frontiers: An Ethnography of Sovereignty in West Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. http://site.ebrary.com/id/10402595.

Chandler, Andrea M. *Institutions of Isolation: Border Controls in the Soviet Union and Its Successor States, 1917-1993*. Montreal ; Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998.

Chang, Heewon. *Autoethnography as Method*. Walnut Creek, Calif: Routledge, 2008.

Chari, Sharad. 'Trans-Area Studies and the Perils of Geographical "World-Writing"'. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 5 (October 2016): 791–98. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816656522.

Chari, Sharad, and Katherine Verdery. 'Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War'. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 1 (January 2009): 6–34. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417509000024.

Chaudet, Didier. 'Hizb Ut-Tahrir: An Islamist Threat to Central Asia? [1]'. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 26, no. 1 (April 2006): 113–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/13602000600738822.

Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus, eds. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, 25th Anniversary Edition*. 2nd ed., 2010.

Coffey, Amanda. *The Ethnographic Self*. 6 Bonhill Street, London England EC2A 4PU United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1999. https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857020048.

Collier, Stephen J. *Post-Soviet Social: Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics*. Princeton [N.J.]: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Collins, Peter, ed. *The Ethnographic Self as Resource: Writing Memory and Experience into Ethnography*. 1. paperback ed. New York, N.Y.: Berghahn Books, 2013.

Da Silva, Karen Correia. 'Discourse 2.0: Language and New Media'. *New Media & Society* 16, no. 4 (June 2014): 696–98. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814524163b.

Darieva, Tsypylma, Wolfgang Kaschuba, and Melanie Krebs, eds. *Urban Spaces after Socialism: Ethnographies of Public Places in Eurasian Cities*. Eigene Und Fremde Welten, v. 22. Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2011.

De Cleen, Benjamin, and Yannis Stavrakakis. 'Distinctions and Articulations: A Discourse Theoretical Framework for the Study of Populism and Nationalism'. *Javnost - The Public* 24, no. 4 (2 October 2017): 301–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2017.1330083.

De Soto, Hermine G., and Nora Dudwick, eds. *Fieldwork Dilemmas: Anthropologists in Postsocialist States*. Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Athlone Press, 1988.

Diener, Alexander C., and Joshua Hagen, eds. *Borderlines and Borderlands: Political Oddities at the Edge of the Nation-State*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010.

Donnan, Hastings, and Thomas M. Wilson. *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State*. Reprinted. Oxford: Berg, 2001.

Dukhovny, V. A. 'Water and Globalization: Case Study of Central Asia'. *Irrigation and Drainage* 56, no. 5 (December 2007): 489–507. https://doi.org/10.1002/ird.327.

Dukhovny, Victor A., Vadim I. Sokolov, and Dinara R. Ziganshina. 'The Role of Donors in Addressing Water Problems in Central Asia: Role of Donors in Addressing Water Problems in Central Asia'. *Irrigation and Drainage* 65 (October 2016): 79–85. https://doi.org/10.1002/ird.1913.

Dukhovny, Viktor A., and Dinara Ziganshina. 'Ways to Improve Water Governance'. *Irrigation and Drainage* 60, no. 5 (December 2011): 569–78. https://doi.org/10.1002/ird.604.

Dukhovnyĭ, Viktor Abramovich, and Joop de Schutter. *Water in Central Asia: Past, Present, Future*. Boca Raton: CRC Press/Balkema, 2011.

Dumont, Louis. *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*. Complete rev. English ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Edensor, Tim. *Industrial Ruins: Spaces, Aesthetics, and Materiality*. Oxford [U.K.] ; New York: Berg, 2005.

Edwards, Rosalind, and Janet Holland. *What Is Qualitative Interviewing?* What Is? Research Methods Series. London : New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2013.

Ellis, Carolyn, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner. 'Autoethnography: An Overview'. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12, no. 1 (2011). https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-12.1.1589.

Ellis, Carolyn, and Art Bochner. 'Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject'. *Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd Ed.)*, 1 January 2000, 733–68.

'Ethnic Conflict in the Osh Region in Summer 1990: Reasons and Lessons'. In *Ethnicity and Power in the Contemporary World*. Tokyo ; New York: United Nations University Press, 1996.

Evans, Rosalind. 'The Perils of Being a Borderland People: On the Lhotshampas of Bhutan'. *Contemporary South Asia* 18, no. 1 (March 2010): 25–42. https://doi.org/10.1080/09584930903561598.

Féaux, de la Croix. '"Everybody Loves Flow": On the Art of Rescuing a Word from Its Users'. *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 39, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 114.

Féaux de la Croix, Jeanne. *Iconic Places in Central Asia: The Moral Geography of Dams, Pastures and Holy Sites*. Culture and Social Practice. Bielefeld: transcript, 2016.

———. 'Incarnating Water in Central Asia: Hydro-Relations along a Transboudnary River'. *Water Alternatives* 14, no. 1 (2021): 12–31.

———. 'Moving Metaphors We Live by: Water and Flow in the Social Sciences and around Hydroelectric Dams in Kyrgyzstan'. *Central Asian Survey* 30, no. 3–4 (December 2011): 487–502. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2011.614097.

Féaux de la Croix, Jeanne, and Mohira Suyarkulova. 'The Rogun Complex: Public Roles and Historic Experiences of Dam-Building in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan'. *Cahiers d'Asie Centrale*, no. 25 (22 December 2015): 103–32.

Fehlings, Susanne, and Hasan Karrar. Informal Markets and Trade in Central Asia and the Caucasus (Central Asian Studies) (1st ed.). Routledge, 2022.

Fehlings, Susanne, and Hasan Karrar. 'Negotiating State and Society: The Normative Informal Economies of Central Asia and the Caucasus'. *Central Asian Survey* 39 (2 January 2020): 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2020.1738345.

Ferenčuhová, Slavomíra. 'Accounts from behind the Curtain: History and Geography in the Critical Analysis of Urban Theory: Accounts from behind the Curtain'. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 40, no. 1 (January 2016): 113–31. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12332.

Ferghana. Three River Stories of the Naryn-Syrdarya. Accessed 17 February 2022. http://en.syr-darya.org/archives/244.

Florin, Moritz. 'Emptying Lakes, Filling up Seas: Hydroelectric Dams and the Ambivalences of Development in Late Soviet Central Asia'. *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 2 (3 April 2019): 237–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2019.1584604.

Foreman, D. L., M. Sanders, and C. M. Bloor. 'Total and Regional Cerebral Blood Flow during Moderate and Severe Exercise in Miniature Swine'. *Journal of Applied Physiology* 40, no. 2 (February 1976): 191–95.

Forster, Abby. 'We Are All Insider-Outsiders: A Review of Debates Surrounding Native Anthropology'. *Student Anthropologist* 3 (1 January 2012): 13–26. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.sda2.20120301.0002.

Fortun, Kim. *Advocacy after Bhopal: Environmentalism, Disaster, New Global Orders*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Foxall, Andrew. 'Borders, Boundaries, and Central Asia Geopolitics'. *Geopolitics* 23, no. 3 (3 July 2018): 743–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1451845.

Freeman, Cordelia. 'Historical Everyday Geopolitics on the Chile-Peru Border'. *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 39, no. 4 (2020): 439–52. https://doi.org/10.1111/blar.13067.

