Sharora – a Soviet microworld

Internationalism of Everyday Life in Soviet Tajikistan (1930s-1990s)

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Vienna, 26 March 2025

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the history of Sharora, a Soviet locality in Tajikistan's Ghissar Valley, as a microcosm of Soviet modernity and as a reflection of Soviet imperial dynamism. It examines the interplay of everyday life, Soviet institutions governing economic, social, and cultural activity, and internationalism, as a goal of Soviet interventions and an unintended fruit of everyday life innovations. Originally settled by former kulaks, exiles, and deportees, Sharora was envisioned as a socialist experiment to transform the "Valley of Death" into a thriving provincial hub for scientists. During the Cold War Sharora evolved into an ethnically and culturally complex community whose history illuminates the contradictory nature of the Soviet formation that struggled the reconcile imperial mode of governance with national aspirations. The dissertation also uncovers unintended outcomes of Soviet policies, such as the transconfessional coexistence of Muslims and Christians in a space where religion, though suppressed, remained central to everyday life. Finally, the Sharora Earthquake of 1989 exposed the fragility of Soviet solidarity, as rebuilding efforts failed to restore the interethnic peace once emblematic of the community.

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Notes on transliteration

The dissertation has followed the Library of Congress transliteration standard for Russian and Tajik as given in the table below:

А а - A a	К к - K k	Х х - Kh kh
Б б - B b	Л л - L l	Ц ц - Ts ts
В в - V v	М м - M m	Ч ч - Ch ch
Г г - G g (Exeption: Ghissar)	Н н - N n	Ш ш - Sh sh
Д д - D d	О о - O o	Щ щ - Shch shch
Е е - E e	П п - P p	Ъ ъ ″ (hard sign)
Ё ё - Ё ё	Р р - R r	Ы ы - Y y
Ж ж - Zh zh	С с - S s	Ь ь ′ (soft sign)
З з - Z z	Т т - T t	Э э - Ė ė
И и - I i	У у - U u	Ю ю - I͡u i͡u
Й й - Ĭ ĭ	Ф ф - F f	Я я - I͡a i͡a

Special letters of the Tajik alphabet are transliterated as follows: Ғ ғ - Gh gh, Қ қ - Q q, Ӯ ӯ - Ū ū, and Ҳ ҳ - H h.

Introduction

The story unfolding on the following pages is a history of a provincial town in Soviet periphery located in central part of the Ghissar Valley (*Vodii Hisor*) of Tajikistan. Prior to the Soviet conquest of the region Ghissar was regarded as one for the least known parts of the Bukharan Emirate and in the 1870s Russian explorers surveying the Ghissar principality (*bekstvo*) of the Emirate doubted whether the town of Ghissar had ever existed. Besides Ghissar proper, the principality encompassed several small villages Dushanbe, Denau, Sari Osio, Kabadion, Kofirnikhon, Darvash, Baisun and others. Importantly the Ghissar Principality also included parts of the present-day Southern and Eastern Tajikistan such as Kuliab and Darvaz. The Western lowlands of the valley were predominantly populated by Uzbeks, while Tajiks lived in Eastern more mountainous areas of Romit and Varzob.[1] The exact location that this history concerns for the most part was invisible and uninhabitable even by local standards. Placed in the 20-kilometer-long strip between two fast-running rivers Surkhandarya and Varzob, tributaries of Amu (Oxus), the central part of the Ghissar Valley did not have a source of water of its own and was instead flooded and swamped all year around. Overgrown with reeds it was home to disease and parasites, predators, and swarms of mosquitoes. This was the birthplace of Sharora, the main protagonist of this dissertation.

The present-day town Sharora (*Jamoati Sharora* in Tajik or *Posëlok Sharora* in Russian) of the Ghissar district is located 14 kilometers south-west of Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe.[2] The

[1] While I could not access indigenous Central Asian sources on the early history of the area I consulted some of the Russian Imperial travelogues: N. Maev, "Ocherki Ghissarskogo Kraia. Materiali Dlia Statistiki Turkestanskogo Kraia. Spb.," no. V (1879); I.I. Vilson and V.Ch. Sriznivskai, *Geograficheskiia Izvestia tom¸XII Vypusk Chetvertyi. Geograficheskii Ocherk Gissarkogo Kraia i Kuliabskogo Bekstvaю*, vol. IV (Russkoie Ggeograficheskoie obshestvo, 1877).

[2] The exact Google Map location: https://maps.app.goo.gl/wCt79UPUiuaydoBU6

southern and southwestern neighborhoods of this town lie at the foot of Urtaboz plateau, popularly referred to as bagara[3] and its northern and eastern sides are surrounded by farmlands (see Figure 1. Map of present-day Sharora). From a historical point of view the place is unremarkable to most of its present-day residents. Not an archeological site, an ancient settlement, a Silk Road node, or a Civil War stronghold, it is all but overlooked by national historians. Only a few still living old-timers can tell a story of how this area had transformed from a wild desert to an economically and socially advanced town.

One can get a sense of this history by looking at the change of toponyms in the Ghissar district from the end of the 1920s to the present day. In the early Soviet time new toponyms celebrated the October Revolution, extoled its leaders, and glorified the Soviet power as a source of new life.[4] The map of the Central Ghissar Valley of the 1930s-40s (see Figure 3) is peppered with references to Karl Marx, Lenin, Zhdanov, Communism, Parts"ezd, Dzerzhinsky and so on. Even the hill that dominates the local landscape was called Pervomaĭskaya gorka, literary meaning, the hill of the First of May. Later, the ideological geographical imagination was complimented by the names of the most significant enterprises in the area such as *Verbliudzavod* (camel farm), *Mulzavod* (mule farm)*, Khlopzavod* (cotton mill), and in the 1950s the map was dominated by the names of various scientific institutions such as *Tsekh* — Tsentralnoe ėksperementalinoe khoziaĭstvo (Central Experimental Farm)*, Uchkhoz* — Uchebnoie khoziaĭstvo (Farm for practical training and research), *Institut Zemledeliia* — Research institute for agriculture and *Astrofizika* – Space observatory of the Institute for astrophysics. Only in 1972 a vernacular name *Sharora*, an

[3] The word bagara comes from the Tajik and Persian word bahor - spring. The word denotes a hilly area for cultivation of rathe-ripe crops, wheat, legumes and alfalfa and other cultures without irrigation.
[4] Janusz Rieger, "The Main Stages of the Development of Russian Place Names," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 37, no. 3/4 (1995): 455–66.

Arabic for sparkle or a very bright star, was used as a name for a residential area discussed in the following chapters.

The succession of toponyms and the way Sharora's natural and social landscape changed over time contains unexpected keys to the Soviet history and offers an opportunity to productively complicate the field. Sharora is a product of Soviet civilizational and developmentalist expansion into what seemed to the contemporaneous observers an uninhabited void. Sharora used to be a community that embodied Soviet dreams of internationalism and the merger of nationalities by bringing dozens of peoples into one town, both voluntarily and forced. Sharora was envisioned as a rational and scientific project designed to bring the fruits of socialist modernity into the Central Asian countryside to transform peasants and herders into engineers, managers, and scientists and some of Sharora's denizens still bear implicit and explicit footprint of this unparalleled endeavor. Undoubtedly, Sharora's very existence on the map of Tajikistan is an achievement but it shows evidence of the many noble failures of the Soviet Union, to guarantee economic equality for men and women working in Sovkhoz economy, to build a truly secular and rational society, secure lasting peace between various parts of this diverse and complex community, and finally, to shield its people from natural and human-made disasters. Sharora is a concentration of nearly all the achievements and failures of the 20th-century socialism, particularly its Soviet iteration, and a still-living open-air archive of everyday life in Soviet Central Asia. While there are many questions one can ask Sharora I have confined myself to the most pressing one, both for myself and my peers from the field — the Soviet nationalities question. This dissertation investigates how the diverse communities populating Sharora and its environs in the Central Ghissar Valley experienced the transformations of the landscape and their living environment in the period between the end of the WWII and the dissolution of the USSR and how these experiences shaped their intra-communal relations. In other words, I am interested in how and why internationalism was a lived experience

in certain Soviet communities and what factors undermined it. In the following chapters I argue that if anything, the sense of internationalism that the Soviet Union promoted, was a product of both intended and unintended everyday life transformations brought about by the Soviet economic structure and social institutions. Soviet internationalism, beyond political ideology, calling for the friendship of peoples and international solidarity, was engrained in how people grew up, worked, loved, and died in a place that was their shared and collective home.

Sharora an Exceptional Norm

Sharora is both unique and representative, exceptional and normal, small and significant for the field of Soviet history. It is congruent with many colonial and post-colonial societies of the 19th and 20th centuries that combined environmental expansion, economic development, and ethno-racial segregation and inclusion both intended and otherwise.[5] On the one hand, Sharora is a piece in a puzzle of myriads Soviet specialized locales, company towns (rabochiĭ posëlok), GULAG settlements (kolonia-poselenie), campus towns (nauchgorodok), military towns (voengorodok) and many others.[6] On the other hand, it is unique in a sense that it combines elements of all of the above by serving multiple kinds of Soviet people — fugitives and exiles, peasants and professional workers, soldiers, scientists, welfare workers and so on, all with their own religion, ethnicity, culture, and a place within the large and complex Soviet whole. Finally, Sharora is not a significant

[5] I was inspired to compare Soviet nationalities policy and everyday internationalism in the 20th century by my fellow panelist at the graduate conference on Late Socialism (Davis Center, Harvard University) Hilary Lynd from UC Berkley and her paper titled Mankurts and Natives: Ethnicity as Authenticity in the Long 1970 and her later publication Hilary Lynd and Thom Loyd, "Histories of Color: Blackness and Africanness in the Soviet Union," Slavic Review 81, no. 2 (2022): 394–417.

[6] Some of such towns have given historians an opportunity for nearly groundbreaking work: Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (Oxford University Press, 2013, n.d.); Alan Barenberg, *Gulag Town, Company Town: Forced Labor and Its Legacy in Vorkuta.Yale-Hoover Series on Stalin, Stalinism, and the Cold War.* (Yale University Press, 2014); Artemy M. Kalinovsky, "Nurek, 'A City You Can Write About,'" in *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 117–43; Sergey Abashin, *Sovetskiy Kishlak Mezhdu Kolonizatsyei i Modernizatsyei*, 2015.

or major place on the world map yet important enough to have earned a place in the Soviet archives, world press headlines, and lasting memory of people living in it, and even passing through.

Another aspect of Sharora that has proven valuable for the field is that it is a *posëlok gorodskogo tipa* — middle ground between a village and a town offering a compact research experience and access to a multiplicity of Soviet everyday life experiences. Material and symbolic map of Sharora has important places reflecting the diversity of Soviet people in Central Asia and their everyday life: modern apartment buildings (*Khrushchevki*) and traditional walled Tajik homes (*khavli*), Russian and Muslim cemeteries, shrines and mosques, a school named after a war hero and a kindergarten, a *klub* and a space observatory, an earthquake memorial and collective grave. These places evince the prominence of both modernity and traditions and the traces of global processes and ambitions such as wars, East-West competition, scientific exchanges, and international relief and reconstruction effort. Hence, Sharora has shared many milestones of the birth, growth, and demise of the USSR displaying unique and particular features of the said processes.

Figure 1: Map of Sharora in 2020 (source: Google maps)

The oldest monuments of Sharora's past, dating back to the late 1920s, arable fields and irrigation canals, rational and centralized kolkhoz economy, welfare infrastructure and public spaces, all devised for productive and cultured workforce, are artifacts of the "Stalinist civilization"[7] contemporaneous to the first kolkhozes elsewhere in the USSR. In 1929, just one year after the launch of the pan-Soviet collectivization policy, a dairy and forage producing collective farm, *Molochno-kormovoĭ sovkhoz*, emerged in this area. However, unlike elsewhere in the USSR, collectivization in the Ghissar Valley was not accompanied by a 'class war' within the peasantry because the area had not seen any private farming before. One could call this event nothing but collectivization without dekulakization because the establishment of the first kolkhozy and sovkhozy in the area did not involve state persecution of "class enemies," property expropriation, or grain requisition. This process was perceived as conquering, populating and

[7] Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (University of California Press, 1997).

culturing a wild Central Asian savanna. Who was shouldered with the mission to collectivize the Ghissar Valley diverged from the broader Soviet trend as well — dispossessed kulaks from the European regions of the USSR, exiled and resettled "unreliable" peoples and social classes, prisoners of war and the likes were to reinvent themselves as party activists and shock workers. Their offsprings of the post-WWII era were the most quintessential Soviet generation because they combined the past of their parents with the future hopes of restarting socialism, and crossed cultural, ethnic, and confessional borders with their neighbors and colleagues, and today have no homeland other than their own Soviet past.

Sharora was a transplanted micro-world because its populace, the animals and plants that formed this realm, were imported from various and often unexpected parts of the world. Both rank-and-file workers, kolkhoz managers, and district officials were strangers to this territory and had little knowledge about its natural resources, economic prospects, and consequently, no clear understanding of what the best product in the given terrain and climate could be. The progress of local economy resembled walking a mine field in the dark and resulted in institutional and occupational vicissitudes. Before Sharora assumed its late soviet form and content it underwent multiple transformations. It started off in 1929 as a dairy farm *Molochno-kormovoĭ sovkhoz* that imported Kostroma cows (*Kostromskaia poroda)* and European, mostly Slavic, workforce. In 1935 the community continued as a mule-breeding sovkhoz 126 (*Mulzavod 126*), while neighboring collectives specialized in horse and camel breeding. In the late 1940s the Ghissar Valley was irrigated and, along with Fergana and Vakhsh Valleys, integrated into the republican cotton cultivation.[8] *Mulzavod 126* was transformed into a sovkhoz producing elite cotton seeds[9] (*Khlopkovyĭ ėlitno-semenododcheskiĭ sovkhoz*) *Stalinabadskiĭ* and shifted the focus from

[8] Adeeb Khalid, "Cottonizing Central Asia (Book Review)," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 20, no. 3 (2019): 644–48.
[9] In soviet agronomy, the term elite seeds, referred to selected and hybridized seeds of the highest quality and harvests.

husbandry to selection and production of technical crops such as cotton, alfalfa, and flax. In the 1960s *Stalinabadskiĭ* was dissolved into several experimental farms and merged with sovkhoz *Dzerzhinskogo*. The new agricultural agglomeration also included a large research institute for agriculture of the Academy of Sciences of the Tajik SSR. Thus, the enlargement of and investment into the agricultural knowhow and production made the Ghissar district a regional center within a peripheral state. Sharora continued to be a destination for the incoming migration but at the same time it began to send its young men to serve on battlefields of the global Cold War in Europe, Africa, and most notably, in Afghanistan. Their international encounters both within and outside the Soviet borders had become the second avenue connecting Sharora to the larger world outside. One can certainly say that starting in the 1970s in their demobilization suitcases[10] Muslim soldiers brought back to Sharora their own version of Late Socialism.

No community is ever a monolith unity, and neither was *sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo*. Scientists and soldiers had coexisted with people, Muslim and Christian alike, for whom a reaffirmation of an authentic national culture and imagined traditional world order was a priority. They maintained old mosques and built new ones, prayed and fasted, tended their cemeteries and mourned their dead. Sharora's history shows that not only was Soviet Union not an irreligious place,[11] it was a transconfessional heterotopia whereby Muslims and Christians trespassed the thin border between their spiritual worlds and likewise gave in to the forces of repulsion of the *fin de siècle* Soviet Union. Hence, the fabled friendship of peoples, and for that matter their divorce, was not always a communist affair, but a spiritual experience as well.

[10] A suitcase given to soldiers discharged from active duty to return home.
[11] Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton University Press, 2018).

Soviet Imperial Dynamics in a Microregional Perspective

I have located my work in the ongoing debates about coloniality, modernity, empire, and nationhood of the Soviet Union.[12] Sharora's story is the history of how colonization and decolonization coalesced in one locale and shows how a peripheral entity could act as a regional center. In line with critics of the "either… or…" approach I argue that when it comes to Central Asia the power dynamic between the purported colonizers and the colonized was inversed. The inversion of entitlements and ownership was informed and shaped by a particular post-WWII situation of simultaneous decolonization and limited sovereignty everywhere in the world. This situation enabled local actors in Soviet Tajikistan to act as if they represented an independent state while deeply integrated into a larger Soviet empire.[13] The emerging postimperial situations within the Soviet Union created radically new opportunities for Central Asians and my research shows that that the colonizers — Russians, Europeans or Westerners, found themselves on an unequal footing with actors of titular nationalities.

At the same time, I do not argue against the significant continuities between Russian imperial rule over Central Asia and the Soviet state building in the region. The very existence of Tajikistan within its contemporary borders and its recognizable 'national culture' owes the Russian imperial ethnographic knowledge and, more broadly, a set of European ideas about modernity and

[12] Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, 2001; Terry Martin, "Modernization or Neo-Traditionalism? Ascribed Nationality and Soviet Primordialism," in *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledge and Practices, 1800-1950*, ed. D. Hoffmann and Y. Kotsonis, 1st ed. 2000 (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2000); Hirsch Francine, *Empire of Nations Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Mark R. Beissinger, "The Persisting Ambiguity of Empire," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 11, no. 2 (April 1995): 149–84., Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Alexander M Martin, "The Imperial Turn," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7, no. 4 (September 2006): 705–12., Valerie A. Kivelson and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Russia's Empires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[13] Artemy M. Kalinovsky, "Central Planning, Local Knowledge?: Labor, Population, and the 'Tajik School of Economics,'" *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 17, no. 3 (2016): 585–620.

nationhood.[14] The involvement of European experts went far beyond nation-making as Soviet scientists, engineers, and workers turned many parts of Central Asian landscape and terrain into "neo-Europes" or transplanted flora and fauna that served the European habitat which led to the imbalance of power between the Soviet metropole and its Central Asian peripheries.[15] Hence the power dynamic between the Soviet center and peripheries was multidirectional with imperial knowledge shaping local politics and local actors either sustaining or undermining the imperial visions.[16]

It should be noted that the integrity of Central Asia as a region is rather questionable. As Svetlana Gorshenina has pointed out Central Asia has very ambiguous temporal and geographic outlines and historically has been "internally divided and enclosed many dissimilar countries with turbulent histories."[17] The region was given identity and borders from without by Chinese, Arab, Mongol, Persian, Russian invaders and assumed its most recognized meaning of the five republics in the Soviet Period.[18] In specialized discourse the region still appears to be subdivided and complex. For example, at times Kazakhstan is separated from other Central Asian republics resulting in *Sredniaia Azia i Kazakhstan*. In military terms Central Asia was divided into two districts — *Turkestanskii voennyi okrug* (Turkistan Military District) and *Sredneaziatskii voennyi okrug* (Central Asian Military District). In the meantime, natural scientists divided the world into agro-ecological and environmental regions that did not abide by the national borders. Such de facto regions, Hungry Steppe, Ghissar Valley, Fergana Valley, Vakhsh Valley, Western Pamires,

[14] Hirsch Francine, *Empire of Nations Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), Adrienne Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton University Press, 2004); Matthias Battis, "The Aryan Myth and Tajikistan: From a Myth of Empire to One National Identity," *Ab Imperio*, no. April (2016).
[15] Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, 2001.
[16] Stephen Kotkin, "Mongol Commonwealth?: Exchange and Governance in the Post-Mongol Space," *Kritica: Explorations in Russian and Euroasian History* 8, no. 3 (2007).
[17] Svetlana Gorshenina, *Izobretenia Kontsepta Srednei/Tsentralnoi Azii: Mezhdu Naukoi i Geopolitikoi* (The George Washington University, 2019), p. 3.
[18] Ibid., p. 5.

Eastern Pamires involved various networks and therefore, produced different power dynamics. Hence, the notion of "provinciality" is significant for understanding the local historical experiences.[19]

The picture gets even more complicated if one views Tajikistan microhistorically, not only as a subordinate nation-state within a supranational body called the USSR, but also as a constellation of semi-autonomous regions each of which made choices far beyond of what an ideal-type empire would offer. Regions within Tajikistan and regionalism in its early post-independence politics[20] reflect the geographic realities of the early Soviet rule that had to recon with limitations of physical access to and communication with its disparate parts. It might have been easier to cross the Atlantic than get a message across from Khujand to Khorog.[21] Regionalization of Tajikistan resulted from economic growth projects and environmental management where ideology and central control were of little help.[22] It was the technocrats and managers on the ground with their networks, which often crossed republican borders, who shaped the power dynamic in Tajikistan.[23]

Does this all mean that the notion of empire can be treated as an insignificant backdrop in thinking about the Soviet Union, the relations between its constituent parts and whatever came afterwards? The evidence of imperial situation within the Soviet state is precisely the emergence of ideas of nationhood that were forged against the colonial knowledge using intellectual frameworks and cultural institutions that resulted from colonial systems. Furthermore, one can argue that the most viable forms of internationalism and the most ambiguous identities are possible

[19] Zukhra Kasimova, "Hybridizing Sovietness, Modernity, Nationality and Provinciality in Uzbekistan, 1941–1984" (University of Illinois at Chicago, 2023).
[20] Tim Epkenhans, *The Origins of the Civil War in Tajikistan: Nationalism, Islamism, and Violent Conflict in Post-Soviet Space (Contemporary Central Asia: Societies, Politics, and Cultures)* (Lexington Books, 2016).
[21] Botakoz Kassymbekova, *Despite Cultures: Early Soviet Rule in Tajikistan* (Pittspugh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016).
[22] Patryk Reid, "Managing Nature, Constructing the State: The Material Foundation of Soviet Empire in Tajikistan, 1917-1937" (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016).
[23] Flora Roberts, "A Controversial Dam in Stalinist Central Asia: Rivalry and 'Fraternal Cooperation' on the Syr Darya," *Ab Imperio* 2 (2018): 117–43.

only within a shared imperial space. Hence, without an imperial prism there is a risk of overlooking significant changes in everyday life and the emergence of entirely new communities like Sharora. More importantly, the very term Soviet would remain unintelligible without understanding the formation of hybrid colonial cultures, quite compatible with creolization elsewhere, that resulted from increased exchange, broader networks and social mobility within a common imperial realm.

Perhaps the innovation of the present dissertation is that it applies a terminological tweak from Soviet empire towards imperial dynamics or dynamism within Soviet space. The change of terms has allowed other scholars of the Soviet Union to reconcile the simultaneous "upheaval and novelty on the one hand, and of continuing imperial, exploitative, and oppressive relations on the other"[24] which characterized Soviet history. This naming would tone down the directionality of relations between Soviet institutions and actors and avoid determinist assumptions about the fate of the Soviet state and finally, recognize the agency of individuals populating it because only people who were participating in the Soviet state on a daily basis were powerful enough to decide its fate. This dissertation has been inspired by an exemplary work of Eric Scott who has argued forcefully that the Soviet Union evolved as an "empire of diasporas" who enjoyed geographic and social mobility and acted in a space between empire and nationhood. Scott has addressed an important gap in our understanding of the Soviet nationalities policy — the "diasporic experience that defined life for millions in the Soviet empire" who travelled outside their titular homelands and often gained prominence in the center."[25] Thanks to the history of Georgian diaspora that has given the Soviet Union a lasting memory through their championing the cultural otherness and entrepreneurship we have gained new insights into both Georgian cultural and economic elites and

[24] Reid, "Managing Nature, Constructing the State: The Material Foundation of Soviet Empire in Tajikistan, 1917-1937," 2016., p. 13.
[25] Erik R. Scott, *Familiar Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora and the Evolution of Soviet Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 11.

the functioning of the multiethnic Soviet Empire. However, my own work diverges from Scott's scope and approach in productive ways. While I agree that diasporic experience, with displacement and mobility, was a definitive one in the USSR, I chose not champions of one's nationhood in an imperial center but ordinary people in the periphery, not cultural exceptionalism but everyday life and culture, and ultimately foregrounded a history of a place where these people had found themselves.

The Cold War as a World-historical Backdrop

A parallel theme in this dissertation is a question how and to what the Soviet imperial dynamic responded. My hypothesis is that internal Soviet dynamism was shaped by the global situation we refer to as the Cold War. The end of the WWII marked an international consensus that there was no place for colonialism in the future of international relations, yet the post-imperial aspirations of the decolonized world were limited to a choice between capitalism and socialism, or a combination of both. It was also a time of alliance building through coercion, diplomacy, and aid. A unique, and somewhat paradoxical, feature of the Cold War was that the countries outside alliances experienced reduced sovereignty under military threat or pressures of "development politics"[26] while those inside camps, such as Tajikistan, found ways to increase autonomy.[27]

Places like Sharora played a role in a competition between capitalism and socialism, by showcasing the successes and achievements of the latter.[28] It was the Cold War that revitalized the postcolonial dynamic within the Soviet empire by empowering Central Asian political and cultural

[26] David C. Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018).
[27] It was precisely this anticolonial argument grounded in the perceived lack of development that the Tajik political elites used in negotiating the republic's industrialization at the Union level. See Artemy Kalinovski, *Laboratory of Socialist Development* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018).
[28] David C. Engerman, "The Second World's Third World," *Kritica: Explorations in Russian and Euroasian History* 12, no. 1 (2011): 183–211.

leaders to access global networks. This resulted in increased interaction between the competing systems and unintended synchronizations of urban designs, social engineering approaches, biopolitical strategies[29], and cultural norms through the 'Iron Membrane' producing shared histories and experiences on the either side.[30] Therefore, the Cold War within this study is understood as a globalizing force that produced subtle, yet discernible impacts on individuals' lives through its 'peaceful battlefields' — science and technology, military service, and religion.[31] These fields have deep national roots, yet they ignore national borders and reach communities far away from their sources. It is these three fields that organized the everyday in Sharora — the locale emerged as a site for agricultural research and experimental sciences; its younger population was exposed to the military dimension of the Cold War through school training and fighting in Europe, Asia and Africa; its residents continued practicing their religious identities and maintain confessional traditions.

To this end, one of the goals of the present study is to contribute to our understanding of the role and place of religion in the Soviet Union and particularly of Islam in Central Asia. Islam and Muslim have long been an important label or rather "cultural marker" for the region's identity, both within the USSR and internationally.[32] But what is the true weight of Muslimness in such titles as the "Sons of Muslims"[33] or "Muslim Battalions"[34] or, for that matter "Muslim insurgents?" Could Muslimness be imagined as a malleable and fluid ingredient in a hybrid composition? The

[29] Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013, n.d.).
[30] Sari Autio-Sarasmo and Katalin Miklóssy, "The Cold War from a New Perspective," in *Reassessing Cold War Europe*, ed. Sari Autio-Sarasmo and Katalin Miklóssy (Routledge, 2010).
[31] Military service is undoubtably associated with violence and war. However, on the everyday level, military service has a substantial peaceful dimension that involves traveling, training, non-combat jobs, culture, socialization.
[32] Paolo Sartori, "Towards a History of the Muslims' Soviet Union: A View from Central Asia," *Die Welt Des Islams* 50, no. 3 (2010): 315–34, p. 319.
[33] Masha Kirasirova, "'Sons of Muslims' in Moscow: Soviet Central Asian Mediators to the Foreign East, 1955–1962," *Ab Imperio*, no. 4 (2011): 106–32.
[34] Jiayi Zhou, "The Muslim Battalions: Soviet Central Asians in the Soviet-Afghan War," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 25, no. 3 (2012): 302–28.

story of Sharora shows that, just as donkeys and horses and various plants, people can be hybridized into unclassifiable species. To map these diverse ways of being Muslim and Soviet the study will aim at a microhistory of Sharora that experienced a global moment through scientific exchanges, military service abroad and resilient religious everyday life habits that offered Soviet Central Asians various globalization options. The study investigates the interaction and hybridization of Muslims and non-Muslims and formal religious practice with superstition and lived religion and look at how this interaction produced even more hybrid individuals whose histories testify a hitherto undiscovered way being Soviet.

I intend to counter the Western perspective on Islam as a colonial category[35] engendered by a juxtaposition of modern (Soviet) and traditional (Muslim) in Central Asia by emphasizing the syncretism of both Islam and communism and their ability to ingest ideas and discourses of local and regional provenance. I will provide evidence of popular responses to various visions and policies of not only the Soviet state *writ large*, but also its local manifestations as episodes of entanglement of "Islamic modernity"[36] and Soviet traditions. For example, a local perspective would show that the Soviet period was experienced by a share of Central Asian Muslims as emancipatory because it allowed them popular religious and spiritual practices that were deemed unorthodox in the pre-Soviet times.[37] Furthermore, it is worth investigating how Central Asians incorporated parareligious rituals and traditions invented by the Soviets[38] as well as non-Muslim influences brought in by the Soviet Europeans.

[35] Will Myer, *Islam and Colonialism Western Perspectives on Soviet Asia* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002).
[36] Mansoor Moaddel, *Islamic Modernism, Nationalism and Fundamentalism Episode and Discourse* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).
[37] And, for that matter, are being banned today in independent Tajikistan.
[38] Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

This dissertation has a range of implications for the Cold War historiography by adding to the ongoing discussion on what exactly the Cold War was. Depending on a witness, the Cold War could appear as a military showdown, a systemic competition, a historical period, an international situation, or a pretext — a pretend-war to justify repression of domestic opposition. The story of Sharora and its residents in the 20th century adds much needed personal and local dimensions of globalization by exploring how individuals from Soviet peripheries domesticated the global. The chapters that follow will also add to the ongoing debates in conceptual history of such notions as modernity, modernization, and development by looking at the ways Central Asians internalized these notions and selectively used different elements of Soviet modernity.

Late Socialism

The last thematic field concerned in this dissertation is Late Socialism. The dissertation grapples with a wide range of questions: Was Late Socialism a homogenous or heterogeneous field? How did Late Socialism impact the Soviet internationalism? What was Late Socialism like in Central Asia? Evidence from Sharora testifies a different temporality — its socialism was not late in terms of aging *pozdniĭ*, but late in a sense of late-coming or *zapozdavshiĭ* or *dolgozhdanyĭ*. Such notions as stagnation and shortage that were used to define Late Socialism elsewhere, in Sharora were unremembered and perceived instead as vibrancy and plenty.

A great share of historiography on Late Socialism was informed by Alexei Yurchak's works and his insistence that the most definitive features of Late Socialism were anonymous discursive shifts within the Soviet political language after de-Stalinization. These performative shifts were possible because after Stalin there was no other dominant figure who would give Soviet ideology its integrity and common-sense effect causing the language of communist leadership to

lose its authority and popular appeal.[39] His exclusively Russophone sources testify that on the level of everyday life Late Socialism was permeated by a sense of what he termed *vnenakhodimost'* — a condition of "positive freedom" to remain creatively Soviet producing unexpected and uncontrollable meanings and subjectivities.[40] One of the goals of this dissertation is to trace *vnenakhodimost'* in Soviet Central Asia and interrogate the indigenous versions of this phenomenon. What interests me about Sharora's Late Socialism is who embodied the fading Soviet society, where were the debates about the future of that society unfolding, and how did various parts of the Sharora's complex community respond to the experience of the crumbling of their world, quite literally, when the fateful Sharora Earthquake caused an eruption of mass media publications, poems and stories, oral history and conspiracy theories. The increased and intensified sense of nationhood and alternative hierarchies in decision-making and control over economy and culture in different parts of the USSR changed the position of the non-titular nationalities in Union Republics. Thus far the story of de-colonization of these republics has been told from the national perspectives ignoring the voices of non-Tajik men and women who nevertheless saw Tajikistan and other Central Asian republics as their homeland.[41] How did they experience the end of the Soviet Union? One of the ways to conceptualize their experience is "indigenous colonization"[42] — a process whereby people widely referred to as colonizers ended up disempowered by the representatives of the titular nationalities in the 1990s.

[39] Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More The Last Soviet Generation*, Paperback (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).
[40] Andres Kurg, "Interview with Alexei Yurchak," Artmargines Online, 2014.
[41] For example Soviet Koreans who had no other homeland but the Soviet republics where they lived, see Dae-Sook Suh, *Koreans in the Soviet Union* (Center for Korean Studies and the Soviet Union in the Pacific-Asian Region Program of the University of Hawaii, 1987).
[42] Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

Structure

While each chapter has its own narrative timeline and highlights milestones in local history, the dissertation as a whole consists of two parts, roughly dividing Sharora's history into the early and late Soviet periods. Part one covers chapters 1, 2, and 3, focusing on Sharora's emergence as an international Soviet environmental, demographic, and economic project. It examines the discovery, exploration, and settlement of the Central Ghissar Valley, the transformation of its environment and landscape, and the civilizational ethos that shaped the mentalities of its first inhabitants. These chapters anchor early Soviet internationalism in the global exchange of scientific expertise, large-scale population movements in Eurasia, the emergence of European diasporas in Soviet Central Asia, and the adoption of modern Western labor management systems in Soviet agriculture.

The early Soviet internationalism of Sharora was predominantly European, shaped by the experiences of Europeans and Slavs who colonized and settled what they perceived as a void. Their struggles and hardships left behind archival traces that convey a sense of entitlement and ownership over the world they created. This part of the dissertation is largely based on published sources and the memories of Sharora's first generation of inhabitants, the pioneers and agents of Soviet modernization.

The second part, encompassing chapters 4, 5, and 6, shifts to the post-WWII period. It explores the second and third generation of sources of children and grandchildren of Sharora living in late socialism after the arrival of Central Asian natives, which gave local internationalism a new meaning by blending European and non-European populations. This complex and vibrant internationalism reshaped everyday life, as the European settlers' previous entitlements were contested by the newcomers. While ethnic tensions and inequalities often surfaced in the

workplace and informal economy, hybridity, conviviality, and the crossing of cultural and confessional boundaries became defining features of late socialist Sharora. The internationalism of natives and Europeans emerged as one of socialism's most viable and enduring legacies.

The dissertation concludes with Sharora's most dramatic historical episode: the Ghissar (Sharora) Earthquake. This catastrophe not only devastated part of the community but also marked the symbolic end of Soviet aspirations to rebuild socialism on new foundations. Hence, the earthquake represents the final chapter of Sharora's lived socialism and its internationalist history.

Sources

Archival research in Tajikistan, a problem in and of itself,[43] provided thematically and chronologically dispersed sources about the environment in the Ghissar Valley and the earliest attempts to transform its natural terrain to set the scene for socialist economy. The state archive of Tajikistan contains files on the earliest kolkhozes mushrooming in the Ghissar Valley between the 1930s and 1950s while Ghissar district branch of this archive provides files on the day-to-day operations of Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo, the economic powerhouse of Sharora community, from 1971 to 1981. In Tajik and Russian archive of film and audio documents I could access photographs taken in Sharora and its environs. Some for the materials were accessible online and abroad at Blinken Open Society Archive in Budapest and various internet-based archives such as project Prozhito collecting personal diaries, memoires, and correspondences of both rank-and-file Soviet citizens and USSR's cultural and political elites.

[43] On the problem of Central Asian archives see Adeeb Khalid, "Searching for Muslim Voices in Post-Soviet Archives," *Ab Imperio*, no. 4 (2008).

Oral history collected on-site in Sharora and remotely in correspondence and social media observation served not only a counterbalance to highly problematic Soviet archives but also allowed me to fill in chronological gaps and scars left by the state archives. More importantly oral history gave this dissertation its basic narrative structure based on the three generations of Sharora inhabitants: grandparents — the earliest explorers, adventurists, and builders of socialist civilization in Central Asia who witnessed Sharora's birth and initial growth, their children living in late socialism — the most vibrant and culturally hybrid internationalism, and the grandchildren who survived and shared the end of both their own local socialism and the fall of the larger Soviet world. Interviews were conducted in two modes: correspondence with the former residents and their family members via social media, on the one hand, and in-person on-site interviews in Sharora to understand the geography of people's travels and their changing capacities, personal connections, social networks and institutional affiliations and many other aspects of their daily lives. Some of the questions to the interviewees were: What career opportunities were available in Sharora during the Soviet time? What were their favorite places in Sharora? Why did they decide to move to Sharora? Were the youth organizations and other social, educational and recreational facilities available for the growing Sharora demographics? From which parts of Sharora did people participate the most? How did they interact with their neighbors and residents from other neighborhoods? Did they serve in the army? Where were they stationed? What were their relations with other conscripts, classmates, colleagues, neighbors?

To reconstruct what Jeremy Johnson has termed a "dialogical space" between pan-Soviet and local cultural forms I paid close attention to hybrid forms of culture such as celebrations, lifestyles, and rites of passage in Sharora focusing on the question: how elements of urban life interacted with elements of rural life, and what was authentic and imported about those events and

practices.[44] Along with my neighbors and relations in Sharora I attended events and rituals that date back to the Soviet era and are important to the community such as Orthodox Easter, New Year celebration, anniversary of the Sharora Earthquake, Muslim holidays Eid al-Adha (Idi Qurbon) and Eid al-Firt (Idi Ramazon), as well as many funerals and weddings, classmates and veteran reunions and other such occasions where I was fortunate to not only ask my questions but also observe exchanges among Sharorians, sad, funny, and controversial.

It should be mentioned that oral history collection was taking place in a rural area where some of the respondents were apprehensive to share their past on the record, partly due to the general mistrust to researchers in Tajikistan, partly because of their humble demeanors. Most people would not understand why their individual story deserved to be shared and recorded. In these cases, I am afraid, some meaningful and interesting stories might have escaped my research nets. Therefore, I presented my interaction with Sharora residents not as interviews but rather as recorded conversations to minimize stress of being interviewed and make them feel as comfortable as possible. This setting resulted in a somewhat informal attitude yet in what I consider to be honest responses. Whenever audio recording was not allowed, I wrote interview notes into my research diary and expanded on them later.

Finally, the field research documented sites and events that anchored everyday life in Sharora, such as: Museum complex The Ghissar Fortress, Institut Zemledelia, Space observatory, Russian Orthodox Easter celebration at the Sharora cemetery, Muslim cemetery, Afghan veterans' reunion in Sharora school #14. These sites still exist, and these annual events around them still take place which gave me a rare opportunity to explore the past in the present and trigger memories of people responsible for various aspects of Sharora's everyday life: scientists, teachers,

[44] Jeremy Johnson, "Speaking Soviet with an Armenian Accent: Literacy, Language Ideology, and Belonging in Early Soviet Armenia," in *Empire and Belonging in the Eurasian Borderlands*, ed. Krista A., Goff and Lewis H. Siegelbaum (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 129–44.

kindergarten caretakers, *pionery* leaders, military and law-enforcers, peasants, workers, and trouble-makers.

Besides material artefacts of the long-gone era, and micro-communities within Sharora who uphold Soviet social practices Sharora has offered this study a glimpse into the local literary past. I have discovered multiple local sources published by Sharora residents from 1989 through the 2000s, that despite genre-related shortcomings, have proven useful in accessing the evidence of everyday life transformations and their impact on relations between different parts of the community. The most prolific residents of Sharora were agricultural scientists from *Institut Zemledelia* A. F. Loshkarëva, B. A. Kreidik, Islom Eshonov, Latofatsho Karamhudoyev who authored at least two known books on local history of the Ghissar Valley *Tragediia i bol' Ghissara (o zemliatriasenii 23 ianvaria 1989 g.)*[45] and *Ivan Grigorievich Sukhobrus pervyĭ selektsyoner Tajikistana*.[46] These authors were professional agricultural scientists and had no training in history-writing and the books were not intended as historical works. Yet their works are history-rich and reconstruct, quite carefully, pieces of early history of this territory and more importantly bear evidence of the common language of Soviet modernity while writing a history of national becoming. *Institut Zemledelia* which was a central node in Sharora's economy and society made at least two attempts to write its own history. *80 soli pursamar dar ilmi ziroatparvari*[47] and *Ta"rikhi mukhtasari poydorshavii ilmi mekhanikoni va barqigardonii kishovarzii tochikiston.*[48] It is worth mentioning that Sharora residents were fond of reading and writing and some of their memoires were discovered during the field research in Tajikistan in the first half of 2020. Olga Shadrina's fictionalized memoires *Sredneaziatskaia Pyl'* (The Dust of Central Asia) dated 1989 is

[45] The Tragedy and Pain of Ghissar (On the Earthquake of 23rd of January 1989) (in Russian) published in 1992.
[46] Ivan Grigorievich Sukhobrus The first Selectioner of Tajikistan (in Russian) published in 1988.
[47] 80 years full of achievements in agricultural science (in Tajik) published in 2012.
[48] A brief history of the establishment of mechanical science and agricultural reconstruction in Tajikistan (in Tajik) published in 2018.

a small masterpiece that depicts the travels and struggles of a Russian woman from the late Tsarist times to the late Soviet period. Likewise, Sohib Imomov, one of the eldest scientists at the institute published his autobiography *Olimi dekhkonzod*[49] — an extremely valuable source for studying the living conditions and available jobs in the Ghissar Valley from the 1930s to the 1990s as well as revealing testimony of opportunities and challenges in everyday life in Soviet Tajikistan.

One of the most frustrating features of working in Tajikistan is its informal and unorganized archival field that curates access to their holdings and interferes with the findings. Luckily, people of Sharora, both dead and still-living are historically-minded and each Sharora's households, Tajik or Russian, represents micro-archives with well-organized and annotated photo albums, folders with professional records and newspaper cutouts, letters and other documents, testifying a life-long strive to be remembered and salvage pieces of the past "for history" (*baroi ta"rikh* in Tajik or *dlia istorii* in Russian. These micro-archives are not culturally and intellectually isolated but are rather informed and shaped by national and global frames of historicity such as civilization, national continuum and ethnic particularism, wars and competition with other states.

For this reason, entering the field required a mental roadmap to navigate these frames productively by evading the icebergs of pre-written history. Microhistory involves not only verified and approved versions of the past but also less privileged knowledge, including rumors, lies, misunderstandings, and myths. Teasing those out of historically-minded people, who view any deviation from the preformulated past a crime against the truth, was a surmountable challenge. Not to betray my unorthodox and critical treatment of the field and to secure the trust of my informants I was looking not as much at an object as around it. I would incite conversations as if

[49] A peasant-born scientist (in Tajik) published in 2017.

in preparation to a formal interview yet use the notes from these informal encounters, full of eloquent slips of tongue, as the evidence I was looking for.

The last methodological note due is my positionality as a researcher. From the geographic and cultural standpoints, I am a native of Sharora, speaking the local languages (Tajik and Russian), remembered by some of its residents as a family member or a neighbor. However, I am a double alien who returned to Sharora after nearly 20 years of traveling and working abroad to investigate the past I had never experienced. Some of the protagonists of the pages that follow, such as Chomba the Gravedigger, Nodir the Drinking Poet, are my relatives, others, such as Muslim scientists and soldiers, are my parents' friends. The reflections on my dual subjectivity of a Sharora-native who lives in Europe and works for an American university proved to be an advantage. History-in-progress, as a rule, remains inaccessible to people living through it. Indeed, after 20 years of living abroad I had unfamiliarized and alienated myself sufficiently from Sharora and my own family to return to it as an object of study. In the meantime, the memory of and physical presence in Sharora's natural and cultural landscapes allowed me access to the knowledge and experience I never expected to have existed.

Chapter 1. Intellectual and Institutional Foundations of Sharora

Thus far historiography of the Soviet empire has been dominated by the focus on human affairs such as Soviet political, economic, cultural and intellectual elites, the party-state, economic actors, workers, peasants and managers, men and women, natives, and settlers. In search for new conclusions, the following pages attempt to write the history of Sharora as a story about relations of humans and nature. The driving question for the chapter is what role did scientific knowledge play in the making of the Soviet world in general and places like Sharora in particular and how transnational scientific exchange shaped the intracommunal relations in Sharora.

The available literature has established that the early Soviet power relied on scientific expertise in the process of parceling the Soviet nationalities and framing the principal policies governing the relations among Soviet peoples and building their national economies.[50] The task now is to investigate the relationship between Central Asian nature and Soviet power and recover from available sources the basic mentalities of Soviet people populating Sharora. The driving thesis of this chapter is that the language and narratives of the early settlers of Sharora was shaped and informed through their experience of colonizing nature and gave them a sense of imperial entitlement in relations with other nationalities populating the Ghissar Valley. The chapter further argues that this mentality contained both creative and destructive elements and explains how environmental destruction and creation of new environments was paradoxically reconciled in Soviet productive utopia. To put it in the words of Maya Peterson, the chapter will give credit and voice to the Central Asian nature as a non-human actor that enticed opportunistic scientists and engineers to realize their "dreams" and ambitions:

[50] Hirsch Francine, *Empire of Nations Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*., Loren R. Graham, Science in Russia and the Soviet Union: A Short History (Cambridge University Press, 1993)., Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, 2021.

> The natural environment is not merely a stage on which the drama of human history takes place; rather, humans are embedded in the natural world, and seemingly natural landscapes are themselves reflections of politics, ideologies, and culture. Indeed, over time, the distinctions between what is "natural" and what is the result of human action become blurred. As human actions shape the environments in which they live, these changing environments, in turn, may shape the possibilities for human actions in the future.[51]

The early Soviet period was the time when Soviet scientists, who previously could study the region only in occasional expeditions were establishing themselves as permanent agents of power. Once the Soviet rule secured its precarious presence in the Ghissar Valley European scientists began to set up a network of research facilities and outposts and connect them as nodes in a complex mycelium of institutions collecting data useful for various sciences. The Ghissar Valley drew at least three such research facilities — agricultural research institute, meteorological station, and space observatory of the institute of astrophysics. These institutions empowered the circulation of knowledge, people, and material resources across the USSR and concentrated them in Sharora allowing the initial growth of its international populace. Its history is not a conventional account of sovietization in Central Asia involving mostly human actors — the party-state, and peasants. Sharora's past is a place where the voice of Tajikistan's nature, geography and climate, can be heard ruling the political, economic and scientific affairs as well as matters of everyday life. Sharora is a tangible artifact of productivist utopianism of Soviet scientists who pursued their research in different corners of the world sowing seeds of microworlds like Sharora. Sharora as a protagonist of the following pages is helpful in the sense that it allows to further revise the history of Soviet collectivization and industrialization in Central Asia by "acting" as a productive emptiness where socialist techno-scientific utopianism was unbridled by the pre-existing lifeways.

[51] Maya K. Peterson, Pipe Dreams: Water and Empire in Central Asia's Aral Sea Basin (Studies in Environment and History) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

1.1. Empire of Earth, Water, and Space: The Birth of Sharora.

Natural scientists are instrumental for imperial expansion and a crucial element of repertoires of imperial power as they take part in what Jane Burbank has termed "cross continental transmission of knowledge, goods, and statecraft."[52] There is a rich body of scholarship that has framed imperial expansion as an environmental expansion.[53] While, the history of natural sciences in the Soviet Union and the role they played in political struggles is a well-accomplished field[54] the environmental turn in the history of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union has opened new research avenues to interrogate how Eurasian environments shaped power structures and interdependences among otherwise disparate communities and actors into a dynamic imperial situation.[55]

Outside of Moscow, natural scientists were instrumental for "discovering" economic potential for each of the Soviet republics thereby fixing each republic's place in the network of exchange of knowledge and resources. More importantly, Soviet scientists brought with them global and strategic visions as to what the socialist future of disparate Soviet worlds should be. Russian and Soviet agricultural scientist Nikolai Ivanovich Vavilov (1887-1943), to take the most notable example, viewed the world in biogeographic terms, implying that the world is divided into regions of independent emergence and development of agricultural centers.[56] These centers were

[52] Jane Burbank, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton University Press, c2010), p. 4.
[53] Some of the important examples include Andrea Wulf, *The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2015); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2014); Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[54] Zhores A. Medvedev, *Soviet Science* (Oxford University Press, 1979); Spencer R. Weart, *Scientists in Power* (Harvard University Press, 1979)., Graham, *Science in Russia and the Soviet Union: A Short History*.
[55] Nicholas Breyfogle, *Eurasian Environments: Nature and Ecology in Imperial Russian and Soviet History* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018). Patryk Reid's conceptualization of the early Soviet rule in Tajikistan as environmental managerial state was particularly illuminating for my study of Sharora, "Managing Nature, Constructing the State, p. 14.
[56] Gian Luigi Corinto, "Nikolai Vavilov's Centers of Origin of Cultivated Plants With a View to Conserving Agricultural Biodiversity," Human Evolution 29, no. 4 (2014): 1–18.

marked by greater biological diversities than elsewhere on the globe. Crops prevailing in such centers of biodiversity, in Vavilov's theorizations, were genetically closest to their wild ancestors. Due to their endemic characteristics these species could be used as genetic materials for hybridization of new more productive and viable varieties[57] and serve the ultimate goal "to feed the world."[58] Vavilov believed there could be only a scientific solution to Russia's perennial problem of low harvest yields (*nizkaia urozhaĭnost'*) and insisted that large-scale harvest failures were caused by unmindful introduction of crops susceptible to disease, volatile climate and weather.[59]

Vavilov's famous expeditions from 1916 to 1940 mapped the centers of origin of major cultivated crops in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas (see figure 1 – Vavilov's expedition routes). Within the Russian Empire and later the USSR, Central Asia, especially the Pamires, was rediscovered as a center of crop diversity and as a natural laboratory for agriculture in extreme climatic conditions.[60] Vavilov ventured at least three known expeditions to the Pamirs, in 1916, 1924, and 1929 and one journey across the Afghan Badakhshan along the River Panj.[61] In the course of his journeys, Vavilov had perpetuated a system of circulation of seeds, publications and correspondence, people and money, among institutions along his routes. Having discovered and mapped centers of crop diversity Vavilov and other scientists advocated the creation of a network

[57] Ibid, p. 4.
[58] The phrase is often recalled as Vavilov's professional mission, see for example: VIR, "Nakormit' Ves' Mir (Exhibition)," 2019.
[59]According to historian of Russian-Soviet agriculture A.A. Nokonov Tsarist Russia had suffered endemically low harvest yields compared to Europe. Despite vaster agricultural territories and a largely rural population, Russian harvest yields were four times lower than in Europe. See more A.A. Nikonov, *Spiral' Mnogovekovoi Dramy: Agrarnaia Nauka i Politika Rossii (XVIII-XX Vv.)* (Minsk: Uradzhai, 1996)., p. 83.
[60] The highest altitudes where wheat cultivation is possible is 3250 meters above the sea level. Vavilov and his followers found many such areas in the Pamires.
[61] V.I. Vavilov, *Piat' Kontinentov* (Moscow: Mysl', 1987)., pp. 25-26.

of centers for seed selection and production of local crops *selektsionaia stantsia*.[62] Such centers were established in villages and kolkhozes in all major regions of Tajikistan: in Panjakent, Khatlon, Ghissar Valley, GBAO. From these four, the Central Ghissar Valley where Sharora is presently located was of particular significance to Vavilov as a place that combined lowlands and hills allowing both irrigated and rainfed (*bogarnoe*) experiments.[63]

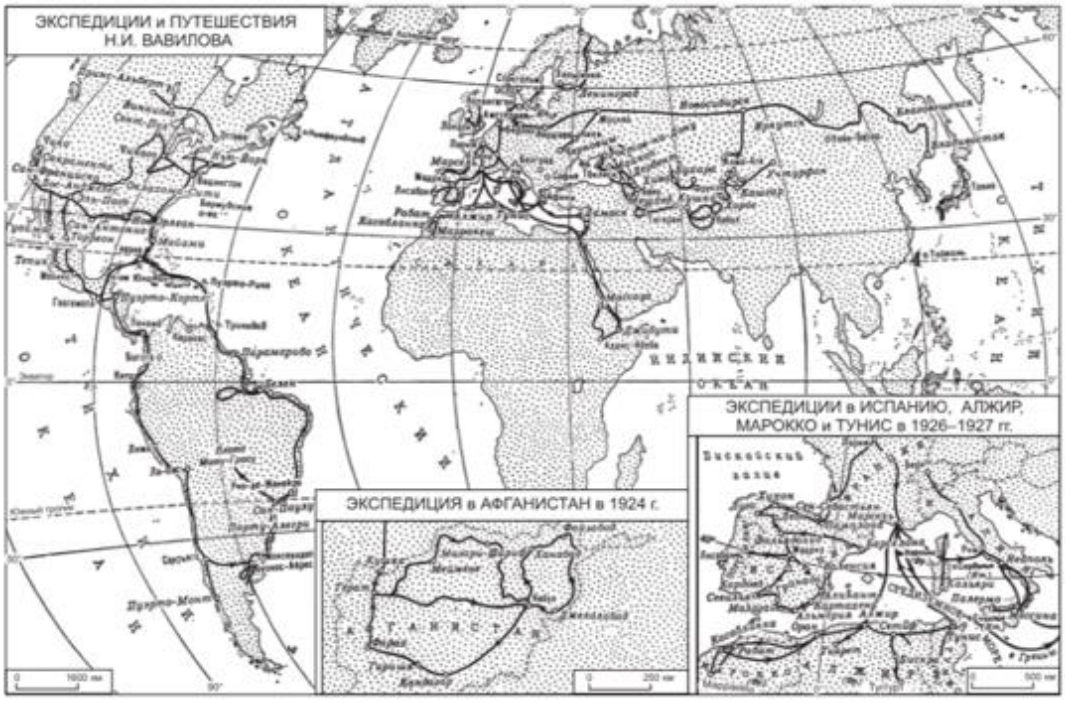


Figure 2. Vavilov's expeditions routes (1916-1940).[64]

Vavilov's empire of knowledge rested on comparative geography[65] — a global vision that was decisive for largescale cottonization of Central Asia. In 1916 on one of his first encounters with the Central Asian oases he hastily proclaimed them akin to Egypt's Nile delta and sought an

[62] One may argue that even Khorog grew as a town due to the concentration of botanists, agronomists, selectionists and other professionals in the 1930s. Today, Khorog Botanical Garden is ranked as the highest alpine garden in the USSR (at the altitude 2320 meters above the sea level).
[63] Bakhtior Odinaev, Conversation with the author, 2020.
[64] Source: N.P. Goncharov, "Ekspeditsyi N.I. Vavilova," *Vavilovskiĭ Zhurnal Genetiki i Selektsii* 16, no. 3 (2012): 560–78.
[65] It is noteworthy that Vavilov was also a renowned geographer and in 1926 received an award from the All-Union Geographic Society for his discoveries in Afghanistan.

opportunity to visit the latter for a detailed comparative study.[66] His attempts at entering Egypt were met with resistance of the British colonial authorities who guarded the key to their cotton monopoly. In 1926 with the help of a research assistant, an Italian student Gudsoni, he managed to procure seeds of Egyptian crops including the much-desired Egyptian cotton.[67] A legend circulating *NII Zemledelia* in Sharora goes that Gudsoni pulled a cotton boll out of its case and quickly separated a seed and stuck it in his ear. The seed still covered in fiber looked like a piece of medical cotton wad and Gudsoni left Egypt unsuspected.[68] This story testifies a global awareness and an idea of international scientific connections of which Tajikistan had been a part. To put it in Vavilov's words: "The greatest successes of selection in the world are associated with its internationalization."[69]

In 1933 shortly after completing his expeditions to the Americas, Vavilov, the head of the Lenin All-Union Academy for Agriculture (VASKHNIL) at the time, presented at the First Conference on the Productive Forces of Tajikistan (*proizvoditel'nyie sily*) in Leningrad, among other renowned scientists — geographers and geologists, meteorologists, hydrologists, botanists, zoologists, ethnographers etc. The goal of the conference was to draft a complex development scheme (*kompleksnoe razvite*) in which all fields of research, agriculture, and industry were to be interdependent. The chairman of the conference A. E. Fersman emphasized that:

> There must be no standing-alone and independent elements. Everything must be tightly interconnected in a single combine: a cotton field is closely connected to the industrialization of the country, and the mining industry is deeply entangled with the energy sector, the energy sector with irrigation, and the industrial output returns to the cotton field in a form of fertilizers.[70]

[66] In his travelogues Vavilov regrets that due to the resistance of the British foreign office in Egypt he could not visit the country in 1926 as a part of his African expedition. See V.I. Vavilov, *Piat' Kontinentov*., p. 71.
[67] In 1932-33 in the Americas Vavilov searched for seeds of wild cotton varieties, idid, p. 242.
[68] Bakhtier Odinaev, "Conversation with the Author (March)" (Sharora, 2020).
[69] Vavilov, N.I., n.d., https://www.mat.univie.ac.at/~neretin/misc/biology/b1/genetika1936-2.pdf.
[70] H.M. Saidmuradov, "Pervaia Konferentsiia Po Razvitiiu Proizvoditelnykh Sil Tadzhikistana (Iz Istorii Otechestvennoi Nauki)." (Akademiya Nauk Tajikskoi SSR, 1983).

Hence, interdisciplinary interdependence of sciences gave way to transnational networks of scientists to enter Tajikistan. Among the first VASKHNIL academicians there were specialists in selection genetics such as Vavilov, pedologist Viliams, botanist Keller, chemists Pryanishnikov as well as a renowned power engineer and hydro-technologist Ivan Gavrilovich Aleksandrov, chemical technologist Edgard Viktorovich Brishke, economist and statistician Valerii Vladimirovich Osinskii. Vavilov's statement at the conference advocated that the most productive species in Tajikistan's climate would be hybrids of Egyptian and American cottons.[71] Besides cotton, Tajikistan was earmarked for the production of foodstuffs and fodder cultures such as grain, corn, legumes and alfa-alfa as well as fruits, and technical crops flax, geranium, tobacco (see figure 2).[72] The lack of arable land and diversity of Tajikistan's climates and landscapes was to be addressed through hybridization and selection of the most optimal seeds for different microregions within Tajikistan and technologization of the cultivation process.

To surmise, although it is largely true that cottonization of Centra Asia was a part of the "revolution from above" and coincides with the most colonial episode in the history of Soviet Central Asia[73] and overlapped with Russian imperial "desert dreams,"[74] the scientists involved in the process proclaimed the goal of cotton independence for the USSR. In other words, the intension behind scientific exploration of the region was to decolonize the nascent Soviet Union from crop dependency (*zernovaia nezavisimost'*). The price to be paid for Soviet independence from capitalist powers was stringent control over peripheries and making all their resources serviceable

[71] Gafur Shermatov, "Pervaia Konferentsia. Perelom v Razvitii Tadzhikskoi Nauki.," Rossiiskii tsentr nauki i kul'tury v Dushanbe., 2021, https://tjk.rs.gov.ru/ru/news/24057.
[72] M.S. Asimov, *Tadzhikskaia SSR Entsyklopedicheskii Spravochnik* (Dushanbe: Akademiya Nauk Tajikskoi SSR, 1974).
[73] Adeeb Khalid, *Central Asia: A New History from the Imperial Conquests to the Present* (Princeton University Press, 2021), pp. 226-227.
[74] Julia Obertreis, *Imperial Desert Dreams Cotton Growing and Irrigation in Central Asia, 1860–1991* (V&R UNIPRESS, 2017).

(*osvoienie*) for the broader Soviet cause. Thus, the history of Soviet sciences shows that colonialism and anticolonialism had coexisted in the foundation of the USSR making the term post-colonial empire the most eloquent expression of the Soviet agenda.[75]

Figure 3. Vavilov with an agricultural map of the Tajik SSR 1933.

The process of integrating expertise under the VASKHNIL umbrella was concurrent with the process of geographic expansion of research projects and proliferation of state-funded research institutes (*nauchno-issledovatelskii institut* or *NII*). In a short period from 1930 to 1935 the number of NIIs in the USSR doubled from approximately 400 to 800 institutions and this growth took a rather chaotic form (*stikhiinyi kharakter*).[76] How precisely all these institutes operated is still to be established but it is clear that their organizational hierarchies and locations from the 1930s to the 1950s had been in a permanent flux reflecting the broader improvisational trend of early-Soviet

[75] Ėtkind, Aleksandr, *Vnutrenniiaia kolonizatsia: Imperskii opyt Rossii Internal colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience,* Biblioteka zhurnala "Neprikosnovennyĭ zapas". Antropologiia, filosofiia, politologiia, istoriia (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2013).
[76] Nikonov, *Spiral' Mnogovekovoi Dramy: Agrarnaia Nauka i Politika Rossii (XVIII-XX Vv.)*., p. 202.

governance.[77] Indeed, Sharora's research institute is a case in point. It started off as a Tajik Zonal Agricultural Experimental Station (*Tadzhikskaia zonalnaia selskohozaistvennaia opytnaia stantsia*) established in 1927. The station was located 8 kilometers to the East of Dushanbe near village Guliston. In 1931 all research projects on cotton were transferred to Kurgan Tiube Oblast within a Cotton Station of Union Cotton Research Institute *Souiznyi Nauchno-isledovatel'skii khlopkovyi Institut* or *SoiuzNIHI*. The same year 1931 the remaining research activities in Stalinabad Oblast were organized within the Republican Station for Rainfed Agriculture *Respublikanskaia stantsia bogarnogo zemledelia* reporting to the All-Union Drought Institute in Saratov. Later, in 1934, the station was transformed into the Republican Experimental Station for Crop Production under the methodological supervision of VASKHNIL. In 1937 the experimental station was renamed into the State Station for Selection and Experiments *Gosudarstvenaia selektsionno-opytnaia stantsiia* that was incorporated into the Tajik Agricultural Research Institute *Tadzhikskiĭ nauchno-issledovatelskiĭ institut Zemledelia* in 1956. The same year the whole Institute was transferred to the Ghissar District, present-day *posëlok Sharora*, where it is currently located.[78]

It should be noted that along with agricultural research the Central Ghissar Valley was also home for Meteorological research stations which were established in Tajikistan as early as 1926. Routine observation of weather variations in different climatic zones and long-term data collection was crucial for agricultural regionalization of new territories and had immediate effect on the choice of crops to be planted in areas observed. According to a local agronomist and selectionist Bakhtior Odinaev, Sharora's meteorological station *Meteostantsia* has been in operation since the 1930s and "it was the presence of [our] *selectsyonnaia stantsyia* that drew the meteorological

[77] Chapter 1. Open-air Rule in Botakoz Kassymbekova, *Despite Cultures: Early Soviet Rule in Tajikistan* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016).
[78] L. Karamhudoev, A.F. Loshkareva, and B.A. Kreidik, *Ivan Grigorievich Sukhobrus* (Dushanbe: Donish, 1988).

station to Sharora."[79] By 1941 there were 3947 meteorological stations in all corners of the USSR. Meteorological data collected locally concentrated in Hydro-Meteorological Service (*Gidrometsluzhba*) in Moscow. Long-term weather and climate observations were vital for regionalization of Tajikistan's agriculture as local selectionists and agronomists included the data on climate, weather patterns and most importantly amounts of precipitation to command the time of sowing and the species of seeds to be sown. For example, Akbar Maksumov's pioneering work on rain-fed agriculture produced while he was the head of Sharora's *NII Zemledelia* devoted several pages to the review of yearly changes in temperature, precipitation, the direction of winds and other specificities of Tajikistan's climate that had been available thanks to long-term weather observation.[80] Climate research and weather observation had immediate implications for agriculture as Soviet scientists set their ambitions not only to build systemic understanding of climate and weather, but also model them. To this end, along with Meteostantsia there were special anti-hail (*protivogradovyi*) artillery systems that fired special cannons at clouds to prevent untimely rainfalls.

[79] Odinaev, "Conversation with the Author (March)."
[80] Akbar Maksumov, *Osnovnyie Problemy Bogarnogo Zemledeliia* (Dushanbe: Izdatelistvo Akademii nauk SSR, 1964)., p. 33-81.

Figure 4. Anti-hail artillery in Ghissar valley in 1971.

Long-term weather observation allowed to establish not only the republic's agroclimatic particularities but also its astroclimatic features — the number of clear nights per year. With more than 200 clear nights a year the Ghissar Valley was one of the most envious sites for observing variable stars,[81] comets and meteors. In 1932 Leningrad-based astrophysicist Natanson requested the construction of the Institute for Astrophysics in Dushanbe to be completed by 1933.[82] Natanson and his colleagues moved to Tajikistan to head the new Institute and conduct space observation. The research agenda of the Tajik Institute for Astrophysics was directed by the Leningrad observatory and its source of funding and governance was Tajik SovNarKom. In 1958 the Institute's observatory was relocated to the vicinity of Sharora and consisted of both research and living facilities and offered jobs to both itinerant and local scientists thereby strengthening its image of a scientists' town (See figure 5). One of the most renown Soviet astrophysicists Svetlana Gerasimenko from Kiev, the co-discoverer of the Churyunov-Gerasimenko comet, moved to Tajikistan and settled on the territory of the Ghissar Observatory.[83] According to her own account:

[81] According to Tajik astrophysicists Tajikistan offers the second best quality of space observation after Chile.
[82] GhissAO Inform, "Istoria Instituta Astrofiziki Akademii Nauk Respubliki Tadzikistan," 2002.
[83] The European Space, "Happy Birthday: An Interview with Svetlana Gerasimenko," 2004.

I have lived in Dushanbe for the past 10 years, and before that I used to live at the observatory located in *posëlok* Sharora of the Ghissar Disctrict. If it wasn't for the civil war, of course we would have all kept on living there. What an unimaginable beauty.
I came to Tajikistan in 1973 by invitation. I was 28 years old. I came without hesitation. I thought I would only stay there temporary, but it turned out to be for good.[84]

Figure 5.Ghissar Observatory in the 1950s.[85]

The Ghissar Observatory near Sharora eventually earned itself a republic-wide fame and even came to represent Tajik SSR as an image on postal envelopes (see Figure 6. A postal envelope with Ghissar Observatory).

[84] Anora Sarkorova, "Gerasimenko: I Discovered the Comet by Accident," BBC interview with Svetlana Gerasimenko, 2014, https://www.bbc.com/russian/science/2014/11/141117_comet_gerasimenko_interview.
[85] Inform, "Istoria Instituta Astrofiziki Akademii Nauk Respubliki Tadzikistan."

Figure 6. A postal envelope Ghissar Observatory.

To conclude, Sharora's three research facilities, *NII Zemledelia*, *Meteostantsia*, and Astrophysics Institute are not accidental places. Their histories testify that the expansion of the Soviet state into the Ghissar Valley and other such places was driven by exploration ethos. The ultimate ambition was for the Soviet Union to muster all available resources. In the process natural scientists had created centralized networks where scientific institutions were not independent but functioned as nodes in a network of exchange of knowledge concentrating in Moscow and Leningrad. Vavilov and other natural scientists played their role of tying the Ghissar Valley and Tajikistan to the wider Soviet networks. VIR was the center of Vavilov's empire containing the greatest diversity of crops from the world including Tajikistan. Yet Tajikistan itself was a province of this empire of crops and did not have its own seed bank.

Thus, *Posëlki Gorodskogo Tipa* like Sharora were connected in a mycelium of people and institutions exchanging ideas and resources across not only the USSR, but indeed the entire world. The idea that Tajikistan was suitable for cotton cultivation, while zealously executed by the Soviet party-state, initially was an international comparative scientific hypothesis and experiment which preceded the Soviet state. The presence of agricultural research facilities worked as civilizational

presence and facilitated the arrival of other research institutes. Hence, interdependence and connectivity of institutions and people was one of the features of internationalism in the Central Ghissar Valley.

1.2. Collectivization as Civilization: The Ethos of Sharorians

We will give you another fight, mother nature!

(The Unmailed Letter, dir. Mikhail Kalatozov 1959)

When examining the history of Sharora a question arises whether it could be defined as a colonial society and if so, who in this society were colonizers and colonized. As has been demonstrated by Botakoz Kassymbekova in the case of Soviet Tajikistan the line between colonizers and colonized could not be based on factors like language, ethnicity, or religion but rather on one's role in the process of state building. The Soviet "colonizers" and "colonized" were equally subjected to promotion and affirmation, as well as repressions. The position of early Soviet cadres was ambiguous because they served as both perpetrators and victims of the regime that they were compelled to embody.[86] Similarly, applying ideas of Prakash and Bhabha to his study of Oshoba Sergey Abashin further acknowledged the permanent interplay between colonizers and colonized taking forms of hybridity, camouflaging, masking, and mimicry wherein the state of coloniality was often self-imposed.[87]

One source of this ambiguity is that in the studies of the Russian and Soviet empires the emphasis was put on the human affairs — their struggles, aspirations, resistance, and negotiations.[88] This approach ignores non-human actors such as landscape, environment, climate,

[86] Botakoz Kassymbekova, *Despite Cultures: Early Soviet Rule in Tajikistan* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), p. 204.
[87] Sergey Abashin, *Sovetskiy Kishlak Mezhdu Kolonizatsyei i Modernizatsyei*, 2015.
[88] Adeeb Khalid, "Introduction: Locating the (Post-) Colonial in Soviet History," *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 4 (December 2007): 465–73.

and their agency in shaping human affairs.[89] Colonialism and Empire are more than just a historic period or a form of state. Empire and colonialism are cognitive and cultural frames equally available to both colonizers and colonized and are a matter of choice, rather than entitlement.[90] By analyzing narratives of engagement between humans and nature in Sharora one can outline colonial frameworks and address the pressing questions laid out by Adeeb Khalid: "Where does empire end, and where do other forms of non-representative or authoritarian polity begin? When can empire be used in thinking about the forms of political inequality in the twentieth century? What are the specificities of colonial difference?"[91]

In the following I posit that disenfranchised European colonizers of the Ghissar Valley, kulaks and exiles from the European parts of the USSR, internalized the European imperial ethos and perceived themselves as bearers of modern civilization to transform the indigenous people and their habitat. However, unlike colonizers of other modern European empires, they were not a privileged group and their entitlements were symbolic and self-imposed. To substantiate this argument, this subsection scrutinizes the local ethos and frames and narratives of people involved in the transformation of the Ghissar Valley interrogating how they position themselves within the context of history and experience the dynamic interplay of time and spatial changes in their environment. This subchapter further argues that Sharora can be best understood as a manifestation of neo-Europe, a product of European ecological expansion. The cultural code underpinning this expansion was, what I call, "the amiable war on nature," where nature occupied the dual role of both a belligerent force and an object of care. Furthermore, following Gayatri Spivak's succinct

[89] Breyfogle, *Eurasian Environments*.
[90] Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
[91] Adeeb Khalid, "The Soviet Union as an Imperial Formation: A View from Central Asia," in *Imperial Formations. Edited by Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter C. Perdue.* (Santa Fe, N.M.: School for Advanced Research Press; Oxford: James Currey, 2007).

claim that ignorance is a dominant form of imperial knowledge I will demonstrate that local history of Soviet Sharorians and the archival traces they left behind has little space for the area's previous inhabitants, its landscapes, or its wildlife. As was demonstrated by Anna Sokolova, Soviet developmentalist ethos constructed a particular temporality "zero-time" — presupposing that nothing worthy of memory had been in place prior to Soviet civilization. Developmental time, a unique Soviet temporality, combined the linear progression of time with the heterogeneity of development. The notion of a void created a time differential necessary to actualize the time of development, transporting the Sharora populace to a symbolic zero time on the brink of civilization's inception.[92] My input into these problems is that zero-time in which there was no place for anything before the symbolic zero, also begot zero-space a void before man-made nature and Soviet man.

The impact of the Soviet era on Sharora went beyond the construction of clubs, modern housing, farms, and factories. It entailed a profound transformation of the Ghissar Valley's landscape, comparable to tectonic shifts. The once gentle hilly and swampy tugai forests were replaced by expansive farmlands. This interdependence between nature and culture in Sharora's history is undeniable. In essence, the current Sharora landscape stands as a monumental testament to socialism, transcending the material realm to become ingrained in the collective memory of its people. This chapter analyzes both the material and mental artifacts stemming from the environmental transformation of the Ghissar Valley. Mental artifacts refer to the cognitive frames expressed in tropes and discourses used by Sharora's residents, what Stoller, Gerasimov, Semyonov, and others refer to as the language of self-description.[93]

[92] Anna Sokolova, "Invading the Void: Social Time Production as a Developmental Tool in the Late Soviet Periphery," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 65, no. 1 (January 2, 2023): 52–71.
[93] Il'ia Gerasimov, Jan Kusber, and Alexander Semyonov, eds., *Empire Speaks out: Languages of Rationalization and Self-Description in the Russian Empire*, Russian History and Culture, v. 1 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2009).

1.3. The Language and Narratives of Early Sharora

The mindsets and motivations of European settlers in the Ghissar Valley can be characterized as developmentalist and the language of the sources is replete with imported terms that express modernity. Soviet statespersons, intellectuals and specialists on the ground, in their documents and oral statements use terms such as: *rekonstruktsia* (reconstruction), *stroitelstvo* (building, construction, making), *razvitie* (development), *khoziaistvo* (management or production), *osvoienie* (expanding into, cultivating, populating). These terms were widely used by both Soviet and post-Soviet economists, sociologists, historians and other scientists to define changes in rural Tajikistan.[94] The main criteria of a modern and developed society were *kul'turnost'* (culturedness), availability of social and public processes and facilities, *blagosostoianie* (welfare, wellbeing), and presence of *sel'skaia inteligentsyia* (village intelligentsia), *nov'* (innovation, newness, improvement).[95] Soviet reiteration of modernity was dominated by materiality in line with Marxist axiom that the socioeconomic environment and *kulturno-byltovyie usloviia* (cultural and living conditions) play the key role in the formation of an individual — *lichnost'*.[96]

Historical records on Tajikistan's Soviet past, both from Tajik archives and oral testimonies, are dominated by a language that could be termed colonial as it conflates the process of modernization with colonization. The language of multiple sources cited below portray Tajikistan's pre-Soviet state of things and places Soviet people came to occupy using various colonial tropes and narratives, such as stagnation and decline, emptiness and wildness, *tera*

[94] See for example Rahim Masov, *Iz Istorii Sovkhoznogo Stroitel'stva v Tadzhikskoi SSR v 1929-1970 Gg.* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1989)., Kilijon Bozorov, "Pereselencheskaia Politika Respubliki Tadzikistan v Poslevoennyi Period i Ee Sotsyalno-Ekonomicheskoie i Kulturno-Bytovoe Znachenie, 1946-1965 Gg." (VAK RF, 2002)., Mahmadsharif Barotov, "Vklad Vakhshskogo Filiala Vsesoiuznogo Nauchno-Issledovatelskogo Khlopkovogo Instituta (Soiuznikhi) v Razvitii Khlopkovodstva Tadzikistanav 20-e 80-e Gg. XX Veka" (Nosir Khusrav State University at Bokhtar, 2019).
[95] S. Mukhtorov, *Nov' Tadzhikskogo Sela* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 1986).
[96] It should be noted that Soviets had a distinct understanding of individuality as lichnost' rooted in the Marxist anthropology and quite different from the bourgeois understanding of individual. In Soviet anthropology lichnost' was defined by an individual's ability to transform nature into economic, social and cultural outputs.

incognita, tabula rasa. The process of modernization itself was described in such terms as exploring, conquering, culturing, and populating. The coloniality of the language of both archival and oral sources is not accidental but represents a literary milieu and the cultural world of Russophone Tajikistanis and Sharora's still living residents. The classics of European colonial fiction, such as Russian editions of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe,* James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* can still be found on Sharorians' bookshelves. Ernest Hemingway, the author of one of the most powerful stories describing a man-nature standoff, *The Old Man and the Sea*, was invoked in one interview as a favorite writer.[97]

By contrast, later versions of Sharora's past, such as *Institut Zemledelia's* own book *80 soli pursamar*, in Tajik language, offers an alternative history of its emergence and development in both Ghissar and Vakhsh areas focusing primarily on the scientific achievements. The book enumerates the key research workers and champions of agricultural sciences, lays out a very dry chronology of growth and expansion of research activities and a succession of directors, lists hundreds of new species of crops and plants invented at the Institute.[98] The 153 pages of this history mention none of the strives and exploits, hardships, and battles that received such colorful and vivid depictions in the works of their Soviet colleagues. Remarkably, Tajik scientists' writings about the history of their institution are completely oblivious of the changes in the living conditions, social infrastructure and urban development in any of the areas where *Istitut Zemledelia* operated its branches.

[97] Imom Sokhibov, "Conversation with the Author (March 2020)" (Sharora, 2020).
[98] Instituti Ziroatkori (Institute Zemledeliya), *80 Soli Pursamar Dar Ilmi Ziroatparvari (Unpublished)* (Akademiiai Ilmkhoi Kishovarzii Instituti Ziroatkori Mundarija, 2012).

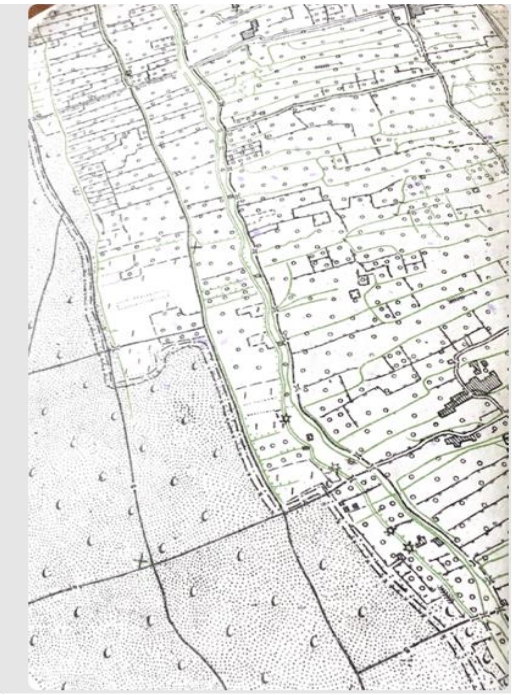


Figure 7. Undated plan of Sharora area from 1935 to 1943.[99]

In Central Asia, and in Tajikistan more than anywhere else, collective farming was a form of civilizational encroachment into the wild — state-funded, organized, and concerted colonization (*osvoienie*) of the barren lands with further placement of modern institutions and urban lifeways. The leap into socialism, in the case of the Ghissar Valley, implied not only economic measures, but thorough transformation of Tajikistan's landscapes and waterscapes, annihilation of entire indigenous ecosystems and growth of new imported ecosystems in their stead.

[99] TsGA RT F. 1745 d. 114, "Delo Po Zakrepleniyu Zemel' Zemlepol'zovaniyu Sovkhoza Mulzavod N. 126," 1943.

Figure 8. Tugai forest in Tigrovaya balka national park.[100]

There is very little information as to what the indigenous landscape of the Central Ghissar Valley was prior to the Soviet period. Presently, the environs of Sharora represent an example of artificial nature, arduously sculpted and organized terrains of land and waterscapes and vegetation with nothing left from the indigenous landscape. In Tajikistan, there are no published or unpublished sources, or even ongoing research describing nature before the collectivization in the Central Ghissar Valley. The first known description of the Ghissar Valley — *Ocherki Ghissarskogo kraia* by N. Maev mention Ghissar princedom as "the least known part of Bukharan Emirate." The Russian imperial explorer characterized Ghissar in his travelogues as a "sickly" town because of its unhealthy climate: fevers, malaria, water contaminated with parasites, mosquitoes, wild boars and tigers roaming forests, bogs and thickets. Exotic diseases such as *risht* —a parasitic worm living under human skin causing cramps, pain, nausea, *tebb* a tropic virus causing inflammation, unquenchable thirst, and often results in death, *miahau*, *iarria oughani*, *lansha* local infections resulting in soars and tissue decay, prospered in the valley.[101]

[100] Image source https://maxkorzhnn.ru/gosudarstvennyi-zapovednik-tigrovaya-balka-tigrovaya-balka.html
[101] N. Maev, "Ocherki Ghissarskogo Kraia. Materiali Dlia Statistiki Turkestanskogo Kraia. Spb.," no. V (1879) p. 192-193; and N. Khanykov, Opisaniye Bukharskogo Khanstva (Imperatorskaya akademiya nauk, 1843).