Frey, Bruno S., and Jana Gallus. 'Towards an Economics of Awards'. *Journal of Economic Surveys* 31, no. 1 (February 2017): 190–200. https://doi.org/10.1111/joes.12127.

Galemba, Rebecca B. 'Remapping the Border: Taxation, Territory, and (Trans) National Identity at the Mexico—Guatemala Border'. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 30, no. 5 (October 2012): 822–41. https://doi.org/10.1068/d7710.

Gavrilis, George. *The Dynamics of Interstate Boundaries*. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Geha, Carmen, Fida Kanaan, and Najat Aoun Saliba. 'Breaking the Cycle: Existential Politics and the Beirut Explosion'. *Middle East Law and Governance* 12, no. 3 (17 December 2020): 357–68. https://doi.org/10.1163/18763375-12030007.

Geismar, H., & Knox, H. (Eds.). (2021). Digital Anthropology (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003087885.

Geiss, Paul Georg. *Pre-Tsarist and Tsarist Central Asia: Communal Commitment and Political Order in Change.* Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2003. http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=214489.

Gielis, Ruben, and Henk van Houtum. 'Sloterdijk in the House! Dwelling in the Borderscape of Germany and The Netherlands'. In *Critical Border Studies*. Routledge, 2014.

Ginsburg, Faye and New York University, USA. 'INDIGENOUS MEDIA FROM U-MATIC TO YOUTUBE: MEDIA SOVEREIGNTY IN THE DIGITAL AGE'. *Sociologia & Antropologia* 6, no. 3 (December 2016): 581–99. https://doi.org/10.1590/2238-38752016v632.

Giordano, Christian, Francois Ruegg, and Andrea Boscoboinik. *Does East Go West?: Anthropological Pathways Through Postsocialism*. LIT Verlag Münster, 2014.

Goffman, Erving. *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*. 1st Pantheon Books ed. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982.

———. *La presentación de la persona en la vida cotidiana*. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 2007.

———. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Nachdr. Anchor Books. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1990.

'Gosudarstvennaya Kontzeptziya Razvitiya Malyx Gorodov i Poselkov Gorodskogo Tipa Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki'. Accessed 21 February 2022. http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ky-kg/53079.

Grandia, Liza. 'Toxic Gaslighting: On the Ins and Outs of Pollution'. *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society* 6 (10 November 2020): 486. https://doi.org/10.17351/ests2020.431.

Green, Sarah. 'Reciting the Future: Border Relocations and Everyday Speculations in Two Greek Border Regions'. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2, no. 1 (March 2012): 111–29. https://doi.org/10.14318/hau2.1.007.

Grigorenko, V. 'V Kyrgyzstane Devochku v Platke Ne Puskayut v Shkolu. |to Zakonno?' Vecherniy Bishkek, 2018. https://www.vb.kg/doc/374233_v_kyrgyzstane_devochky_v_platke_ne_pyskaut_v_shkoly._eto_zakonno.html.

Gubaeva, S. S. *Naselenie Ferganskoĭ Doliny v Kontse XIX-Nachale XX v: Ėtnokul'turnye Protsessy*. Tashkent: Izd-vo 'Fan' Uzbekskoĭ SSR, 1991.

Guha, Ramachandra. 'Anil Agarwal and the Environmentalism of the Poor'. *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 13, no. 3 (September 2002): 147–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/10455750208565494.

———. *Environmentalism: A Global History*. Longman World History Series. New York: Longman, 2000.

Guha, Ramachandra, and Juan Martínez Alier. *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South*. London: Earthscan Publications, 1997.

———. *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South*. London: Earthscan Publications, 1997.

Guillebaud, Philomena. 'The Role of Honorary Awards in the Soviet Economic System'. *American Slavic and East European Review* 12, no. 4 (December 1953): 486. https://doi.org/10.2307/3004226.

Gulnara Aitpaeva, and Aibek Samakov. *The Textbook on Traditional Knowledge Related to Water "Water's Message"*. Bishkek, 2017. https://aigine.kg/?page_id=5883&lang=en.

Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson. 'Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference'. *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (February 1992): 6–23. https://doi.org/10.1525/can.1992.7.1.02a00020.

Hammersley, Martyn, and Paul Atkinson. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. London ; New York: Tavistock, 1983.

Hann, C. M., ed. *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies, and Practices in Eurasia*. London ; New York: Routledge, 2002.

Hann, C. M, and Keith Hart. *Economic Anthropology: History, Ethnography, Critique*. Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2011.

Hann, Chris, and Mathijs Pelkmans. 'Realigning Religion and Power in Central Asia: Islam, Nation-State and (Post)Socialism'. *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 9 (November 2009): 1517–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130903209111.

Hann, Christopher Michael. *'Not the Horse We Wanted!': Postsocialism, Neoliberalism, and Eurasia*. Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia 10. Münster: LIT, 2006.

Haraway, Donna Jeanne. *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Paradigm 8. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003.

———. *When Species Meet*. Posthumanities 3. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Harms, Erik. 'Urban Space and Exclusion in Asia'. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 45, no. 1 (21 October 2016): 45–61. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102215-100208.

Hayano, David. 'Auto-Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems, and Prospects'. *Human Organization* 38, no. 1 (March 1979): 99–104. https://doi.org/10.17730/humo.38.1.u761n5601t4g318v.

Heath, Sue. *Innovations in Youth Research*. Basingstoke [u.a.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

'Hijabs in Kyrgyzstan: Alternative Modernity, (Dis)Integration and Individualization'. In *Beyond Post-Soviet: Layered Legacies and Transformations in Central Asia*, Geographica Augustana:109, 2021.

Hine, Christine. *Virtual Ethnography*. 6 Bonhill Street, London England EC2A 4PU United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2000. https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857020277.

Horst, Heather A. 'New Media Technologies in Everyday Life'. In *Digital Anthropology*, edited by Daniel Miller and Heather A. Horst, English ed. London ; New York: Berg, 2012.

Horst, Heather A., and Daniel Miller, eds. *Digital Anthropology*. English ed. London ; New York: Berg, 2012.

Horst, Heather, and Daniel Miller. *The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication*. Routledge, 2020.

Horstmann, Alexander, Martin Saxer, and Alessandro Rippa, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Asian Borderlands.* London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.

Horstmann, Alexander, Reed L. Wadley, and International Convention of Asia Scholars, eds. *Centering the Margin: Agency and Narrative in Southeast Asian Borderlands ; [Papers Presented in a Two-Session Panel Organized for the Third International Convention for Asian Scholars (ICAS) in Singapore, Aug. 19 - 22, 2003].* Asian Anthropologies 4. New York: Berghahn, 2008.

Human Rights Watch. 'Tadjikistan: Sobytiya 2019 goda'. In *World Report 2020*, 2020. https://www.hrw.org/ru/world-report/2020/country-chapters/336559.

Humphrey, Caroline. *The Unmaking of Soviet Life: Everyday Economies after Socialism / Caroline Humphrey*. Culture and Society after Socialism. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.

Hunter, Holland. 'The Overambitious First Soviet Five-Year Plan'. *Slavic Review* 32, no. 2 (June 1973): 237–57. https://doi.org/10.2307/2495959.

Iacomelli, Aldo, ed. *Renewable Energies for Central Asia Countries: Economic, Environmental and Social Impacts*. NATO Science Series, v. 59. Dordrecht ; [Great Britain]: Springer, 2005.

Ibañez Tirado, Diana. '"We Sit and Wait": Migration, Mobility and Temporality in Guliston, Southern Tajikistan'. *Current Sociology* 67, no. 2 (1 March 2019): 315–33. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392118792923.

Ibañez-Tirado, Diana. '"How Can I Be Post-Soviet If I Was Never Soviet?" Rethinking Categories of Time and Social Change – a Perspective from Kulob, Southern Tajikistan'. *Central Asian Survey* 34, no. 2 (3 April 2015): 190–203. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2014.983705.

Ibraimov, S.I. *Osh Oblast, Kyrgyzstan. Outline of Socio-Economic Development*. Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1979.

'ICSC 0591 - TRICHLOROSILANE'. Accessed 13 April 2022. https://www.ilo.org/dyn/icsc/showcard.display?p_card_id=0591&p_edit=&p_version=2&p_lang=en.

Iğmen, Ali. *Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5vkh78.

Isabaeva, Eliza. 'Leaving to Enable Others to Remain: Remittances and New Moral Economies of Migration in Southern Kyrgyzstan'. *Central Asian Survey* 30, no. 3–4 (1 December 2011): 541–54. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2011.607917.

Ismailbekova, Aksana. 'Lineage Associations in Kyrgyzstan, by Aksana Ismailbekova (Bonn International Center for Conversion)'. *The CESS Blog* (blog), 4 January 2018. http://thecessblog.com/2018/01/lineage-associations-in-kyrgyzstan-by-aksana-ismailbekova/.

Ismailbekova, Aksana, and Gulzat Baialieva. 'E-Nformality: Smartphones as a New Regulatory Space for Informal Exchange of Formal Resources'. In *Informality, Labour Mobility and Precariousness: Supplementing the State for the Invisible and the Vulnerable*, edited by Abel Polese, 321–41. International Political Economy Series. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82499-0_13.

Itō, Mizuko, ed. *Hanging out, Messing around, and Geeking out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media*. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010.

Itō, Mizuko, Daisuke Okabe, and Misa Matsuda, eds. *Personal, Portable, Pedestrian: Mobile Phones in Japanese Life*. 1. pbk. ed. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006.

Jansen, Stef. 'People and Things in the Ethnography of Borders: Materialising the Division of Sarajevo: PEOPLE AND THINGS IN THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF BORDERS'. *Social Anthropology* 21, no. 1 (February 2013): 23–37. https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.12001.

Janybaeva, A. '#vsemirnyi Den Platka'. Accessed 22 February 2022. https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/всемирныйденьплатка/.

Johnson, Malynnda. '"But You Looked Smart": Participant Observations of HIV Testing and Counseling for Young Adults'. *International Review of Social Research* 3 (1 June 2013). https://doi.org/10.1515/irsr-2013-0010.

Joppke, Christian. *Veil: Mirror of Identity*. Repr. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012.

Kalinovsky, Artemy M. *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018.

Kamchybekov, K. *Party Management of Electrification in Kyrgyzstan in the Period of Constructing Communism*. Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1964.

Kameneva, G. 'Deyatelnost Jensovetov v Rewenii Sotzialnyh Voprosov: Istoriya i Sovremennost'. *KANT*, no. 1 (10) (2014): 82–86.

Elektricheskie stantzii. 'Kaskad Tash-Kumyrskix GES'. Accessed 17 February 2022. http://www.energo-es.kg/ru/o-kompanii/filialy/kaskad-tash-kumyrskikh-ges/.

Kassymbekova, Botakoz. *Despite Cultures: Early Soviet Rule in Tajikistan*. Central Eurasia in Context Series. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016.

Keskula, Eeva. 'Mining Postsocialism: Work, Class and Ethnicity in an Estonian Mine'. Doctoral, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2012. https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/8001/.

Khalid, Adeeb. *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

Kim, Youna. 'Mobile Phone for Empowerment? Global Nannies in Paris'. *Media, Culture & Society* 38, no. 4 (May 2016): 525–39. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715613638.

Klandermans, Bert, and Jacquelien van Stekelenburg. *Social Movements and the Dynamics of Collective Action*. Oxford University Press, 2013. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199760107.013.0024.

Kochumkulova, Elmira. *Kyrgyz Herders of Soviet Uzbekistan*. Bishkek: University of Central Asia, 2014. https://ucentralasia.org/publications/2017/may/kyrgyz-herders-of-soviet-uzbekistan.

———. 'Kyrgyz Nomadic Customs and the Impact of Re-Islamization after Independence'. Unpublished thesis. University of Washington, 2007.

Kŏchŭmkulova, Ėlmira, and M. Kŏchŭmkulov. *Sovettik Ŏzbekstandyn kyrgyz chabandary: tarykhyĭ-ėtnografii͡alyk bai͡an = Kyrgyz herders of Soviet Uzbekistan: historical and ethnographic narratives*. Bishkek: Borborduk Azii͡a universiteti, 2014.

Koichiev, Arslan. 'Ethno-Territorial Claims in the Ferghana Valley during the Process of National Delimitation, 1924-7'. In *Central Asia*. Routledge, 2003.

Kolossov, Vladimir. 'Border Studies: Changing Perspectives and Theoretical Approaches'. *Geopolitics* 10, no. 4 (December 2005): 606–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040500318415.

Kotkin, Stephen. *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*. Berkeley, Calif: Univ. of California Press, 1995.

Kozinets, Robert V. *Netnography: Ethnographic Research in the Age of the Internet*. 1st ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd, 2010.

Kuban, Nurdan. 'Hydroelectric Plants and Dams as Industrial Heritage in the Context of Nature-Culture Interrelation: An Overview of Examples in Turkey'. *Energies* 14, no. 5 (26 February 2021): 1281. https://doi.org/10.3390/en14051281.

Kuwayama, Takami. *Native Anthropology: The Japanese Challenge to Western Academic Hegemony*. Rosanna, Vic: Trans Pacific Press, 2004.

Lacour, Claude, and Sylvette Puissant. 'Re-Urbanity: Urbanising the Rural and Ruralising the Urban'. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 39, no. 3 (March 2007): 728–47. https://doi.org/10.1068/a37366.

Larkin, Brian. *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

———. 'The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure'. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42, no. 1 (21 October 2013): 327–43. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155522.

Larson, Brendon. *Metaphors for Environmental Sustainability: Redefining Our Relationship with Nature*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2011.

Laruelle, Marlène. *Being Muslim in Central Asia: Practices, Politics, and Identities*. BRILL, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004357242.

———. *Being Muslim in Central Asia: Practices, Politics, and Identities*. BRILL, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004357242.

———, ed. *Constructing the Uzbek State: Narratives of Post-Soviet Years*. Contemporary Central Asia : Societies, Politics, and Cultures. Lanham ; Boulder ; New York ; London: Lexington Books, 2017.