Early Soviet descriptions of Tajikistan's terrain and environment are consistent with the Russian imperial voices. In their collective attempt at local history, lead scientists of NII Zemledelia have achieved nothing in the way of reconstructing the indigenous nature in the Ghissar Valley but the following brief passage:

> In the 20s, the territory of the current Sharora was unoccupied (*neosvoena*), completely overgrown with tugai trees, and very swampy. Game was abundant here, there were many wolves, jackals, foxes, and other predators.[102]

Such narratives of unfriendly encounters between Soviet people and Central Asian nature date back to the first lead agricultural scientist of *NII Zemledelia* and selectionist of Tajik cotton varieties Vecheslav Krasichkov whose biography figures in many contemporary journalist and academic works as exemplary life of struggle against the wild:

> But the reeds on the Vakhsh were burning, the engines of American tractors and excavators roared, tigers and hyenas left these places for good, jackals ran away howling. And soon new buildings appeared on the land liberated from tugai.[103]

> The land of thick tugai, impassable roads, malaria. Here on the Vakhsh, Vyacheslav suddenly realized that there was no civilization, no big cities, that the vast expanse in time separated him from his hometown of Saratov.[104]

The source of hostility towards the indigenous landscape of the Ghissar Valley and its wild life is enrooted in the very circumstances of life and work in Tajik countryside in the early Soviet period and an expression of resentment of being pitted against the hostile environment:

> living conditions were extremely difficult, there was not enough housing, there was no school, hospital, running water, bathhouse, and other basic human conditions. People lived in tents and dugouts. After some time, several barrack-type houses were built. Entire

[102] I. Eshanov, A. F. Loshkareva, and L. Karamhudoev, *Tragediya i Bol' Gissara (O Zemletryasenii 23 Yanvarya 1989 g.)*, 1992.
[103] Ilkhom Zaripov, "Tvorets Volshebnoi Korobochki," *Vecherka*, August 19, 2013, https://vecherka.tj/archives/10854.
[104] Gafur Shermatov, "Все Началось с «Египтянина». Как Таджикистан Вышел На Первое Место По Урожайности Хлопка? | Новости Таджикистана ASIA-Plus," accessed November 9, 2023, https://old.asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20230616/vse-nachalos-s-egiptyanina; Barotov, "Vklad Vakhshskogo Filiala Vsesoiuznogo Nauchno-Issledovatelskogo Khlopkovogo Instituta (Soiuznikhi) v Razvitii Khlopkovodstva Tadzikistanav 20-e 80-e Gg. XX Veka."

> families huddled in small, cramped rooms. A little later, the same barracks housed an outpatient clinic and a state farm office.

Not only elite scientists had experienced and unwelcoming nature of Tajikistan and formed their live stories around those experiences. Oral sources of the first settlers of the Ghissar Valley and rank-and-file workers corroborate the literary sources cited above. For example, Aleksandra Fiodorovna Draganova, whose parents were deported from Crimea after the WWII and exiled (*soslali*) to Tajikistan has recalled: "when they [her parents] came here there was nothing. We made homes of reeds and built dugouts for winter."[105]

The narrative framing of life stories featured in many literary, journalist, academic, and personal accounts of early life in Tajikistan is militant and anchored to words like landing force (*desant*), frontline, battle, victory, glory etc. Furthermore, the decedents of the first European settlers recall that their parents received special training and developed paramilitary skills and competences crucial for survival in Central Asia. Galina Babaeva has shared that her mother Olga Shadrina could ride a horse, shoot a hand pistol, and speak both Tajik and Shugnani languages. She arrived in Stalinabad by train and then flew an airplane to the Pamirs wearing a black jumpsuit.[106]

Both oral sources and local history texts reflect influence of Soviet productivist novels, most evidently *The Man Changes His Skin* (*Chelovek meniaiet kozhu*) by Bruno Jasinski — the story of "conquering and taming" the River Vakhsh and transforming its valley into one of the largest cotton plantations in Tajikistan. Another level of militancy towards nature discernible in texts and memory produced in Sharora follows the Soviet literary pattern in which the hostile

[105] Viktor Agopov, Conversation with the author, 2020; Alexandra Agopova and Viktor Agopov, "Conversation with the Author on June 29-30" (Sharora, 2020).
[106] Galina Babaeva, "Conversation with the Auhtor on February 16" (Sharora, 2020).

indigenous nature merged with Basmachi insurgents the archenemy of Soviet settlers. Krasichkov reportedly wrote:

> peacetime was not peaceful at all. The Basmachi were scouring the area, and any night one could expect an attack from those thugs... No, it was not without reason, - recalling this period of life, V.P. Krasichkov writes in his memoirs, - when we received appointment to Central Asia, we considered ourselves mobilized to the cotton front.[107]

Later Sharora residents and scientists wrote about the Ghissar Valley the same way demonstrating the bridge between the narratives from two different valleys:

> Working as a cashier, V.V. Lugovskaya had to go to Gissar to transport cash. There were no vehicles. And she had to ride on horseback; even worse - on a mule. It was incredibly difficult and perilous. Danger lurked for her, around every turn of the road, behind every bush. One day, as she was passing through a garden, she heard a gunshot. Fortunately, the bullet missed her and she managed to escape.[108]

Again, the source of this story is not cited and most likely is a personal memory. Interestingly, the authors avoid direct association of Ghissar's locals with the daily malice towards their labor exploits. Instead, they choose to exaggerate, dramatize and adventurize their own place in local history and emphasized the materiality of their life and work.

Soviet militancy towards nature is traceable not only to the hardships that the first settlers had experienced upon their arrival in the Ghissar Valley but also to the prestige associated with great Soviet wars — the Civil War and the WWII. Nearly all major scientists who figure on these pages, Krasichkov, Kreidik, Sukhobrus fought at the WWII and their life and death at the front permeates their writings.

Another notable region in local history is Europeans' myopic treatment of the pre-Soviet past of the Central Ghissar Valley. For example, in their notes on the early history of Sharora

[107]Zaripov, "Tvorets Volshebnoi Korobochki."
[108]Eshanov, Loshkareva, and Karamhudoev, *Tragediya i Bol' Gissara (O Zemletryasenii 23 Yanvarya 1989 g.)*, 1992., p. 10

Eshanov, Loshkariova, and Karamkhudoev only mention a native population near Sharora in passing:

> Until 1929, slightly above the current location of the observatory, since ancient times there was a small village in which people from Afghanistan lived. It was called *Qishloqi Khazarion*. Those who lived here sacredly preserved their customs and lived according to the laws of their ancestors. Their main occupation was animal husbandry. At the end of the 1920s, people of other nationalities began to arrive here and settle near the village. Its inhabitants did not like it, and soon almost all of them left their homes (*nasizhennye mesta*).[109]

Besides the verbal embellishment and fictionalization this short paragraph gives nothing but the name and location of the earliest known settlement near Sharora. It is clear from the paragraph that Afghan villagers were forced out. During interviews no one could corroborate the story or add more details to it or even locate old houses and buildings left by Khazarion. Tajik regional and republican archives are even more silent about this village and there are no records about what had happened to its denizens: did they migrate to another region or were they absorbed into other villages? The lack of information about the pre-Soviet native population of the area in question can be explained as product of the Europeans' claim on indigeneity in this territory. In their memories and history sketches about Sharora the European settlers and their descendants living there treat Central Asians who followed them to Sharora in the 1950s with very similar silencing. The first mention of Central Asians in local history reads:

> In those years, there were few people of indigenous nationality on the farm; they were mostly residents of neighboring villages, and they worked as herdsmen. In the village, there lived mainly people who came from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Bashkiria and other regions.[110]

> In the post-war years, migrants began to move to the state farm from mountainous Karategin (Tajiks) and from Jirghital (Kyrgyz). They very quickly mastered the techniques of cultivating cotton and became foremen of high yields.[111]

[109] Eshanov, Loshkareva, and Karamhudoev., p. 4.
[110] Ibid. p. 5.
[111] Ibid. p. 7. The same trend can be observed in oral history from the current residents Alla Babaeva and Galina Babaeva (Fab. 16, 2020).

In contrast, European settlers are much more present in local history and their biographies often take whole pages. For example, Aleksandr Karpovich Tsygolnikov who moved to Sharora in 1931 and worked as a truck driver had his story told on one whole page. Even his Ford truck has a biography while the entire ethnic groups such as Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Kyrgyz are mentioned collectively in one short paragraph. Oral history from Sharora is likewise conflicting. Loshkariova and her co-authors report that the *klub* in the center of Sharora was built by a foreman Baranovsky in 1952 while Tajik-speaking locals credit the construction of the *klub* to their Tajik celebrity Eshon Bobo — a 104-year-old war veteran.[112]

1.4. Sharora — a Neo-Europe?

Historically making new colonial territories habitable for international populace, not only for indigenous peoples, and erecting European towns in Asian and Africa required thorough environmental transformation of indigenous landscapes, flora and fauna.[113] The following pages will demonstrate that Sharora was a manifestation of what Alfred Crosby has termed Neo-Europe — transplanted landscape, flora and fauna, or portmanteau biota, that served the purpose and goals of European expansion into otherwise hostile environments. While the Soviet case, as has been shown above, was not an unaquivocally colonial project, the scale, intensity, and success of its environmental and urban endevour in Central Asia matches neo-Europes elsewhere in the world.[114]

Transformation of the Ghissar Valley began in earnest in the first post-war years and is linked to the completion of the Big Ghissar Canal that connects the River Varzhob in Dushanbe

[112] Eshon Bobo was 104 years old at the time of interview with him in 2020.
[113] Tristram Hunt, *Cities of Empire: The British Colonies and the Creation of the Urban World*, n.d. 89., Elizabeth Sinn, *Plantation, Town, and Colony: The Mapping of Nineteenth-Century Hong Kong* (Honk Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1987)., technological innovation, for example the invention of air-conditioning made such city-states as Singapore possible, "Singapore: The Air-Conditioned Nation: Essays on the Politics of Comfort and Control, 1990-2000: Cherian George.
[114] Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*.

with Karatag near Ghissar. The canal was the most transformative factor for local environment as it brought not only water but also around 30,000 people from various regions of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, RSFSR and other parts of the Union to settle and continue changing the valley's landscape. Local residents recall that the soil dug out of the canal bed was distributed across the valley to fill in ravines and pits thereby flattening the terrain of the entire valley.[115]

The first animal settlers were herds of Tajik horses and donkeys used for hybridizing mules — the main draft animal of the pre-mechanization period, and even camels bred near Sharora in Urtabuz. Local residents also enumerate Russian cows of Kostroma breed brought to Ghissar valley from Russia with the promise to increase the yields of dairy products and meat. To the same end two large pig farms opened in the vicinity of Sharora, one in Shainak and one near *Ainy khlopzavod*. Additionally, European peasants brought with them new aggressive species of birds, most notably geese and Muscovy ducks (known locally as *indoutki*) for private poultry farming. Previously ubiquitous Tugai thickets were eradicated throughout the Ghissar Valley and replaced with more valuable species (*blagorodnyie, tsennyie sorta*) such as oaks, pine, elms, acacia, and Eucómmia. Thus, new animals and plants replaced the indigenes a decade before cotton monoculture was introduced.

In addition to changing landscapes and biota Soviet settlers in Tajikistan waged a war on the indigenous microworld drawing expertise and specialists from around the world. Due to its high temperatures Tajikistan is a subtropical world — home to parasites, diseases, and viruses common in Africa, India, and the Americas. Russian imperial explorers of Central Asia Khanykov, Middendorf, Fedchenko, and Shyshov paid great attention to documenting diseases spread in Bukhara between 1840s and 1910s. They noted that some of the areas including the Ghissar Valley

[115] Alexandra Draganova and Viktor Agopov, "Conversation with the Author on June 29-30" (Sharora, 2020).

were uninhabitable during the summer months due to ravaging fevers, malaria, risht worm (Guinea worm) infection, and other diseases caused by local microbes, viruses, and parasites. A common practice among wealthy would be seasonal migration to mountainous gorges of Karatag where the climate is cooler. Russian imperial expansion brought its scientists, administrators, and military to grapple with local diseases that killed off more people than advanced European weapons.[116]

The early Soviet rule in Tajikistan ushered in largescale resettlement of Europeans to hitherto unpopulated valleys, including the Ghissar Valley. The settlers, having no luxury of seasonal migration as the work on farms and plantations was year-round, were no longer observers of local diseases, but their victims. Botakoz Kassymbekova has found innumerable archival documents from Tajikistan lamenting that Soviet officials were locked to beds for months by malaria.

Infectious diseases presented even graver danger. According to one citizen, the main enemy of Soviet rule in Tajikistan in the 1920s was not armed resistance but malaria, which, along with tuberculosis, was the foremost threat to the region and took the lives of thousands of people.[117] According to the historian Gafur Shermatov there were more sick people than healthy residents in Dushanbe, just 14 kilometers away from Sharora, in 1926: out of 5607 registered residents there were 81 cases of typhoid, 4200 cases of malaria, 720 cases of flu, 123 cases of dysentery, 1512 cases of scabies, 56 cases of mange, 256 cases of trachoma, 772 cases of eczema, 510 cases of tuberculosis; in other words, there were 2623 cases of diseases more than residents which means that the majority of patients went through more than one disease that year or that cases were reported from other localities in the Ghissar Valley, also known as the Valley of Death. Seasonal

[116] Lisa Walker, "Reshaping the Land, Chasing the Mosquito Soviet Power and Malaria in Tajikistan 1924-1938," in *Eurasian Environments Nature and Ecology in Imperial Russian and Soviet History* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), 280–97.
[117] Botakoz Kassymbekova, *Despite Cultures: Early Soviet Rule in Tajikistan* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), p. 44.

malaria was the most widespread disease as it thrived in Tajik environment and was a part of peasant life.[118]

Figure 9. Narkomzdrav building. Dushanbe cir. 1926.

In response, European settlers had to temper their bodies to deal with tropical diseases on the one hand and include epidemiological considerations into their program of environmental transformation, on the other. Medical measures included mandatory quinin distribution to all citizens (those who avoided were subjected to fines and criminal charges), all water containers were to be treated with kerosine oil (*neftezatsia*), malaria expeditions and mapping (searching for breeding grounds for mosquitos), mosquito net distribution, and mosquito hunt during winter months, and weekly medical checks for all state employees. Additionally, vaccination against tuberculosis, smallpox, diphtheria, tetanus, polio were enforced on both Europeans and natives. In Sharora proper, the first medical facility, *ambulatoria* and pharmacy, reportedly dating back to a

[118] According to Narkomzdrav statistics in 1925 the percentage of people infected with malaria was: in Kuliab – 88%, in muminabad – 96%, in Ghissar — 94%, in Dushanbe – 85%, in Kurgantiube — 60%, in Gharm – 65%.

period from 1948-1954, was housed in the first two-story building of the sovkhoz. The previous medical facility had only one medical personnel Liuba Litkovskaia. In post-war years Sharora had a full-service hospital with all necessary departments and 25 beds.

Ecological measures included draining swamps abundant in the Ghissar Valley, studying and improving the entire irrigation system, straitening of river and canal beds, cleaning canals, reinforcement of embankments.

Figure 10. Medical checkup at the Ghissar canal construction site.

Thousands of European doctors and medical scientists were dispatched to Tajikistan. Among them, of particular interest are those with expertise in tropical diseases. Among them, Professor of the Central Tropical Institute E.M. Martsynovskii who was also a Soviet member of the International Commission for Malaria at the League of Nations, Academician E.N. Pavlovskii, renowned

Russian and Soviet expert on tropical parasites, and A.M. Diakov the first head of Narkomzdrav of Tajik SSR, also one of the first Soviet experts on India. Thanks to their training in tropical environments and pathogens and their international connections both within the USSR and abroad, these experts drew best practices of combating malaria from various parts of the world. One such innovation was introduction of gambusia also known as mosquito fish. Gambusia deserves a history of its own as a species crossing not only international, but indeed continental boarders. Its indigenous areal was the Gulf of Mexico, but today it can be found all over the world, including the Ghissar Valley where it thrives in irrigation canals, drainage reservoirs, and water collectors. The reason why this tiny gray fish is so ubiquitous is that it feeds on mosquito larvae and eggs as well as most water parasites such as Giardia (known in Russian as *liamblii*). This feature was discovered in Barbados in early 1900s by a US zoologist Seale. Gambusia thrives in both sea and fresh waters and the most diverse climatic zones, including Caucasus and Central Asia. Medical historians hail gambusia as a game changer when it was first introduced in Italy, Spain, and Corsica as a natural anti-malaria agent. The long-term observations in all localities showed up to 500-fold decrease in the mosquito larvae populations and gambusia earned a new name — the mosquito fish. The studies demonstrating the impacts of gambusia on controlling malaria were presented in 1925 in Rome and Geneva at World Health Organization's Malaria Commission.[119] Soviet scientists, including E.M. Martsynovskii, the head of the Tropical institute attended the conferences and followed on Gambusia studies. The fish drew attention of the head of Abkhaz Tropical Institute N.P. Roukhadze who introduced gambusia in Abkhazia in 1926. According to Roukhadze gambusia's effect on malaria proved invaluable (*neotsenimyi*) and the fish was

[119] Gabriel Gachelin et al., "Evidence and Strategies for Malaria Prevention and Control: A Historical Analysis," *Malaria Journal* 17, no. 1 (December 2018): 96.

introduced to Abkhazia's all large and small water reservoirs (*vodoemy*).[120] Although, I don't have the archival evidence of how exactly gambusia made its way to Tajikistan, knowing that the leading Soviet scientists and the Tropical Institute were aware of its useful features, Martsynovskii could serve as a bridge connecting WHO Malaria Commission, Abkhaz Tropical Institute, and Tropical Institute of Tajik SSR that was established in 1941.

To surmise, international towns and populace, like Sharora, require international technological and scientific effort, and indeed a natural environment that is suitable for not only native population but Europeans as well. The environmental history of the Ghissar valley allows framing Sharora as a colonial society or Neo-Europe with transplanted people and biota taking the place of the indigenes. The declared ambition of the Sovietization of the region was socioeconomic development of the Tajik SSR and its titular nationality, yet the isolated case of Sharora shows that European settlers preferred not to notice the region's natives, people and plants alike. The loss of indigenous species was never lamented as the new landscape, flora and fauna, cultured nature, took their place forming a completely artificial landscape.

Furthermore, the process of Sovietization, that is usually discussed as political, economic, and cultural transformation of Central Asia, had an important input from natural scientists. Russian imperial and Soviet scientists were among the first Europeans to have taken decisions on the future of the region. By imagining the world as made of moving pieces they succeeded in transplanting entire ecosystems to new localities and made them livable and serviceable. Thus, in the case of Tajikistan, the ethos of exploration and conquest were dominant mentalities of European settlers which presupposed hostility to wild nature and embracing artificial nature. Local history and

[120] Nikolai Roukhadze, *Studies on the Proliferation and Efforts to Combat Malaria in Soviet Abkhazia in 1929* (Sukhum: Abkhaz Tropical Institute, 1929)., p. 53, 59. On the use of Gambusia in controlling malaria in Uzbekistan see N.P. Sokolov, *Gambuzii i Ikh Rol' v Bor'be s Maliariiei* (Tashkent, 1939).

memory of European settlers of Sharora and their descendants viewed their past and their micro-world only as their own, excluding the past of the Central Asians.

Finally, Soviet Union, among other things was a biological empire. It rode on the backs of big animals like cows and pigs, and small ones like geese and ducks. Each animal and bird made a difference that has never been fully understood or acknowledged. The least visible yet salient agent of soviet expansion is gambusia, the tiny humble fish that has made the new Soviet valleys malaria free.[121] If Soviet Union was a biological empire, then being a Soviet Central Asian, among other things, meant being a new human in biological sense because they created and populated a new world suitable for international populace.

[121] There were of course small episodes of malaria in various parts of Tajikistan during the Soviet period. However, the Ghissar Valley transformed from the Valley of Death into the Valley of Life. According to the UN the last case of malaria in Tajikistan was registered in 2014.

Chapter 2. Peopling Sharora

Good accountants are needed everywhere.

A.I. Koreiko. Ilf and Petrov. The Little Golden Calf.

Having established the role of the intellectual elites in the making of Sharora it is now the time to investigate different trajectories that made up its populace. The long and complex process of peopling Sharora deserves a study of its own but, for the purposes of this dissertation, it is necessary to answer such essential questions as: What brought them here and why did the first settlers choose this territory out of all places? The following chapter explores various push and pull factors for Sharora's populace to arrive at their destination for permanent or temporal residence and how migration status affected further life of various Sharora residents. The goal of the chapter is to add to the existing perspectives on migration and geographic mobility in the Soviet Union using Sharora's history as a case study. The chapter applies such notions as regimes and repertoires of mobility and migration offered by Lewis Siegelbaum and Leslie Moch and explore which regimes and repertoires constitute a dominant pattern of peopling Sharora. Furthermore, the chapter investigates the social relations within the Sharora community as resulting from various regimes and repertoires of migration and border-crossing within the USSR and internationally.

2.1. Migration in Soviet History

Internal and international migration of millions of people in the USSR was an integral part of the totalitarian state system which placed group responsibility on nationalities deemed hostile to the Soviet state (*vrazhdebnyi sovetskomu gosudarstvu*) and socially alien classes (*sotsyalno chuzhdyie klassy*) and used the country's enormous expanse and uneven access to civilization as a penal

resource.[122] In the 1930s about 7 million persons were internally relocated within the USSR with about one million move to Central Asia. Among them there were alien classes such as kulaks and Cossacks, and ethnic minorities Koreans, Germans, Ingrian Finns, Karachais, Kalmyks, Chechens, Ossetians, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars and Meskhetian Turks, Poles, Belarusians, Russians, Ukrainians, Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Jews, Assyrians, Chinese, Russians, Iranians, Iranian Jews, Moldovans, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Greeks, Italians, Bulgarians, Armenians, Hemshins, Yakuts, Abkhazians, Hungarians.[123] Such large-scale forced resettlement was not unique to the Soviet Union and was integral to imperial population management and exchange in various regions.[124] Similarly, Botakoz Kassymbekova has argued that the logic behind the policy of migration from the European part of the USSR to the peripheries was part and parcel of imperial rule tactics. The specificity of the Soviet case, however, was that forced population resettlement of Soviet Europeans to newly "conquered territories" pursued the goal of state building and overcoming backwardness. In other words, Europeans were resettled to Central Asian peripheries for the sake of development (*razvitie*) of newly integrated territories. To this end in 1936 alone 3000 households moved from European part of the USSR to Tajikistan.[125] Scientists, party officials, professional workers, engineers, technical elites, and ordinary peasants had been

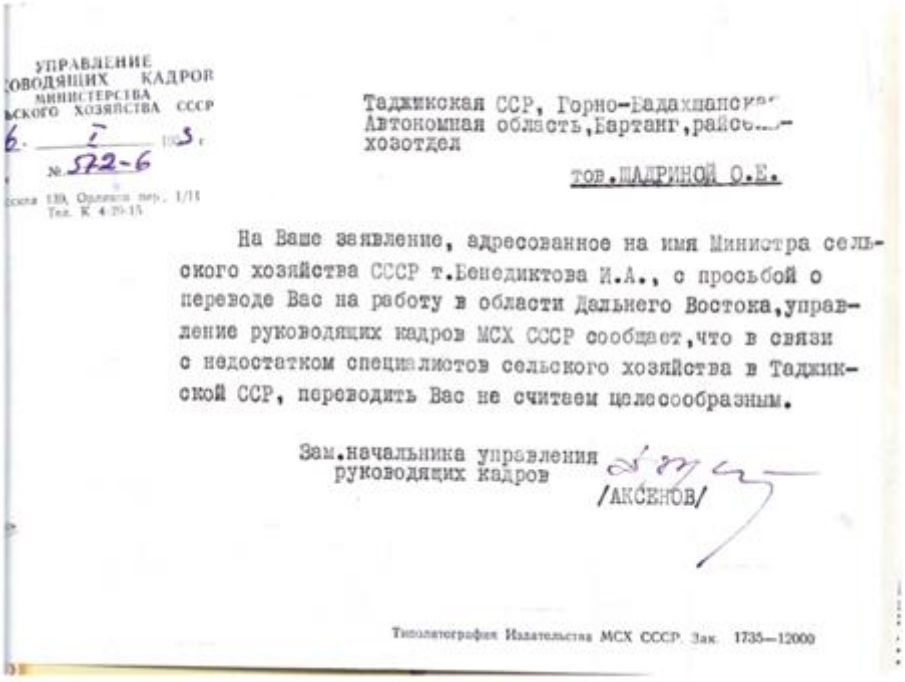
[122] Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (Anchor Books, 2003); Alon Rachamimov, ed., *The Soviet Deportation in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (Manchester University Press, 2021); Lynne Viola, *Enemy on the Margins: Deportation, Citizenship, and the Soviet Union's Involuntary Settlers, 1930-1953* (Oxford University Press, 2005).
[123] N. L. Pobol′ and Pavel Markovič Polân, *Stalinskie deportacii 1928-1953*, Rossiâ XX vek (Moskva: Meždunarodnyj fond "Demokratiâ" Materik, 2005).
[124] For the case of population transfers in British Empire to South Africa, Ceylon, and Sri Lanka see Robert A. Huttenback, "Indians in South Africa, 1860-1914: The British Imperial Philosophy on Trial," *The English Historical Review* 81, no. 319 (1966): 273–91; Sujit Sivasundaram, "Ethnicity, Indigeneity, and Migration in the Advent of British Rule to Sri Lanka," *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 2 (2010): 428–52., for Ottom and post-Ottoman Turkey see Nesim Şeker, "Forced Population Movements in the Ottoman Empire and the Early Turkish Republic: An Attempt at Reassessment through Demographic Engineering," *European Journal of Turkish Studies. Social Sciences on Contemporary Turkey*, no. 16 (June 30, 2013); "Expulsion and Emigration of the Muslims from the Balkans," Text, EGO(http://www.ieg-ego.eu) (IEG(http://www.ieg-mainz.de)), accessed January 30, 2024, http://ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/europe-on-the-road/forced-ethnic-migration/berna-pekesen-expulsion-and-emigration-of-the-muslims-from-the-balkans.
[125] Botakoz Kassymbekova, *Despite Cultures: Early Soviet Rule in Tajikistan* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), p. 38.

relocated to Tajikistan even before the Soviet rule claimed full command over Eastern Bukhara. Europeans were instrumental not only for building the Soviet state in Tajikistan but also connecting this state to the Soviet core and other constituent republics. Migration to Tajikistan was also a penal measure for purged communists and dekulakized peasants to absolve themselves from their purported crimes.[126] Elsewhere she has demonstrated that internal resettlement of Tajiks from the mountains of Gharm and Karategin to lowlands of Southern Tajikistan at the border with Afghanistan was an economic, political, and security measure: 1) to force Tajiks, perceived by Soviet officials as superior farmers, to cultivate cotton in newly irrigated Vakhsh Valley, 2) to restore "historical justice" by "returning" valuable arable lands to Tajiks as the titular nationality, 3) to populate the Soviet borderland with "reliable people" to secure the Tajik- Afghan border.[127]

Siegelbaum and Moch have looked at migration regimes as integral part of state-building and the ideals the Soviet state pursued which required mass labor mobilization by way of dispatching ardent communist enthusiasts, such as *khetogurovites*, *dvatsatitysiachniki*, and Komsomol activists, by thousands to combat backwardness and wild nature in remote areas. In the meantime, the vastness of the Soviet Union's territory, its internal diversity, and uneven distribution of human resources gave its citizens repertoires of migration allowing them autonomy and privacy in the most volatile moments of Soviet history. A migration regime or repertoire also determined an individual's future social status and presented both limitations and benefits. There were exiles (*ssylnye*), residents of regime settlements (*rezhimnye poselenia*), special re-settlers (*spets pereselentsy*) whose mobility was severely hampered and required travel permits (*see figure 10 denied travel permit*). On the other hand, there were evacuees, specialists, or career migrants (*spets naznachentsy*), itinerants, and enthusiasts who could travel freely while enjoying benefits

[126] Ibid, pp. 70, 78.
[127] Botakoz Kassymbekova, "Humans as Territory: Forced Resettlement and the Making of Soviet Tajikistan, 1920–38," *Central Asian Survey* 30, no. 3–4 (2011): 349–70.

such as housing and financial allowances. In the case of Sharora, mass migration and settlement in the Ghissar Valley was crucial for the claims for privilege and indigeneity in the growing Sharora community of diasporas.



УПРАВЛЕНИЕ
ОВОДЯЩИХ КАДРОВ
МИНИСТЕРСТВА
ЬСКОГО ХОЗЯЙСТВА СССР
6. I 1953 г.
№ 572-6

Таджикская ССР, Горно-Бадахшанская
Автономная область, Вартанг, райс...
хозотдел

тов. ШАДРИНОЙ О.Е.

На Ваше заявление, адресованное на имя Министра сельского хозяйства СССР т.Бенедиктова И.А., с просьбой о переводе Вас на работу в области Дальнего Востока, управление руководящих кадров МСХ СССР сообщает, что в связи с недостатком специалистов сельского хозяйства в Таджикской ССР, переводить Вас не считаем целесообразным.

Зам. начальника управления
руководящих кадров
/АКСЕНОВ/

Типолитография Издательства МСХ СССР. Зак. 1735—12000

Figure 11. Denied travel permit for Olga Shadrina (found in Sharora)

2.2. European Aboriginals

Soviet Tajikistan "was the product of specific, purposeful constellations of activities" that required the import of technology, material infrastructure, and more importantly, people into remote workspaces.[128] The way people traveled and settled in Sharora was decisive for their self-understanding within the newly created Tajik SSR and their entitlements in Sharora. Relocation to Central Asia was an erosive factor for previous identities and social links of resettled persons as they acquired new qualifications and social roles. At the same time large-scale population movement from European to Asian parts of the USSR was an extension of the Russian Imperial

[128] Patryk Reid, "Managing Nature, Constructing the State: The Material Foundation of Soviet Empire in Tajikistan, 1917-1937" (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2016), p. 11.

migration regime that scattered "frontier Russians" or European diasporas along the fringes of the Russophone world.[129]

Micro-census and biographies of Sharora's residents evince that they and their parents had used nearly all of the regimes and repertoires of migration available to Soviet people. Sharora was not only the destination but also a temporal home for those on a life-long run. The following pages tell the most representative stories of people migrating to or through Sharora and how their experience of migration shaped their social and cultural life.

As was discussed previously, Sharora emerged as a node in a network of scientific institutions and perpetual exchange of staff which produced a particular regime of migration — itinerant scientists who sought new research opportunities or escaped volatile political climate. Soviet itinerant scientists can be also viewed as career migrants driven away from their hometowns by "institutional determination" of where their work was to be performed.[130] Although scientists' mobility was limited by the available regimes of migration within the Soviet state, they also invented individual repertoires of movement in order to maximize their symbolic and material gains.

Permanent geographic mobility was predicated by the nature of a research project or the current conjuncture in each field of sciences. Without exaggeration Vavilov was the pioneer itinerant scientist with the goal to visit and bring samples from all the centers of origin of cultivated crops scattered across 5 continents and accumulating the entire diversity of existing crops in VIR

[129] Frontier Russians is a recurring theme in many works discussing migration in the Russian Empire and the early Soviet Union. See, Aileen Kane, *Colonizing Russia's Promised Land: Orthodoxy and Community on the Siberian Steppe* (University of Washington Press, 2016); Jeremy Smith, *Red Nations: The Nationalities Experience in and after the USSR* (Cambridge University Press, 2013); Grigol Ubiria, *Soviet Nation-Building in Central Asia: The Making of the Kazakh and Uzbek Nations* (Routledge, 2020).

[130] Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Leslie Page Moch, *Broad Is My Native Land: Repertoires and Regimes of Migration in Russia's Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014)., p. 157.

(All-Union Institute for Crop Cultivation).[131] Vavilov's research expeditions took 26 years from 1916 to 1940 and were decisive for agriculture in Tajikistan (see Chapter 1). In some sense Vavilov had normalized permanent travel as the main lifestyle for many agricultural scientists and discovered Tajikistan as a destination. Ivan Grigorievich Sukhobrus, who is hailed today as the first selectionist of Tajikistan, was the first itinerant scientist traversing Tajikistan.

Ivan Sukhobrus was born in 1902 in Kursun uezd of Kiev Gubernia. In 1926 he moved to Kiev to study at the Institute for Agriculture. After graduating in 1930 he travels to Southern Kazakhstan to work at the Krasnovodopadskaia experimental station. After another year Sukhobrus joined a group of selectionists led by D. Riazanov traveling to Southern Tajikistan to organize selection work for rainfed crop cultivation. In order to interact with Tajik farmers and collect seed samples Sukhobrus learned Tajik. In 1939, Sukhobrus relocated to the Pamirs, reportedly to avoid political repressions that ravaged across the USSR, where he worked on his study titled *Mestnye sorta Pamira*[132] until 1942. In 1942 he joined the Red Army and was eventually killed at the Battle for Moscow near Rzhev.[133] While in Tajikistan Sukhobrus was on the move the entire time. In fact, none of his biographers could tell where exactly his house or apartment was located. Between 1932 and 1934 Shukhobrus organized or joined expeditions and field experiments in all corners of Tajikistan:

> The first expedition followed the route Dushanbe, Nurek, Kangurt, Baldzhuan, Khovaling, Muminabad, Shuroabad, Kyzyl Mazar, Dushanbe. The second expedition covered Dushanbe, Iangi-Bazar, Obi Gharm, Khait, Jirgital, Tavil-Dara, Kalai-Khumb, Dushanbe. The third expedition covered the route Dushanbe, Kurgan-Tiube, Dzhilikul, Kabodian, Piandzh, Parkhar, Dangara, Dushanbe.

[131] Corinto, "Nikolai Vavilov's Centers of Origin of Cultivated Plants With a View to Conserving Agricultural Biodiversity."
[132] Local species of Pamirs is a monograph by I. G. Sukhobrus based on field research in GBAO in 1936 and 1937. His book was published in Stalinabad posthumously in 1954.
[133] Karamhudoev, Loshkareva, and Kreidik, *Ivan Grigorievich Sukhobrus*, 1988., pp. 5-6.

In the 1930s there were no roads connecting any notable trading and administrative centers of Tajikistan and much of the travels had to be on mule or camel-back and cross Tajikistan's countless gorges. Hence, Sukhobrus spent most of his time on the road and exemplified the life of an itinerant scientist.[134] Itinerant scientists, especially those whose work presupposed permanent migration for field observations and sample collection from various corners of the USSR played a vital role in the future of villages and farms that hosted them along the way because each of such scientists helped in enlarging their host institutions partly responding to the state's economic goals, partly in attempt to pursue their own scientific interests. Their precarious and itinerant lifestyle can be explained by the search for safety and resources which were not available elsewhere in the USSR. After itinerants had discovered places with promising research potential they were followed by career migrants for more permanent residence. Sharora's *Institut Zemledelia* acknowledges the fact that the earliest leadership of Tajikistan's agricultural sciences were exclusively Russophone migrants:

> It is noteworthy that among the workers of departments and laboratories, branches and stations, as well as bases and camps were members of all nationalities of the former USSR who served the interests of their country's agrarian science. Scientists such as Sukhobrus I.G., Arnold E.Ia., Kolmakova Z.S., Yanpolskaia G.A., Diakonova S.G., Ermolenko A.P., Bukarev V.M., Zareiskiĭ T.Y., Ananeva M.A., Riazanov K.D., Rozov A.K., Shuman T.N., made a valuable contribution to the development of agricultural science and its various branches.[135]

When in Tajikistan, these scientists had to stay on the move internally as a survival strategy in the period that is remembered as the Great Terror.[136] For instance, the notorious Lysenko affair and the subsequent disavowal of Vavilov's genetics resulted in internal purges which were often used

[134] L. Karamhudoev, A. F. Loshkareva, and B. A. Kreidik, *Ivan Grigorievich Sukhobrus* (Donish, 1988), pp. 5-8.
[135] Instituti Ziroatkori (Institute Zemledeliya), *80 Soli Pursamar Dar Ilmi Ziroatparvari (Unpublished)* (Dushanbe: Akademiiai Ilmkhoi Kishovarzii Instituti Ziroatkori Mundarija, 2012).7.
[136] Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).

to eliminate theoretical opponents. [137] The evidence of such conflicts in Tajik SSR is ample, albeit in camouflaged language, in secondary literature:

> There were, naturally, scientific disputes and conflicting viewpoints on the problems of the nascent cotton cultivation. But what is worse, there were people who had wrong ideas about agronomic techniques of cotton cultivation[138]

And:

> The years 1937-1938 were a dark part of Ivan Grigorievich Sukhobrus's life. Slanderers and enviers would not leave him in peace. He found himself under the shadow of suspicion and doubt. He was working under a lot of stress for long months. He was often called in to give testimony by the respective authorities (sootvetstvuiushie organy), at nights, and during the day he kept on working restlessly. Only by chance did he avoid death. In early 1939 he was helped to move to Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast[139]

Most probably these instances of prosecution were means to resolve internal conflicts through political means during early state-building in Central Asia when access to justice and conflict mediation was unavailable.[140]

In Sharora, itinerant scientists and career migrants from the European part of the USSR dominated the professional, scientific, and everyday life infrastructure from the 1930s to the 1960s. Oral history and archival materials agree that Soviet Europeans headed all social and economic institutions including Sovkhoz Stalinabadskiĭ, the engine of local economy and all welfare organizations (school, kindergarten, shops, klub, hospital) in Sharora. European Sharorians associated the notions of culturedness with their Europeanness. In her fictionalized memoires, Sharora resident Olga Shadrina described her social environment in Tajikistan in the late 1930s:

> In those distant times, there was an elite European society in Khorog. People of high culture: engineers, doctors, teachers. The best of the best were sent there, knowledgeable

[137] Loren R. Graham, *Lysenko's Ghost: Epigenetics and Russia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016).
[138] Barotov, "Vklad Vakhshskogo Filiala Vsesoiuznogo Nauchno-Issledovatelskogo Khlopkovogo Instituta (Soiuznikhi) v Razvitii Khlopkovodstva Tadzikistanav 20-e 80-e Gg. XX Veka.", p. 26.
[139] Karamhudoev, Loshkareva, and Kreidik, *Ivan Grigorievich Sukhobrus*, 1988., p. 6.
[140] Sergei Abashin, "Ocherk 4i Malenkii Stalin," in *Sovetskiy Kishlak Mezhdu Kolonialismom i Modernizatsiei* (Moscow: Novoye literaturnoe obozreniye, 2015), 145–75. For the broader discussion of the purges see Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Signals from Below: Soviet Letters of Denunciation of the 1930s," *Chicago Journal* 68, no. 4 (1996).

> individuals who could be of use to the Pamiris in every way. Doors in apartments were not locked, as there were no thieves.[141]

Importantly, European aboriginals of Sharora did not perpetuate their privilege and instead were crucial for the creation of the local native elites who gained positions of leadership in the 1960s as the Academy of Agricultural Sciences of Tajik SSR, assumed direct control over all research and experimental facilities and they emerged as the first high-rank Tajik scientists.

The study of history of Sharora population formation discerns both migration regimes, the state policies, rationalities, priorities, infrastructure and planning in organizing and controlling the movement of people, within the boundaries of its immediate or indirect political governance,[142] and migration repertoires, individual experience of and response to migration as well as ways of "bending the regimes"[143] or appropriating those regimes for individual's own purposes. The regimes of migration were the realm of state institutions and repertoires were the sphere of career and labor migrants, resettles, fugitives, prisoners of war, itinerants and the likes. On the microlevel, the border between regimes and repertoires is very porous and what was initially envisioned by the state as a strict regime, on the ground could transform into a personal repertoire.

Peopling Sharora was possible as a part of a more global understanding of people as productive force and defense resource to be managed within a discourse and system that had been taking form in Europe since the WWI. The movement of people and, as a result, demographic change or even the emergence of new settlements and towns took place during active combat and periods of relative peace. In the case of the Soviet Union the primary institutions charged with population management were directly or indirectly related to defense authorities, NKVD and

[141] Although the author of this passage invokes her youth years in Khorog she lived in Sharora from the 1970s to the end of the 1980s and where she wrote her memoires, O.E. Shadrina, "Sredneaziatskaia Pyl" (Memoires, 1989).

[142] Here I mean the borders of the USSR proper and the borders of its satellite states of the Eastern Block.

[143] Siegelbaum and Moch, *Broad Is My Native Land: Repertoires and Regimes of Migration in Russia's Twentieth Century*., p. 17.