Laslett, Barbara. 'Personal Narratives as Sociology'. Edited by Kathryn Church, Marianne Gullestad, Temma Kaplan, Susan Kreiger, Brigid O'Farrell, Joyce L. Kornbluh, and Luisa Passerini. *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 391–401. https://doi.org/10.2307/2655287.

Laszczkowski, Mateusz. *'City of the Future': Built Space, Modernity and Urban Change in Astana*. First paperback edition. Integration and Conflict Studies, Volume 14. New York Oxford: Berghahn, 2018.

Latour, Bruno. *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*. 11. print. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 2003.

Leach, Edmund Ronald. *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure*. [Reprint of the ed.] London 1970. London School of Economics Monographs on Social Anthropology 44. New York, NY: ACLS History E-Book Project, 2006.

Lechevalier, Arnaud, ed. *Borders and Border Regions in Europe: Changes, Challenges and Chances*. Edition Politik 15. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013.

Ledeneva, Alena V., ed. *The Global Encyclopaedia of Informality. Volume 2*. London: UCL Press, 2018.

Little, Peter C. 'Another Angle on Pollution Experience: Toward an Anthropology of the Emotional Ecology of Risk Mitigation: ANTHROPOLOGY OF RISK MITIGATION'. *Ethos* 40, no. 4 (December 2012): 431–52. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1352.2012.01269.x.

Liu, Morgan Y. *Under Solomon's Throne: Uzbek Visions of Renewal in Osh*. Central Eurasia in Context. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012.

Lonkila, Markku, and Anna-Maria Salmi. 'The Russian Work Collective and Migration'. *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no. 5 (2005): 681–703.

Louw, Maria Elisabeth. *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia*. Central Asian Studies Series 7. London: Routledge, 2007.

Low, Setha M. *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2016.

———. 'THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CITIES: Imagining and Theorizing the City'. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25, no. 1 (21 October 1996): 383–409. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.25.1.383.

MacLeod, Arlene Elowe. 'Hegemonic Relations and Gender Resistance: The New Veiling as Accommodating Protest in Cairo'. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 17, no. 3 (April 1992): 533–57. https://doi.org/10.1086/494748.

Macy, Joanna, and Chris Johnstone. *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy*. Novato, Calif: New World Library, 2012.

Madramootoo, Chandra A., Viktor A. Duchovnyj, and Advanced Research Workshop on Socio-Economic Stability and Water Productivity: Food and Water Security in Central Asia, eds. *Water and Food Security in Central Asia: Proceedings of the NATO Advanced Research Workshop on Socio-Economic Stability and Water Productivity: Food and Water Security in Central Asia, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 18 - 20 March 2008*. NATO Science for Peace and Security Series C. Dordrecht: Springer Netherland, 2011.

Mah, Alice. *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012.

Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2012.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Magic, Science and Religion*, 2015.

Mamatkanov, D.M. *Gidroenergetika Kirgizii. Hydroenergy of Soviet Kirghizia*. Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1976.

Mambetalieva, K. *Byt i Kultura Shahtera-Kirgiza v Ugolnoi Promyshlennosti Kirgizii. Everyday Life of a Kyrgyz Miner in a Coal-Mining Industry of Kyrgyzstan.* Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1968.

Mamedov, Georgii, and Oksana Shatalova. *Poniatiia o sovetskom v Tsentralnoi Azii*, 2016.

Martínez, Oscar J. *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994.

Mason, Jennifer. *Qualitative Researching*. 2nd ed. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 2002.

Massell, Gregory J. *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919-1929*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1974.

Mazur, Paula Erizanu. '30 Years after the Collapse of the Soviet Union, Is It Time to Finally Stop Using the Term "Post-Soviet"?' The Calvert Journal. Accessed 21 February 2022. https://www.calvertjournal.com/features/show/13044/30-years-independence-ussr-term-post-soviet-use.

McBrien, Julie. *From Belonging to Belief: Modern Secularisms and the Construction of Religion in Kyrgyzstan*. Central Eurasia in Context Series. Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017.

McCully, Patrick. *Silenced Rivers: The Ecology and Politics of Large Dams*. Enlarged&Updated ed. London ; New York: Zed Books, 2001.

McNeill, John Robert. *Something New under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World*. 1. publ. as a Norton paperback. New York, NY: Norton, 2001.

McNeill, John Robert, and Corinna R. Unger, eds. *Environmental Histories of the Cold War*. Publications of the German Historical Institute. Washington, D.C. : New York: German Historical Institute ; Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Megoran, Nick. 'For Ethnography in Political Geography: Experiencing and Re-Imagining Ferghana Valley Boundary Closures'. *Political Geography* 25, no. 6 (August 2006): 622–40. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.05.005.

———. *Nationalism in Central Asia: A Biography of the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan Border*. Central Eurasia in Context Series. Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017.

———. 'On Researching "Ethnic Conflict": Epistemology, Politics, and a Central Asian Boundary Dispute'. *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 2 (March 2007): 253–77. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130601125585.

———. 'Rethinking the Study of International Boundaries: A Biography of the Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan Boundary'. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 102, no. 2 (March 2012): 464–81. https://doi.org/10.1080/00045608.2011.595969.

———. 'The Critical Geopolitics of the Uzbekistan–Kyrgyzstan Ferghana Valley Boundary Dispute, 1999–2000'. *Political Geography* 23, no. 6 (August 2004): 731–64. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2004.03.004.

Megoran, Nick, Gaël Raballand, and Jerome Bouyjou. 'Performance, Representation and the Economics of Border Control in Uzbekistan'. *Geopolitics* 10, no. 4 (December 2005): 712–40. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040500318498.

Megoran, Nick, and Shavkat Rakhmatullaev. 'Authoritarianism, Ethnic Management and Non-Securitisation: The Kyrgyz Minority in Uzbekistan'. *Europe-Asia Studies* 0, no. 0 (3 March 2022): 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2032603.

Mernissi, Fatima. *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. Rev. ed., 1st Midland Book ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Merrill, Samuel. 'Keeping It Real? Subcultural Graffiti, Street Art, Heritage and Authenticity'. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21, no. 4 (21 April 2015): 369–89. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2014.934902.

Mirabs. Three River Stories of the Naryn-Syrdarya. Accessed 17 February 2022. http://en.syr-darya.org/archives/113.

Mitchell, Timothy. *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Mokrenko, Anastasia. 'Pugayushaya dostoprimechatelnost. Kompleks "Aalam Ordo" na Issyk-Kule razrushaetsya'. 24.kg, 5 April 2021. https://24.kg/agent_024/188808_pugayuschaya_dostoprimechatelnost_kompleks_aalam_ordo_naissyik-kule_razrushaetsya/.

Montgomery, David W., and John Heathershaw. 'Islam, Secularism and Danger: A Reconsideration of the Link between Religiosity, Radicalism and Rebellion in Central Asia'. *Religion, State and Society* 44, no. 3 (2 July 2016): 192–218. https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2016.1220177.

Morand, D.A., and R.J. Ocker. 'Politeness Theory and Computer-Mediated Communication: A Sociolinguistic Approach to Analyzing Relational Messages'. In *36th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, 2003. Proceedings of The*, 10 pp. Big Island, HI, USA: IEEE, 2003. https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.2003.1173660.

Morey, Yvette, Andrew Bengry-Howell, and Christine Griffin. 'Public Profiles, Private Parties: Digital Ethnography, Ethics and Research in the Context of Web 2.0'. In *Innovations in Youth Research*, edited by Sue Heath and Charlie Walker, 195–

209. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230355880_11.

Morris, Jeremy. *Everyday Post-Socialism: Working-Class Communities in the Russian Margins*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

———. 'Unhomely Presents: Trauma and Values of Endurance Among Older People'. In *Everyday Post-Socialism*, by Jeremy Morris, 151–88. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95089-8_5.

Morris, Jeremy, and Abel Polese, eds. *The Informal Post-Socialist Economy: Embedded Practices and Livelihoods*. Routledge Contemporary Russia and Eastern Europe Series. London ; New York: Routledge, 2014.

Morrison, Claudio, and Gregory Schwartz. 'Managing the Labour Collective: Wage Systems in the Russian Industrial Enterprise'. *Europe-Asia Studies* 55, no. 4 (2003): 553–74.

Mountz, Alison. *Seeking Asylum: Human Smuggling and Bureaucracy at the Border*. Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Muehlebach, Andrea. 'On Affective Labor in Post-Fordist Italy'. *Cultural Anthropology* 26, no. 1 (February 2011): 59–82. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2010.01080.x.

Muehlebach, Andrea Karin. *The Moral Neoliberal: Welfare and Citizenship in Italy*. Chicago Studies in Practices of Meaning. Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Müller, Martin. 'Goodbye, Postsocialism!' *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 4 (21 April 2019): 533–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2019.1578337.

Murzakulova, Asel, and Irene Mestre. *Border Change and Conflict in Central Asia : The Case of Agro-Pastoral Communities in Cross-Border Areas of the Ferghana Valley*, 2018.

'Mutakallim'. Accessed 18 February 2022. http://mutakallim.kg/%d0%b3%d0%bb%d0%b0%d0%b2%d0%bd%d0%b0%d1%8f-%d1%81%d1%82%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%86%d0%b0/.

Narayan, Kirin. 'How Native Is a "Native" Anthropologist?' *American Anthropologist* 95, no. 3 (September 1993): 671–86. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1993.95.3.02a00070.

Nasritdinov, Emil. 'Translocality and the Folding of Post-Soviet Urban Space in Bishkek: Hijrah from "Botanika" to "Botanicheskii Jamaat"'. In *Mobilities, Boundaries, and Travelling Ideas*, edited by Manja Stephan-Emmrich and Philipp Schröder, 1st ed., 319–48. Rethinking Translocality Beyond Central Asia and the Caucasus. Open Book Publishers, 2018. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv8j3t2.15.

Nasritdinov, Emil, and Nurgul Esenamanova. *10 The War of Billboards: Hijab, Secularism, and Public Space in Bishkek*. Brill, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004357242_012.

National Research University Higher School of Economics – Saint Petersburg, and Vladimir V. Kostyushev. 'Alexeyev's Dramatic Sociology: Discovery Through Overcoming'. *Sociological Journal* 23, no. 4 (2017): 178–83. https://doi.org/10.19181/socjour.2017.23.4.5537.

Nazpary, Joma. *Post-Soviet Chaos: Violence and Dispossession in Kazakhstan*. London ; Sterling, Va: Pluto Press, 2002.

'"Net vody, gaza, sveta". Selchane obratilis k Jeenbekovu v god razvitiya regionov'. Accessed 17 February 2022. https://kaktus.media/doc/377376_net_vody_gaza_sveta._selchane_obratilis_k_jeenbekovy_v_god_razvitiia_regionov.html.

Neumann, Iver B. 'Autobiography, Ontology, Autoethnology'. *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 04 (October 2010): 1051–55. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210510001191.

Newman, David. 'On Borders and Power: A Theoretical Framework'. *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 18, no. 1 (March 2003): 13–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/08865655.2003.9695598.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. First Harvard University Press paperback edition. Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Norsworthy, L. Alexander, ed. *Rural Development, Natural Resources, and the Environment: Lessons of Experience in Eastern Europe and Central Asia*. Washington, DC: Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development, Europe and Central Asia Region, World Bank, 2000.

Nugent, Paul. *Smugglers, Secessionists & Loyal Citizens on the Ghana-Toga Frontier: The Life of the Borderlands since 1914*. Western African Studies. Athens : Oxford : Legon, Ghana: Ohio University Press ; James Currey ; Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2002.

Obertreis, Julia. *Imperial Desert Dreams*. Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2017.

'Odnoklassniki'. Accessed 19 February 2022. https://ok.ru/group52852000948306.

O'Reilly, Karen. *Key Concepts in Ethnography*. SAGE, 2009.

OSCE. 'Border Trade. Evaluation of Crossing Borders between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan'. Bishkek, 2011.

Ostiguy, Pierre, Benjamin Moffitt, and Francisco Panizza, eds. *Populism in Global Perspective: A Performative and Discursive Approach*. Conceptualising Comparative Politics, vol. 13. New York, NY: Routledge, 2021.

Ottenberg, Simon. 'Thirty Years of Fieldnotes: Changing Relationships to the Text'. In *Thirty Years of Fieldnotes: Changing Relationships to the Text*, 139–60. Cornell University Press, 2019. https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501711954-007.

Paasi, Anssi. 'Boundaries as Social Processes: Territoriality in the World of Flows'. *Geopolitics* 3, no. 1 (June 1998): 69–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/14650049808407608.

Parker, Noel, and Nick Vaughan-Williams. *Critical Border Studies: Broadening and Deepening the 'Lines in the Sand' Agenda*, 2016.

Pelkmans, Mathijs. *Defending the Border: Identity, Religion, and Modernity in the Republic of Georgia*. Culture & Society after Socialism. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2006.

'Personal Remittances, Received (% of GDP) - Kyrgyz Republic | Data'. Accessed 19 February 2022. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=KG.

Peterson, Maya K. *Pipe Dreams: Water and Empire in Central Asia's Aral Sea Basin*. Illustrated Edition. Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

Pétric, Boris-mathieu. 'Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan or the Birth of a Globalized Protectorate'. *Central Asian Survey* 24, no. 3 (1 September 2005): 319–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930500310402.

Petryna, Adriana. *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens after Chernobyl*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Pianciola, Niccolò. 'Stalinist Spatial Hierarchies: Placing the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz in Soviet Economic Regionalization'. *Central Asian Survey* 36, no. 1 (2 January 2017): 73–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2016.1221380.

Pink, Sarah. 'Chapter 5. Researching Relationships'. In *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*, edited by Heather A. Horst, John Postill, Larissa Hjorth, Tania Lewis, Jo Tacchi, and Sarah Pink. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2016.

Pink, Sarah, Heather A. Horst, John Postill, Larissa Hjorth, Tania Lewis, and Jo Tacchi, eds. *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2016.

Platt, K. 'The Post-Soviet Is Over: On Reading the Ruins'. *Undefined*, 2009. https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Post-Soviet-Is-Over%3A-On-Reading-the-Ruins-Platt/baaa82966ced55685d1681df6f7170831fdf2e77.

Polese, Abel. 'What Is Informality? (Mapping) "the Art of Bypassing the State" in Eurasian Spaces - and Beyond'. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 24 October 2021, 1–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2021.1992791.