People's Commissariat for Defense. The permanent threat of aerial bombardment and raids on industrial centers and living quarters was one of the main pushing factors and potential territories reached by enemy aviation were considered for evacuation. During the interwar period Central Asia was increasingly connected to the expanding Soviet railway network to become one of the main destinations for evacuated industries and people.[144] During organized and state-sanctioned evacuation or resettlement, priority was given to intelligentsia, cultural figures, scientists and scholars whom Soviet authorities viewed as capable of reproducing socialist institutions, culture and economy in a new place.[145]

Although evacuation was predominantly a state regime of migration there was also individual response to it as moving to Central Asia often promised survival: "One can eat even grass there" shared one of the descendants of Russian migrants into Central Asia explaining the decision of her grandparents to flee famine stricken Volga region.[146] Migrations into the region also occurred during WWI, the Civil War and the famine of the 1930s. In many cases, however, the hopes and expectations for better life were unfulfilled. Hunger, unemployment, homelessness, diseases, and summer heat pushed many evacuees to continue their journey to other Central Asian locales.[147] Since the beginning of WWII Central Asia, more often Tashkent, was the primary destination because if its popular image as "the city of bread," a temperate climate, and connection to the larger Soviet railroad network. In the first months of the war alone around 800,000 people were evacuated to Central Asia, 80% of whom settled to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.[148] It is safe

[144] Rebecca Manley, "Conceiving Evacuation from Refugee to Evacuee," in *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 7–23.
[145] Rebecca Manley, "The Official Mind of Evacuation," in *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009)., p. 36.
[146] Alla Babaeva, "Conversation with the Author on July 27, 2020" (Sharora, 2020).
[147] Rebecca Manley, "Survival on the Tashkent Front," in *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 148–95.
[148] Siberian Institute of management – branch of Ranepa (Novosibirsk, Russia) and M.P. Belenko, "Evacuation of Civilians in the Central Asian Republics of the USSR during the Great Patriotic War," *Historical Courier*, no. 4 (2019).

to assume that a portion of the remaining 20% of evacuees settled in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Furthermore, wartime statistics of evacuation and secondary literature studies migration as a movement from point A to point B and overlooks multiple facts of further migration within the region. Most of the Sharora's European population spent their first years in Central Asia in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan before moving to the Ghissar Valley. Agopov and Draganova's story is characteristic in this sense. In 1944 following the decision of GKO (State Committee for Defense) Agopov and Draganova's parents were exiled from Crimea along with Crimean Tatars for alleged collaboration with Nazi occupation forces.[149] They were forced to resettle in Guriev in Kazakh SSR. In 1945 they moved to Molotovabad in Kuliab Oblast of Tajik SSR and worked in cotton cultivation.[150] In 1950 Agopov and Draganova, along with thousands of exiles, moved to Jilikul raën of Stalinaban oblast (present-day Districts of Republican Subordination in Ghissar Valley) of Tajik SSR. In 1956, following the decision of the Ministry of Interior Agopov and Draganova's status of special settlers (*spetsposelenie*) was revoked, and they moved to Sharora as free citizens of Tajik SSR.

Another regime of migration into Central Asia was deportation and resettlement of ethnic minorities from USSR's border regions. Deportation of ethnic minorities from border regions was justified by the purported unreliability and disloyalty of certain ethnic groups. Relocated people were usually bound to a particular territory and assigned specific kinds of works in-demand. For example, German POWs in Northern Tajikistan had worked in Uranium mines since the end of

[149] Postanovlenie GOKO za #5859 from 11 May 1944.

[150] Tajik historian Gafur Shermatov has shown that the Vakhsh Valley had been a destination for dekulakized Russian and Ukrainian peasants since 1937. The first group of Slavs 3758 families or 9948 persons arrived in Khatlon in 1937. While in Khatlon Slav exiles could not relocate to other parts of Tajikistan, their work at cotton plantations and irrigation was constantly monitored by OGPU officers, even short-distance movement between farms required special travel permit (*propusk*) until mid 1950sGafur Shermatov, "Как раскулаченных русских отправляли на спецпоселение в Таджикистан," BBC news Russian Service, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-42108549. Archival materials "Меморандум НКВД СССР № 111 Руководству Таджикистана о Сроках Перемещения в Республику Спецпереселенцев Из Других Регионов. 22 Марта 1935 г. // ЦА ФСБ РФ. Ф. 3. Оп. 4. Д. 8. Л. 28. Машинописная Копия, Заверенная Сотрудником СПО НКВД СССР Виньке.," n.d.

WWII and could not change their residence at will. There was a sizable population of *Volksdeutsche* from the Volga Region of RSFFSR and Odessa Oblast of Ukraine who were deported to Tashkent shortly after the beginning of the war and then dispersed across the region. In Sharora one whole street was populated by Germans.[151] In in the 1950s, Sharora resident and *Zemledelia* lead scientist encountered a group of Finns, either Finnish POWs or deportees of Finn-Karelia borderland living and working in the Karategin region of Eastern Tajikistan.[152] There were also a few Korean families in Sharora, as everywhere else in Central Asia, descending from Korean deportees from the Russian Far East.

Ethnic minorities as people without homeland, once relocated to Central Asia were particularly prone to settle in the region. Their ambiguous ethnic and religious background was a notable admixture to the growing complexity and diversity of Central Asian populace, urban and rural alike. Photocollages and *vignettes* from Sharora's school #14 from the 1970s-80s, along with Russian and Ukrainian last names, showed many German and Korean last names: Eiswert, Ewert, Gellert, Balk, Tsoĭ, Tian to name just a few. There are dozens of German graves still visible at Sharora's Russian cemetery marked with German insignia and oriented to the West.[153]

A survey of biographies of Sharora's first residents showed that they came from all corners of the USSR and beyond. Local history enthusiasts and Sharora residents Loskareva, Eshanov, and Karamkhudoev the authors of *Tragediia i bol' Ghissara* in their chapter on the first inhabitants of Sharora in the 1930s and 1940s mention exclusively Slavic names: the director of *Mulzavod 126* Niukhin, head agronomist Iushenko, head mechanical engineer Tiurina, tractor operator Filipenko, director of Sovkhoz Stalinabadskiĭ Muraviov, driver and mechanic Tsygolnikov and others.

[151] Informants recalled that one of Sharora's streets, Aerodromnaia was populated almost exclusively by Germans.
[152] Sokhibov, "Conversation with the Author (March 2020)."
[153] Russian orthodox graves are laid out head to the East while German head to the West making them easier to distinguish even when the insignia or gravestones are no longer readable.

One of Sharora's old-timers Galina Babaeva recalls that "there were no Tajiks here [in Sharora] at the beginning."[154] She remembers that along with European scientists, technicians and managers came rank-and-file peasants some of whom were "kulaks" and "*benderovtsy*"[155] — Russian and Ukrainian non-kolkhoz farmers and those accused of anti-Soviet resistance, escaping persecution of Soviet law-enforcement in their homelands.[156] A former Sharora head of police department Davlatier Odinaev confirms the presence of people deemed as anti-Soviet elements who were "defeated" *razbombili* elsewhere in the Soviet Union and lived "quiet lives" in Sharora.[157]

Yet, Sharora was not a high-security settlement. There was a local section of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, aka *militsia,* with a few full-time officers like in any other small town or village. Its denizens could move in and out of *posëlok* without any background check with a high chance to reinvent themselves as a loyal Soviet citizen. The permeability of Sharora's borders and its diverse population, however, did not preclude investigation into an individual biography and persecution. The post-WWII social climate everywhere in the USSR was such that nearly everyone with a Ukrainian last name could be labeled *benderovets*, everyone with a German last name could be a former POW and every other person could be a former collaborator.[158] In Sharora for instance, two of my informants recalled a geography teacher[159] working in school #14 in the 1960s who was

[154] Babaeva, "Conversation with the Auhtor on February 16."

[155] The interview was conducted in 2020 before the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the pejorative term benderovtsy was not yet on everyone's lips and is more likely to date back to the Soviet period.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Davlatier Odinaev, "Conversation with the Author on March 19" (Sharora, 2020).

[158] In interviews the informants displayed their suspicion towards neighbors by referring to their German men as former *fashisty* or *Fritzy*, and German women as spoils of war (*trofeinaia nemka*), and Ukrainians as *benderovstsy*. They also noted that many of their German and Ukrainian neighbors has changed their last names into more Russian variants.

[159] This person was mentioned without name or exact time of the events in Babaeva, "Conversation with the Auhtor on February 16." and Babaeva, "Conversation with the Author on July 27, 2020."

investigated on charges of Nazi collaboration in one of the occupied territories and "hanged himself when a SMERSH group arrived in *posëlok*."[160]

Another interesting character was Olga Evgenievna Shadrina,[161] born into a noble and learned family in Penza countryside in 1915. According to her daughter Galina Babaeva, Olga Evgenievna feared persecution for her near-noble pedigree and her relation to Shadrins (or Chadrins in French spelling) — well-known Russian counts. Olga Evgenievna had been changing residences in Dagestan, Far East, GBAO, and Ghissar, until she finally secured employment at *Institut Zemledelia* in 1968 and a peaceful retirement later. Being constantly on the move and working in remote and inaccessible mountainous regions allowed this remarkable woman to survive some of the most dramatic episodes of Russian and Soviet history despite her background and somewhat flamboyant lifestyle.[162]

For the majority of European settlers in the Ghissar valley the road to Sharora was long, precipitous and multi-directional. For instance, Evgenii Ivanovich Muraviev, the first director of the Sovkhoz Stalinabadskiĭ after having worked in the Ghissar Valley for 7 years moved to Rostov oblast' of Russia in 1955 to assist the region in launching an experimental cotton cultivation. The project failed due to unsuitable climatic conditions and Muraviev returned to Tajikistan and shortly after was transferred to kolkhoz Otuz-Adof in Kyrgyz SSR.[163] Some of the former residents testify that the first director of the Slalinabadskiĭ seed-producing sovkhoz in Sharora was a Georgian Shavla Konstantinovich Zhvania. One of the streets in Sharora, *Kuchai Zhvania*, bears his name.

[160] SMERSH was a military counterintelligence organization in charge of investigating Nazi collaborators and spies. It operated from 1942 to 1946. It could not by any means be seen in Tajikistan in the 1960s. It is most likely that the respondent Galina Babaeva fictionalized or genuinely confused the organization's identity. The story with geography teacher was also corroborated by Alla Babaeva, "Conversation with the Author on July 27, 2020."

[161] Olga Evgenievna Shadrina and her mother Anna Fiodorovna Shadrina has left an abundant personal archive with documents from Russian, Dagestan, GBAO of Tajikistan and Ghissar which will lead to a separate research.

[162] Shadrina, among other traces left a semi-fictional autobiography *Sredneaziatskaia pyl* (Central Asian Dust) of a certain literary value about her travels and adventures in Russia, Caucasus, Far East, Central Asia and particularly Pamirs.

[163] Instituti Ziroatkori (Institute Zemledeliya), *80 Soli Pursamar Dar Ilmi Ziroatparvari (Unpublished)*., p. 151.

Zhvania is also mentioned in the archival records from 1958 as the head of the winery *Sadvinsovkhoz Shahrinau* where he was acclaimed for "high yields of fruit and wine grapes year after year."[164] Zhvania's family, his son Guram and his daughter-in-law Alexandra and their children Marina, Leonid, Aniuta and Alexander lived in Sharora until the late 1990s before moving to Rostov Oblast in Russia.[165] There were other Caucasians [*kavkaztsy*] living in Sharora – store manager *zavmag* Vazgen, the Boldzhua family working in Shahrinau winery, and an Armenian man working at Khlopzavod.

To surmise, the European settlers were the first ones to discover, populate and build in the Central Ghissar Valley and Sharora grew as a result of their daily effort. Although on the republican level the policy of indigenization or *korenizatsia* empowered Tajik cadres to occupy the positions of leadership, Sharora in the 1930s-50s seemed to have started off as a place where non-Europeans came to be a minority. This demographic situation is important for understanding the modes of interaction between people and forms of their everyday life and cultural expressions thereof discussed in later chapters.

Another repertoire of migration in Soviet Tajikistan was urban rural migration — families moving from Dushanbe to Sharora. For example, interlocutor Alla Babaeva moved to Sharora from Dushanbe in the 1970s when her father Ali worked at Sharora on construction of apartment buildings and liked the *posëlok*. Svetlana Riazaeva initially commuted to work at Sharora's *Institut Zemledeliia* for years.[166] She then moved to Sharora in 1968 after she received an apartment there from the Institute. Similarly, the *Volksdeutsche* Tamara Balko, shared that their family moved to Sharora from Dushanbe in 1980 when her father got a job at PMK *Peredvizhnaia Mekhanicheskaia*

[164] Masov, *Iz Istorii Sovkhoznogo Stroitel'stva v Tadzhikskoi SSR v 1929-1970 Gg.*, p. 198.
[165] Sergei Mushta, "Correspondence with the Author," 2019.
[166] She recalled that scientists were bused to and from Sharora for work at the institute. There were 4 buses picking institute staff from 4 different locations in Dushanbe.

Kolona — a construction company, equipped with excavators, trucks, cement mixers, bulldozers and other kinds of machinery, in charge of construction projects in the countryside including farm buildings, housing construction, roads and irrigation canals etc. Tamara's mother, a pre-school teacher in Dushanbe *vospitatelnitsa*, kept her job in the city and commuted between Sharora and Dushanbe.[167]

There were also indigenous people of the Russian North in Sharora.[168] How they made their way to Central Asia is unknown, but it is interesting that the Soviet policies must have intervened with the traditional repertoires of migration of the northern nomads following their reindeer, seasonal hunting and gathering, trading etc. and created new regimes of migration that they now used to travel to other regions of the USSR, including Central Asia.

2.3. Native Newcomers

Peopling the Central Ghissar Valley with native population (*korennoie naselenie*) was the second episode in large scale migration within the region specific to the post-WWII period. The large scale migration of Central Asians (Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Kyrgyz) to Tajikistan's lowlands was part of state-run regime of labor mobilization for Tajikistan's growing cotton farming. The specificity of this migration regime in Tajikistan was that in the early years of Tajik SSR the Tajiks were a minority in their titular republic and the transfer of ethnic Tajiks from the mountainous regions to fertile arable lands pursued the goal of equal distribution of titular population across the region. Additionally, the overabundant Uzbekistan shared its workforce with newly developed (*osvoiennye*) valleys in neighboring Tajikistan. Before and after the WWII a great number of people was brought into the Central Ghissar Valley by the construction of the Grand Ghissar Canal

[167] Tamara Balko, "Correspondence with the Author," 2020.
[168] Sharora *uchastkovyi* called them *chukchi*.

that streamlined Varzob water across the Ghissar Valley into the River Karatag and further into Surkhandaria in Uzbekistan. The construction was labor intensive and required thousands of workers. Since the project served both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan the latter contributed some 25,000 workers many of whom settled in the local sovkhozes along the canal.[169]

Tajiks started settling in Sharora in the late 1940s. They were predominantly Tajiks from the mountainous regions of Karategin valley, Gharm and Darvaz. A large group of Kyrgyzs was brought from Jirgital in the Nothern Pamires and formed a Kyrgyz mahalla called Manas at the eastern edge of Sharora. Local historians do not specify their initial occupations after arrival at Sharora. Eshanov Loshkareva and Karamkhudoev briefly compliment the first Tajik and Kyrgyz settlers as "foremen of high cotton yields"[170] but this succinct remark also suggests that the Tajiks and Kyrgyz toiled as lowly field workers. Interviews with Sharora residents show a similar trend. This resettlement campaign often described as forced and mass in literature[171] on the Soviet rule in Tajikistan had not only economic rationale but also geopolitical objective of realizing what Terry Martin termed the Piedmont Principle.[172] The process is portrayed in the literature as "humans as territory" because the mountaineers from Gharm and Darvaz who, according to Botakoz Kassymbekova, were not only to man the expanding Vakhsh Valley but also secure the regions bordering Afghanistan.

The popular response to resettlement policy in Tajikistan has been only scarcely accessed. Recent scholarship produced by Tajik historians is reluctant to accept the enforced nature of the

[169] Uzbeks had constituted a large portion of Sharora's population and one of the neighborhoods has been called posëlok Uzbekistan.
[170] I Eshanov, A.F Loshkareva, and L Karamhudoev, *Tragediya i Bol' Gissara (O Zemletryasenii 23 Yanvarya 1989 g.)* (Dushanbe, 1992).
[171] Niccolò Pianciola, "Stalinist Mass Deportations and the Ethnicization of the Soviet Borderlands," *Europe-Asia Studies*, n.d.; Benjamin Siegel, *Creating Soviet Tajikistan* (Unknown, n.d.); Valery Tishkov, *Migration, Settlement, and Ethnic Conflict in the Soviet Union* (Unknown, n.d.); Robert Conquest, "Migration and Forced Relocation in Central Asia under Stalin," in *Various Anthologies on Soviet Ethnic Policies*, n.d.
[172] Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, 2001.

Soviet population management in Tajikistan.[173] There is growing evidence that along with forced resettlement of mountaineers to populate the new cotton farms there were also people seeking refuge from famine and natural disasters in the mountainous regions. For example, respondent Nodir Khabibov shared that his grandfather, a dynastic mullah from Kamarob gorge in Gharm, moved his entire household to the Vakhsh valley in 1949-1950 along with his elder son Nabi and other 6 children.[174] Nodir Khabibov could not state clearly if the move of his ancestors was voluntary or forced. But he did mention that living conditions in the mountains were harsh. In 1949, the village Khaiit in the neighboring Rasht district was wiped out by an earthquake at the magnitude of 9-10 degrees Richter scale. The famous Khaiit earthquake buried 33 villages killing some 25,000 people and leaving the region's entire infrastructure and roads in ruins. The survivors were offered jobs, land plots, construction materials, and livestock in the Vakhsh valley and were likely to accept them willingly. Mountaineers also escaped famine that had ravaged the Pamirs and highlands of Eastern Tajikistan caused by collectivization, grain requisition and violence of the civil war. Sharora's residents shared that their parents born in the 1920s and 1930s in highland countryside had lost most of their siblings to famine.[175]

At the time of resettlement to the Vakhsh valley in 1950 Nodir's father was 20 years old. One of his 6 brothers grew ill due to unhealthy climate and environment of Vakhsh Valley (see Chapter 1) and the family was allowed to resettle to an area with a more suitable climate. They chose Almossy gorge, kishlak Duchinara in the northern limits of the Ghissar Valley as their new home because of its climatic similarity with their native Gharm. All the six Khabibov brothers

[173] Tajik historians view the resettlement of mountaineers as a "historical justice" as Tajiks retained the lands that had been taken by the nomads and as economic opportunity, see Bozorov, "Pereselencheskaia Politika Respubliki Tadzikistan v Poslevoennyi Period i Ee Sotsyalno-Ekonomicheskoie i Kulturno-Bytovoe Znachenie, 1946-1965 Gg."
[174] Nodir Khabibov, "Conversation with the Author on February 15" (Dushanbe, 2020).
[175] Galina Babaeva, "Conversation with the Auhtor on February 16" (Sharora, 2020) and Svetlana Riazaieva, Conversation with the author, 2020 both mentioned that their fathers were sole survivors in their families and raised as orphans in Dushanbe.

found jobs and homes in the nearby kolkhozes. Nabi brought his wife from Vakhsh, got her a job at Zhdanov kolkhoz and started a family. The Khabibovs had 6 children of their own and adopted two nephews. In the early 1950s Nabi commuted between Tajikistan and Turkmenistan where he worked at a wool plant.

The abovementioned Davlatior Odinaev related that his ancestors were originally from the Kuliab region. They had moved to Gharm long before 1917 and founded kishlak Kuloba.[176] The father Afghon Odina worked privately as a craftsman (Taj. *usto*). He had studied at a madrassah in Bukhara to be a mullah but never publicized his past outside his congregation. It is not clear why the Odinaevs chose to move to Ghissar valley rather than to their place of origin in Southern Tajikistan. Perhaps they found the living and working environment in Sharora healthier than elsewhere in Tajikistan. The biographies of the two of the Odinaev brothers, Davlatior and Hudoyor and career opportunities they enjoyed might explain why the family chose Sharora. None of the Odinaevs had ever worked manual labor in the fields. Davlatior had an ambition to be a pilot and tried to pass an admission commission to an aviation school but fell sick and missed the deadline. He then went to serve in the army and after return joined the law enforcement. He retired as a Major in the early 2000s.[177] His younger brother Hudoior served in Afghanistan as a conscript and after the army became a schoolteacher and still works in #14 school in Sharora. Both speak fluent Russian.

Personal archives in Sharora have revealed that some Tajiks populating Ghissar Valley had adopted itinerant lifestyles similar to the ones led by Soviet Europeans. The famous wrestler *pahlavon* and WWII veteran Tuichi Kuziev, according to his elder son Juma, was constantly challenged by rival wrestlers on any occasion. According to his son, in the 1930s Tuichi lived and

[176] Literary means a place where Kuliabis live.
[177] Odinaev, "Conversation with the Author on March 19."

worked in Mahram near Konibodom in Northern Tajikistan. One day he attended a community gathering *maraqa* and together with other men of the neighborhood was eating plov when he was challenged by another wrestler. "Tuichi got off the *dastarkhan*, grabbed the contender by the core and clasped his arms behind the unfortunate challenger. When Tuichi released his grab, his opponent fell on the ground lifeless." Tuichi, fearing legal consequences, fled his native Mahram leaving his 4 brothers behind and moved to the Ghissar Valley, first to kishlaq Andrei and later (after the WWII) to Sharora.[178] Tuichi's most remarkable journey was to the fronts of WWII. Fighting and driving a fuel truck in the Southern Front Tuichi met the end of the war a wounded patient in Yugoslavia. After recovering he traveled to Georgia to work at the Caucasus Military Highway (*Kavkaszskaia voennaia doroga*) while his kin back in Tajikistan thought him dead. Overall, Tuichi's wartime travels took seven years and his relations recall that upon his return he had forgotten Tajik language.[179]

For some native Tajik scientists constant migration was a survival strategy as well. The case of the former Chairman of the Tajik Communist Party Nusratullo Maksum is illustrative. He was purged and exiled to Moscow in 1934 and executed in 1937. His elder son Akbar, born in Kokand in 1928, stayed in Moscow until 1944 and joined the Tajik Institute of Agriculture as a 16-year-old and graduated in 1948. In 1951-1956 he headed the Department of Rainfed Agriculture at the state station for selection and experiment as a senior researcher, and from 1956 to 1959 he worked as the Head of Department at *Institut Zemledelia*. He defended his doctoral thesis in 1957. From 1961 Akbar Maksumov led agricultural research in Tajik SSR at the Academy of Agricultural Sciences and VASKHNIL (*Vsesoiuznaia Akademia selskokhoziaistvennykh nauk im. Lenina*) and was the first Tajik scientist to have supervised the first native agricultural

[178] Juma Kuziev, "Conversation with the Author" (Sharora, 2020).
[179] Babaeva, "Conversation with the Auhtor on February 16."

specialists. His younger brother Muzaffar was born in Moscow in 1937. He graduated from the Moscow State University as an Astrophysicist in 1961 and moved to Tajikistan to defend his doctoral dissertation in 1967. From 1977 to 1992 he headed the Institute for Astrophysics.[180] As a result, both Maksumovs found their way to Sharora from Uzbekistan and Moscow respectively, through two different sciences. They represent the first native intellectual elites who trained new native scientists and led their research projects thereby allowing native scientists to reach positions of leadership. The collective of *Institut Zemledeliia* mentions the first native last names as new national scientific cadres in the 1960s:

> along with these scientists such Tajik researchers as Sanginov B., Domulojonov H.D., Rahmatjonov U.R., Eshonov I.E., Mahsumov A.N., Mansurov N.I., Rashidov H., earned a reputation as scientists[181]

These individuals represent rural intellectual elites of Sharora. They graduated their university courses in the 1950s and 1960s. Some of them, like Maksumov earned their doctoral degrees in the 1960s and their students, like Imom Sokhibov, got their candidacies (*kandidat nauk*) in the 1970s.

In the 1970s and 1980s the dominant migration regime to and from Sharora was tied to military service. Soldiers traveling to serve far away from their homes were a part of the 20th century *modus vivendi*. Mandatory military service was an important migration regime for all male Sharorinians. The respondents shared that they traveled as far as Hungary, Eastern Germany, Ukraine, Far East, Siberia, Africa, Georgia, and since the 1980s Afghanistan. All of the respondents returned back to Sharora to start new jobs and families. Sometimes, Tajik soldiers would marry during active duty and bring their spouses with. For instance, a respondent Lola

[180] It is noteworthy that Muzaffar Maksumov had posted on his website memoires of Alia Tartak a writer who was arrested in 1937 and spent much of her life in GULAG, source: A.B. Evreshenko, "Maksumov Muzaffar Nusratulaevich," 2013, http://www.mnmaksumov.narod.ru/biography.html.
[181] Instituti Ziroatkori (Institute Zemledeliya), *80 Soli Pursamar Dar Ilmi Ziroatparvari (Unpublished)*.

Salikhova recalls that her father Sharif was born in a mountainous region of Tajikistan. In the 1970s he was conscripted to serve in Novosibirsk and got married there, had a child and was given a house in Novosibirsk. After completing his duty, according to Lola, he missed his homeland and decided to move back to Tajikistan with his family. However, his urban wife was reluctant to live in a remote village and they moved to Sharora to Sharif's brother Imbragim as a compromise. Both spouses got jobs, Sharif as a tractor operator and his wife as a laboratory assistant in *TsEH*.[182]

To conclude, there were all kinds of migrants to and from Sharora – resettled population groups and deportees, career and labor migrants, and eternal itinerants which resulted from the endemic depopulation and repopulation in various parts of the USSR during the 1930s and 1940s. People came in large groups, in fact in entire villages, like Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Tajik workers. They also came in smaller families and individually. Peopling the Ghissar Valley can be partly explained as a spillover of overpopulating Tashkent and Almaty which were better connected to the USSR railroad networks and took more migrants than the cities could manage. One of Ghissar Valley's pull-factors was that it allowed a fresh start professionally and socially as a place of acceptance and accommodation of social, ethnic, religious and other kinds of difference. Another particularity was that its denizens had compromised access to urban civilization and centrality of capital cities for safety, comfort and competition-free social environment of Sharora. Finally, an important particularity of Sharora was its ethnic composition which had no clear majority and minority divide and in which the European aboriginals lived and worked with the Central Asian newcomers. Both Europeans and natives, whose memory and paper trails were found in Sharora, were exposed to various regimes and repertoires of migration. Ghissar and Vakhsh Valleys were first populated by Europeans who made up the international majority in these regions. Their

[182] Lola Salikhova, "Correspondence with the Author," 2020.

concentration in settlements like Sharora can be explained by their limited mobility and their special status. Natives, Tajiks and Uzbeks, enjoyed greater mobility and could change their residence at will. Special status of Europeans, particularly those exiled and resettled as alien social elements (*chuzhdyie sotsyalnye elementy*) and persecuted peoples was detrimental for their indigenous culture, identity, and belonging (national, confessional, tribal) as they were forced to conceal their past and reinvent themselves as generic Soviet people.[183] Armenians, Georgians, Ossetians, Koreans, and Kazakhs, although heavily Russified, kept their basic national and cultural self-understanding. In contrast, moving in larger families and collectively, natives mostly failed to form international communities.

The European leadership and dominance of economic, social, and cultural sectors in Sharora in the post-WWII period was gradually dismantling because Sovietization undermined the privilege and indigeneity of Sharora's Europeans and granted more entitlement to the natives. This development brought about both interethnic peace and cultural intermingling and conflicts which the following chapters will investigate in greater detail.

[183] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Chapter 3. International Sovkhoz

This chapter studies the building and growing of local economy in Ghissar Valley that payrolled Sharora community and its welfare. The purpose of the chapter is to outline the common and specific features of economic life of the region in question and foreground the role of economic institutions in forging and sustaining its multiethnic workforce.

The collectivization of agriculture in the Soviet Union during the 1920s and 1930s stands as one of the most violent and transformative aspects of Soviet history. Initially introduced in 1928 as a response to the post-Civil War grain crisis, collective farms (kolkhozy and sovkhozy) were envisioned as vehicles to modernize the fragmented rural economy into consolidated, mechanized, and scientifically managed enterprises. This effort was part of Stalin's "big break" (bol'shoi perelom), which ushered in shock industrialization, centralized planning, and the sociocultural transformation of the countryside .[184] However, these policies entailed the undoing of NEP, mass dekulakization, and, in regions like Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and the European USSR, catastrophic famine and unrest.[185] Furthermore, historians like Lynn Viola have characterized collectivization as "internal colonization," aimed at eradicating peasant autonomy.[186] Katherine Verdery's analysis has argued that collectivization was a form of etatization —state domination over individual lives, achieved through labor regimentation, the creation of new social categories, and the

[184] Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (University of California Press, 1997); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Introduction," in *Stalin's Peasants : Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3–18. James Harris, "The Great Break," in *The Great Fear: Stalin's Terror of the 1930s* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2016), 82–100.
[185] Nikonov, *Spiral' Mnogovekovoi Dramy: Agrarnaia Nauka i Politika Rossii (XVIII-XX Vv.)*; Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*, 1. issued as an Oxford Univ. press paperback (New York: Oxford Univ. Pr, 1987); Sarah Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan* (Cornell University Press, 2018). In his opening statement at the XVI congress of VKPB Kalinin called for "socialist reconstruction of agriculture after NEP "XVI s'ezd Kommunisticheskoi Partii (b) Stenograficheskii Otchet" (Moscow, Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoie izdatelstvo, 1930)., p. 3.
[186] Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance*, e-book (Oxford University Press, 1996).

industrialization of agriculture.[187] Meanwhile anthropologists have highlighted peasants' new forms of agency and a persistent "tug of war" between the state and the peasantry, expressed through subtle, daily resistance.[188]

The Soviet countryside was neither monolithic nor uniformly oppressive. Caroline Humphrey has demonstrated that kolkhozy and sovkhozy were not only production units but also instruments of political and cultural integration, introducing Siberian and Central Asian peasants to new social statuses and forms of Soviet citizenship.[189] Martha Lampland has argued that socialist labor bore similarities to capitalist practices, with standardized work hours, technologized labor, and social benefits[6] while Sergey Abashin's longue durée history shows that kolkhozy were dynamic spaces reflecting broader Soviet trends and accommodating preexisting economic practices, which persisted and even thrived within socialist frameworks.[190]

This chapter builds on these insights, viewing the Soviet Union as a composite state interacting selectively with global contexts and creating pockets of multiethnic and international life partly enabled by importing and transferring production models into Soviet economic planning. Evidence from the Sharora community suggests that while peasants engaged in globalizing socialist modernity, they also pursued self-interested lives shaped by local traditions. Sharora exemplifies the entangled processes of international labor, leisure, and welfare that defined everyday life under socialism.

[187] Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next* (Princeton University Press, 1996).
[188] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
[189] Caroline Humphry, *Karl Marx Collective: Economy, Society, and Religion in a Siberian Collective Farm* (Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1983).
[190] Martha Lampland, *The Object of Labor: Commodification in Socialist Hungary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Martha Lampland, *The Value of Labor: The Science of Commodification in Hungary, 1920-1956* (Chicago London: The University of Chicago press, 2016).

The main protagonist of this chapter is *Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo* — the production base for the *Institut Zemledeliia* and the key employer of the Sharora community. *Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo* was not a kolkhoz that would abide by the Soviet economic plans but rather an experimental farm (*experimental'noe khoziaĭstvo*) that instead used scientific methods in agriculture to inform and help Soviet economic planning set production goals. It was also a site of daily interaction between scientific approaches to agriculture and agricultural scientists, on the one hand, and agricultural managers and ordinary peasants, on the other. More importantly, *Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo* was a large enterprise that employed thousands of people of different nationalities and socio-cultural backgrounds and a site of display of lived Soviet internationalism. Smaller production units such as cooperatives and kolkhozes could envelope and seal off entire ethnic and religious communities.[191] In contrast, large state-run enterprises and sovkhozes relied on large and diverse workforce and exposed its workers and their dependents to international technologies and labor management.

3.1. Oscillating Sovkhoz

Setting up rural economy in the early Soviet period resembled walking across a mine field. Agricultural agglomeration that would later become Sharora changed its economic occupation a few times. Knowledge about the local environment and geography was decisive in taking and changing decisions about what the collectives in the Central Ghissar Valley should farm. The earliest archival traces of Sharora came from GIPROZEM[192] (Nauchno-issledovatelskiĭ institut po zemleustoĭstvu) an institution devised for land surveys, analysis of composition of soils, mapping

[191] Humphry, *Karl Marx Collective: Economy, Society, and Religion in a Siberian Collective Farm*; Sergei Abashin, "Ot Dosovetskoy Ekonomiki k Kolkhozu Preodolenie Krizisa," in *Sovetskii Kishlak Mezhdu Kollonializmom i Modernizatsyei* (Moscow, 2015); Stéphane A. Dudoignon and Christian Noack, eds., *Allah's Kolkhozes: Migration, De-Stalinisation, Privatisation, and the New Muslim Congregations in the Soviet Realm (1950s-2000s)*, First edition, Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, Band 314 (Berlin: KS, Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2014).
[192] TsGA RT F. 1745 d. 114, "Delo Po Zakrepleniyu Zemel' Zemlepol'zovaniyu Sovkhoza Mulzavod N. 126."

of arable land or plots for residential or industrial construction and collection of other kinds of land-related data. According to the file, in 1943 the territory concerned was a "landmass [*sic.*] with thick vegetation (*s khoroshim travostoyem*) quite suitable for cattle grazing."[193] It is understandable, therefore, why the first farms in Central Ghissar Valley were cattle breeding. Local historians and Sharora's long-term residents I. Eshanov, A. Loshkareva, and L. Karamkhudoev recall that in late 1920s the first kolkhozes were *Komunism*, *1-e Maya* and in 1929 *Molochno-kormovoi sovkhoz*.[194] There were also animal farms since at least 1935:[195] *Mulzavod 126* (mule farm)*, Konezavod 152* (horse farm)*,* and *Verbliudzavod 114* (camel farm).[196] These animals were essential for early Soviet economy and military as beasts of burden connecting remote off-road areas in largely roadless landscape and unmechanized labor.[197] The republican government was closely monitoring the profitability and overall performance of animal farms and assessing their economic prospects. A note from *Tadzhiksovkhoztrest* to the Ministry of Sovkhoz *Ministerstvo Sovkhozov SSSR* from 1947 records deliberations regarding the state of the farms:

> Due to the impossibility to access fodder from the irrigated lands the *konezavod* does not have any prospects for development. In the nearest time the question of irrigation of the region will be solved and a question of unprofitability of using the cotton lands for cattle grazing during the high season will be raised.
> The territory [of *Mulzavod*] is surrounded by cotton kolkhozes. The *zavod* does not have its own grazing fields and is forced to graze [animals] on the cotton fields during the spring-summer months causing the whole range of problems, particularly when the number of animals is growing.[198]

[193] Ibid, p. 8.
[194] Eshanov, Loshkareva, and Karamhudoev, *Tragediya i Bol' Gissara (O Zemletryasenii 23 Yanvarya 1989 g.)*, 1992., p. 4.
[195] GIPROZEM files date back to 1935 and mention Mulzavod chairman Niukhin N.T.
[196] Masov, *Iz Istorii Sovkhoznogo Stroitel'stva v Tadzhikskoi SSR v 1929-1970 Gg.*, p. 154.
[197] Reid, "Managing Nature, Constructing the State: The Material Foundation of Soviet Empire in Tajikistan, 1917-1937," 2016.
[198] Masov, *Iz Istorii Sovkhoznogo Stroitel'stva v Tadzhikskoi SSR v 1929-1970 Gg.*, p. 155.

Figure 12. Agrarian and soil atlas of Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo in 1966-1967 (marked green).

While no one in particular was mentioned as responsible for the economic decline of the animal breeding in the valley, it was clearly caused by the expanding cotton cultivating which claimed the best available land. As a result, mule and horse farming was moved to the nonarable areas in Southern Tajikistan and camel grazing was discontinued all together.

In Tajikistan cotton farming came with mechanization and capital investment. The first post-war five-year plan nearly doubled the capital investment into Tajikistan's sovkhoz economy, from 117.53 million rubles in 1940 to 222 million rubles in 1948.[199] On the 14th of July 1948 the Ministry of Sovkhoz of the USSR ordered the reorganization of *Mulzavod 126* into an elite seed-producing sovkhoz *Stalinabadskiĭ*.[200] The new sovkhoz was to produce seeds of short-fiber

[199] Sharifjhonovna, Fotima, "Mery Po Dalneishemu Razvitiiu Kolhozhogo Stroia i Organizatsionno-Khoziastvennomu Ukrepleniu Kolkhozov Severnyh Raionov Strany," *Scientific-Theoretical Journal Bulletin of TSULB (Tajik State University of Law, Business and Politics)* 4, no. 65 (2015): 39–51., p. 43.
[200] Elite seeds are carefully selected seeds that give maximum harvest yields.

(*korotkovoloknistyi*) species of cotton through selection of the best-quality seeds. The same year the mules and donkeys from *Mulzavod 126* were to be transferred to *Sovkhoz Metintugai* in Kuliab oblast[201] and former mule grazers turned into cotton growers.

Thus, in many ways, the year 1948 was a new threshold in Ghissar Valley economy. Local historians connect this process to three factors: the return of the specialists and professional workers from the WWII fronts, the completion of the Ghissar canal that brought water of Varzob River to irrigate 14.5 thousands hectares in the Ghissar Valley and further expansion of irrigated territories for large-scale mechanized agriculture.[202] The enlarged sovkhoz was appointed leadership of higher standing than previously. The first director of the Sovkhoz Stalinabadskiĭ was Evneii Ivanovich Muraviov who came to Ghissar region from Farkhor and Varkhsh regions where he had worked as an agronomist. He also had worked as a deputy minister of textile industry.[203]

Still, any significant transformation in Central Asian countryside, leave alone "the leap into socialism" had remained an aspiration rather than an actual progression. However, there was pulpable difference between the pre-war and post-war economic strategies which coincided with the transition from Stalin's to Khrushchev's leadership over the CPSU in the early 1950s. In 1951 with Stalin still at the helm of the party-state, Nikita Khrushchev dared to put forward a comprehensive plan of socialist construction in the countryside on the pages of *Pravda*. The goal of the plan was to close the gap between cities and countryside by building new kolkhoz settlements (*posëlki*) with schools, clubs, bathhouses, houses of culture, nurseries, stadiums, libraries, shops, and other cultural and living amenities. The settlements were to be connected to power grids and streetlights, have running water and sewage, sidewalks, and parks.[204] In planning

[201] Ibid., p. 162.
[202] Eshanov, Loshkareva, and Karamhudoev, *Tragediya i Bol' Gissara (O Zemletryasenii 23 Yanvarya 1989 g.)*, 1992., pp. 6-7.
[203] Instituti Ziroatkori (Institute Zemledeliya), *80 Soli Pursamar Dar Ilmi Ziroatparvari (Unpublished)*., p. 151.
[204] Nikita Khrushchev, "O Stroitelstve i Blagoustroistve v Kolkhozakh," *Pravda #63*, March 4, 1951.

the future kolkhoz settlements, Khrushchev argued, a priority was to be given to simple forms, generic design, and lower construction costs which would result in mass-scale building of housing for the workers.[205] Khrushchev's enthusiasm was not wholeheartedly shared by other party members as in the next *Pravda* issue the editors disclaimed his article as a discussion rather than an approved party program (*v diskussionnom poriadke*).[206]

От редакции

ИСПРАВЛЕНИЕ ОШИБКИ

По недосмотру редакции при печатании во вчерашнем номере газеты «Правда» статьи тов. Н. С. Хрущева «О строительстве и благоустройстве в колхозах» выпало примечание от редакции, где говорилось о том, что статья тов. Н. С. Хрущева печатается в дискуссионном порядке. Настоящим сообщением эта ошибка исправляется.

Figure 13. Pravda disclaimer on Khrustchev's article.

Khruschev's *Pravda* statement turned into one of the priorities of the 5th five-year plan (1951-1955) which stipulated the doubled capital investment into agriculture and increased production of construction materials by 2-3 times.

One problem that the increased investment could never solve was the perennial land shortage (*malozemel'e*) in Tajikistan. In the Central Ghissar Valley access to land was even more pressing — how to combine husbandry, large-scale cotton cultivation, forage production, and construction of the living and social facilities when there was barely enough land for cotton in the valley between two and 18 kilometers wide? Scientific knowledge collected by European experts, surveyors, and planners was futile because it ignored local knowledge about rainfed agriculture in mountainous terrains (*bogarnoe zemledelie*) that had been signature knowledge of Tajik

[205] Ibid.
[206] "Ot Redaktsii Ispravlenie Oshybki," *Pravda #64*, March 5, 1951.

highlanders in pre-Soviet times.[207] The first Tajik agricultural scientist who elevated local knowledge to the level of central planning was Akbar Nusratulaievich Maksumov (also mentioned in Chapter 2). Akbar Maksumov dedicated his life to formulating sustainable agriculture on *bagara* land that would reconcile modern technology, machinery (*agrotekhnika*), seed selection with knowledge about local microclimates, traditional forms of land, water, and forest management, and crop rotation, and the impact of wild plants and animals on agriculture in mountainous microregions. His multiple studies and projects of his students went into his two-volume *Osnovy Bagarnogo Zemledelia v Tadzhikistane* in which he critiqued set-pattern (*shablon*) practices of earlier periods as unmindful and destructive. He advocated new approaches in *bagara* agriculture that would take into account all the challenges of *bogara* cultivation such as short seasons of moisture accumulation in soils, hot winds detrimental to atmospheric and soil moisture such as *garmsil, afganets, fion*, and problems of mechanization of labor on *bagara* lands due to broken terrain. Maksumov's project, granted that the entire complex of his recommendations was considered, promised to make serviceable hundreds of thousands of new hectares while keeping all valleys still available for cotton.[208]

Expanding into Sharora's *bagara* land allowed further Sovkhoz enlargement as ordered by Nikita Khruschev in order to maximize their efficiency and minimize overhead costs. The reform led to a sharp decreased in the number of farms across the USSR — from 83,000 in the 1950s down to 45,000 in the 1970s.[209] In the Ghissar district sovkhoz enlargement resulted in Sovkhoz

[207] Russian Imperial ethnographers had complimented the skills with which Tajiks (Gal'cha) cultivated hillsides in 19th and early 20th century: A. P. Shyshov, *Tajiki Etnograficheskoe i Antropologicheskoe Issledovanie*, 1910; L. A. Middendorf, *Ocherki Ferganskoy Doliny* (Imperatoskaya academia nauk, 1882); Khanykov, *Opisaniye Bukharskogo Khanstva*.
[208] Maksumov, *Osnovnyie Problemy Bogarnogo Zemledeliia*.
[209] Robert Service, "Khrushchev's Agricultural Reforms: Successes and Failures," *Russian History* 19, no. 2 (1992): 97–110; G. Gleason, *Kolkhozy to Sovkhozy: The Shift in Soviet Agricultural Strategy* (Cambridge University Press, 1987); John M. Letiche, "The Enlarged Collective Farms: Mechanization and Management Issues," *The Journal of Economic History* 22, no. 4 (1962): 457–73; R. W. Davies, *The Soviet Economy under Khrushchev* (University of

Dzerzhinskogo which incorporated the research institute, experimental farms, cotton mill, machine and tractor station (MTS), construction brigade and many other economic and social institutions. Agricultural scientists and professionals, both European and native, became the local elites in Sharora leading a predominantly Central Asian workforce.

The next vital stage in the development of the area under study was the decision by the Ministry of Cotton Production of the USSR (*Ministerstvo khlopkovodstva SSSR*) in 1953 to raise cotton yields through mechanization of the production cycle. Since the 1930s there was only one Ford truck that transported the produce and supplies between Stalinabad and the sovkhoz. According to the decision, the cotton producing sovkhozes were to be equipped with agricultural machinery (tractors, trucks, combiners etc.) and technical specialists[210] and *Sovkhoz Stalinabadskiĭ* acquired an MTS with tractors, harvesters, and seeders. Machine operators were trained at the vocational training facility near Sharora.

In 1957 to strengthen its experimental and selectionist component *Sovkhoz Slalinabadskiĭ* allocated 3120 hectares of irrigated and non-irrigated land to the Central Experimental Farm (*Tsentralnoe eksperimentalinoe hoziaistvo – TsEH*) of the Research Institute *Zemledelia*. The scientific focus of the emerging farm was furthered by the construction of the three-story campus building for the *Institut Zemledelia* in 1961. In April 1973 the Central Experimental Farm merged with Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo and became the main scientific and experimental base for agriculture in Tajik SSR and one of Tajikistan's largest sovkhozy.[211]

Pittsburgh Press, 1974); David J. O'Brien and Stephen K. Wegren, *The Virgin Lands: A History of Soviet Agriculture from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Yale University Press, 1986).

[210] Masov, *Iz Istorii Sovkhoznogo Stroitel'stva v Tadzhikskoi SSR v 1929-1970 Gg.* p. 183

[211] In May 1957 Soviet economy divided into production regions Sovnarkhozy which resulted in state farm enlargement, see Peter Rutland, *The Politics of Economic Stagnation in the Soviet Union: The Role of Local Party Organs in Economic Management* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

To surmise, Sharora was not an isolated case of large-scale agricultural construction but rather an element of the Stalinist priority on organized and rationalized farming of crops relevant for industry and defense that assumed new scale and intensity under Nikita Khrushchev.[212] The history of decision-making regarding the direction of the future economy in the valley the republican authorities and specialists on the ground tried various options, husbandry, fodder and crop production and finally large-scale cotton cultivation. Cotton cultivation and cotton seed production were recognized as more profitable (*bolee reintabelnoe*) by the republican authorities and helped Tajik SSR justify sizable investments into the republic's economy and infrastructure.

3.2. Khruschev's Sovkhozes

Khrushchev's strategizing was a reiteration of an agelong Marxist prophecy of closing the gap between the countryside and cities under communism. The three pillars of intensification of agriculture: chemicalization, mechanization, melioration had not only left a profound economic and environmental footprint by making the previously unpopulated territories livable but also brought about the changes in kolkhoz demographics as, in the process, more and more urban intelligentsia cadres, such as teachers, engineers, MTS workers, doctors, agricultural scientists and so on, would be drawn into the countryside. It was only after Stalin's death and Khrushchev's takeover that his "high modernism became a ubiquitous everyday life experience reaching the most peripheral and remote areas such as the Ghissar Valley in Tajikistan."[213] Between the 1950s and

[212] I am aware of the current recognition of the disastrous effects of collectivization in Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Introduction," in *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3–18., yet Tajikistan presents a radically different case as a void and free field for various scientists to pursue their research and transform the environment.

[213] Julia Obertreis, *Imperial Desert Dreams Cotton Growing and Irrigation in Central Asia, 1860–1991* (V&R UNIPRESS, 2017).

1970s Mulzavod was transformed into a small model Soviet town in the countryside — *posëlok gorodskogo tipa* (see Figure 14 and 15).

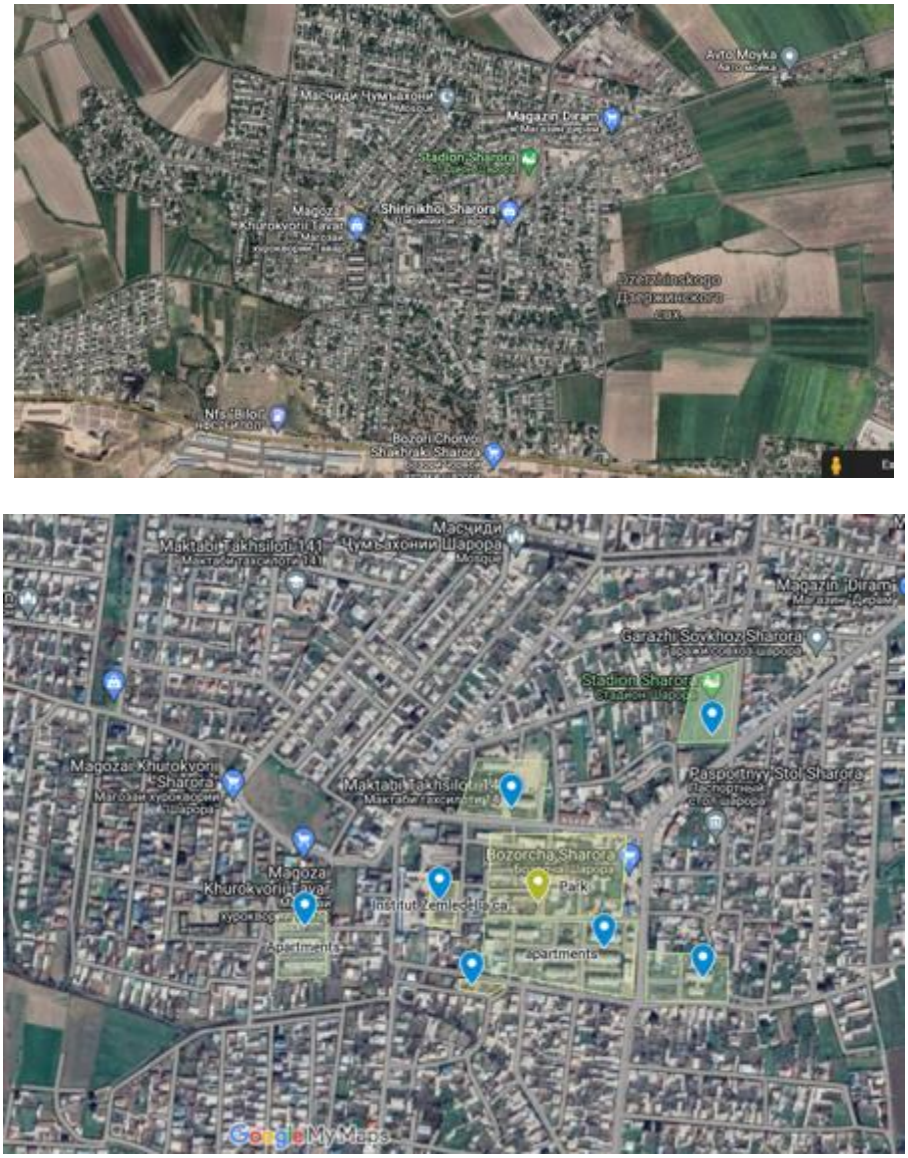


Figure 14. (top) A satellite view of Sharora, (bottom) Sharora's social infrastructure: apartment buildings, hospital, bathhouse, school, klub, park, stadium.

In 1962, Nikita Khrushchev visited Tajikistan and stopped near Aini cotton processing plant (*khlopzavod*) just 3 kilometres away from the center of Sharora. Many Sharora residents and schoolchildren, and employees of Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo took part in the welcoming ceremony and were perplexed why Nikita Sergeevich chose not to visit their cutting-edge search facility and

sufficed with corn fields outside Sharora. Nodir Khabibov, 6 years old at the time of Khruschev's visit to Tajikistan, claims having seen the Soviet leader over the fence of the workers dormitory where the Khabibovs' family resided. Nodir also claimed having witnessed how Khruschev was presented a Tajik national gown and hat (*joma* and *toqi*) and how the head of the nursery (*zavdetskiĭ sad*) from *Kolkhoz Kommunism* and heroin mother of 11 children Jahon apa called Khrushchev "beautiful as a performer (*artist*) from the philharmonics." Reportedly, Khruschev turned red and embarrassed, and the head of the Tajik KGB Tsvigun had Jahon apa arrested "for insulting the head of state." Jahon apa was fortunate that Khruschev was removed from office one month after his trip to Tajikistan and she was acquitted.

Nevertheless, the visit was a highly symbolic gesture, underscoring the importance of Central Asia to the Soviet Union's broader political and economic ambitions. It took place following Khruschev's famous tour in the USA where he was accompanied by the then First Secretary of the CP of the Tajik SSR Jabor Rasulov. Khrushchev's visit was intended to bolster support for his agricultural reforms aimed at raising the level of life in the countryside and catching up and overtaking the capitalist West[214] and closing the "technological gap" between Soviet Central Asia and the European regions of the USSR.[215]

[214] Leonid Mlechin, *Nikita Khrushchev* (Zhyzn zamechatelnykh liudei, 2021); N.G. Tomilina et al., *Nikita Segeevich Khrushchev Dva Tsveta Vremeni Dokumenty Iz Lichnogo Fonda N.S. Khrushcheva Vol. 2* (Moscow: Rossiia XX vek, 2009). Khrushchev famously declared: We have communism but there is no potatoes, bread, cabbage.

[215] Gafur Shermatov, "Dushanbe i Dushanbintsy 60-Kh Godov. Dorogoy Nikita Sergeevich," *Asia PLus*, 2015, https://www.asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20150907/dushanbe-i-dushanbintsy-60-kh-godov-dorogoi-nikita-sergeevich; Said Ali, "Tadzhikskiy Podarok Khrushchevu Ili Kak Khalat Smenili Na Konya," *Asia PLus*, August 10, 2023, https://www.asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20231008/tadzhikskii-podarok-hrutshevuili-kak-halat-smenili-na-konya; Violotta Nichkova, "Rabochie Budni: Nikita Khrushchev Vizit Khrushcheva v Tadzhikistan i Vstrecha s Semenom Tsvigunom," 2017, https://generaltsvigun.ru/2017/03/13/рабочие-будни-никита-хрущев/.

Figure 15. Nikita Khruschev in Tajikistan 1962.[216]

Khruschev also opened Central Asia for scientific exchanges with the "foreign East" the newly independent and predominantly Muslim states of Asia and the Middle East, and like many scientists and cultural elites from Central Asia and Caucasus Sharora's agricultural scientists were instrumental intermediaries in Soviet Union's New Eastern Politics.[217] Some former scientists from *NII Zemledelia* remember their personal and professional encounters with the foreigners (*innostrantsy*) from India and Iran working on new rainfed crops, grain, beans and legumes, vital for food security:

> They sent scientists from India. My father personally worked with an agronomist from India. When the Indian man saw my father, he exclaimed, "It turns out you are my brother!" This was because my father was dark-skinned, had full lips, a broad nose, and curly hair. The Indian man was named Mr. Mehra. He and my father worked together a

[216] Source, personal archive of the Head of KGB of Tajik SSR Semion Tvigun who accompanied Khrustchev in his tour in Tajikistan, Nichkova, "Rabochie Budni: Nikita Khrushchev Vizit Khrushcheva v Tadzhikistan i Vstrecha s Semenom Tsvigunom."

[217] Kirasirova, "'Sons of Muslims' in Moscow: Soviet Central Asian Mediators to the Foreign East, 1955–1962"; Masha Kirasirova, *The Eastern International: Arabs, Central Asians, and Jews in the Soviet Union's Anticolonial Empire*, 1st ed. (Oxford University PressNew York, 2024).

> lot, mainly focusing on legumes. On drylands, they cultivated fast-growing crops like alfalfa and other plants. Mr. Mehra from India would often say, "By blood, you are my brother." When he returned to his homeland in India, he sent my father gifts: three cans of real Indian tea, soap, needles—small things, but thoughtful. My father was happy to be remembered by him.
> There were colleagues who, during the revolution in Iran, when they were attempting to overthrow the Shah—we were inspired at the time by the idea of building communism across the world. One such person was MELS. He was an Iranian communist who settled here, conducted scientific work, and was a candidate of agricultural sciences. He lived in the city of Dushanbe, had a Russian wife, but they did not have any children.[218]

Additionally, Sharora's campus, townscape, and experimental crop fields were a mandatory sight for international delegations from Western countries. The central plaza facing *NII Zemledelia* was adored with fountains, flowerbeds, and lined with picturesque trees. Current still living Sharorians refer to them with a degree of fascination as *innostrantsy* or foreigners from Germany (GDR) and even Americans bused to Sharora and surrounding natural and historic sites for international conferences along with film crews and correspondents.

3.3. Welfare Sovkhoz

In this chapter I examine the transformations of everyday life including labor and leisure in Tajik countryside in a period roughly between the 1970s and 1980s which coincides with the timeframe of Late Socialism. I argue that the international features of labor and leisure, and welfare more broadly, both contributed and precluded the evolving Soviet internationalism. The chapter engages both archival sources from the Ghissar district archive and an oral history collection from interviews, conversations, and correspondences with Sharora's current and former residents.

For Sharora workforce the intersystemic convergence implied internationalization of labor whereby both natives and Europeans shared the same jobs and leisure and had equal access to social infrastructure which was another important factor in forging the international Soviet man.

[218] Galina Babaeva, "Conversation with the Author on February 16" (Sharora, 2020).

This chapter zooms into the everyday life of agricultural workers presenting archival records of Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo (SD or Sovkhoz) containing evidence of day-to-day operations, labor mobilization, conflicts, and disputes between sovkhoz and its workers, and among workers themselves. The archival sources are complemented by oral testimony and correspondence with still living sovkhoz workers or their dependents adding an emotional and subjective backdrop to the story.

Agriculture in Late Soviet Union was very different from its earlier versions. The peasantry of the collectivization period was no longer a single identifiable class or a "we-group" in the Late Socialist period but divided into professional often self-interested groups seeking to maximize their economic gains. The estimated number of employees in SD could be as high as 4-5 thousand individuals[219] and included very different professions: cotton pickers and cotton growers (also referred to as *dekhkane*), cotton gin operators (approx. 10 people), brigadiers (group leaders, one per 6-10 workers), drivers of trucks, tractors, and harvesters, mechanizers and mechanics, irrigation workers (*polivakshiki*), cattle breeders (*zhivotnovody*), milkmaids and herdsmen, beekeepers, gardeners, vegetable growers, a construction brigade, and support staff — accountants, cashiers, storage workers, sovkhoz director, and his deputies. The scientific and experimental component of sovkhoz's work was run by approximately 300 scientific staff including selectionists, agronomists, engineers, lab workers, heads of research programs, and finally cultural organizers, *Klub* workers, librarians, *kruzhok* leaders (sports, music, arts, etc.). All these workers appear in sovkhoz accounting books. Welfare workers, at least 100 schoolteachers and staff, nursery workers, and medical workers at Sharora hospital as well as law enforcement were paid by their respective ministries, though they served Sharora workers and residents.

[219] The number of sovkhoz employees varied from season to season depending on labor availability, weather conditions, construction projects, high or low harvest yields and many other contingencies.

As one can see from the paragraph above that in the 1970s and 80s the social and professional landscape in the Late Socialist countryside was very complex as Sharora's workforce was multiethnic and multifunctional. The senior management of the SD and *NII Zemliadelia*, district party leadership were Tajiks. Many mid-level professionals and white-collar workers such as planners, accountants, lead scientists and researchers were Europeans and Russophone Pamiris. All peasants *dekhkane*, junior specialists and agronomists, team leaders and brigadiers, tractor operators and drivers were Tajiks and Uzbeks.[220] Each group of workers learned how to use their position within the sovkhoz economy to maximize benefits, both licitly and otherwise. The most common way to double one's income in sovkhoz was to work overtime or win in an inner competition (*sotssorevnovanie*). It is noteworthy that archival sources are void of exaltation or appeals to socialist enthusiasm. Instead, the predominant language of the relations between the sovkhoz and its workers is materialist and pragmatic.

While the wages for all levels of employees were non-negotiable ranging between 80 and 150 rubles per month, workers received between 50 and 100 percent of their monthly salaries for reaching and surpassing the target numbers. In 1981 brigadiers, usually Central Asian men, got 150 rubles in bonuses while average workers received 80 and 50 rubles on top of their monthly paychecks.[221] Tractor drivers, predominantly native men, also got between 80 and 60 rubles in cash rewards. Machinery operators on average received higher wages and bonuses than manual workers. In 1981 each cotton picker, always native women, received a third-tier payment of 0.7 kopeks per kilogram of harvested cotton with the daily target weight of 48 kilograms. The same year ten cotton harvester operators got a bonus of 80 rubles while three manual harvesters (cotton pickers) who won the first, second, and third prize in the annual socialist competition got 60, 50,

[220] FTsGA RT Ghissar, "Fond 208, Opis 2, Delo 2 Proizvodstvenniye Prikazy Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo 1977 g. 96 Listov," 1976-77.
[221] d. 3 FTsGA RT Ghissar F. 208, Op. 2, "Proizvodstvennyie Prikazy," n.d., p. 44.

and 40 rubles respectively. Cotton weeders, also Central Asian women (see figure 3), received 30, 25, 20, and 15 rubles.[222] Some years champion cotton pickers received no cash bonuses but "valuable gifts" such as a woolen kerchief costing 20.5 rubles while drivers transporting the cotton received 50 rubles in cash bonuses.[223]

Workers having access to means of transportation and machinery had even more opportunities to leverage and scheme the sovkhoz to their advantage. For example, when equipment, trucks, or tractors were out of order their drivers and operators demanded to be paid in full when proven that the damage to the machinery was not their fault. In the meantime, there were several cases when drivers and operators were accused of negligent treatment of the entrusted machinery, sloppiness, overuse, and "that spare parts and tools were often dropped and lost in the fields"[224] which is highly suggestive of the intentional wreckage of the equipment.

[222] TsGART Ghissar Fond 208, Op. 2. del. 3., "Proizvodstvennyie Prikazy 1978 g. Na 89 Listov," 1978, p. 47.
[223] The cost of the gifts seems unreasonably high see ibid. p. 57.
[224] FTsGA RT Ghissar F. 208, Op. 2. d. 6 "Proizvodstvennyie Prikazy" 73 Lista," 1981., p. 22.

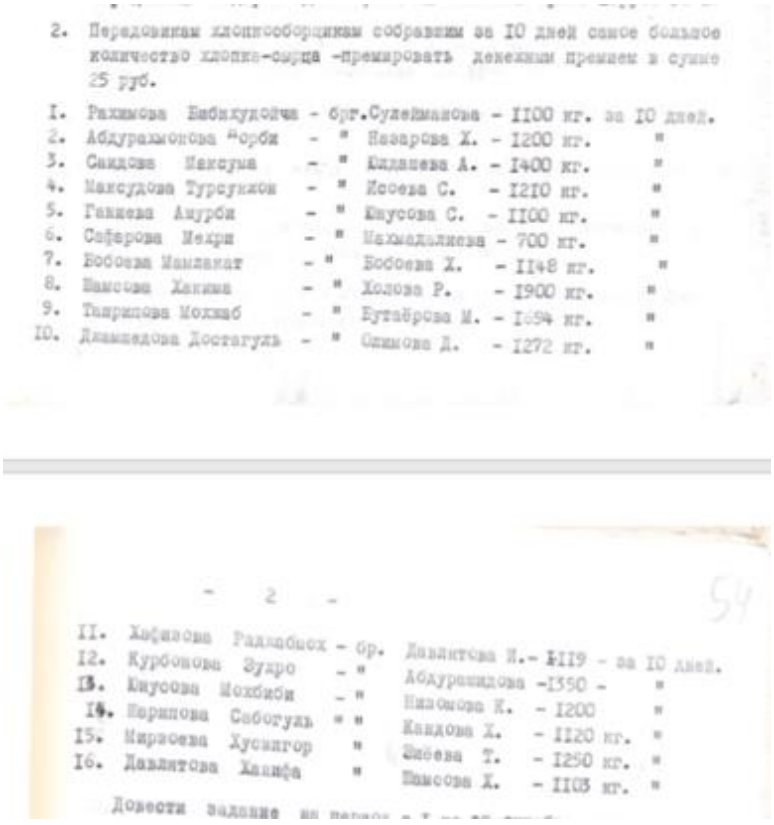


Figure 16. Central Asian female cotton pickers

Furthermore, drivers used sovkhoz cars and trucks to transport private fodder and other goods around the sovkhoz territory on fuel paid by the sovkhoz. For example, in May and June of 1981 sovkhoz fuel use was reported 2.4 tons above the limit and the sovkhoz garage work was audited. The investigation showed that the speedometers on many vehicles were broken making it impossible to calculate the mileage. Some of the vehicles were reported missing from the garage and instead parked in front of drivers' homes.[225]

Some archival documents portray sovkhoz drivers as above the law. In 1978 eight drivers from Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo, all native men, were caught off-route by the traffic police for violating traffic rules and using service vehicles for personal errands. The drivers received a warning (*strogoie preduprezhdenie*) and were invited to explain themselves at a meeting of the

[225] FTsGA RT Ghissar F. 208, Op. 2, "Proizvodstvennyie Prikazy.", p. 31.

workers' committee. The same year five other drivers were accused of grabbing 1412 kilograms of mixed fodder (*kombikorm*) which had been produced by the sovkhoz to supply its dairy farm. The investigators charged the drivers a total of 140 rubles, withheld from the drivers' wages. Without denying the findings, the drivers petitioned the workers' committee that the kombikorm was stolen more than one and a half years before the investigation and the money was withheld unlawfully. The committee sustained their demand and reimbursed the money.[226] In contrast, other workers did not enjoy such privileges and were often fined for damages or disciplinary violations. For example, in 1981, five milkmaids, two brigadiers, one herdsman, and one nightguard were fined between 80 and 10 percent of their bonuses for different violations of work discipline (*narusheniie trudovoĭ distsipliny*) such as absenteeism, not meeting report deadlines, producing below plan targets, etc.

It may appear at first that workers dealing with the machinery had monopolized material and infrastructural resources for their sole benefit and the manual and less qualified workers were the underdogs. A closer look at sovkhoz documents and state anxieties at the time reveals a very different picture. Cottage farming and cattle ownership was legalized in the USSR after WWII and were, on average, 70 percent more productive and profitable than collective or state farming.[227] Memories of private farming and trading were ubiquitous in Sharora's collective memory.[228] People recall profiting from orchards and gardens, cows, sheep and goats, rabbits, and various kinds of poultry chickens, geese, ducks, and turkeys. The products of farming were consumed daily, conserved, or sold at Sharora's marketplace. The main challenge of private farming was the lack of usable land (*malozem'e*) in Tajikistan as the best of the arable irrigated and rain-fed

[226] d. 4 FTsGA RT Ghissar F. 208, Op. 2, "Protokoly Zasedanii Rabochego Komiteta," n.d., p. 37.
[227] Nikonov, *Spiral' Mnogovekovoi Dramy: Agrarnaia Nauka i Politika Rossii (XVIII-XX Vv.)*.
[228] Babaeva, "Conversation with the Author on July 27, 2020."Galina Babaeva, "Conversation with the Auhtor on February 16." (Sharora 2020).

territories were cultivated by Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo and its experimental farms and always guarded. As a result, securing fodder was a daily battle for Sharora's peasants. The abovementioned episode with *kombikorm* theft was routine if not systemic. A testimony of the Turgunovs family is a good case in point. While none of the family members worked in the agricultural sector or fodder production in SD, the family held a few dozens of chickens and fed them a steady supply of *kombikorm*, and enjoyed an output of up to 40 eggs a day.[229] The daily supply of eggs produced in Sharora not only satisfied the natural demand of the residents but was also traded for other foodstuffs and offered as a treat at communal feasts by Christians and Muslims alike.[230]

Figure 17. Dzhura Kuziev and his son with an unusually large number of eggs posing in front of Turgunov's home.

[229] "Anvar Turgunov Correcpondence with the Author," n.d. It is very likely that the head of Turgunov's family secured access to kombikorm through his close friendship with Dzhura Kuziev, the employee of the komikorm workshop.

[230] Colored eggs were given out to children for trick-o-treating during Orthodox Easter and Muslim Idi ramazon. Sharora's residents recall preparing and giving out 500-600 painted eggs during Easter and Idi Ramazon.

Land grabbing was a widespread phenomenon in land-poor Tajikistan to the extent that in 1976 the republican authorities legislated measures against the practice of illicit land appropriation (*samovolinyi zahvat zemli*).[231] According to the sovkhoz documents, in 1977 two individuals, Ramazonov and Berdyiev were charged with land grabbing yet the measures taken against them were not specified.[232] Peasants were also implicated in keeping their private livestock in sovkhoz herds (*soderzhanie lichnogo skota v sovkhoznom stade*), fed, pastured, and reared at the state expense thereby minimizing the cost of holding livestock at home and maximizing their profit from meat and dairy.[233] To surmise, the informal and formal economies in sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo were interdependent, while peasants were taking advantage of the sovkhoz resources such as land, irrigation, fertilizers, fodder, and infrastructure, they also enjoyed a healthy and stable market for their products and the overall satisfaction with life quality in the countryside.

Sovkhoz budget was also burdened with the social welfare of its workers and sponsored their leisure, entertainment, and various contingencies. Workers' committee annually sent 8-10 workers to resorts in Tajikistan (Zumrad, Obigarm, Karatag) and abroad (Sochi, Esentuki, Yurmala), allocated salaries for two cultural workers at the Klub, sponsored a self-organized band and Sharora sports teams, paid for new year celebrations *novogoniaia ëlka* at 13 schools and kindergartens listed in sovkhoz accounts, and presented gifts and cash to the WWII veterans. Additionally, the sovkhoz chairman received weekly requests for financial assistance from current and former sovkhoz workers and people somehow associated with them. The assistance averaged around 100 rubles and, in most cases, was requested to alleviate difficult life circumstances or family needs *tiazholoe semeĭnoe polozhenie*. In some of the petitions, financial assistance was requested for funerals, medical treatment, and lack of income. The word poverty was never used.

[231] d. 2 FTsGA RT Ghissar F. 208, Op. 2, "Proizvodstvennye Prikazy," 1977.
[232] Ibid.
[233] Ibid. p. 48.

Significantly, sovkhoz was an important center of local power and exerted much influence in mediating conflicts among peasants and workers and sometimes in covering up the crimes they committed. For example, in 1977 chief engineer of the sovkhoz Kholikov R. was under investigation by the district procuracy for the case of forging invoices and illicitly appropriating spare parts and tires for his car for a total of 366.51 rubles.[234] From the further documents of the sovkhoz archive, it appears that Kholikov not only was never punished or reprimanded for this embezzlement but instead was promoted and figured as a deputy chairman of the sovkhoz. Similarly, it was not only the senior management who could get away with crime but also ordinary workers and Sharora residents. For example, in 1978, Sharipov Nazarali attempted to steal some peaches from the sovkhoz-owned orchard. A guard named Ortyk Kurbonov stood on the way of the offender and lost two teeth in a rock fight defending the fruit. The case was heard in the workers' court (*tovarisheskiĭ sud*) and no legal action followed. Similarly, a certain Niyazov Shukhrat got drunk in Sharora's *bufet* and got into a brawl with the local policeman. The case was shelved after a reprimand. A registry from Sharora's local police office (*uchastkovyi*) did not mention any of the cases described above. The former head of law enforcement testified that sovkhoz management had more power than the law enforcers and, unlike the law-enforcers without a warrant, could even search peasants' and workers' houses when suspecting theft of fodder, equipment, or fuel, yet such illicit activities were hardly ever taken to administrative or criminal courts.[235]

To surmise, in the 1970s and 80s the workforce of the Late Socialist Sovkhoz in Tajikistan was predominantly native Tajik with Europeans occupying only a slim portion of highly specialized jobs. One can call the economic situation in Sharora during this period as communism

[234] FTsGA RT Ghissar F. 208, Op. 2, "Proizvodstvennye Prikazy.", p. 7.
[235] Odinaev, "Conversation with the Author on March 19."

for native men because it was them who maximized their economic gains, both licit and illicit, and enjoyed corporate protection of sovkhoz. Archival evidence shows that the income of European professionals was limited to high wages for comfortable office jobs while native women only received low wages and bonuses for hard manual labor such as weeding and picking cotton. These two categories never figure in investigations on scheming, negligence, embezzlement, landgrabs, pilfering, or surcharges (*pripiski*).

3.4. Interethnic Conflicts at Work

While both oral and written sources recall relations between various parts of Sharora community as interethnic peace and internationalist friendship there is also memory of interethnic tensions and grudges among European and Russophone Sharorians towards their native Tajik colleagues and neighbors. Sharora's Europeans incriminated Tajiks with violation of communist ethics (*moral'*) and lack of integrity at work (*trudovaia distsiplina*). Russophone Venera Sadykovna, who had worked in Sharora school #14 since 1962 as a math teacher and vice principal in the 1980s praised her European colleagues in an unusually long and detailed tirade, listing their names, classes taught, and summarizing their achievements:

> I was fortunate to work with amazing teachers: Nina Sergeevna, who came from Astrophysics, taught Russian language and literature. Domogatskaya Svetlana Alexandrovna also taught Russian language and literature, as did Valentina Mikhailovna Sultanova. Maya Yakovlevna gave wonderful lessons, and Bodzhikova Emma Ashotovna taught Russian in Tajik classes. Even though it was primary school, her students could already speak the language. Tsygolnikova Natalya Alexandrovna was also an excellent teacher. There were so many Russian language and literature teachers because they also taught in Tajik classes, and there were many of those. Marya Mikhailovna Kalintseva taught English or German, and in the old school, she taught chemistry. Her husband, Nikolai Matveevich Kolentsev, taught history. He was once the school's principal, but they removed him—not by his will—and replaced him with another woman who wasn't a specialist. She didn't last long, and principals started changing every two to three years. Thanks to the good teachers who put in effort, our school ranked second in the district, after the Krupskaya School. Our students often won second and sometimes first places in

competitions (academic olympiads). Some of their works are still kept in the Hissar Museum. In general, the school had a great reputation.[236]

Although reluctantly, Venera Sadykovna changed the tone when she shared her experiences with Tajik teachers who were all men. In her testimony Venera complained about Tajik teachers' absenteeism, negligencee, incompetence, fraud and lack of discipline:

> I don't know if I should talk about this, but during the cotton-picking season, our students were forced to go to the fields from around September 20th until almost the end of November to pick cotton. Inspectors from the district education department were sent to monitor the work. One of these inspectors, a former physical education teacher, didn't do his job but would come to eat and drink vodka provided by the principal. At that time, I was the vice principal. One day, I took the students to the Kyrgyz brigade to pick cotton. Just as we arrived, the school principal, Kanoatov, started yelling at the brigade leader, E. Lalayev, "Brew some tea!" I'm not a patient person, but I'm fair. Even though the principal outranked me, I said, "Did you come here to drink tea? Let's first assign the students to the rows, distribute the teachers across the field to supervise them, and then you can have tea." Of course, the principal didn't like this, nor did the inspector, who was expecting breakfast. It was difficult for me to work with teachers in the Tajik classes. Not all of them were conscientious, and some didn't do their jobs. Based on my recommendations, a few were dismissed for lack of knowledge and insufficient qualifications. I was exhausted. After every conflict, I wanted to quit. The principal even suggested I write a resignation letter. Whenever I demanded that teachers fulfill their duties, they would complain about me to the principal. We had no support, so I eventually left. Nobody worked the way I did. I didn't just sit in the office. When the bell rang, I would run through the hallways to check on everything. Tajik teachers would stand around chatting about their news. Naturally, I would get angry and tell them to go to class. I would peek into classrooms to see what teachers were doing during lessons. There was one case with Dovlatov. He was administering a math test—just a problem and its solution written out. I thought, "This isn't a test!" I looked into the class and saw him leaning on the windowsill, staring outside, while the children were doing who knows what. I walked in and saw what he had given them—this wasn't a proper test. It was a deception. The students weren't learning anything. I suggested he switch to a half-time position to improve his teaching skills. But he lost his house gambling and eventually left. Another case was with Eshmatov, who was teaching sixth-grade math around 1982–1983. The teacher didn't know how to work with decimals or fractions. A student tried to solve a problem, and even the teacher couldn't do it correctly—he made mistakes himself. What kind of teacher is that!? Teaching math like that in sixth grade would ruin the children's mathematical foundation. I wasn't mean; I was demanding. When the bell rang, I would find teachers still sitting in the staff room. "Didn't you hear the bell? The students are waiting for you." Once, I entered a classroom and found elementary school teachers eating during the lesson. They had forced the children to bring them food—flatbread, yogurt, or whatever—and were eating while the students just sat there. One student even

[236] Venera Sadykovna (Conversation with the author), 2020.

> stood with a stick to keep the others from running away. What kind of work was that? It was a betrayal of the state. In general, I was not a convenient vice principal for the administration."

Indeed, Venera Sadykovna was often regarded as a strict and demanding teacher and administrator and one could claim that her experience at school #14 was *ad hoc* and isolated. However, there were similar testimonies from more amiable individuals all incriminating Tajik men with the same wrongs. For example, Alla Babaeva who did field research on cotton agronomy for her doctoral dissertaion and worked on various fields in the Ghissar Valley as a junior scientist in fertilizers. Part of her work involved manual labor collecting soil and cotton samples for chemical analysis. She would work the same hours in the same conditions with native women and noticed that brigadiers, again native men, would either be absent or drink tea on a covered bed (tapchan): "When I worked with those Tajik and Lakai girls our hands were all covered with little cracks and red spots (*tsypki*). The heat was scorching. And our supervisor (*rais*) was drinking tea in the shade."[237]

Even some native men expressed profound frustration with the way Tajik men worked. Nodir Khabibov, lead electric engineer at Ghissar construction company PMK contrasted work ethics of Europeans and natives:

> There was a German section (*uchastok*) where only Germans worked around 1982-1984. This section had its own foreman, who received an additional 10 rubles for the role. If his base salary was 200 rubles, he earned 210 with the extra pay for being a foreman. But the foreman didn't have to push them much. They would go to work, sit for five minutes for a smoke break, get up, do their tasks, and after another hour, they'd take another short break. They completed their work on time, efficiently, and with quality. In contrast, the local sections—Ghissar, Shahrinav, and Ordzhonikidzeabad—where locals [Tajiks] worked, were a different story. Oh, there, the foreman and supervisor had to constantly monitor them. For example, they'd mix a batch of mortar and then disappear. You couldn't find them—one would say he went to the bathroom and return only after an hour and a half. In short, they were lazy. There was even a Soviet slogan: *"Those who want to work will always find a way to do the job, and those who don't will always find an excuse."* The locals always had excuses. At the end of the month, they'd demand their

[237] Babaeva, "Conversation with the Author on July 27, 2020."

> wages, asking, "Why does the German section get paid 300 rubles while we only get 150?" And they were told, "First, go and see how they work." The Germans were exemplary workers. Without supervision, they had a sense of responsibility and tackled their tasks independently. The locals, however, needed constant oversight from the foreman, supervisor, and site master. They also wasted resources—like fuel—because, for example, someone would say, "I left my ruler or template at home," and they'd have to go back and get it. They were cunning, observing how others worked while avoiding their own responsibilities.[238]

Similarly, Imom Sokhibov, lead agronomist at Institut Zemledelia in his oral testimony and memoires recalled near-criminal negligence and carelessness of his Tajik subordinates working experimental fields where Imom tested a scientific hypothesis on alfa alfa cultivation. Sokhibov's hypothesis was that alfa alfa, a perennial plant, yields highest seed harvest on the tenth year and kept his experimental field allocated for alfa alfa for nine years straight. On the tenth year a Tajik mechanizer and tractor driver by mistake ploughed Sokhibov's alfa alfa field discarding his entire research project at the most crucial stage. Imom has held a grudge against the tractorist for more than 50 years as he could neither repeat the experiment nor prove his hypothesis.

Hence, in oral history from Tajik countryside Late Soviet sovkhoz in an ethnically and culturally diverse environment was a site of not only conviviality but also expression of stereotypes and grudges whereby Soviet European women and men claimed the role of guardians of socialism while native men were found pilfering and slacking. This is not to say that all Tajik men followed the pattern of low socialist morale and corruption. But the absence of Europeans among those indited with misdemeanor at work in both archival and oral sources suggests that it was them and a few Russophone natives who maintained the prestige of Soviet workers.

3.5. Housing

Muscovites have been corrupted by the housing issue.
Mikhail Bulgakov

[238] Khabibov, "Conversation with the Author on February 15."

The following subchapter will address the history of housing in Sharora as the most noteworthy socioeconomic good of the Soviet rule and a vital element of everyday life experience in the 20th century. Housing in the USSR was both an achievement demonstrating the advantage of the socialist economy and a curse because housing was an object of local grievances and a measurement of efficiency of Soviet leadership. The pages below explore the various forms of housing available to Sharora residents, their transformation over time, and Sharorians' modes of engagement with their homes.