Polese, Abel, Borbála Kovács, and David Jancsics. 'Informality "in Spite of" or "beyond" the State: Some Evidence from Hungary and Romania'. *European Societies* 20, no. 2 (15 March 2018): 207–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2017.1354390.

Pol'skaia, V. 'Ocherk 6. Ocherki o Stroitelstve Kaskada Totogulskih GES'. Accessed 17 February 2022. http://karakulcy.narod.ru/history/Ocherk6.html.

Routledge & CRC Press. 'Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia'. Accessed 9 August 2021. https://www.routledge.com/Postsocialism-Ideals-ideologies-and-practices-in-Eurasia/Hann/p/book/9780415262583.

Prescott, J. R. V., and J. R. V. Prescott. *Political Frontiers and Boundaries*. London ; Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987.

Pritchard, Sara B. *Confluence: The Nature of Technology and the Remaking of the Rhône*. Harvard Historical Studies 172. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Privratsky, Bruce G. *Muslim Turkistan: Kazak Religion and Collective Memory*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001.

Radcliffe-Brown, A. R, Cyril Daryll Forde, and International African Institute. *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2015. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/e/9781317406105.

Radnitz, Scott. *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia*, 2012. https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801466175.

Reed-Danahay, Deborah. 'Autoethnography'. Oxford University Press, 28 February 2017. https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199766567-0162.

Reeves, Madeleine. *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014.

———. 'Fixing the Border: On the Affective Life of the State in Southern Kyrgyzstan'. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29, no. 5 (October 2011): 905–23. https://doi.org/10.1068/d18610.

———. 'Intimate Militarism: Domesticating the Border in Rural Central Asia'. In *Routledge Handbook of Asian Borderlands*, edited by Alexander Horstmann, Martin Saxer, and Alessandro Rippa. London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.

———. 'Materialising State Space: "Creeping Migration" and Territorial Integrity in Southern Kyrgyzstan'. *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 7 (September 2009): 1277–1313. https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130903068814.

———. 'Staying Put? Towards a Relational Politics of Mobility at a Time of Migration'. *Central Asian Survey*, 17 October 2011. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02634937.2011.614402.

———. 'Time and Contingency in the Anthropology of Borders: On Border as Event in Rural Central Asia'. In *Eurasian Borderlands*, edited by Tone Bringa and Hege Toje, 159–83. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58309-3_7.

Postsocialism. 'Research Papers', 22 January 2015. https://postsocialism.org/research/.

Rivkin-Fish, Michele R. *Women's Health in Post-Soviet Russia: The Politics of Intervention*. New Anthropologies of Europe. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005.

Roberts, Flora. 'A Controversial Dam in Stalinist Central Asia: Rivalry and "Fraternal Cooperation" on the Syr Darya'. *Ab Imperio* 2018, no. 2 (2018): 117–43. https://doi.org/10.1353/imp.2018.0030.

Romero, Fernando. *Hyperborder: The Contemporary U.S.-Mexico Border and Its Future*. 1st ed. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008.

Roy, Olivier. *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*. The CERI Series in Comparative Politics and International Studies. New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 2004.

———. *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways*. Comparative Politics and International Studies Series. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

———. *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

Ruget, Vanessa, and Burul Usmanalieva. 'Can Smartphones Empower Labour Migrants? The Case of Kyrgyzstani Migrants in Russia'. *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 2 (3 April 2019): 165–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2019.1594170.

Rupesinghe, Kumar, and V. A. Tishkov, eds. *Ethnicity and Power in the Contemporary World*. Tokyo ; New York: United Nations University Press, 1996.

Russett, Bruce M., and John R. Oneal. *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*. New York: Norton, 2001.

Russo, John, and Sherry Lee Linkon, eds. *New Working-Class Studies*. Ithaca [N.Y.]: ILR Press, 2005.

Sadyrbek, Mahabat. *Legal Pluralism in Central Asia: Local Jurisdiction and Customary Practices*. Routledge, 2017.

Sahadeo, Jeff. *Voices from the Soviet Edge: Southern Migrants in Leningrad and Moscow*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019.

Sahlins, Marshall. 'Two or Three Things That I Know about Culture'. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5, no. 3 (1999): 399–421. https://doi.org/10.2307/2661275.

'Sait Kara-Kultzev'. Accessed 6 March 2022. http://karakulcy.narod.ru/history.html.

Samotsvetu. *Moi Adres Sovetskii Soiuz*, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_x10yGBJs2k.

Sanchez Betancourt, D., and A. Teagle. 'Community Action in the Time of COVID-19: Moving at the Speed of Trust; Sitting with Complexity', 2020. https://doi.org/10/15406.

Schmidt, Matthias, and Lira Sagynbekova. 'Migration Past and Present: Changing Patterns in Kyrgyzstan'. *Central Asian Survey* 27, no. 2 (1 June 2008): 111–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930802355030.

Schmidt, Matthias, Rune Steenberg, Michael Spies, Henryk Alff, and Henryk Alff. 'Beyond Post-Soviet: Layered Legacies and Transformations in Central Asia'. *Institut Für Geographie, Universität Augsburg* Geographica Augustana, no. 33 (2021): 109.

Schneider, Gerald. 'Russett, Bruce & John Oneal: Triangulating Peace : Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organization'. *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 5 (1 September 2001): 650–51. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343301038005020.

Schröder, Philipp, ed. *Urban Spaces and Lifestyles in Central Asia and Beyond.* ThirdWorlds. London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2017.

Schwenkel, Christina. *Building Socialism: The Afterlife of East German Architecture in Urban Vietnam.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.

———. 'POST/SOCIALIST AFFECT: Ruination and Reconstruction of the Nation in Urban Vietnam: POST/SOCIALIST AFFECT'. *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no. 2 (May 2013): 252–77. https://doi.org/10.1111/cuan.12003.

———. 'The Current Never Stops: Intimacies of Energy Infrastructure in Vietnam'. In *The Promise of Infrastructure*, edited by Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta, and Hannah Appel, 102–29. Duke University Press, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002031-005.

Scott, James Wesley, ed. *A Research Agenda for Border Studies.* Elgar Research Agendas. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020.

Sehring, Jenniver. 'Water User Associations (WUAs) in Kyrgyzstan : A Case Study on Institutional Reform in Local Irrigation Management', 1 January 2005.

Seneviratne, Prianka N. 'Transportation Facilitation in Azerbaijan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan: Challenges and Opportunities'. In *Lucerne Conference of the CIS-7 Initiative*. Switzerland, 2003.

Sgibnev, Wladimir, and Andrey Vozyanov. 'Assemblages of Mobility: The Marshrutkas of Central Asia'. *Central Asian Survey*, 24 February 2016. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02634937.2016.1145381.

Siegelbaum, Lewis H. 'The Condition of Labor in Post-Soviet Russia: A Ten-Year Retrospective'. *Social Science History* 28, no. 4 (2004): 637–65.

Siegelbaum, Lewis H., and Leslie Page Moch. *Broad Is My Native Land: Repertoires and Regimes of Migration in Russia's Twentieth Century*. Ithaca ; London: Cornell University Press, 2014.