Socialist housing policies in the Soviet Union and Central Asia during the 20th century were emblematic of the broader socialist project, aiming to provide adequate shelter and promote social equality among citizens. In the context of Tajikistan, socialist housing initiatives were deeply intertwined with the broader Soviet urbanization drive, reflecting a commitment to modernization and industrialization.[239] These policies emphasized mass housing construction, often in the form of standardized apartment blocks, to address housing shortages and accommodate the rapid influx of rural migrants to urban centers.[240] Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, housing and urban planning turned showcase towns into propaganda-sites where high quality of life (*blagoustroiennyĭ*) and modern urban design demonstrated the advantages of socialism and its transformative capabilities targeting not only international audiences of the Third World, but also its domestic constituents, whose loyalty had never been unequivocal.

Soviet housing, still dominating Sharora's townscape today, is a monument of high modernism in Central Asian countryside. The rationalities behind the housing construction outside the cities included the need to depopulate Soviet cities suffering from perennial shortage of

[239] Daria Bocharnikova and Steven E. Harris, "Second World Urbanity: Infrastructures of Utopia and Really Existing Socialism," *Journal of Urban History* 44, no. 1 (January 2018): 3–8.
[240] Jozsef Hegedus, Ivan Tosics, and Bengt Turner, *The Reform of Housing in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (London, New York: Routledge, 2005).

housing and social services, industrializing the countryside by transplanting urban forms of everyday life and culture into rural areas, attracting professional workers, technical intelligentsia, and welfare specialists to places that had suffered from underdevelopment and low quality of life. In other words, communism was to come everywhere and for all Soviet citizens wherever they lived.[241]

Housing and people's relation to their dwellings was one of the most formative everyday life experiences in Sharora. Just like socialist subjects vary from generation to generation, so do socialist homes, reflecting different modes of engagement with and towards the natural environment, the socialist *byt*, capitalism, and preexisting lifeways. Furthermore, access to housing in Sharora reflected settlement patterns and population grouping which often took ethnic terms – Europeans first, natives second, thereby creating inequalities in the quality and location of homes. Finally, housing, and its concomitant materiality produced new affective regimes – modes of engagement between housing their dwellers, resulting in new "sites of social interaction and conflicts, [and] community building.[242]

In the 1930s, when the Ghissar Valley was colonized by the Soviet Europeans, there was no general settlement plan for what would eventually become Sharora as Soviet architects and urban planners did not include countryside into their theorizations. Issues of the most important journal on architecture and planning Arkhitektura SSSR from 1936 through 1954 were not concerned with the countryside. Thus, the early Soviet mode of housing was unregulated and *ad hoc* and it was up to the villagers to decide what, where and how to build. Archival files on Sharora

[241] Artemy Kalinovsky, "NUREK, 'A CITY YOU CAN WRITE ABOUT," in *In Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 117–43.
[242] Alexey Golubev, *The Things of Life: Materiality in Late Soviet Russia* (Cornell University Press, 2020), p. 91, Steven E. Harris, "Soviet Mass Housing and the Communist Way of Life," in *Everyday Life in Russia Past and Present* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), 181–202.

had no documents on construction and planning.[243] The early settlers of Sharora, exiled Soviet Europeans, mostly Slavic peasants, brought with them traditional architecture and design of European parts of Russia and Ukraine and had reproduced housing styles and aesthetics common in their regions of origin — single family homes built of burned bricks, roofed with red tiles, on a land plot of six *sotka* or 600 square meters (see figure 8). Construction of housing in Sharora area used the surrounding environment for materials. Urtaboz plateau aka *bagara* dominating Sharora landscape consists of loam soils and red clay appropriate for brick and tile production and the locals have shared that there was a small brick factory at the foot of the hills in the southern end of the settlement supplying the community with construction materials. According to Sharora residents some of the settlers built their own houses using materiel and sovkhoz workforce, others recall that both apartment buildings and private homes were built by a special construction brigade paid and supplied from the sovkhoz budget.[244]

[243] I specifically checked the GIPROZEM files in GART where such documents should be found.
[244] Add sources from interviews of the Agopovs and Khabibov.

Figure 18: One of the few remaining first houses in Sharora built in the 1930s (photo by the author, January 2020).

It was only in the post-war period when Sharora saw more significant interest in planning and construction from the state. In 1948, the minister of Cotton Production of Tajik SSR Kholmatov, among other things, was also tasked with further betterment of the cultural and living conditions (*kulturno-bytovye usloviya*) for the workers and specialists.[245] This decision was one of the earliest recorded effects on the livelihood in Sharora. Indeed, local sources testify that from 1948 to 1954 there was a significant betterment of the living and working conditions in the area concerned. There were new private family homes as well as vital urban infrastructure including a club, teahouse, school, sovkhoz office, kindergarten and a hospital and "a street lined with modern apartment buildings."[246] Streets still visible on the arial footage of Sharora are marked by regularity pertinent to small European towns with straight streets, sidewalks, and lights. The names of the streets of the Soviet period suggest that the residents took initiative in the toponymy: the street

[245] Iz istorii sovkhoznogo stroitelstva.
[246] Instituti Ziroatkori (Institute Zemledeliya), *80 Soli Pursamar Dar Ilmi Ziroatparvari (Unpublished)*., p. 153.

Aerodromnaya was the nearest to Ayni airfield (*aerodrome*), *Vishnevaya* was the street having a lot of cherry trees (*vishnia* – cherry), *Sadovaya* street was built on the site of an orchard (*sad* — garden or orchard) etc. Furthermore, Sharora itself did not have a name of its own until 1972 and the settlement was called after the economic landmark of the area: Mulzavod, Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo, Institut Zemledelia.

Stalinist era buildings, both in towns and in the countryside were of individual design built to dominate a cityscape. The individuality of buildings of that period is evident in the fact that most of them have names of their own, usually after an architect, an organization, or a famous resident. The first apartment building in Sharora was a two-story block of small flats built of timber and adobe called by the locals either as Finnish house or *Kukushkin dom* (the Cuckoo House). At different times the house hosted a pharmacy, a bookstore and a library, and finally, private apartments. The second generation of proper apartment buildings were two small two-story buildings adjacent to the new building of the Institut Zemledelia built in the mid-1950s.

Figure 19. Kukushkin dom.

In the post-Stalinist period, Khruschev-led CPSU took new approach to architecture epitomized in the oft-cited Resolution of the CC CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the USSR

on the Elimination of Excesses in planning and Construction of 1955.[247] Allegedly a collective legislation, the Resolution was Khrushchev's long list of allegations against architects and construction bureaucrats who "spent millions of rubles on unnecessary archaic embellishments instead of living space." The Resolution stipulated that design for construction of housing and offices must prioritize the "economy of construction, maximize the necessary facilities and utilities for residents of the apartments, schools, hospitals, and other structures, as well as planting of trees and vegetation around living quarters."[248] From 1959 to 1970 Tajikistan boasted 10 million m^2 of housing, 4 million of them in kolkhozes.[249] Another milestone for housing construction in Tajikistan was the launch of cement combine in Dushanbe in 1957 which produced 1,100,000 tons of cement per year and the stunning increase of brick production from 4,000,000 to 200,000,000 per year.[250]

Khrushchev's legacy lived on in Brezhnev era and the famous *Khruschevki* apartment blocks became ubiquitous. What's more, the USSR moved towards granting the right to housing to all Soviet citizens constitutionally. This process started in 1973 when the USSR ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966, which required the signatory member-states to guarantee the "right to a decent standard of living including decent food, clothing and housing, and to continuous improvement of living conditions." The new edition of the USSR Constitution of 1977 fixed the right to housing to all Soviet citizens.[251] In Sharora the construction of its signature blocks of flats (*etazhki* or *seksia*) began in earnest in the late 1960s

[247] "Жилищное Законодательство1953-1960 Гг. | Музей Истории Российских Реформ Имени П. А. Столыпина," accessed February 29, 2024, http://museumreforms.ru/node/13867.
[248] Ibid.
[249] M.S. Asimov, *Tadzhikskaia SSR Entsyklopedicheskii Spravochnik* (Dushanbe: Akademiya Nauk Tajikskoi SSR, 1974), 128.
[250] Nazarsho Dodkhudoiev, *Vlast' Vremeni* (Almaty: Daik Press, n.d.)., p. 27.
[251] A.A. Frolov, "The constitutional right to housing in the USSR and in the CIS countries: historical and juridical analysis.," *Law Department of Povolzhskiy cooperative Institute (branch) of Russian University of cooperation*, 2017.

and completed by 1973. To surmise, Sharora's homes represent the three generations of Soviet housing: peasant homes, first urban-style buildings, mass produced Khruschevki each of which, theoretically, offered particular everyday life experiences.

The Soviet government constantly designed and changed its long-term plans to provide all Soviet citizens with adequate housing but could never catch up with the population growth and urbanization rates that demanded more and more housing, especially in Central Asia and Tajikistan. While all Soviet citizens had a right to housing, constitutional expectations and reality did not always match, mainly because the Soviet state had its own view of what Soviet citizenship entailed. Thus, like elsewhere, access to the housing in Sharora was secured through employment.

Figure 20: Khruschevki of Sharora.

Each employer had annual allocations of land plots and construction materials or a pool of apartments (*zhyloĭ fond*) that it distributed among its employees upon request. Many factors determined the quality of housing — worker's qualification, employer's standing in the republican economy and its prestige, the time when an individual or family moved to Sharora. For people, living in Sharora the quality of their housing included not only a house itself, but its location. Although new socialist towns were designed without segregation into "downtown" and "outskirts"

Sharora did have a symbolic center — the interjection of roads connecting Dushanbe-Ghissar and Ghissar-Kurgan-Tiube. This part of Sharora had a market, bakery, *klub*, *bufet*, *univermag, khozmag*, kiosk, bus stop, stadium. Furthermore, people living around the symbolic center had easy access to the school and hospital. The population around the symbolic center were Europeans, Germans, Russians and Ukrainians, Tatars and others, who settled in Central Ghissar Valley between the 1930s and the 1950s. Even though these people were often peasants working for Sovkhoz Stalinabadskiĭ they were first to occupy the central and most urbanized part of Sharora. Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Kyrgyz working the same jobs but arriving in Sharora much later were allotted housing plots near bagara hills and farmlands a distance (20-30-minute walk) away from the symbolic center and on less lucrative land plots. For example, the houses of the neighborhoods at the foot of bagara called Eshoni Devona, and villages Okuli Bolo and Okuli Poyon were built of adobe bricks (*khisht*) and these areas had never have access to potable water and relied on weekly water truck deliveries.

Scientists were given new apartments in a *microraion* adjacent to the Institut Zemliadelia five-minute walk away from the institute, school, market and shops, and hospital. This was the most gentrified part of Sharora no different from any new *microraion* in any Soviet capital — green, spacious, orderly, lit at nights, with two small parks (*polisadnik*) with fountains and recreational and entertainment facilities. Apartments in this area were booked for Institut Zemledelia research staff and important welfare workers. Agricultural scientists with specialist diplomas and doctoral candidacies joined Institut Zemledelia as part of their research projects or nominated by their academic supervisors. Imom Sohibov recalls that in 1957 the first Tajik head of the Institut selected 10 graduates of Tajik University for Agriculture and invited them to work at various departments (see figure 20). All of them were given apartments and cottages near the campus. Employing institutions took some degree of liberty in arranging their workers housing.

Sohibov shared in his interview and autobiography that, until circa 1962 as a young specialist he lived in an old house in Sharora. In 1962 he took a field trip outside Ghissar district and upon his return found his house with doors and windows bricked up and his wife and little daughter nowhere to be found. Dressed ruggedly and dusty after his work in his field he did not dare to go to the institute and decided to go to the teahouse. As he sat over his cup of tea his colleague showed up and demanded a gift for good news (*sevanchi*). "They gave you a great house. Akbar Nusratullaevich himself came and gathered us and we packed and moved whatever there was in your old place. Let's go and I will show you your new home!" Imom could not believe that he had received a house after only one month of employment at the institute. His new residence consisted of two rooms, a small garden, and a porch, and was located 50-60 steps from his workstation.

Some second-tier research staff (*nauchrabotniki*) who were enrolled in graduate and post-graduate studies conducted their fieldwork at the institute and received apartments. Svetlana Riazaeva heard about Zemledelia from her classmate and applied for the position at the laboratory in 1968. At the beginning Svetlana used the Institute's bus service to commute to Sharora from Dushanbe but in 1975 she applied for an apartment and, as a single with no children, received a one-room apartment from the Institute. When Svetlana had her daughter in 1978 she was transferred to a two-room apartment in the neighboring building.

Figure 21: The first native agricultural specialist of Institut Zemledelia in 1958 (source Imom Sohibov)

Nepotism was an acceptable way to get a white-collar job or apartments among Europeans and natives alike. The Institute's favorite agronomist A.B. was characterized by his former colleagues as "a hardworking specialist and a pure soul." He was among the first native specialists to organize Tajikistan's rainfed agriculture for grains and legumes. He reserved for himself a humble apartment near the campus, but when his daughter G.B. moved to Sharora in the early 1970s he got her a job as a junior research assistant even though she did not have a degree in agriculture. When G.B. married off she received a three-room apartment where she lived with her husband, her mother, and her two children. When in 1986 G.B. gave birth to her third child she received a four-room apartment (the largest number of rooms by Soviet standards) to allow each family member sufficient space. In 1984 both Svetlana Riazaeva, mentioned earlier, and G.B.

transferred to School #14 as a chemistry teacher and lab assistant respectively, but both kept their apartments granted by Institut Zemledelia.[252]

Furthermore, in 1973 another woman, a recent graduate of Tajik University for Agriculture A.S. moved to Sharora where her father worked for the construction company building apartment buildings. She befriended G.B. and fell in love with her brother. The agronomist A.B. found A.S. a job at the Institute and supplied (*ustroil*) the newlywedded with a two-room apartment. Despite their privileged position and benefits they received thanks to nepotism, all the individuals described here have proved their value and commitment to Sharora community and socialist agriculture more broadly. For Soviet workers, particularly to Soviet Europeans living in Central Asia, integrity and allegiance to Socialist project were essential life values.

The prevailing knowledge about Soviet housing claims that housing distributed by the Soviet government had created notable inequalities —modern apartment buildings located in and around the symbolic center of Sharora occupied by high-value specialists and welfare workers offered better access to utilities and social infrastructure.[253] Oral history from Sharora indicates the existence of "invisible boundaries" separating showcase areas populated by Europeans from more rural native neighborhoods thereby excluding and marginalizing peasants and blue-collar workers. During a group interview with Sharora residents, one 45-year-old man, a high school graduate in the late 1980s called Sharora's central area "a white ghetto with *kishkak* around it."[254]

Yet this unequal access to modernity did not always translate into economic inequality. Outside the formally socialist economy, housing was a vital economic resource for informal

[252] According to the Resolution of the Supreme Soviet of 10.9.1953 Soviet citizens could retain their apartments provided by employers even after termination of the working relations.
[253] Gregory D. Andrusz, *Housing and Urban Development in the Soviet Union* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002); L. M. Grigoriev and V. A. Pavlyushina, "Economic Inequality in the USSR: Myths and Reality," *Russian Journal of Economics* 5, no. 1 (2019): 49–65; Jane R. Zavisca, *Housing the New Russia: Space, Place, and Inequality* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).
[254] Group interview with Vakhid, Rahmon, Firuz, Anvar, Samandar, 2020.

economic activity consisting of land, water, animals, plants, traditional crafts, and food processing.[255] Distance between homestead and pasture, and irrigation canal, to quote one example, was decisive for a household's financial prosperity because animals could be fed and watered and a private plot irrigated with ease and away from the watchful eye of authorities, in a few hours and not impede formal work at the state farm or school attendance.[256] Hence, although imaginary boundaries within socialist settlements had always existed people cast into one lifeway, or another found ways to benefit from resources available to them. There was also a liminal space between the town and kishlak where residents hybridized their dwellings — these houses combined features of modem apartments and rural homes (*khavli*). A typical cottage surrounding the central neighbourhood had running water, outdoor and indoor kitchens hooked to natural gas pipes, and lined along asphalt roads. However, none of them were hooked to canalization and relied on dugout toilets. The interiors of these houses simulated the ones of modern Soviet (European apartments) with furniture sets (*garnitur*), television and radio sets, fashionable posters (*plakat*) of movie stars and singers, bookshelves with popular Soviet and foreign fiction. The so-called modern apartments often underwent restructuring to accommodate the lifestyles of former peasants. Visiting Sharorians' homes during the fieldtrip I have seen multiple examples of what could be termed *makhalaization* of apartments: some families would transform their balconies into verandas with trestle beds (*tapchan*) to host traditional Muslim *dastarkhan* seating, expensive and luxuriant carpets would be hung on the walls as a display, while the floors would be covered by simpler rugs (*palas*), first floor apartments would claim small plots of land in front of their windows for small-scale gardening and even farming poultry (see earlier subchapters), families with daughters would devote a section of a room for traditional Tajik *sanduk* — a chest with dowry

[255] Abashin, *Sovetskiy Kishlak Mezhdu Kolonizatsyei i Modernizatsyei*, 2015., pp. 248-252
[256] Here I have summarized daily routine of native children and women who described their everyday life and sources of subsistence where cottage farming and husbandry took a notable place.

for a bride-to-be and a pile a *kurpacha* (mats and thick blankets) that her family would be hand-making or buying for several years.

People living in Sharora in the Soviet period had diverging attitudes towards their housing. Modern apartments were a natural limit to birthrates and there is a notable correlation between the type of housing and the number of children in a family. Micro census of Sharora population of the 1970s through the 1990s shows that the number of children in families residing in apartments ranged from one to three, while families living in individual homes in the outskirts, mostly natives, ranged from four to eight children.[257] Hence, residents of the apartment buildings could afford a comfortable lifestyle and reap some of the fruits promised by Socialism such as leisure time and activities, traveling, cultural activity and sports, reading and even fiction writing (see next subchapter) while families living in the rural part of Sharora were effectively tied to their subsistence economy unable to leave their animals and plants for more than a day and turning every family member into workforce. During one group interview I witnessed a debate among Afghan war veterans, men in their 50s an 60s, living in different parts of Sharora each defending his type of housing. In response to his friend's boasting the benefits of living in an apartment one man said: "How can you live in such a place where you shit three meters away from where you eat?" One thing is certain, during the Soviet period people living in Sharora demonstrated high degree of satisfaction with their homes, cottages and apartments alike. There was no evidence of striving to leave Sharora and move to Dushanbe. On the contrary, overwhelmingly my respondents would give up their apartments in Dushanbe to live in Sharora.

As elsewhere in the Soviet Union some people in Sharora failed to secure housing and joined the ranks of the Soviet homeless (*bomzhi — bez opredelionnogo mesta zhitelstva*). Soviet

[257] Many native respondents reported having up to 10 children. Some families killed in Sharora earquake had 12-14 members.

law criminalized homelessness as *brodiazhnichestvo*.[258] Because of the criminal nature of the situation of homelessness and the regime of migration that necessitated life on the move (see chapter 1) many people suffered hidden homelessness. O.S. left her previous place of work in Khorog in the late 1960s to Sharora where her husband A.B. worked as an agronomist. She got a job as a secretary and typist at the same Institute. She divorced her husband because of his drinking and promiscuity and moved to her daughter's. Her humble position at the institute did not allow her to receive a state apartment. Similarly, her son Vadim, fresh out of the army in 1970 had not had a long-term job or a place of residence anywhere in the USSR and was de facto homeless until he married A.S. and moved in with her. N.D. had lost both her husband and her son and over several decades lived alone until she took in her friend and colleague from Dushanbe who had no apartment of her own (no detailed explanation was offered). Native families with large number of children suffered hidden homelessness because the square footage in their homes did not pass Soviet standards — 9 m^2 per person. Thus 6-8 children living in two or three small rooms of a peasant house in their teen age were effectively homeless. Sharora resident Tajik man T. K. petitioned his place of work Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo for an apartment as his married son, two unmarried sons, and 4 daughters lived with their parents in a house of four small rooms.

Housing in Sharora had both contributed to building and undermined an international society. As Steven Harris has argued in his microhistory of everyday life in Soviet mass housing projects "the shortcomings of this grand experiment in urban planning and social engineering opened a space for ordinary people to create community in ways that either presaged or adhered to the discourse on the communist way of life whereby citizens would take over the functions of

[258] See Ukaz Verkhoznogo Soveta "O merakh borby s antiobshestvennymi, paraziticheskimi elementami" ot 25 iulia 1951 goda, UK RSFSR st. 209 "sistematicheskoie zaniatie brodiazhnichestvom ili poproshainichestvom", Andrey Sergeevich Berkutov and Elena Vladimirovna Kravchenko, "Fighting with Vagrancy in USSR during the 1950–1960 Years," *Filosofia Prava* 2, no. 75 (2016): 104–11.

the state and live with their neighbors in a harmonious social order."[259] While still inferior in quality and availability to the housing in the West the Soviet housing program, when compared to the pre-Soviet situation and the one in the Third World is a remarkable achievement.[260] While failing its residents on the daily basis, when apartments given for free but never fully maintain by the state, when apartment owners depended on external handymen and workmen for fixing and repairing, Soviet housing has contributed to the Soviet policy of internationalism in unintended ways by serving as a place of interaction, cohabitation, and hybridization of everyday lives.[261]

3.6. Leisure

He is the man of the people, but he is also a man.
(A quote about Nikita Khrustchev from Stanley Kubrick's film).

In any industrial society labor and leisure are tightly intertwined — leisure is not only a reward for labor, but, in a sense, is also an extension of labor because leisure reinforces [workers'] "competence as credible consumers and reliable workers."[262] A Soviet man manifests himself and herself not only in work but also off work. Leisure in the Soviet Union was as important as work and political activity — organized, civilized, and cultured ways to spend time off work were important markers of modernity and one of the achievements and advantages of the socialist order. Contemporary observers of Soviet everyday life have noted that by the mid 1960s Soviet leisure

[259] Harris, "Soviet Mass Housing and the Communist Way of Life."
[260] Katherine B. Eaton, *Daily Life in the Soviet Union*, The Greenwood Press "Daily Life through History" Series (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2004), pp. 153-174.
[261] Through the 1980s Tajik SSR, where population growth was most rapid in the USSR, experienced housing crisis that inspired much of criticism of Soviet authorities during perestroika and even expressed itself in street violence and unrest in the 1990s. In response to the crisis the Soviet government developed a comprehensive housing program *Zhilye 93* (Housing 93) to increase the housing stock available to citizens, decentralize and partly privatize housing, and support local initiatives and experiments promising faster and cheaper construction technologies. While the program yielded successes in many parts of the Soviet Union it failed spectacularly in Tajikistan where it did not fully alleviate the persistent shortages and families still faced long waiting times for adequate housing. See "Zhilishnaia Programma Delo Vsenarodnoie. IX PLenum TsK Kompartii Tadzhikistana," *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, September 28, 1988.
[262] Chris Rojek, *The Labour of Leisure: The Culture of Free Time* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2010), p. 2.

was in many ways compatible with Western forms of leisure and recreation and included sports, culture broadly defined, eating and drinking out, camping and beaches, reading, watching television and listening to the radio, arts and crafts.[263] Soviet people could choose between what David Crowley and Susan Reid have termed regulated leisure associated with "compulsory happiness and official optimism" or invent their own pleasures, little and big.[264] Leisure, like many other forms of everyday life in the USSR had its own regimes and repertoires and displayed regional and national variations. What was an acceptable and available form of pastime in European parts of the Soviet Union could be unacceptable and unavailable in others. Hence, the following subchapter explores the formation of regimes and repertoires of leisure in Soviet Sharora within the larger Soviet context and as part of the Tajik nation-making and investigate the tensions and acceptance of still surviving pre-Soviet and new Soviet pastimes.

There is no systematic evidence about forms of leisure in the Ghissar Valley, or Tajikistan for that matter, before the Soviet period. Most likely modern ideas of organized vacation time and economy of leisure did not exist until the post-war decades. There was no infrastructure for modern leisure as we know it and leisure was a privilege of propertied classes.[265] In the past Central Asians and European peasants alike had little time outside daily toil with the rare exception of life cycle events such as weddings, initiation ceremonies, funerals and other such occasions for merriment or grief outside of routine but at the same time required significant effort from the community. *Khizmat*, Tajik for serving or helping, was a social practice of volunteering and catering for community gatherings among young men (*khizmatchi*) in which the kind of work one does

[263] Jeremy R. Azrael, "Notes on Soviet Urban Attitudes toward Leisure," *Social Problems* 9, no. 1 (July 1961): 69–78.
[264] David Crowley and Susan Emily Reid, eds., *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2010), pp. 4-5.
[265] Some of the earliest observations of leisure among Tajik peasants have been made by Shyshov, *Tajiki Etnograficheskoe i Antropologicheskoe Issledovanie*.

depended on his social status (teenage boys would wait tables, young unmarried men were in charge of prepping food for cooking, peeling and cutting vegetables, attending to fire under pots and samovars, ritualistic pouring water for guests to wash hands *dastshui*, a master of ceremony (*tuichi*) would manage their work, give orders, and welcome guests. Everyone in the community would be somehow employed according to talent — wrestlers challenge one another, mullahs, eshons, or hojjis would pray, khofiz would entertain with songs, poetry, or dance, women prepared takeaway gifts. Traditional forms of leisure could last several days: wedding three days, funeral feast (*maraca* or *khudo"i*) were given on the 3rd, 7th, and the 40th day after funeral and one year after a funeral, *tui* or boys' circumcision and initiation ceremony took one full day, Muslim holidays Idi Ramazon took 3 days and Idi Qurbon 1 day, Nawruz took one day. All of these holidays and occasions were a mixture of leisure and work and according to the testimonies of Sharorians there has never been a shortage of feasts.[266] In most cases traditional occasions necessitated travel of family, relatives, and close friends from other regions and stay with the hosts as part of *zoiorat* (visiting) or *mehmoni* (being guests). Such trips would take up to several days and constitute a form of leisure.

It should be noted that leisure in the sense of idle pastime outside of life cycle events was frowned upon as idleness (*bekori*). The conservative part of the native population preferred each and every family member to be productive all year around and viewed leisure as a short road to other vices. Native women were particularly discouraged to participate in collective and individual leisure activities and female family members of my respondents denied having ever taken up sports and traveling for tourism. Some kind of traditional pastime could be flaneurship like attending weekly consumer or livestock bazaars (bozori or tamosho) not with the goal to buy something but

[266] Sergey Abashin, *Sovetskiy Kishlak Mezhdu Kolonizatsyei i Modernizatsyei*, 2015, Ocherk Sedmoi Mahallia, Mahallia v Oshobe, Mahallia Tui, pp. 294-306.

simply to see what is on the market and be seen by other villagers. Even a simple stroll would not be an accessible way to spend time as Tajik villages are not designed for idle walking or congregation and whenever free, native men and women would sit or stand in front of their homes hoping for an acquaintance or a relative to pass by and share news and gossips.

In the post-war period, leisure activities were ubiquitous and nearly mandatory in all corners of the Soviet world[267] and increasingly resembled those forms of leisure and recreation familiar in the West.[268] Sharora had gone through what contemporary observers proclaimed "leisure revolution."[269] Sharora has material and immaterial traces of all possible elements of socialist leisure experience, both very basic and more sophisticated, such as hobbies, sports, tourism and recreation, entertainment, culture, and simply doing nothing. The regimes of leisure implied heavy state presence and control over leisure activities and privileged European forms of pastime. The year 1956, when Instiut Zemledelia campus and its beautified environ were completed in Sharora was an important threshold in the history of leisure. Soviet-style cultured leisure (*kulturnyi dosug*) and "cultural enlightenment" were concentrated in Sharora *klub*[270] built in 1956; competitive collective sports such as football and volleyball took place at the stadium and Sharora had its own youth football team composed of children of the Institute's and sovkhoz workers playing teams from other *posëlki* and 5-6 small teams representing their neighborhoods. Sports in Sharora were not only exercise but also a spectacle as those who played also entertained the audience. It is noteworthy that in the 1970s and 1980s the choice of sports and games in Sharora and other small towns were spontaneous and unpredictable thanks to the drawbacks of the Soviet

[267] Anne White, *De-Stalinization and the House of Culture: Declining State Control over Leisure in the USSR, Poland, and Hungary, 1953-89* (London: Routledge, 1990)
[268] Azrael, "Notes on Soviet Urban Attitudes toward Leisure."
[269] Lawrence Whetten, "Leisure in the Soviet Union," *Challenge*, April 1, 1960.
[270] On workers clubs and houses of culture see White, *De-Stalinization and the House of Culture*; Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "The Shaping of Soviet Workers' Leisure: Workers' Clubs and Palaces of Culture in the 1930s," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 56 (1999): 78–92.

retail and supply system. One winter Sharora's *univermag* offered hockey-sticks and pucks for sale and for several seasons Sharora youth played hockey inspired by the USSR-Canada Super Series of 1972. Another summer the same *univermag* brought roller skates and nearly all the children took to roller skating. However, with no spare parts and roads unfit for skating all the skates broke down within a year and Sharora children had to wait for another sport or game to arrive.

There were three long streets for strolling (*guliat'*) and several roofed *besedka*[271] with benches for fellow-workers and neighbors to congregate. Sharorians remember that they strolled and socialized for up to 5 hours every weekday. Remarkably, in social media posts and oral history about leisure in Sharora there are no recollections about the official and ideological forms of leisure (*obshestvenno-politicheskie i kulturnye meropriiatia*). The regimes of leisure introduced by the state gave birth to a plethora of individual and collective repertoires of leisure. Sharora *klub* serving as a liminal space between the official and unofficial, public and private, Soviet and Western is but one example. The *klub* had the main audience room for screening films and performing music and smaller rooms for music classes and rehearsals. A certain Kudrat is remembered as the man in charge of music clubs and performances. He engaged several teenagers from Sharora school, two of whom also played for Sharora football team, and formed an amateur band with a soloist Roza Kanafina, drummer Guram Zhvania, two guitarists Sabit Kanafin and Gena Gulmitdinov, and Tolik Zakharov on trumpet. The band members recall that drums and trumpets were available with other standard orchestra instruments at the Sharora klub but there were no electric guitars, bass and rhythm. Genadiy has recalled that: "Sabit and I made the bass guitar during crafts class at school in Ivan Nikonorovich Vetkin's workshop."[272] Roza has shared that the band made another

[271] *Besedka* is a roofed structure on support columns with no walls typical for parts and gardens. The word comes from the Russian besedovati or converse.
[272] In Soviet school it was called *trud* (labor) class.

guitar at their home "while parents were at work." The band's repertoire included songs from popular animation films such as *Bremenskie muzykanty*, Soviet heats such as *Sinii lion*, and now Western classics Venus by Shocking Blue.[273] In the 1970s the band was mature enough to perform at weddings and dance parties at restaurants thereby privatizing their hitherto social role as workers' entertainers and reap material benefits of their talent: "We played at weddings at the restaurant Badakhshon, at Jewish weddings. They paid well."[274] In addition to live music, listening to records was an important part of cultured leisure. In Sharora, a must-have collection of vinyl records in the 1970s would include not only Soviet stars such as Alla Pugacheva, Yurii Antonov, Pesniary, Vesëlye Rebiata, but also Central Asian ensembles Yalla with Faruh Zakirov, and Western bands The Beatles, Abba, Boney M, Dschinghis Khan.[275]

[273] The band had no idea what the lyrics of the song were and simply transliterated the title as Shizgaris. The typical way to acquire lyrics of foreign in the USSR was to write them down by ear into a notebook (*pesennik*) which, without knowledge of foreign languages, always led to corrupted texts.
[274] Gulmitdinov Genadii, Correspondence with the author, 2020; Guram Zhvania, Correspondence with the author, 2020; Roza kanafina, Correspondence with the author., 2020.
[275] I found some of these records in Sharora homes. Others were invoked in conversations, correspondence, social media posts.

Figure 22. (Top) Sharora band circa 1970, (bottom) Sharora football team circa 1960.

From the 1960s onwards Sharora experienced individualization of leisure manifested in arts and crafts, reading and mass media consumption at home. As was mentioned earlier one of the earliest buildings in Sharora was a bookstore. There was also a kiosk with newspapers and magazines in the central part of the *posëlok*. Soviet denizen of Sharora read Russian classics, Soviet literature, Western translations, English, American, French, and German classics, and Russian translations of Persephone poetry, Umar Hayaam being the favorite. Some hobbies required specialized literature. Svetlana Riazaeva loved knitting and sewing and subscribed to European periodical Burda Moden which was available in the USSR since the late 1950s and in 1986 came in Russian edition. The magazine contained patterns and techniques for fashionable clothing designs. Another specialized magazine for the countryside was *Krestianka* (peasant woman or girl)

Figure 23. Soviet book collection in a Sharora apartment.

Collectorship was perhaps even more popular. During the fieldtrip I found collections of minerals, coins such as large Olympic Rubles, badges, empty cans of Western sodas and beers, and empty cigarette packs. Some hobbies combined collectorship and crafts as Sharora youth could transform a cigarette pack into a jet model (see illustration below).

Figure 24. Jets made of cigarette packs.

A significant element of everyday leisure in Sharora and generally in the USSR was partying at home[276] — *khodit' v gosti* in Russian or *mehmoni* in Tajik — a special dinner for colleagues, neighbors, or close friends, often accompanied by dancing. Partying at home could coincide with public holidays such as New Year, May Day, Victory Day or be a personal occasion such as wedding, birthday, job promotion, return from the army, graduating from a university and so on. Oftentimes *mehmoni* was completely spontaneous or timed to paycheck day (*poluchka*). The number of guests attending such parties could range from one individual guest to as many as could fit around a table or *dastarkhan*. Central Asian home parties played an important social role in crossing national, cultural, confessional, and other borders with food and drinks being the principal lubricant of the process. In the past Central Asian cuisine and food culture was not as spectacular and fragrant as it appears today. All food was divided into everyday meals and holiday dishes. Everyday food in peasant households consisted of bread and tea, seasonal vegetarian soups such as *otalla*, *sialaf*, and Spring special *mantu* or *sambusa* stuffed with alpine herbs *kabudi*, bean dishes *mastoba* or *lobio*, in southern Tajikistan *qurutob* was a daily meal and in the Pamirs *shirchoi*, a mix of strong black tea, milk, butter, and salt is still consumed every day. In rare cases when cooking oil was available a family could enjoy stir fried potatoes and butter squash called *kadubirion*. Wealthy families could afford weekly *gusht birion* or fried meat. An ersatz plov called *shavlia* was made of small amount meat, beans and mosh or mungo beans, and cheap rice. Special meals for celebrations in most cases included soup *shurbo* and Central Asian signature — *plov*. Even on special occasions unusual or unexpected meals were not offered to surprise or impress guests as something rare and unique. Every wedding, funeral, tui feast served the same traditional

[276] Katherine B. Eaton, *Daily Life in the Soviet Union*, The Greenwood Press "Daily Life through History" Series (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2004), pp. 258-266.

hot meals, snacks, salads, and sweets. The challenge for chefs was to impress the guests with a hidden innovation or secret recipe for the same meals to make them as delicious as possible.

European settles brought with them their traditional dishes as well as new ways to preserve food. Ukrainian and Russian *borsh*, *varenniki*, *pelmeni*, chicken noodle soup *lapsha*, stuffed cabbage leaf *golubtsy*, stuffed paprika *bolgarskii perets*, an endless variety of sweet and savory pies cherry, apricot, apple pies, cabbage pie *kapustnik*, chicken pie *kurnik*, and European homemade desserts honey cake *medovik* and thin pancakes *bliny* with sour cream, jams, honey, condensed milk and so on. It is noteworthy that before the Soviet period Tajiks never consumed mushrooms due to complete lack of knowledge about edible and poisonous species. Europeans of Sharora hunted mushrooms restlessly and discovered an edible variety of tree mushroom *veshanki* (lat. *Pleurotaceae*) that flourished on mulberry frees cultivated for silkworm farming. *Veshanki* stir fried with onions and potatoes oozed an irresistible rich aroma and natives slowly began to hunt mushrooms either for their own consumption or for market. Similarly, the culture of conserving food, jams and pickled vegetables was not known in the Ghissar Valley. Tajiks still today have no word for jam or pickled vegetables in their colloquial language and simply call them *vareny* and *salëny*. Every Slavic housewife had her own recipe for sauerkraut, canned jams and pickled tomatoes and cucumbers and owned a special key for sealing glass pots *zakrutka*. The consumption of *zakrutka* was so significant that it often caused seasonal republic-wide shortage of sugar, vinegar, jars and jar lids and other supplies. Thanks to proximity of European and native households, culture of sharing food with neighbors, attending each other's celebrations and parties, and more importantly engaging in mixed marriages resulted in wide adoption and hybridization of food culture. For example, while Europeans' home parties might not invite large numbers of native guests, orthodox funeral feast *pominki* were open to many neighbors and colleagues of a diseased sometimes several dozens of people attending the 3rd, 7th, 40th day and anniversary feasts.

Standard *pominki* would serve substantial selection of cold and pickled snacks, sliced sausage and cheese, seasonal salads, traditional sweet rice kasha with raisins *kutia*, a soup of choice chicken noodle soup or borsh both served with sour cream and finely chopped greens, pancakes. Sweet berry *kompot* was served as a beverage and three shots of vodka without clinging were mandatory to complete the ceremony. While there was no second course in traditional orthodox *pominki* in mixed families plov or *golubtsy* were served as the second course. Similarly, housewives in mixed marriages had to master Central Asian cuisine to meet the standards of a good daughter-in-law *kelin* in a native family as visits *mehmoni* and lifecycle events were never-ending.[277] As a result, food migrated from table to *dastarkhan* and vice versa which had larger sociocultural implications for all Central Asian republics as menus of traditional eateries *oshkhona* now have nearly all the dishes listed above.

More individualized forms of leisure included Television and Radio. In the 1960s there were only 3 television-sets in Sharora, not coincidentally all in the homes of sales workers *zavmagi*. Unlimited consumption of television programs was a norm and children in particular were allowed to watch TV until they fell asleep and there was a phrase for that in Sharora *spat' pod televizorom* or sleep under the television-set. Furthermore, because of the shortage of television-sets it was normal for neighbors to spend time together watching TV.[278] By the 1970s Television was the dominant form of leisure in the USSR and the number of television sets in Sharora was steadily growing along with the number of TV channels and programs.[279] Soviet Television produced thousands of programs: children's, youth, sports, arts and culture,

[277] On traditional and ritual role of Russian wives in Central Asian families see Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Intermarriage and the Friendship of Peoples [Electronic Resource] : Ethnic Mixing in Soviet Central Asia / Adrienne Edgar* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022).
[278] Dzhura Kuziev, Conversation with the author, 2023.
[279] I estimate that in the 1970s half of the households in Sharora own a TV and by the end of 1980s Tv ownership in Sharora was nearly universal. The models were black and white and color. There was also a TV repair service in Sharora. In early 1990s Sharora had cable TV.

documentaries, science, Soviet politics and news. Importantly, there were national television stations in each Soviet Republic. Tajik Television Studio opened in 1959. The station broadcasted programs in Tajik including original programs and translations of the Russian programs. Tajik Film Studio opened as early as the 1930s but its heydays were in the 1970s and 1980s when the studio produced two-three featured films every year, TV series (*mnogoseriinyi film*), dozens of documentaries, animation films, and co-productions. In their cultural orientation Soviet film screened in Tajikistan was both occidentalist featuring such masterful representations of the imagined Occident as Sherlock Holmes and Three Musketeers, and orientalist presenting Soviet ideas of the Orient in One Thousand and One Nights (*Skazki Shaherezady*) and Dzhura the Hunter from Minarkhar (*Dzhura Okhotnik iz Minarkhara).*

Radio broadcast in Tajik SSR began on the 10th of April 1930 when there were 20 radio receivers in the whole country. Radio programs, concerts, propaganda materials, radio theater performances, lectures, news, went from 7:00 to 22:00 hours every day. Sharorians recall two radio stations in particular Radio Mayak and Radioi Tojikiston. In border regions such as Leninabad Oblast and Regar Uzbek radio stations were available. My respondents recalled Soviet and Tajik radio with much appreciation and evaluate both Radio and TV programs as of high quality. For example, Tajik respondents invoked children's program Khobi Shirin Khurdtarakon (Sweet Dreams Little Ones) — fairytales and stories narrated by Fotima Ghulomova in her unique voice and tone: "I liked to fall asleep to her sweet voice" a man has recalled. There were Tajik radio celebrity singers such as Salomat Kobilova and Shoista Mullojonova.