Silova, Iveta, and Sarfaroz Niëzov, eds. *Globalization on the Margins: Education and Post-Socialist Transformations in Central Asia*. Second edition. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc, 2019.

Smith, Dorothy E. *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People.* Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2005. http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1323152.

Sokolsky, Mark. 'Broad Is My Native Land: Repertoires and Regimes of Migration in Russia's Twentieth Century. By Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch'. *Journal of Social History* 50, no. 1 (September 2016): 244–46. https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shv089.

'«Sovetskogo cheloveka» net, eto prosto slova. Sotiolog Viktor Wachstein'. Accessed 21 February 2022. https://www.pravmir.ru/socziolog-viktor-vahshtajn-sovetskogo-cheloveka-net-eto-prosto-slova/.

Sparkes, Andrew C. 'Autoethnography and Narratives of Self: Reflections on Criteria in Action'. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 17, no. 1 (1 March 2000): 21–43. https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.17.1.21.

Speaking Soviet with an Accent. Accessed 25 December 2020. https://books.google.com/books/about/Speaking_Soviet_with_an_Accent.html?hl=de&id=HFnHjAn18sgC.

Spector, Regine A. *Order at the Bazaar: Power and Trade in Central Asia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017.

Spencer, Liz, and R. E. Pahl. *Rethinking Friendship: Hidden Solidarities Today*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Starr, S. Frederick, Baktybek Beshimov, Inomjon I. Bobokulov, and P. D. Shozimov, eds. *Ferghana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia*. Studies of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2011.

'Statistika po migratzii'. Accessed 19 February 2022. http://ssm.gov.kg/ru/page/39.

Steenberg, Rune. 'Accumulating Trust: Uyghur Traders in the Sino–Kyrgyz Border Trade after 1991'. In *Routledge Handbook of Asian Borderlands*, edited by Alexander Horstmann, Martin Saxer, and Alessandro Rippa. London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.

Stenning, Alison. 'Where Is the Post-Socialist Working Class?: Working-Class Lives in the Spaces of (Post-)Socialism'. *Sociology* 39, no. 5 (December 2005): 983–99. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038505058382.

Stephan-Emmrich, Manja, and Philipp Schröder. *Mobilities, Boundaries, and Travelling Ideas: Rethinking Translocality Beyond Central Asia and the Caucasus*. Open Book Publishers, 2018.

Stürmer, Stefan, and Bernd Simon. 'Pathways to Collective Protest: Calculation, Identification, or Emotion? A Critical Analysis of the Role of Group-Based Anger in Social Movement Participation'. *Journal of Social Issues* 65, no. 4 (December 2009): 681–705. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2009.01620.x.

Suyarkulova, Mohira. 'Fashioning the Nation: Gender and Politics of Dress in Contemporary Kyrgyzstan'. *Nationalities Papers* 44, no. 2 (March 2016): 247–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2016.1145200.

Svensson, Jakob, and Caroline Wamala Larsson. 'Situated Empowerment: Mobile Phones Practices among Market Women in Kampala'. *Mobile Media & Communication* 4, no. 2 (May 2016): 205–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/2050157915619212.

Swett, C. 'Outpatient Phenothiazine Use and Bone Marrow Depression. A Report from the Drug Epidemiology Unit and the Boston Collaborative Drug Surveillance Program'. *Archives of General Psychiatry* 32, no. 11 (November 1975): 1416–18.

Sxelenyi, Ivan. 'Cities under Socialism—and After'. In *Cities After Socialism*, edited by Gregory Andrusz, Michael Harloe, and Ivan Szelenyi, 286–317. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470712733.ch10.

Tabyshalieva, Anara. *The Challenge of Regional Cooperation in Central Asia: Preventing Ethnic Conflict in the Ferghana Valley*. Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1999.

Tapper, Richard, and K. S McLachlan. *Technology, Tradition and Survival Aspects of Material Culture in the Middle East and Central Asia*. London; Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2003. http://www.myilibrary.com?id=10383.

Tarlo, Emma, and Annelies Moors, eds. *Islamic Fashion and Anti-Fashion: New Perspectives from Europe and North America*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

Tash-Komur Jashtar Birimdigi. *Tash-Kumyr Shaaryna Karashtuu Kyzyl-Alma Shaarchasy*, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFcZ_CoAVMk.

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.

Tedlock, Barbara. 'From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation: The Emergence of Narrative Ethnography'. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 47, no. 1 (April 1991): 69–94. https://doi.org/10.1086/jar.47.1.3630581.

Teichmann, Christian. 'Cultivating the Periphery: Bolshevik Civilizing Missions and Colonialism in Soviet Central Asia'. *Comparativ*, 1 January 2009. https://www.academia.edu/3446565/Cultivating_the_Periphery_Bolshevik_Civilizing_Missions_and_Colonialism_in_Soviet_Central_Asia.

The Moral Neoliberal. Accessed 19 November 2021. https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/M/bo13040555.html.

ARCADE. 'The Post-Soviet Is Over: On Reading the Ruins'. Accessed 9 August 2021. https://arcade.stanford.edu/rofl/post-soviet-over-reading-ruins.

'The War of Billboards: Hijab, Secularism, and Public Space in Bishkek'. In *Being Muslim in Central Asia: Practices, Politics, and Identities*, 233–57. BRILL, 2018. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004357242.

Thompson, Eric C. 'Mobile Phones, Communities and Social Networks among Foreign Workers in Singapore'. *Global Networks* 9, no. 3 (July 2009): 359–80. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-0374.2009.00258.x.

Thrift, Nigel. 'Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect'. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 86, no. 1 (March 2004): 57–78. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0435-3684.2004.00154.x.

Tilly, Charles. *Durable Inequality*. Nachdr. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2009.

Tilt, Bryan. 'Perceptions of Risk from Industrial Pollution in China: A Comparison of Occupational Groups'. *Human Organization* 65, no. 2 (June 2006): 115–27. https://doi.org/10.17730/humo.65.2.69dufcr1hatnpu5v.

Tlostanova, Madina. 'Can the Post-Soviet Think? On Coloniality of Knowledge, External Imperial and Double Colonial Difference'. *Intersections* 1, no. 2 (22 June 2015). https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v1i2.38.

———. '«Nastupaet moment trivializatzii dekolonialnosti»: interview s madinoi Tlostanovoi'. syg.ma. Accessed 21 February 2022. https://syg.ma/@horizontalpub/nastupaiet-momient-trivializatsii-diekolonialnosti-intierviu-s-madinoi-tlostanovoi.

———. *What Does It Mean to Be Post-Soviet?: Decolonial Art from the Ruins of the Soviet Empire*. Duke University Press, 2018. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11smfqp.

Toktogulova, Mukaram. *The Localisation of the Transnational Tablighi Jama'at in Kyrgyzstan - Structures, Concepts, Practices and Metaphors*. Crossroads Asia Working Paper Series. Crossroads Asia, 2014.

Toktomushev, Kemel. 'Understanding Cross-Border Conflict in Post-Soviet Central Asia: The Case of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan'. *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 17, no. 1 (2018): 21–41. https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.17.1.02.

transcript. 'Borders and Border Regions in Europe'. transcript Verlag. Accessed 31 January 2022. https://www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-8376-2442-7/borders-and-border-regions-in-europe/.