To surmise, film, television, and radio in Soviet Tajikistan provided high quality content addressing the growing diversity of the Soviet citizenry. In places like Sharora there was no inequality in access to national, international, and global culture. Equality in access to culture via

television and radio was an important factor contributing to hybridity and internationalism of local Soviet culture.

Figure 25. Dzhura Kuziev with a portable radio. Sharora circa 1975.

Finally, collective and individual tourism and vacationing was an important innovation in leisure in Central Asia. Each solid Soviet enterprise had its corporate sanatoriums *zona otdykha* reserved for its employees. In the 1960s after *Institut Zemledelia* established itself in the Ghissar Valley it appointed one of its researchers Gendra Dovudovich Mirzoev to organize *zona otdykha* in Sumbula village on the River Kafinigan near Karatag gorge.[280] All Institute employees as well as sovkhoz workers whose work was affiliated with the institute were entitled to spend a portion of their annual leave, two weeks out of 24 vacation days with their families. The zone had cottages, swimming pool, outdoors game and sports area, a dance floor for discotheques, a canteen serving three meals a day, and access to an improvised beach on the banks of Kafirnighan. Workers in

[280] Riazaieva, Conversation with the author.

need for more medical recreational and health resorts such as Shohambary mineral water resort in the northern part of the Ghissar Valley or rodon spa Khoja Obi Garm in Varzob gorge. All my respondents, irrespective of their background or position within the institute or sovkhoz have reported that they spent time in both Sumula and one of the resorts of the Ghissar Valley, exception being native women who were only allowed to travel for long-term medical recreation in other districts.

Summer vacationing also took unorganized form as summers in the Ghissar Valley are long and hot. Soviet Europeans brought with them a new culture of swimming and sunbathing completely foreign for the natives. The older generation of natives in Sharora like elsewhere in Tajikistan could not swim and was reluctant to show skin. There was no concept of swimwear and until the present Tajiks call swimming trunks *tursik* or *tursuk* from Russian *trusy*. In the post-war decades Tajikistan saw a surge in the number of public beaches not only outside the cities but inside urban centers. Urban beaches were in all towns of Soviet Tajikistan and at least two in Dushanbe *Komsomol Lake* and *Park Druzhby Narodov* which Sharorians frequented.

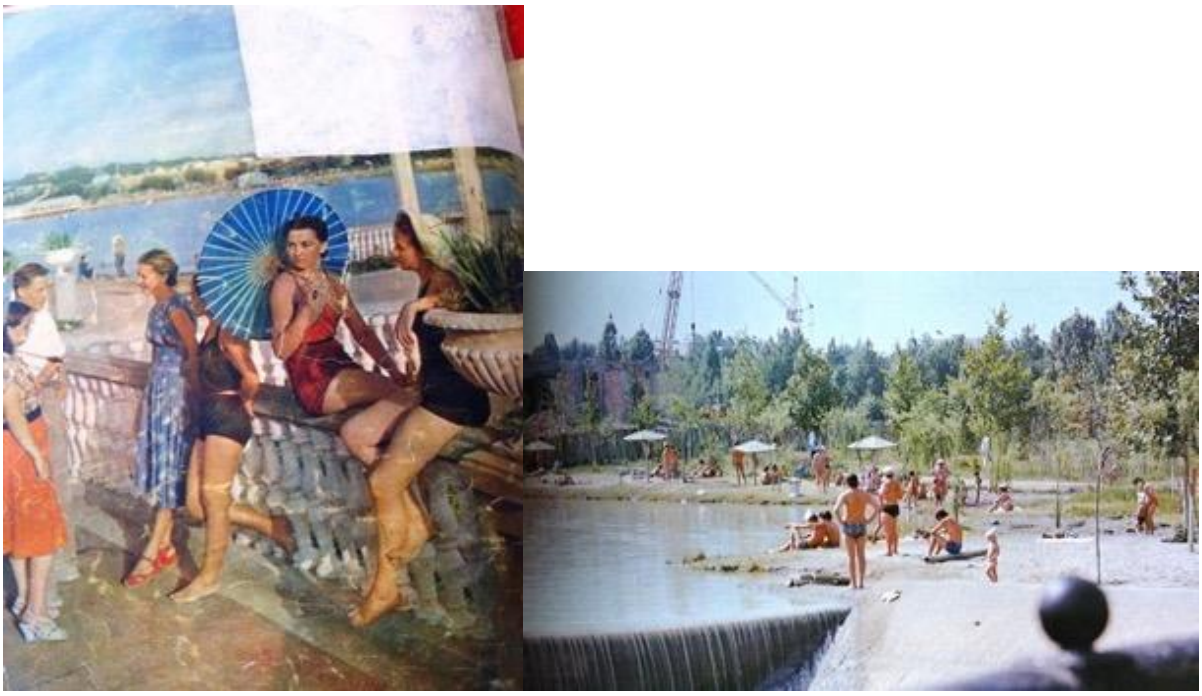


Figure 26. Komsomolskoie ozero 1956 (left) photograph by N. Safin, Park druzhby narodov 1985 (right) photograph by G. Verkhovskii.

Sharorians used various ways and places to spend time on a beach. They would cross *bagara hills*, drive or hitchhike to the River Kafirnighan to spend a weekend on a wild-beach *dikiĭ pliazh* or unequipped and unsupervised beach. Mechanized sand mining (*mekhka'er*) not far from Sharora formed a big lake of underground water with green banks easily accessible from both Dushanbe and Sharora. Gradually the lake was surrounded by dachas and beaches and became one of the destinations for swimming and sunbathing.

Figure 27. Sharorians at wild beaches in the 1960s (left) and 1987 (right)

Likewise, internaitonal travel for tourism was easily accessible in Sharora for both natives and Europeans. All of the respondents and their immidiate circle of friends and family have had an experience of internaitonal travel within and outside the USSR in search for advature and exposure to anigmatic Occident. A very large part of oral testimonies collected from current and former Sharora residents during my fieldwork and followup correspondence were about traveling and adventures abroad. N.Kh. has been the most intriquing traveller from Sharora as he visited Moscow and hisrotical towns in Russa (*Zolotoe kol'tso*), Riga, Šiauliai, Bulgaria and other places. Every year he got a travel certificate *putiovka* from trade union at his place of work (PMK) as he was well connected to the PMK trade union organization. N.Kh. insists that there was no corruption involved in obtaining *putiovkas*. However, one day in early 1980s trade union secretary asked N, chief engineer at the time, to let him use a corporate vehicle to visit his relatives in a remote village. N misunderstood the request thinking that the secretary asked him to drive his own car and arrived to the secretary's house with his volga automobile and caused much amusement and spectacle among the neighbors. The trade union secretary felt very obliged and N was the first in line for new *putiovkas* henceforth. N. recalls that there was no much competition for *putiovkas* abroad among the natives because travel and leisure abroad was often costly. In observance of corporate subordination N. asked the head of his organization *rais* if he wanted to go instead and the answer was always negative. On a few occasions N. travelled with Tajik colleagues and was always irritated by their behavior abroad. One of his fellow travelers to the Baltic states took with him a box of plums having heard from someone that plums were very expensive and that the price of a box of plums was as high as a TV-set. On the way back to Tajikistan the same companion filled the same box with glass shiels for kerosin lamps. N. estimated that the entire enterprise of exporting a box of plums and importing a box of glass was worth kopeyks. N.Kh. himself was an easy-going traveler. He had a new suit for such special occasions, a briefcase that would fit a few items he

knew were in short supply in the European part of the Union: two bottles of vodka, some green tea, small portable kettle and dried fruites. The main motivation for N. to travel was sexual adventures he hoped to experience abroad such as vacation affair *kurortnyi roman* or erotic dance shows in the Baltic states *striptiz v variete*. All Tajik male respondets travelled abroad alone or in groups but without their native spounses. Native women did not travel abroad or spend time in resorts alone. Three Russophone female respondets had experience of traveling abroad to Russia, Baltic states and Eastern Europe, other Central Asian republics, and even Paris.

Soviet leisure did not preclude individual and collective pleasure. They were deeply entangled. Soviet rule brought with it new ways to employ and exploit nature and humans while at the same time erected an economy and ideology of leisure that was internalized by people living in Sharora. In the case of Sharora pre-Soviet and Soviet forms of leisure had converged and morphed. Native women however, hardly ever accessed the new forms of transnational leisure and succumbed to whatever traditions permitted.

To conclude, a Late Socialist sovkhoz was less dictatorial and oppressive than one in the period of collectivization. Exploitative economic practices and internal inequality of income, power, and access to goods pertinent to the Late Soviet economy were satisfyingly balanced by both material and non-material welfare. In addition to employment and housing, social and geographic mobility, and capacity-building opportunities Sharora workers enjoyed sovkhoz protection, patronage, and safety, which would be in very short supply in the post-socialist period.

However, it was still very exploitative and demanded an increasing amount of labor not only from workers but also from their family members.[281] Yet the language framing labor relations in the countryside had shifted from exaltation and appeals to communist morale to *quid pro quo*

[281] On October 5, 1981 the sovkhoz director ordered all sovkhoz employees and their family members to join the cotton harvesting effort with the daily target of 60 kilograms of harvested cotton. FTsGA RT Ghissar F. 208, Op. 2, "Proizvodstvennye Prikazy." p. 56.

formulations. As a result, the workers sought and used ways to exploit state resources as well as their own families to maximize benefits. Rather than revolting or striking against what could be termed economic exploitation, the workers resorted to what Michel De Certaeu has termed "poaching" on money, land, and more importantly, time paid by the state.[282] In Sharora the accusations of poaching and unsocialist behavior were thrown along ethnic lines of Sharora community with European and often women and men frowning upon Tajik men as the bucket-passers, slackers, and tricksters (*moshennik*). Yet, individual wealth and success were not accessible to everyone in sovkhoz. Particularly, it was native women, toiling on the cotton fields who profited the least from either licit or illicit economic gains. Hence Sharora's economic structure was communism for Tajik men.

[282] Michel De Certaeu, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984).

Chapter 4. Childhood in Sharora

With this chapter I want to add to the history of everyday life in Central Asia and a micro history of Sharora by putting children and childhood at the center of my study and reimagine the Soviet empire as the world made for children and, in some ways, by children — an infantile empire. To put it in the words of Marina Balina and Evgeny Dobrenko, childhood was "the prototype of the Soviet Utopia"[283] and by looking at regional variations of Soviet childhoods one can reach new conclusions about the local meanings of the Soviet. Childhood has been a protagonist in many works on Russian and Soviet history.[284] Looking at the Soviet Union through children's eyes has proved illuminating as the logic of Soviet policies and practices towards children place the Soviet state more firmly within the context of European biopolitics aimed at reproduction and modernization of nations in the interwar period.[285] Unlike most of Europe, where race and nationhood had remained the primary goal of state reproductive efforts, the Soviet welfare, education, and ideological cultivation of children was directed at the entire diversity of peoples populating the vast Soviet space. In Soviet Union childhood had a historic role to play — not only were Soviet boys and girls the future — "new men and women" for their own country, but their childhood experience was also to demonstrate the advantages of socialism to the rest of the world.[286]

[283] Marina Balina and E. A. Dobrenko, eds., *Petrified Utopia: Happiness Soviet Style*, Anthem Series on Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies (London; New York: Anthem Press, 2009), p. xviii.
[284] Anaita Khudonazar, "Generational Politics: Narratives of Power in Central Asia's Visual Culture" (PhD Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2011), https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/generational-politics-narratives-power-central/docview/928969147/se-2; Mehmet Volkan Kaşıkçı, "Growing Up Soviet in the Periphery: Imagining, Experiencing and Remembering Childhood in Kazakhstan, 1928–1953" (PhD Thesis, Arizona State University, 2020), https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/growing-up-soviet-periphery-imagining/docview/2476548987/se-2; Kasimova, "Hybridizing Sovietness, Modernity, Nationality and Provinciality in Uzbekistan, 1941–1984."
[285] David L. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism, 1914–1939*, 1st ed. (Cornell University Press, 2011).
[286] Ibid.

The most recent classics on the topic, Elizabeth White's *A Modern History of Russian Childhood* has shown that childhood in the Russian Empire was a class phenomenon and ranged from non-existent in peasant families to somewhat available in families of higher social classes.[287] Children's education and wellbeing was a matter of concern among intelligentsia and Russian nobility in late 19th century and many trends in and approaches to childhood had survived into the Soviet period.[288] The only shortcoming of this detailed and *long duree* account of the emergence of childhood in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union is that the Soviet period is merely a period, it is understood in temporal terms and simply implies Russia during the Soviet rule. It does not engage with the cultural diversity of the Soviet empire and leaves the interaction of Russian and non-Russian childhoods outside the scope of study. Ignoring the fact that the creation of the USSR was similarly transformative for both the "Russian core" and for all the communities included into this project, invites further inquiries into how European and socialist, and non-European and not-exactly socialist childhoods interacted.

Some historians of Soviet Central Asia have addressed the importance of childhood for becoming Soviet. Artemy Kalinovsky's chapter *Ayni's Children the Making of Tajik Soviet Elite* is based on published memoires and interviews with Tajik technical and cultural intelligentsia and covers various periods of their childhood and youth.[289] The accounts of what was going on both "inside and outside the classroom" is largely an idealistic recollection of the normative Soviet childhood which, however pervasive and profound, was not the only childhood possible. Even though it is true that non-acceptance of mandatory goods of Soviet modernization often resulted

[287] Elizabeth White, *A Modern History of Russian Childhood: From the Late Imperial Period to the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).
[288] Ibid. p. 31.
[289] Artemy Kalinovski, *Laboratory of Socialist Development* (Cornell University Press, 2018).

in marginalization, the life stories of non-elite children may show that marginalization was not always the end of relations with the Soviet.

Furthermore, one important shortcoming of the literature on childhood is that it fails to recognize that childhood is a borderland phenomenon in the sense that in the process of becoming a child may cross multiple generational, cultural and national, and institutional borders. Soviet period in Central Asia and perhaps most explicitly in Tajikistan was the time of increased social and geographic mobility and international, intercultural, and interconfessional intermingling which opened possibilities for many coexisting regimes and repertoires of being a child. Central Asia was not only a Soviet borderland, but also a global borderland, drawing forms of childhood from far beyond the limits of not only national republics but from the larger world. Hence, what may at first appear as a very local and "indigenous" childhood was in fact an instance of global entanglements. Finally, the literature on Soviet childhood ignores the ambiguities of adult-child relations and their mutual interference as a crucial everyday life experience. Both archival evidence and oral history collected from Sharora indicates that in the late Soviet Union adults displayed a great deal of infantilism, while their children co-created culture that was not exactly childish. Since the beginning of the 20th century children have had agency and centrality in the social world and any analysis of the Soviet past would benefit from comprehensive and complex history of childhood.[290]

To clarify the key terms of this chapter, infantile empire, I view imperial space is a shared realm in which distant borderlands are connected, and cultural transfers take place despite distance and difference. In this broader sense, Empire is a space of historical and cultural familiarity between diverse societies.[291] Imperial analytical frame implies looking at Tajikistan ignoring its

[290] Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood* (John Wiley & Sons, 2017).
[291] Burbank, *Empires in World History*., p. 8.

titular nationality or its current political borders emphasizing instead symbolic and material border crossing and intermingling enabled by shared historical forces that drew resources and cultural practices across vast territories thereby transforming everyday life in different societies otherwise unfamiliar with one another. I define infantilism as crossing generational borders between children and adults whereby adults choose to act as children by avoiding social mobility while children hurry to grow up towards independence and autonomy. There is a consensus among historians and contemporary observers that Soviet children had a mentality of adults. Their role models were children featured in Soviet propaganda taking defiant stance against immoral enemies often at the cost of life. Such characters included Pavlik Morozov, a boy who in 1932 denounced his kulak father and was killed by other relatives and Timur and his Team, a secret organization of village children who helped elderly, families of Red Army soldiers, and fought local crime in the 1930s and 1940s. At the same time, Soviet adults, particularly in the post-WWII years displayed clear signs of state-nurtured infantilism. As Catriona Kelly noted Soviet popular culture presented the USSR as a "place of infantilized populace." Mikhail Zhvanetsky, a famous Soviet stand-up comic from Odessa had put it ever more brilliantly: "This isn't a country, it's a kindergarten. Radio and television announcers talk to us though we were feeble-minded, or children."[292] Furthermore, the whole Soviet period is often remembered as a fairy tale by those who were children in the post-war period.[293]

In contrast to Catriona Kelly's emphasis on disempowering effects of Soviet childhood, the gist of this chapter is that what is understood to be Soviet infantilism should be treated as a

[292] Catriona Kelly, "A Joyful Soviet Childhood: Licensed Happyness for Little Ones.," in *Petrified Utopia Happiness Soviet Style* (New York, London: Anthem Press, 2009), 3–18.
[293] Catriona Kelly has characterized Soviet existence as 'fairy-tale reality' in *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 102. In the case of Tajikistan historians noted the word *afsona*, Tajik for fairy tale to describe the Soviet past, see Brinton Ahlin, "Keeping Islam: Rites of Autonomy and Authority at a Central Asian Shrine" (PhD dissertation, New York, NYU, 2018).

civilizational achievement and one of the instances when a promise of modernity was realized. Adulthood of children and infantilism of adults is not an indicator of adversity between Soviet people vs Soviet state, but an effect of Soviet materiality, new forms of everyday life, and domestication of global modernizing trends. Hence, in this chapter I choose to interrogate how people of Sharora responded to their childhood, what opportunities and challenges Soviet childhood experience contained and how Soviet children engaged with the childhood institutions and policies on the level of everyday life.

4.1. Sharora Childhood as a Geo-social Mobility

Changes in children's social and geographic mobility, and their autonomy from family, have taken a century and date back to the larger and more global reform and revolutionary movement of the late 19th and the early 20th century. Childhood in pre-revolutionary Central Asia was shaped by Islamic traditions, rural or nomadic lifestyles, and communal social structures. It was a period defined less by leisure and exploration and more by preparation for adult responsibilities, which began early. Boys were often involved in agricultural or herding tasks, while girls learned domestic skills and prepared for marriage as central to their futures.[294] Religious education was a cornerstone of childhood, with boys attending *maktabs* to study the Quran and basic literacy, and girls receiving moral and religious instruction at home. Childhood itself was relatively short, as children were expected to take on adult roles by their early teens.[295] In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, reformers associated with the Jadid movement, such as Ismail Gasprinskii and Mahmud Khoja Behbudi, called for a modernization of childhood. They sought to integrate new pedagogical methods into the existing system, emphasizing literacy, critical thinking, and a balance between

[294] L. I. Rempel, *Traditional Uzbek Family and Its Evolution* (Moscow: Nauka, 1981); Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1987).
[295] Rempel, *Traditional Uzbek Family*, 42–43.

secular education and Islamic principles.[296] These efforts reflected a desire to prepare the younger generation for the challenges of a rapidly changing world, while preserving the cultural and religious identity of Central Asia.[297]

After the October revolution and the stupendous social and cultural transformation of the region, the principal policies behind the creation of childhood aimed at limiting the role of families in children's welfare. Decades after the revolution for children of "the lower classes" such as peasantry and industrial workers childhood still did not exist and they were viewed by their parents and the society at large as workforce-in-becoming and were expected to contribute to a household's economy.[298] In the early Soviet period, child labor, early marriage and bride price were still widely practiced in Central Asia in the 1930s, especially in the countryside.[299] Hence the goal behind instituting childhood in the USSR was achievable through limiting the role of family in raising children.[300] To disempower patriarchal family Soviet power gave children social and geographic mobility, i.e. gaining new economic and social opportunities, and improving one's life through education and relocation.[301] Biographies of many Sharora denizens testify that Soviet children growing up in the context of nascent Soviet institutions enjoyed agency and autonomy in building their careers or securing their social future. In many cases Soviet institutions of childhood replaced parents all together and raised Soviet children ready for modern and international modalities of

[296] Khalid, *Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform*, 112–120.
[297] Iris Livshits, *Customs and Traditions of Central Asia* (Tashkent: Nauka, 1984); Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
[298] Heywood, *A History of Childhood*.
[299] See a legal case of a marriage between two nine-year-old children to arrange a property transfer in Sergey Abashin, *Sovetskiy Kishlak Mezhdu Kolonizatsyei i Modernizatsyei*, 2015, pp. 360-364, Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Cornell University Press, 2004).
[300] White, *A Modern History of Russian Childhood*.
[301] Florian R. Hertel, *Social Mobility in the 20th Century: Class Mobility and Occupational Change in the United States and Germany* (Springer, 2016); Yastrebov, Gordey, "Intergenerational Social Mobility in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, January 1, 2016; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934*, Soviet and East European Studies (Cambridge, Eng: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 159. Although Fitzpatrick's work covers the period between 1928 and 1934 in the case of rural Tajikistan many early-Soviet policies, working and living conditions remained in place into the post-war decades.

childhood. However, for the children of the 1930s and 1950s childhood was very short as they had to share the hardships and burdens of adults.

One of Sharora's still living residents, Sohib Imomov, is an embodiment of the short-lived childhood. His biography illustrates how engagement with various Soviet institutions for children granted survival in the most dramatic and impoverished decades of the Soviet rule in Tajikistan. He was born on the 10th of May in 1937 in qishlaq Mortepa in Ghissar district. As a child growing up in the 1940s and 1950s Sohib Imomov had shared all the hardships of early Soviet state-making and post-war recovery. He lost both of his parents to famine and disease by the time he turned five or six. Sohib's elder brother was drafted to the Red Army during WWII and Sohib and his little sister moved to their uncle and aunt's, who had six children of their own. Soon Sohib lost his uncle and his little sister, a particularly bitter loss for him. His aunt, now a single mother of 7, worked as a milkmaid in the nearby Zhdanov kolkhoz and struggled to provide herself and her children with the bare subsistence. Each child in the household was called to contribute and little Sohib spent his early childhood looking for ways to win the day's bread. As he recalls in his memoires: "Farm managers would assign orphaned youths like us to hard labor, such as herding sheep, tending cattle, and irrigation work."[302] He picked cotton in various parts of the Republic — in Ghissar district and in the Vakhsh valley in Molotovabad. His first job was collecting firewood around the nearby hills and exchanging it for bread in Ghissar. He recalled his first flatbread that he had earned that way. He wanted to bring his trophy home and share it with the family to demonstrate his value to the household. As he carried the bread in his bosom, he could not resist his hunger and took a bite, then another, and in a few steps devoured his earning and came home

[302] Sohib Imomov, *Sohib Imomov Olimi Dehkonzod* (Irfon, 2017), p. 18.

empty-handed. During the interview Sohib Imomov shared his memory of hunger and the death of his sister with tears and in notable distress.

Most of Sohib Imomov's childhood passed in formal and informal orphanage. Being raised by the closest relatives is a common practice in Muslim societies because an abandoned or orphaned child is a disgrace for the whole kin (*saghera*).[303] With the advent of the Soviet institutions dealing with childhood, new options appeared that had transformative potential for an individual's life. In 1952 Sohib Imomov went to Nadezhda Krupskaia Boarding School in Ghissar (*shkola-internat*) where, in addition to instruction, children got food rations and beds. It was in this boarding school when Sohib had internalized the value of education and in his memoirs and oral testimony, he recalls how his Tajik teachers cited Lenin "Khoned, khoned, boz kham khoned!" and Stalin: "Khamai mas"alaho, kadrho hal mekunand."[304]

Geographic mobility in rural Tajikistan was limited for peasants, adult and children alike. Peasants had to obtain a relocation permit from kolkhoz or sovkhoz chairperson which was not easy to secure. To acquire a permission to continue his school studies Sohib, who had just finished 7th grade had to walk 2-3 kilometers to present his case to Sovkhoz chairman (*rais*) of Zhdanov Sovkhoz Yokub Yusupov. As he walked along the dusty dirt road an American-made car Willis caught up with him. The passenger of this impressive automobile took interest in a little boy walking all alone and engaged in a conversation. Sohib explained the man that he was seeking a permit to continue his school studies and hoped that *rais* would grant him a relocation permit and a passport and the man from the car exclaimed: "Very well. Continue your studies and become a literate person (*odami bosavod shav*)." It turned out that the man who interrogated Sohib Imomov and encouraged him was no other than Bobojon Gafurov, the then Secretary General of the Tajik

[303] Unadopted children would often be termed saghera, a pejorative term denoting a child that no one wants.
[304] Tajik calque for their famous phrases "Learn, learn, and again learn!" (Lenin) and "All the problems are solved by cadres" (Stalin).

Communist Party and the head of state. Despite this high level encounter the sovkhoz deputy treated Sohib with hostility: "Hey, what are you doing here orphan (*saghera*)? Did you not recognize this man, you stupid?"[305] He dismissed Sohib with his request unanswered and made him repeat the journey the next day.

After the 8th grade Sohib was taken in for upbringing and care by his elder brother's machine and tractor station MTS, like millions of other orphans who were nurtured in corporate guardianship (*shefstvo*). Corporate guardianship was a common practice for many in the Red Army units during and after the war. Soldiers and support personnel adopted orphaned children along the way and proclaimed them "sons of regiment" (in Russian *syn polka*). In his memoires Sohib called himself in Tajik *pisari MTS* — literally son of MTS.

Despite his old age at the time of the interview, the childhood memories of Sohib Imomov, both in his memoires and in oral testimonies, are full of details and insights about humble and provincial institutions of childhood which suggests that they were formative for his life and career. He survived the famine of the 1930s and the deprivation caused by the WWII because he combined both preexisting culture of adoption by extended kin, and new, Soviet institutions, such as boarding school and corporate patronage. He survived thanks to geographic mobility and welfare opportunities that allowed him to earn a living while still a child. One can conclude with confidence that Sohib had succeeded in life by Soviet standards as he built a successful career as a scientist and has been a respected member of Sharora community.[306]

There are cases when children's social mobility factored in adults' geographic mobility. Biography of Sharora resident Svetlana Riazaeva is a case in point. She was born in 1946 in vegetable growing community Shainak near Sharora, in a family of impoverished Ukrainian

[305] In Tajik О, ту сагера, дар ин чо чй кор мекуний? – the word saghera (orphan) bares a nearly insulting connotation of a foundling or refused child.
[306] Sohib Imomov, *Olimi Dehkonzod* (Irfon, 2017), and Sohib Imomov, Conversation with the author, 2020.

peasant and a Tajik young man whose entire family had died of hunger. Her first school (see image below) was a simple mudbrick hut and offered instruction up to the 4th grade to both Russian and Tajik groups. The school as the settlement itself was powered by diesel generator and there was no access to drinking water and other modern facilities. School children appearing on the photograph below did not look much different from adults in their clothes, footwear, and hats. Having finished the 4th grade the whole family had to move to Dushanbe where the nearest full curriculum school was located so Svetlana could continue her studies while her parents, still assigned to the vegetable kolkhoz in Shainak, had to commute to work daily. Death accompanied every family and Svetlana lost two of her siblings and nearly died of measles herself.[307] Remarkably, in the midst of death and deprivation, anywhere a family would move, there would be a school for children to study and children's programs they could participate in. As a schoolgirl in Stalinabad (Dushanbe) Svetlana Riazaeva worked as a bricklayer (kamenshik) and cottage farmer after studies. She failed admission exams to the medical university and pursued a career in chemistry in the 1960s.

[307] Riazaieva, Conversation with the author.

Figure 28. Riazaeva's first school in Shainak in the 1950s.

These two examples of social and geographic mobility available to children in the Ghissar valley are rather modest in terms of distance from old household to new life or from a lower social and economic position to a higher one as both Sohib and Svetlana merely moved from a smaller village with incomplete school course to a school with more years of study. But in the context of rural development in the socialist period this minor change proved vital for the course of life. As will be clear in subsequent chapters, in the case of Sharora, sometimes even moving a household across a street was unimaginable. Most importantly, these two individuals were forced to take their life into their own hands and take responsibility for their future making important decisions where to live and study.

To surmise, in the early Soviet and immediate post-war years childhood was a short segment in life, limited by four school years available in rural Tajikistan due to lack of resources

for the rapidly expanding Soviet civilization in Tajik countryside. Making schools available for 7 and then 9 grades was a long and uneven process and in Central Asia was complete around 1958.[308] However, children and their parents believed schools could allow a family to change their residence and improve their social standing. Adult geographic mobility was very limited, and Svetlana's parents were not allowed to relocate from Shainak while Sohib had to request a nearest village soviet *(selsovet)* a permission to transfer to his new school in Ghissar. Significantly, both Sohib and Svetlana had a say in their life and made choices where to live and where to study based on their vision of the future and their career choice. Their parents or guardians had to respect that choice, and this was something new for Central Asians and Europeans alike. The expectation that parents or guardians respect children's choices—whether in education, social participation, or personal ambitions—marked a significant ideological shift introduced by the Soviet state. This was particularly new in Central Asia, where family decision-making was traditionally governed by communal, patriarchal, or religious norms. Soviet policies, aimed at breaking traditional hierarchies, introduced a degree of autonomy for children that also reshaped generational and familial dynamics in both Central Asia and in European areas of the USSR.

4.2. Longer Childhood

In the post-war Soviet Union, childhood began to take on new significance as the state increasingly prioritized educational access and infrastructure development. The gradual expansion of resources and efforts to universalize nine years of mandatory schooling marked a shift from the earlier Soviet years, when resource scarcity and the challenges of rapid rural transformation often curtailed the length and experience of childhood. This evolution reflects broader post-war efforts to solidify socialism by investing in the next generation, even in the farthest reaches of the countryside.

[308] Mark Sandle, *Education in the USSR* (London: Routledge, 1999).

Additionally, by the 1960s childhood was increasingly associated with innosense and children were viewed as imaginative and dynamic, while their childhood was seen as a fleeting stage rather than a symbol of the "bright future" envisioned in earlier Soviet ideology. This perspective, which persisted through the late Soviet period, framed childhood as a nostalgic "golden age" rather than a space for rebellion or transformation.[309]

Hence, when in the post-war decades Soviet institutions of childhood, such as nurseries, schools, after-school activities and clubs, were not all-encompassing and the overall childhood experience was incomplete and short-lived, young Soviet Tajikistanis made conscious effort to use those institutions to their advantage. In the later Soviet period, when childhood-related institutions and services were more widely spread, and childhood experience lasted longer, some children allowed themselves a degree of what I call social immobility – a conscious choice not to pursue opportunities offered by the Soviet state and even avoid the various institutions of childhood. Social immobility expressed itself in defying life strategy, not having a plan for a future, quitting or allowing oneself to be expelled from *pionery* or failing end-of-year exams to stay in the same grade for two or more years *vtorogodnik* and other forms of disengagement. The interlocutors who chose social immobility were children of respected sovkhoz workers and technical intelligentsia and their lifestyle cannot be explained by poor upbringing. But failing in childhood and other Soviet places for children had never prevented them from having a socially and economically fulfilling youth and passable adulthood. Social immobility was a paradoxical product of Soviet social engineering and welfare from cradle to grave that granted people employment and housing and other social goods demotivating personal and professional growth. Famous plumber Afonia,

[309] Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890-1991*, p. 142

a comedy character in Georgyi Danelia's eponymous film of 1975, has expressed this situation familiar to nearly every worker in the USSR:

- Why don't you claim a promotion to a foreman, Afanasii Nikolaevich? They don't give you the job?
- Who, me? They've offered me the foreman job a thousand times. But what's the point?
- You have no ambition. You don't want fame.
- What kind of fame does a foreman have? Is he a cosmonaut or a hockey player? A foreman has responsibilities over the roof and one salary. And I work under a contract and get paid by the job. And overtimes.
- And your own profits (*navar*)…

Two telling examples of social immobility are childhood memories of two individuals known in Sharora as Viktor Fiodorovich and Chomba. Viktor Fiodorovich described himself in 1960s as an unruly *khuligan*. He was proud to be born in a family of Crimean Cossacks deported to the Vakhsh Valley in the 1940s. In the 4th grade he failed his level requirements and had to retake that year's course — became *vtorogodnik*. He reportedly started a fight with one of his classmates and threw an inkpot at him but missed and the inkpot hit the blackboard, and the act was later construed as an attack against the teacher. That year Viktor faced expulsion from school. In the 6th grade he was publicly chastised and expelled from *pionery* for throwing a home-made smoke grenade into a *pioniry* meeting room. He confessed he had no plan for his life and liked to spend his time doing sports and picnicking on the hills around Sharora (see photograph below). When in the 8th grade he was noticed by a weightlifting coach who offered him a place at the Sports school *fizkulturniy tekhnikum* and Viktor Fiodorovich joined that school to become PE teacher in Sharora for the rest of his life.[310] One reason to construe this biography as social immobility is that in late socialism PE teachers (fizruk) and workshop teachers (trudovik) were proverbial and notorious figures in school folklore as their jobs required the least training, education, or integrity. One popular joke

[310] Agopov, Conversation with the author.

of the time states: When fizruk and trudovik quit their jobs a regular school becomes a top school, an equivalent of Woody Allens's joke: If you can't do, teach. If you can't teach, teach gym.

Figure 29. Sharora schoolchildren meeting the sunrise on Bagara.

Similarly, Chomba, growing up in the family of respected sovkhoz worker in the 1950s and 1960s, had no clear vision as to what to do with his life and is remembered as constantly failing at school. He was left to retake the 3rd grade two times and did not dare to stay in school after the 4th grade. Many of his acquaintances and family in Sharora report that he has been trying to conceal the fact of his illiteracy his entire life and chose the least intellectually demanding jobs in farming and construction. However, his illiteracy was an open secret many of his friends and relations would share various anecdotes caused by his inability to read or write, that tell more about the USSR than about Chomba himself. For example, when he served in the army in a contruction company *Stroibat* he had not reported his poor school performance and the fact of his illiteracy and the comander appointed him to fill in for an engineer. Chomba took up the job and passed for an engineer for two weeks by signning every paper that crossed his desk. The comander suspected Chomba and asked him to find and read Dushanbe on the USSR map. Chomba failed the test to

the amusement of the entire company.[311] While his employment record from the Soviet period is uninterrupted and at the time of the interviews he lived on a well-deserved pension, he has been reluctant to grow socially, intellectually, and professionally.[312] In fact, Chomba is the only member of his extended family to be known by a nickname rather than his first name —an sign of condescending treatment by the extended keen and neighbors.

Both Viktor and Chomba could be interpreted as embodying aspects of an "extended Soviet childhood"—a phenomenon shaped by the Soviet state's emphasis on the prolonged cultivation of youth as model citizens. This idea is reflected in their adult lives, where their prioritization of carefree and adventurous lifestyles could be seen as a continuation of the idealized, playful, and collective ethos associated with Soviet childhood. While they did not consistently meet the expectations of a "model" Soviet child—falling short in academic, civic, or social responsibilities—their life trajectories nonetheless align with the cultural and ideological frameworks that defined Soviet youth, particularly in rural settings like Sharora. Importantly, their experiences should not be seen as outright rejections of Soviet childhood ideals, as they did not explicitly challenge the Soviet state. Rather, they embody prolonged and widely accepted innocence, exentrism, and infantilism that was cultivated in children in late socialism.

4.3. International Childhood

One important aspect of childhood in Sharora is internationalism of childhood when children crossed ethnic, cultural, and confessional boundaries thereby co-creating new forms of everyday life and contributing to conviviality of their parents in Sharora. Historians of the Soviet childhood

[311] I have heard various versions of this story from multiple local sources, not cited here for privacy reasons, and suspected that Chomba himself has been cultivating it.
[312] Pieces of Chomba's life were drawn from various sources but here mostly from Nina Drofa, Conversation with the author, 2020.

have only recently begun exploring the intersection of nation-building and childhood with the resultant interethnic peace and conflicts involving Soviet children born in interethnic marriages or resulting from such intimacies, or simply from sharing common public spaces and institutions.[313]

Childhoods were lived not only in specialized institutions but are also part of important national and religious traditions that play a decisive role in children's socialization.[314] This subchapter attempts to grasp the difference between different kinds of childhoods in Sharora stemming from the complexities of Sharora's ethnic compositions and spatial organization and explain instances of both interethnic peace and tensions among children. As has been shown in the incipient chapters, Sharora area was discovered and populated in the 1930s as a European (Russophone) settlement and it was not until the 1950s when a period of internationalism began with Tajik, Uzbek, Kyrgyz and other Central Asian nationalities moving in and starting families. Adrienne Edgar in her latest work has shown that interethnic marriages and intimacies became a Soviet norm, particularly in capital cities and provincial towns. It was interethnic families (*mezhetnicheskie braki*) that produced international offsprings (*metisy*) unable to locate themselves unequivocally within national or supranational self-understanding.[315] However, as I will show further in this subchapter, much of internationalism or the proverbial friendship of people, took place in various childhood institutions and public spaces populated by children. It was these public spaces where common Soviet identity was most viable.

[313] With notable exception of Adrienne Lynn Edgar and Benjamin Frommer, eds., *Intermarriage from Central Europe to Central Asia: Mixed Families in the Age of Extremes*, Borderlands and Transcultural Studies (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020); Edgar, *Intermarriage and the Friendship of Peoples [Electronic Resource] : Ethnic Mixing in Soviet Central Asia / Adrienne Edgar*.

[314] Don S. Browning and Marcia J. Bunge, *Children and Childhood in World Religions: Primary Sources and Texts* (Rutgers University Press, 2009).

[315] Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Intermarriage and the Friendship of Peoples: Ethnic Mixing in Soviet Central Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022).

Soviet childhood in places like Sharora was lived at the crossroads of ethnicity-based formal citizenship and the supranational social and cultural reality of everyday life. Nursery and school #14, the most crucial childcare and educational facilities in Sharora, opened in 1934 in the former hospital building and were modest in size and staff. In 1952 the school moved to the former laboratory of the Institute for Horticulture and could host 650 leaners. In 1976 the school moved to a proper two-story school building with 36 classrooms, gym, big meeting room (*aktovyi zal*), canteen, library, and outdoor sport facilities serving nearly 2000 schoolchildren.[316] In the late 1970s Sharora kindergarten relocated into a new two-story building with bedrooms and classrooms for around 2000 children, with playgrounds and outdoor play area simulating city traffic with roads and signage, and professional caretakers and supervisors.

[316] "Maktabi Tahsiloti Mionai Umumi #14i Nohiiai Hisor Ba Nomi Kosimov Oleg Musulmonkulovich," n.d., Venera Sadykovna (Conversation with the author).

Figure 30. Sharora kindergarten in the 1930s (top), 1980s (bottom).

They were constantly expanding in the early post-war decades the kindergarten in Sharora operated mostly in Russian because its primary function was childcare and not education and because the caretakers were almost exclusively Europeans. In school, however, the instruction was available in Russian, Tajik, and Kyrgyz languages and children went to groups based on their ethnicity (*russkyi, tadzhikskii, kyrgyzskii klass*). According to the testimony the quality of teaching and school materials in local languages were satisfactory and as biographies demonstrate growing up in native language (Tajik or Kyrgyz) did not impede professional career and economic wellbeing. For example, Mamajon Safarov, now the head of Mechanization department at the Institute for Agriculture based in Sharora, recalls with much satisfaction learning sciences, humanities, and

Russian language in Tajik.[317] Similarly, Ahtambek Avvalbekov, now retired, went to Kyrgyz school in Sharora with full curriculum taught in Kyrgyz except for Russian and Tajik language. He insisted that he rose to the positions of leadership in Komsomol and machine building factory in Dushanbe thanks to the foundations he mastered in Kyrgyz language.[318] One important exception from the rule of ethnic parceling into language environment were Uzbeks. Although Uzbek schools had existed elsewhere, in Dushanbe and Northern Tajikistan, there was none in Sharora. Uzbeks could choose between Russian and Tajik schools and this choice was decisive for their further life as those children, despite belonging to the same ethnic group of Uzbeks, grew up in very different environments as Tajik-Uzbeks and Russian-Uzbeks.