Tripathi, Dhananjay. *Re-Imagining Border Studies in South Asia*. Taylor & Francis, 2020.

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton, New Jersey Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Tulbure, Narcis. 'Introduction to Special Issue: Global Socialisms and Postsocialisms'. *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 27, no. 2 (2009): 2–18.

Turaeva, Rano, and Michael Brose. 'Halal Markets in Non-Muslim Secular Societies: Halal as Brand, Halal as Practice'. *Sociology of Islam* 8, no. 3–4 (10 December 2020): 295–306. https://doi.org/10.1163/22131418-08030001.

Tylor, Edward B. *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*. Dover Thrift Editions. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2016.

Umetaliev, Mamatali Solton uulu. *Bazyl Baatyr*. Bishkek: Biyiktik, 2010.

Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World. Accessed 24 March 2022. https://rowman.com/ISBN/9780847690428/Uncertain-Transition-Ethnographies-of-Change-in-the-Postsocialist-World.

Upchurch, Martin, Richard Croucher, Hanna Danilovich, and Claudio Morrison. 'The Transformation of Work and Industrial Relations in the Post-Soviet Bloc: 25 Years

on from 1989'. *Work, Employment and Society* 29, no. 3 (June 2015): NP1–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017014564006.

Urinboyev, Rustam. 'Establishing an "Uzbek Mahalla" via Smartphones and Social Media: Everyday Transnational Lives of Uzbek Labour Migrants in Russia'. In *Constructing the Uzbek State: Narratives of Post-Soviet Years*, edited by Marlène Laruelle, 119. Contemporary Central Asia : Societies, Politics, and Cultures. Lanham ; Boulder ; New York ; London: Lexington Books, 2017.

Vaquera-Vásquez, Santiago. 'The Unbearable Lightness of Being Fronterizo: Reflections on Border Crossing'. *Ex-Centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Media*, no. 3 (30 December 2019): 136–50. https://doi.org/10.26262/exna.v0i3.7554.

Verdery, Katherine. *The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania*. Culture & Society after Socialism. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003.

Vila, Pablo. *Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Borders Social Categories, Metaphors, and Narrative Identities on the U.S.-Mexico Frontier*. University of Texas Press, 2000. https://utpress.utexas.edu/books/vilcro.

———, ed. *Ethnography at the Border*. Cultural Studies of the Americas, v. 13. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

Vladivostok State University of Economics and Service (Vladivostok, Russian Federation), T.V. Varkulevich, M.N. Arnaut, Vladivostok State University of Economics and Service (Vladivostok, Russian Federation), N.R. Pashuk, and Vladivostok State University of Economics and Service (Vladivostok, Russian Federation). 'THE ROLE OF A REGIONAL UNIVERSITY IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF A TERRITORY (BY THE EXAMPLE OF PRIMORSKY KRAI)'. *Vestnik Tomskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta. Ekonomika*, no. 44 (1 December 2018): 93–103. https://doi.org/10.17223/19988648/44/6.

'Vo chto prevratilsya "Manas aiyly"! Etnographicheskii kompleks obeshali vosstanovit'. Accessed 21 February 2022.

https://kaktus.media/doc/396420_vo_chto_prevratilsia_manas_ayyly_etnografic
heskiy_kompleks_poobeshali_vosstanovit_foto.html.

'Vol. 40 No. 1 (2015) | Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological
Society'. Accessed 9 August 2021.
https://journal.fi/suomenantropologi/issue/view/4182.

Volodin, V. 'Karakulcy', 2004. http://karakulcy.narod.ru/photoalbum/album2.html.

Von Schnitzler, Antina. 'TRAVELING TECHNOLOGIES: Infrastructure, Ethical
Regimes, and the Materiality of Politics in South Africa: TRAVELING
TECHNOLOGIES'. *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no. 4 (November 2013): 670–93.
https://doi.org/10.1111/cuan.12032.

Wall, Sarah. 'Easier Said than Done: Writing an Autoethnography'. *International
Journal of Qualitative Methods* 7, no. 1 (1 March 2008): 38–53.
https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690800700103.

Wastl-Walter, Doris. *The Routledge Research Companion to Border Studies*, 2016.
http://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=97813156
12782.

Wegerich, Kai, Daniel Van Rooijen, Ilkhom Soliev, and Nozilakhon Mukhamedova.
'Water Security in the Syr Darya Basin'. *Water* 7, no. 9 (27 August 2015): 4657–
84. https://doi.org/10.3390/w7094657.

Weinthal, Erika. *State Making and Environmental Cooperation: Linking Domestic and
International Politics in Central Asia*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002.
http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=
nlabk&AN=78078.

Weltbank, ed. *Weather and Climate Services in Europe and Central Asia: A Regional
Review*. World Bank Working Paper 151. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2008.

White, Richard. *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River*. 6.
printing. A Critical Issue. New York: Hill and Wang, 2001.

Wilson, Thomas M., and Hastings Donnan, eds. *A Companion to Border Studies*. Blackwell Companions to Anthropology 19. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

Wooden, Amanda E. 'Another Way of Saying Enough: Environmental Concern and Popular Mobilization in Kyrgyzstan'. *Post-Soviet Affairs* 29, no. 4 (July 2013): 314–53. https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2013.797165.

Wooden, Amanda E. 2017 "Images of Harm, Imagining Justice: The Shape and Shifting Forms of Gold Mining Contestation in Kyrgyzstan ," in Kirk Jalbert, Anna Willow, David Casagrande, & Stephanie Paladino, eds. ExtrACTION: Impacts, Engagements, and Alternative Futures . Routledge.

Woodworth, Max D. 'Picturing Urban China in Ruin: "Ghost City" Photography and Speculative Urbanization'. *GeoHumanities* 6, no. 2 (2 July 2020): 233–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/2373566X.2020.1825110.

Worthington, Lisa. 'Svetlana Peshkova, Women, Islam, and Identity: Public Life in Private Spaces in Uzbekistan. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014, Pp. Viii + 352, ISBN: 978-0- 8156-3373-0 (Hbk)'. *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 29, no. 2 (21 June 2016): 203–4. https://doi.org/10.1558/jasr.v29i2.30887.

Wouters, Patricia K., Victor Dukhovny, and Andrew MacAllan, eds. *Implementing Integrated Water Resources Management in Central Asia: Proceedings of the NATO Advanced Research Workshop on Integrated Resources Management in Transboundary Basins: An Interstate and Intersectoral Approach, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 23 - 28 February 2004*. Nato Science Series Series 4: Earth and Environmental Sciences 77. Dordrecht: Springer, 2007.

Yurchak, Alexei. *Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. In-Formation Series. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Zartman, I. William, ed. *Understanding Life in the Borderlands: Boundaries in Depth and in Motion*. Studies in Security and International Affairs. Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 2010.

Zhursin, Zhanagul, and Farangis Najibullah. 'The Hijab Debate Intensifies As School Starts In Kazakhstan'. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 2019, sec. Kazakhstan. https://www.rferl.org/a/the-hijab-debate-intensifies-as-school-starts-in-kazakhstan/30148088.html.

Zukin, Sharon. *The Cultures of Cities*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995.