Figure 31. Sharora Pionery camp in 1965.

Children attending schools in their native languages could advance their Soviet careers, lifestyles and ideals in their native languages but internationalism as one of the key promises of the Soviet order was a high-hanging fruit. One of the few ways to cross ethnic borders was taking

[317] Mamajon Safarov, Conversation with the author, 2020.
[318] Ahtambek Avvalbekov, Conversation with the author, 2020.

advantage of Sharora's geography. Although there was no official separation of neighborhoods along ethnic borders, there were in place formal and informal regimes of peopling Sharora. Eight two-, three-, and four-story apartment buildings in the central part of the town were reserved for agricultural scientist of the NII Zemledelia and welfare workers, teachers, doctors, and others, usually Russophone Europeans. The residential areas most proximate to the apartment buildings Sadovia, Vishniovaya, and Aerodromnaya streets were also populated by Germans, Tatars, Jews, Russians, Ukrainians, and several families of mixed ethnic composition. The Easternmost neighborhood of Sharora was its only Kyrgyz mahalla. The neighborhoods further away from the symbolic center of the town were peasant Muslim areas mostly Tajik and Uzbek. The reasons behind such population distribution have been explained in the previous chapter, but what is meaningful for the topic of internationalism is that Tajiks and Uzbeks living in the proximity with the Russophone neighborhoods were more likely to adopt international (Soviet) lifestyles. When talking about his childhood Mamajon Safarov shared that in the 1960s their class was a closed Tajik-speaking community for most of their childhood. Yet his friend Dzhura Kuziev lived the closest of all to the apartment buildings and developed friendships there. As a result, his Russian language was the best in the class and Russophones have always dominated Dzhura's social circle.

Another way for Sharora's residents to intermingle was through kindergartens and *pionery* organizations which, unlike ethnically divided schools, accepted mixed groups. Looking through family photo albums of any Sharora resident one cannot fail to see the diversity of ethnicities present on them. Kindergartens were a place where cultural and linguistic transformations were potent not only for children but also for caretakers themselves. Many old-timers of Sharora recall that their caretakers had to learn native languages to handle children efficiently while children learned Russian to communicate to their peers. Davlatior Odinaev recalls that when he was in the 4th grade in the 1960s his geography teacher was a Russian war veteran Kalintsev who taught a

class of Tajik children and after each lesson asked his students "*fahmidi?"* (Taj. Did you understand?).[319]

While Tajik and Kyrgyz classes in Sharora's school were relatively hermetic units, the so-called Russian classes could hardly be called Russian or even Slavic as they accepted various ethnicities ready to study in the Russian language. A very representative Russian class that agreed to participate in an interview was a group of 5 men in their mid-40s who grew up in Sharora and were classmates in Sharora in the 1970s and 1980s: 1 born from Tajik and Russian parents, 3 Pamiries, and one Uzbek. They shared that besides them, their class included Germans, Koreans, Kazakh, Russian, Ukrainian, Tatar, a Russophone Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and Jews. When I asked them how they developed lasting friendships being so different, one of the men responded: "Now we all seem different to you because you think of us in terms of our ethnicities (*natsii*), but back then we were children of the same Soviet people."[320] It should be noted that during the group interview participants' sentiments towards the Soviet past were not unanimously positive and many shortcomings of Soviet economy were invoked. Yet internationalism stood out in the conversation as the only unambiguously positive aspect of their life in the USSR.

Using Russian language as the main medium of communication for people who were not ethnic Russian was challenging as such children could not unequivocally belong to their co-nationals. They confessed not being able to read a simple Muslim prayer at funerals and other occasions, did not fully understand Tajik traditions, and were alienated from their Tajik extended family, cousins, uncles, aunts and often confusing different kinship terms. However, it was the Russian language that paved the way to the internationalist convergence on a local level.

[319] Davlatior Odinaev, Conversation with the author, 2020.
[320] Group interview with Vakhid, Rahmon, Firuz, Anvar, Samandar.

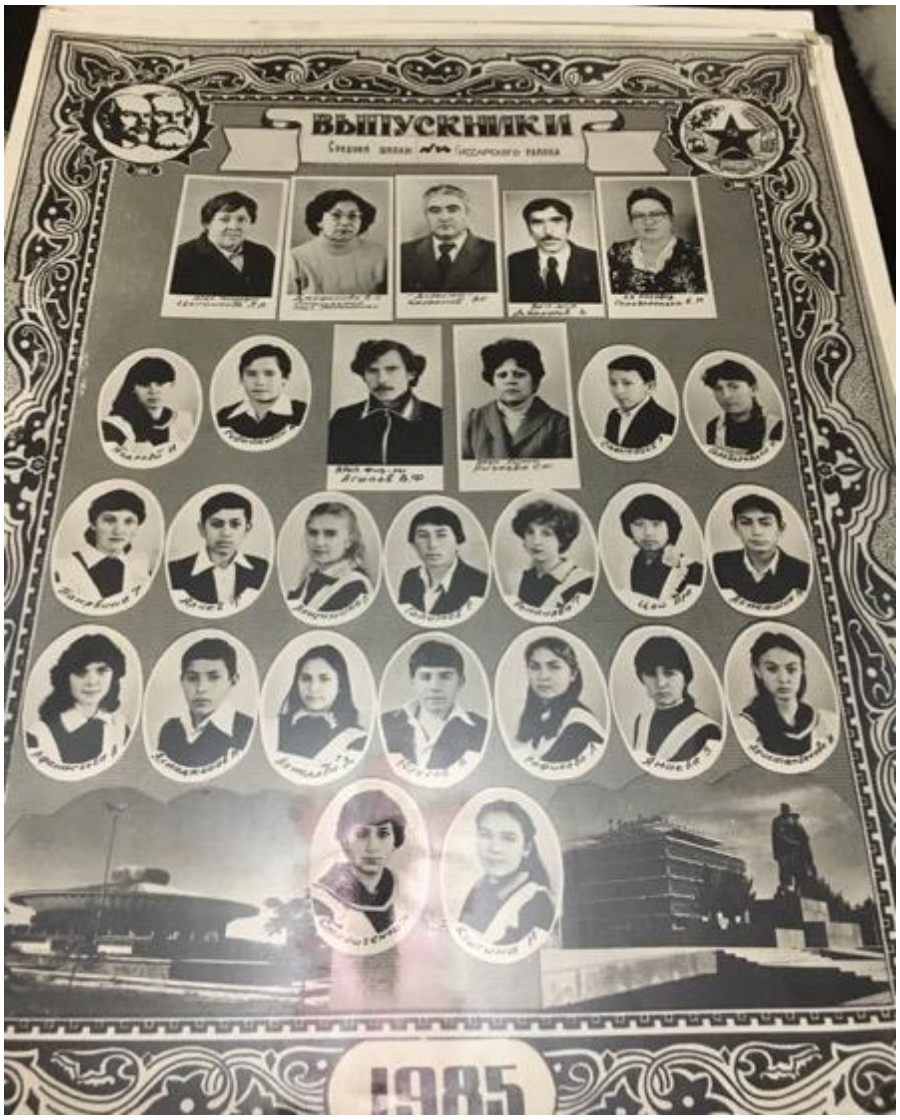


Figure 32. Senior class at school #14 featuring Russian, Tatar, Tajik, Korean names.

It is noteworthy that native children were not passive benefactors of social goods and non-native caretakers and teachers had to take a significant effort to be accepted by the classes they supervised. Failures to fit in with the natives, resulting in conflicts and dismissals, were not infrequent. Viktor Agopov recalled that in the early 1970s his first appointment as a PE teacher was in a rural Tajik school #33 in Sumbuli, on the left bank of Kafirnigan river 10 kilometers away from Sharora. Viktor, insisted that children in school #33 should respect school requirements and bring gym clothes to PE classes. However, unable to explain his demands in Tajik or comprehend the children's response he found himself increasingly alienated. The children then petitioned the

school principal accusing Viktor of misconduct and rudeness, and Viktor was dismissed. He explains this outcome as resulting from failure to understand the difference between more international and hence Soviet studentship and more isolated and more native school-goers — the former took all the classes seriously, be they workshop (*trud)* or PE, while the latter were reluctant to change clothes and exercise as a part of the school day.

Geography and proximity to the public spaces of convergence and common Soviet culture were important factors in success or failure in growing up an international Soviet individual. One can characterize this situation as *mahalazation* of identity or developing ethnic belonging within an ethnic neighborhood.[321] Tajik and Uzbek families would occupy Sharora's outskirts — areas proximate to the agricultural lands while Russophone families of welfare workers and agricultural scientists and white-collar professionals lived in apartment buildings and family homes in the vicinity of the symbolic centers of the town. The contrast between rural outskirts and gentrified neighborhood was such that my respondents used the term "white ghetto" to describe the latter. As was clarified above the Russophone populations in Sharora was not ethnically Russian and is best characterized by the Tajik term *uruszabona* – Russian-speaking yet not Russian. Segregation of populations was never intended but resulted from the fact that Russian language and Soviet civilization engendered local internationalist environment and marginalized those who were not sufficiently exposed to the Soviet social innovations.[322]

[321] Mahala means neighborhood in many Central Asian languages. By *mahalazation* of identity I mean distribution of population into ethnically homogenous neighborhoods, such as Tajik, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Russian. Sergei Abashin, "Ocherk Sedmoi. Mahalla.," in *Sovetskii Kishlak. Mezhdu Kollonializmom i Modernizatsiei.* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015), 291–318.

[322] Evidence of ethnicity-based distribution of population in Soviet cities and towns and exchange and tensions between traditional and Soviet *byt* are ample in both literature, for example, Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930–1966*, Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010); sometimes difference in habitant translated into conflicts in interethnic families, see Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Intermarriage and the Friendship of Peoples [Electronic Resource] : Ethnic Mixing in Soviet Central Asia / Adrienne Edgar* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022), pp. 49-50, in oral history form the field Sharora is mostly recalled as an island of internationalism and modernity surrounded by kishlak – less developed native, Tajik or Uzbek, suburbs.

4.4. Holidays and Games of Sharora

Identity and belonging are not always expressed through a choice of language or place of residence. Elements of imperial cultures such as celebrations and holidays proved just as powerful agents in shaping and reshaping a sense of community of otherwise very different people. A history of New Year *Novyĭ god* represents a phenomenon of imperial transfers and border crossing on Eurasian scale. It is a palimpsest of pagan and Christian, secular, and religious, European and non-European artifacts. Despite containing everything non-Central Asian the Soviet version of New Year enrooted itself deeply into the social and cultural fabric and still constitutes the highlight of the year.

As any modern state, the Soviet Union sought to manage time for its populace to synchronizee festivities across all regions and republics through separation of the year into holidays (*prazdniki*) and regular working days (*budni*). Pan-Soviet holidays were marked red in the calendars. Soviet holidays are a pinnacle of common Soviet identity and were instrumental for forging the Soviet nation. They also anchored the post-Soviet people to their memories of what they believe was "happy past."[323] Baiburov and Piir have claimed that the New Year was unlike the official state holidays in the sense that it was not charged with inspiring "the sense of belongingness" to the Soviet whole. But my evidence suggests that the New Year, at least outside the European parts of the USSR had an important role to play, especially for children who were socialized into the Soviet whole through the celebration.

[323] Albert Baiburin and Alexandra Piir, "When We Were Happy: Remembering Soviet Holidays," in *Petrified Utopia Happiness Soviet Style* (New York, London: Anthem Press, 2009), pp. 185-6.

The roots of the new year celebration go down millennia and deserve a history of their own. For this chapter it is meaningful to reflect on how New Year was imported into Eurasia in 1700 as a part of Westernization drive in the Russian Empire and spread across diverse populations of the continent during the Soviet period. All the requisites of New Year celebration, masquerade costumes, New Year tree *ëlka* (in Russian) or *archa* (in Tajik) and adornments and decorations, feast *novogodniĭ stol*, presents for children and Grandpa Frost *Ded Moroz*, and a repertoire of New Year carols, were all products of Russian Imperial tradition alien to its non-European and particularly Muslim populations. In 1935 Soviet New Year became one of the official holidays and spread all over the USSR. Ded Moroz was rebranded into local languages, for example Kazakh Ayaz Ata, Kalmyck Kysh Babai, Tajik Boboi Barfi.

Sharora, which also functioned as a state farm was the main sponsor of the official new year celebration called *novogodniaia ëlka* for all children living within its territory. There were around 12 schools and kindergartens dependent on the sovkhoz and each year the worker's committee allocated around 120 rubles per institution for new year celebrations. This amount covered presents for children, a paper bag of candy and small toys, fees to *Ded Moroz* and *Snegurochka* mandatory show hosts at each celebration, entertainment (music, dance, decoration etc.). The local chapters of *pionery* in both Russian and non-Russian groups headed by an adult leader and organizer *pioner vozhatyĭ* were in charge of organizing the celebration.[324]

[324] New Year celebrations figured in Ghissar branch of the state archive of Tajikistan in documents from 1971 to 1981: FTsGA RT Ghissar, "Fond 208, Opis 2, Delo 2 Proizvodstvenniye Prikazy Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo 1977 g. 96 Listov," n.d.; "FTsGA RT Ghissar F. 208, Op. 2. d. 6 'Proizvodstvennyie Prikazy' 73 Lista," 1981; I have also based my account on the testimony of Sharora *pionery* organizer in Sharora in the 1970s Alla Babaeva, "Conversation with the Author on July 27, 2020" (Sharora, 2020); as well as many native and European participants and witnesses of the celebrations, particularly Nodir Khabibov, "Conversation with the Author on February 15" (Dushanbe, 2020).

Figure 33. Children at New Year celebrations at School #14: 1960s (left) and 1980s (right).

Aside from state-organized celebrations and cultural activities like New Year celebration there were many cases of children taking control of their free time to play collective street games often choosing games and activities that were frowned upon by their parents and local Soviet authorities alike. In a sense Sharora streets represented a model of the larger Soviet world, a space of familiarity and proximity between very different societies, where children from different parts of Eurasia congregated, shared, and exchanged their cultures, games being both an object and a medium of those cultural transfers. Some of these games are remembered today as quintessentially Soviet, even though they had existed in multiple pre-Soviet communities and appeared to Soviets as cultural atavisms (*perezhitki*).

The Soviet period in Central Asia was the time of unprecedent cultural diversity as millions of people traveled and migrated into the region with their cultures and games. The most remarkable game that captures the spirit of Eurasian connections is lianga – a popular game in which a piece of metal attached to a cut of animal skin is kicked in the air in various acrobatic ways. The game has several names and is believed to be of either Chinese or Mongol origin. Its Kalmyk version is called zos, in Baikal area it is known as urzhum, among Buryats as zaibak or taebaeg, in China

lanka, and in Russian lianga. The meaning of zos is Chinese coin with a hole in the middle that makes it easy to attach a furred skin, while lanka means leg, sometimes strong leg similar to Russian *liazhka* or *liagat'*. The game is believed to have been a part of military training for nomad horsemen who played lianga to strengthen their legs to be able to ride their horses and shoot arrows at the same time or even draw bow with their legs. There is a legend that the first liangas were made of human sculps. In the 19th century Russian Empire had finally reached its eastern borderlands and populated Baikal area and the Far East with Cossack settlers. The Russian Cossacks living side by side with Dungans, Mongols, Kalmyks, Buryats, and other nomadic cultures had taken up lianga and spread it back to the West. Another roadway for lianga was probably the Silk Roads taking the game to Central Asia and then further west to the Caucasus. In my view, the Soviet Union, which by the 1930s unified the vastest landmass into one polity, played the most decisive, albeit unintended role in the spread of lianga.

Oral history from Sharora as well as multiple testimonies of Soviet people shared on social media, blogs and comments to videos about lianga, in Russian, Tajik, and Uzbek indicate that lianga was most widely present in the 1970s and 1980s.[325] They describe lianga as very contagious as children could easily play it for three or four hours every day. The typical venues for the games were apartment building lobbies and staircases (pod"ezd), open areas between blocks (dvor), school hallways at recess, or any other open plot. Even though it was the same game for all the peoples playing it, there were some regional variations. The general emphasis of the game was on competition through individual skill as each player had to kick lianga the most times and in the

[325] Here and henceforth, I have summarized multiple bits of conversations and correspondences on social media among present and former Sharora residents on WhatsApp group chat, not cited for privacy reasons, and comments and messages on Odnoklassniki.ru. these testimonies are corroborated by similar comments on Youtube and other websites discussing lianga videos:
https://yehe.asia/articles/themes/traditions/667-udivitelnaya_istoriya_zoski_skalp_vraga_ili_oruzhie_/,
https://uzbloknot.com/2021/01/06/lyanga/, https://infourok.ru/klassniy-chas-zabitaya-igra-zoska-721340.html

most acrobatic way. But in Tajikistan there was an innovation as the end of an individual performance kicked off a teamwork. In most countries the game did not promise any prize or bets but in Russia lianga was played for a wish (a loser had to do something that a winner wished). But the most interesting variation is that girls were not allowed to play in Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and everywhere in the Caucasus yet they played freely in nomadic societies.

Soviet authorities, mostly parents and schoolteachers were opposed to playing lianga and constantly discouraged it. In the official Soviet mind lianga was associated with transgression, hooliganism, and gambling. Lianga posed a serious challenge to the normative Soviet sports and physical culture, despite the obvious health benefits to those who played lianga. One of the ways to counter the proliferation of lianga was inventing and spreading urban legends libeling lianga such as claims that excessive playing of lianga causes hernia. My respondents from Sharora mentioned that one of their peers did get hernia because of lianga but could never recall his name.

To conclude, childhood in Sharora was a local variation of the larger and more global revolutionary process whereby childhood underwent significant institutional and ideological transformations and Sharora displays traces of those processes. Children growing up in Sharora in various episodes of its history were exposed to and involved into various ideas and institutions of childhood that the Soviet rule imported from its Russian and European borderlands. The early Soviet period featured both the extension of pre-revolutionary family life based on local traditions and religion and at the same time revolutionary transformation of childhood whereby children were to take responsibility for their future life. Childhood of the early Soviet period was short due to lack of resources of the young Soviet state yet promised upwards mobility. In many cases children shared impoverishment, repressions, and exploitation their parents experienced in the 1930s and 1940s. At the same time state childhood institutions, orphanages and schools, were decisive for their survival and growth because, as some Sharora biographies testify, they could and

did replace parents. In the 1960s to 1970s childhood generally overlapped with school age, up to the 9th or 11th grade and assumed new meaning as a crucial stage of life to be filled and busied with education, culturally and emotionally enriching activities, while also preparing an individual to a normative Soviet adulthood. Late Soviet children experienced the golden age of childhood because they enjoyed guaranteed welfare from cradle to grave and high quality of life even in the countryside and were viewed as innocent, creative, and imaginative while their rebeliosness and transgressions were tolerated if not normalized. In exceptional cases such prolonged childhood resulted in infantile adulthoods that welcomed academic and professional failure and social immobility. Finally, Sharora childhod was a definitive experince of Soviet internationalism because the policies and institutions of childhood, combined with pan-Soviet celebrations and the games children played, enabled the different ethnic groups populating Sharora community to overcome cultural distance and experience a very local variation of the Soviet whole. However, the evidence suggests that the process of integration was incoplete and there remained pockets of ethnic homogeneuity beyond the Soviet transformative reach.

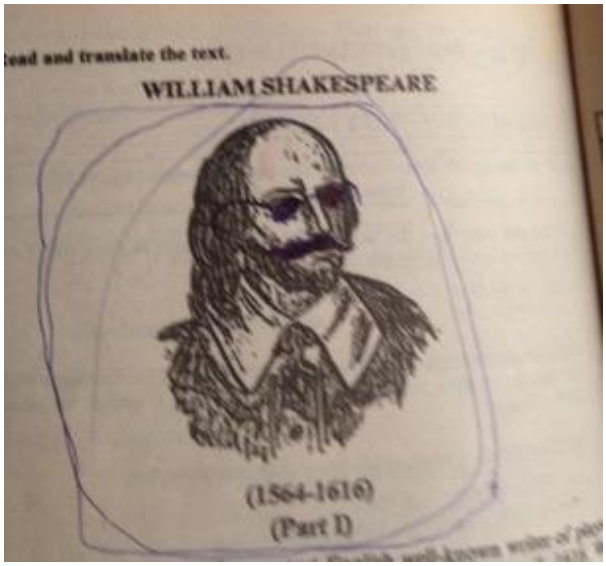


Figure 34. Vandalized textbook from Sharora school #14 from the 1980s.

Chapter 5. Spirituality and Religious Life in Sharora

- Are you Muslim or Christian?
- I am an atheist.
- Are you a Christian atheist or Muslim atheist?

The purpose of this chapter is to address the questions of the impacts of state atheism on everyday life and spirituality in rural Tajikistan and complicate our understanding of relations between state and society by adding new *modi* of interaction between the two. The main argument of the chapter is that disempowerment of pre-Soviet religious institutions in the USSR paradoxically democratized and diversified the spiritual field in rural Central Asia and played an important role in sustaining interethnic peace in international community of Sharora. It adds to the scholarship on religion in the Soviet Union, which thus far has treated religion, be it Christianity or Islam, as a solid category, by drawing a picture of reciprocity between Soviet institutions and people practicing spirituality and religion. The goal of this chapter is to present experiences of being a Christian in a Muslim society and vice versa, being a Muslim in a Christian dominated community, while at the same time to investigate the hybrid forms emerging from the interaction of Christianity, Islam, and Communism. Lastly, the convergence of Christianity, Islam, and Communism formed an important dimension of internationalism in Soviet Sharora. Before diving into Sharora's spiritual life the broader context is important.

5.1. Secular Jihad

The Soviet Union was the first radically atheist state and the fight against religion and superstition was at the core of constructing a new Soviet man.[326] This ambition to eradicate religion from public sphere and individual lives had remained unfulfilled throughout the Soviet period and relations

[326] Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism*, 2018; Catherine Wanner, ed., *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine* (Washington, D.C: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012).

between the Soviet party-state and religion oscillated from militant rejection to recognition and accommodation:

> from the antireligious repression and "militant atheism" of the early Soviet period, to Stalin's rapprochement with religion in 1943, to Nikita Khrushchev's remobilization of the campaign against religion and turn to "scientific atheism," to Leonid Brezhnev's retreat from ideological utopianism in the late Soviet period, to Gorbachev's break with atheism and return of religion to public life in 1988.[327]

Scholars have tied each iteration of Soviet policies towards religion to the incumbent leader of the party-state and particular domestic and international challenges the USSR faced at each stage of its state-making and reform.[328] Soviet-style secularization of society was a part of large-scale modernization drive shared by many former empires and dynastic kingdoms such as Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan, seeking their own paths to modernity.[329] Much of the knowledge about the Soviet Union's engagement with Islam was shaped during the Cold War when Soviet state's treatment of religion signaled to the Western pundits that the USSR was a totalitarian empire doomed for defeat from within.[330] In reality, Soviet institutions for religion and cults were a form of recognition and formalization of the religious field — a church for Islam in Eren Tasar's terms.[331] These

[327] Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton University Press, 2018), p. 6.
[328] Catherine Wanner, ed., *State Secularism and Lived Religion in Soviet Russia and Ukraine* (Washington, D.C: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012), p. 5-6.
[329] Adeeb Khalid, "Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective," *Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies; Cambridge University Press* 65, no. 2 (2006): 231–51.
[330] Alexandre Benningsen and Marie Broxup, *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State* (St. Martin's Press, 1983); Alexandre Benningsen and Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay, *Islam in the Soviet Union* (Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1967); Will Myer, *Islam and Colonialism Western Perspectives on Soviet Asia* (Routledge, 2002).
[331] Eren Tasar, *Soviet and Muslim: The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943-1991* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2018); Paolo Sartori, *A Soviet Sultanate: Islam in Socialist Uzbekistan (1943–1991)*, Sitzungsberichte / Österreichische Akademie Der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, 937. Band (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2024), p. 12.

institutions were not a façade but enjoyed a degree of autonomy and had their own strategy of regulating and even combating Islamic unorthodoxies.[332]

Furthermore, having undergone mass migrations and population exchange, and more importantly, thorough social and cultural transformations during and after the WWII, one can speak of the existence of non-Muslim Central Asia linked to larger Soviet confessional networks.[333] Russian Orthodox Church opened Saint Nikolas Cathedral in Dushanbe in 1943 and patronized the Orthodox cemetery as a part of the cathedral complex.[334] The Cathedral and the cemetery served the key life-cycle events such as baptizing and funerals, to those Soviet Central Asians who chose to remain part of the church.[335] Besides, Orthodox Christians there was a network of Baptist cells connecting major Soviet cities including Central Asian who revealed themselves in 1971 in the campaign against prosecution of Baptists in Barnaul, RSFSR. Letters in support of the arrested coreligionists were sent from Tashkent, Frunze, Kant, and Dushanbe. The letter from Dushanbe was signed by 25 individuals and listed the total of 76 members.[336]

The Soviet authorities in Tajikistan applied various means to limit the presence of religion in both public and private spheres. The predominant form of combating religion in late socialist period were cultural and ideological with Islam being the principal target.[337] Propaganda of atheism was to be conducted at schools, workplace, and in public space. Atheism was integral to

[332] Paolo Sartori and Bakhtiyar Babajanov, "Being Soviet, Muslim, Modernist, and Fundamentalist in 1950s Central Asia," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 62 (2019): 108–65.
[333] Sebastin Peyrouse, "Christians as the Main Religious Minority in Central Asia," in *Everyday Life in Central Asia : Past and Present*, ed. Jeff Shahadeo and Russell Zanka (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Sebastin Peyrouse, "The Relationship between Church and State in the Post-Soviet World: The Case of Christianity in Central Asia," *Journal of Church and State* 49, no. 1 (2007): 97–115.
[334] I visited the Russian Orthodox church in Dushanbe in 2020 and spoke to some of its members and patrons. The church has its own website https://lifted.asia
[335] Former Sharora resident Alla Babaeva, born in a mixed family of Tajik father and Russian mother, shared that she and her 3 sisters, born between 1957 and 1974, and her son born in 1978 were all baptized in St. Nikolas Cathedral in Dushanbe within their first year.
[336] "HU OSA 300-85-9 Samizdat Archives Published Samizdat," 1971.
[337] Marianne Kamp, "Where Did the Mullahs Go? Oral Histories from Rural Uzbekistan," *Die Welt Des Islams* 50, no. 3 (2010): 503–31.

building communism because it left no place for superstition and ensured that the future communist society would not be divided along the confessional lines.

Soviet Tajik intelligentsia used popular culture such as radio and television programs, novels, and cartoon magazines to provide appealing, secular and at times anti-religious entertainment. The most noteworthy example of such entertainment is satirical cartoon magazine *Khorpushtak* (Taj. Hedgehog) established in 1926 and seeing its heyday in the 1970s.

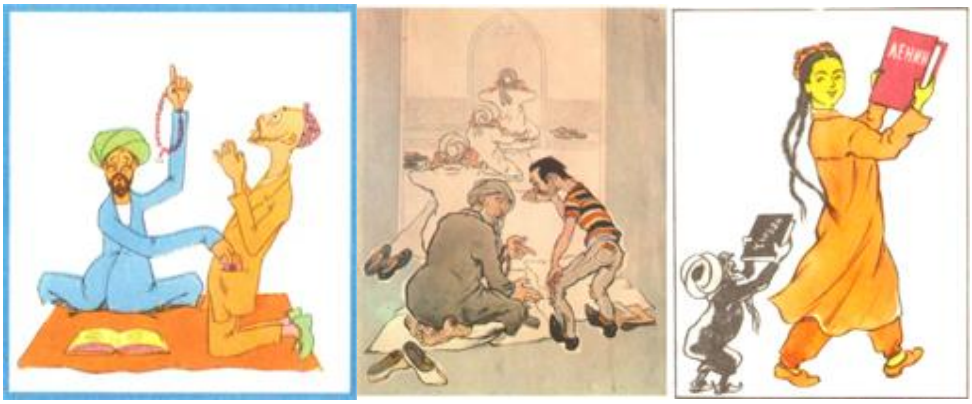


Figure 35. Pages from Khorpushtak, 1976. Artists H. Rasulov and D. Safoev.

The magazine had different names at different periods: Mullo Mushfiqi, Kaltaq, Bigiz, Mushfiqi, Hojja Nasreddin. In 1953 the magazine took the name *Khorpushtak* as it is still called today. The average circulation of Khorpushtak was 100,000-120,000 copies. The pages of *Khorpushtak* were full of biting criticism of religious authorities and mullahs and hypocrisy of Tajik men practicing their traditional roles of patriarchs at home while acting as loyal Soviet leaders in the public. Tajik artists' anti-religious enthusiasm was not always unanswered, especially in the perestroika years when Soviet artists and writers were targeted by devout activists. The story of Fazliddin Muhammadiev (1928-1986), a renowned Tajik Soviet writer is an example of Soviet secular martyr. He developed his style of Soviet satirist working as an editor of the abovementioned *Khorpushtak* magazine. In 1963 Fazliddin Muhammadiev accompanied a group of Soviet Central Asian pilgrims to hajj disguised as a doctor. Following the journey, in 1965

Muhammadiev published a sarcastic and humorous travelogue *Dar on dunye* (*In the other world*) first in Tajik and in 1970 came its Russian translation *The Trip to the Other World or the Tale of a Great Hajj* (*Puteshestvie na tot svet ili povest' o velikom khadzhe*) ridiculing his religious compatriots who displayed mercantilism, hypocrisy, fanaticism, ignorance, and servility in the face of Arabs. Muhammadiev wrote in realist prose filled with Tajik folk literary techniques emulating the traditional Muslim *hajjname* travelogues and at the same time expressing profound revere to Soviet modernity.[338] He built himself into his plot as a doctor overseeing health of the elderly members of the hajj group thereby achieving the based-on-true-events effect of his novel. Upon his return he renounced the title *hojji* — the only known case of turning down the title after completing the pilgrimage.

Fazliddin Muhammadiev was a formative writer for the post-war Soviet Tajik secular intelligentsia as he displayed familiarity with the basics of Islam and its sacred vocabulary yet chose to extol the way the Soviet rule had rebuilt his native Tajikistan. While in the holy land Muhammadiev felt no rapture at the sight of the Muslim sacred town and explicitly distanced himself from the rest of the group. What's more, he noted the insanitary conditions of life in Sudan and Saudi Arabia and absurdity of the hajj rituals. *The Trip to the Other World* and Muhammadiev's other works were translated into Russian, Uzbek, Latvian, Armenian, Estonian, German, Romanian, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Czech, Arabic, Kazakh, Turkmen, Kyrgyz, Belarusian, Ukrainian, German, Polish and Bulgarian.[339] In June 1986 Fazliddin Muhammadiev was attacked and stabbed by street thugs in Dushanbe and died of wounds on 18 October that year. Soviet press

[338] Vladimir Bobrovnikov, "From Moscow to Mecca: Entangled Soviet Narratives of Pilgrimage in the Unlikely 1965 Hajjnāme of Fazliddin Muhammadiev," in *Narrating the Pilgrimage to Mecca*, ed. Marjo Buitelaar and Richard Van Leeuwen (BRILL, 2023), 221–41, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004513174_011, p. 222.

[339] Mehrinisso Bakaeva, "Khudozhestvennyie Funktsii Realii v Proizvedeniikh Fazliddina Muhammadieva i Osobennosti Vospriiatia Ikh Natsionalnogo Kolorita v Russkikh Perevodakh" (PhD dissertation, Dushanbe, Tadzhikskii Gosudarstvennyi Pedagogicheskii Universitet шьью Sadriddina Aini, 2020).

raged on the pages of *Literaturnaia gazeta* and *Kommunist Tadzhikistana* for 2 years condemning the assailants as religious fanatics, Wahhabis, drug edicts, pack of animals etc. Although the court proceedings were not revealed to the public authors of numerous articles claimed that Muhammadiev was attacked as a *qofir* (*bezbozhnik*) and compared Muhammadiev to his protagonist — a Tajik elder Buzurg who survived manslaughter by a Basmachi gang invoking a typical plot of secular Soviet martyrs of the civil war prose.[340]

Aleksandr Borshagovskii's *Staia* exemplifies the resentment of Soviet secular intelligentsia outraged by Muhammadiev's fate:

> every literate Tajik knows Muhammadiev, the masses honor him, but his books also have irreconcilable enemies. Two decades ago, as a medic, he accompanied gray-bearded mullahs on their trip to places of light — to Mecca and Medina. He saw a new world for himself. He also met Tajik migrants of the 1920s and learned their life stories, difficult and sometimes dramatic, and soon published the book Journey to the Other World... The book does not infringe upon the dignity and honor of believers; it is smart and sad. It contains piercing, I would say, bitterly sympathetic portraits of the elders, it contains the wisdom of atheism. The book has been translated into many languages, but Muhammadiev has not been forgiven not only by clergy or ignorant people, but also by other double-minded "intellectuals"[341]

In the late 1980s when Perestroika finally reached Tajikistan, repressions against and persecution of religious figures gave way to public debates about the place of religion in the socialist society. The concerns with the rise of Islam started appearing on the pages of *Kommunist Tadzhikistana* in 1986 as Soviet authorities urged Tajik journalists and regular citizens to respond to books and mass media publications commenting on human rights situation in the USSR. In 1986 Amnesty International published an open letter in support of Kalandar Saddurdinov from Kurgan Tiube arrested for his protest of the Soviet invasions of Afghanistan and expressing his religious views

[340] Anuar Alimzhanov, "Poklonenie Spravedlivosti," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, February 27, 1988.
[341] Aleksandr Borshagovskii, "Staia," *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, October 12, 1986, #50 (5116).

in public. Amnesty International characterized Sadurdinov as "martyr of consciousness."[342] Nevertheless, in his statement published in *Kommunist Tadzhikistana* Sadurdinov denounced himself in the following manner:

> I, resident of Kurgan Tiube, am a believer in religion of Islam. In 1986 the state law enforcement organs opened a criminal case against me. People's court found me guilty in crimes of spreading false ideas defaming the Soviet state and sentenced me to one year of suspended prison term (*uslovnyi srok*). In our country, as we know, there is freedom of conscience, that is, every citizen has the right to be a believer, no one is persecuted for their religious affiliation. On the contrary, the state strictly condemns every attempt to infringe on the rights of believers. I knew all this well, but due to a misunderstanding of some issues, I falsified reality, distortedly commented on the situation among believers. For example, I said that in the Soviet Union Muslims are not given the opportunity to freely read prayers or learn the religion of Islam. I spoke about the need to teach our children religion in secondary Soviet schools, and that in this matter teachers should play the main role (although in our country religion is separated from the state, and the church from the school). Of course, these demands were wrong.[343]

Sadurdinov's self-incriminating passage and other publications exemplify the contradictory nature of Perestroika in Central Asia where the proclaimed freedom of consciousness and the policy of openness coexisted with repression and individual persecution in cases when the existence of the Soviet state was questioned.

Many articles commenting on the rise of Islam and its impact on gender, public order, and nationalism appeared on the pages of Soviet press daily with authors, many of whom native Soviet Tajik women — teachers and lawyers, voiced their alarm. The authors of a series of articles about self-immolation of young women blamed the failures of the state to provide education and proper employment to girls who grow up dependent on their "feudal" fathers and husbands.[344] Tajikistan's

[342] K. Sadurdinov, "Ia blagodaren svoiei strane Pismo Zhitelia kurgan Tiube v organizatsiiu Amnesty International," *Kommunist Tazhikistana*, October 8, 1988.
[343] Ibid
[344] N. Anbaurzova, "Pod Pokrovom Shariata," *Selskaia Zhizni*, September 8, 1988; T Azizova, "A Zakon Molchit," *Selskaia Zhizni*, August 16, 1988.

party-state called regional communist party organs, intelligentsia, Komsomol, labor union organizers, teachers to combat religious expressions which threatened internationalism.

> One cannot help but see today such a trend as the interweaving of nationalist views with religious ones. Extremist clergy often speak from nationalist positions: declaring religion the custodian of national traditions and culture. The religious situation in our republic is alarming. Essentially the entire ritual system is in the hands of the clergy. It is especially bad in rural areas. Strange as it may seem, the influence of Islam on the creative intelligentsia has increased. There is a tendency to group people on a tribal and compatriot basis. This is also reflected in the placement of personnel. Localism creates a nervous environment in work collectives and raises the risk of conflict situations.[345]

> The religiosity of the population, including young people, remains high. In the minds of some of the intelligentsia, boys and girls, there is an identification and confusion of folk and religious holidays, rituals and traditions, and there is an underestimation of the reactionary essence of religion. In recent years, in a number of areas, the number of self-immolations has increased, and work with harmful, outdated customs has been weakened.[346]

To surmise, on the macro level, in the 1970s and 1980s the religious and spiritual life in Tajikistan was complex and heterogeneous containing, among other things, Muslim, non-Muslim, and secular or communist trends.[347] These spheres coexisted in the public sphere, sometimes paralleled, sometimes clashing. The next subchapter will explore the interplay between these spheres on a microlevel, by looking at the functioning of religion and spirituality in everyday life in Sharora.

5.2. Sharora as a Post-secular Heterotopia

It is unproductive and misleading to portray Central Asia as a Muslim region within the Soviet empire. Any imperial space is a place of constant intercultural, interethnic, and interconfessional intermingling, not a world of pure forms. For this reason, the following subchapter explores the

[345] A.N. Iakovleva, *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 8. 04. 1987.
[346] "V TsK Kompartii Tazhikistana," *Kommunist Tazhikistana*, February 5, 1988.
[347] For more on the diversity of everyday religious life elsewhere see David W. Montgomery, "Namaz, Wishing Trees, and Vodka: The Diversity of Everyday Religious Life in Central Asia," in *Everyday Life in Central Asia : Past and Present*, ed. Jeff Shahadeo and Russell Zanka (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

hybrid forms of religions and spiritualities in Sharora. The term that best characterizes Sharora's religious life is post-secular heterotopia. Post-secularism is defined as " inability to fully separate religion from secular politics."[348] Michelle Foucault defined heterotopia as a "world inside a world" containing incongruous elements contradicting one another "as a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live."[349] The classic examples of heterotopias are libraries, prisons, classrooms, cemeteries represent slices of time that allow one to jump into another temporality, places where time can merge or split.

Applied to the Soviet context post-secularist heterotopia indicates the product of deinstitutionalization of religion which resulted in eclectic religiosity and spiritualism.[350] Deinstitutionalization of religion in the Soviet Union dissolved the borders not only between different faiths, in the case of Sharora between Christianity and Islam, but also between believers and non-believers producing spiritual entanglements which contributed to the overall experience of being Soviet.

5.3. Sharora's Lieux de Spiritualité: Religious Life On-site

Different parts of Sharora community, Christians and Muslims, had different ways to practice their religions, often on unequal terms. Based on oral history, and personal archives collected during my fieldwork and the remaining material evidence of religious life, during the Soviet period Sharora's believers organized their faiths around both formal and informal sites and practices. The

[348]Clayton Crockett, "What Is Postsecularism?," *American Book Review* 39, no. 5 (2018): 6–14.
[349] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, 1984, https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf, p. 4.
[350]Ekaterina Grishaeva and Valeria Shumkova, "What Does It Mean to Be a True Orthodox in Post-Secular Russia: Attitude Toward Magic Among Orthodox Believers in the Middle Ural," in *Religion and Magic in Socialist and Post-Socialist Contexts*, ed. Cotofana Alexandra and James M. Nyce, vol. 1, Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society, vol. 163, 173 (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2017).

overarching Soviet frame and Soviet forms of everyday life had not only caused the permutation of Islam and Christianity but also created new forms of spiritualities.

First, religion and spirituality were often concentrated around formal and informal holy sites imbued with spiritual meaning — *lieux de spiritualité* or realms of spirituality. One of such sites is medieval Ghissar Fortress (Qalai Hisor) complex six kilometers away from Sharora. The complex represents a formal, state-sanctioned site where Islam is encountered as national heritage of the Tajik people.[351] In the 1970s Soviet archeologists salvaged and conserved the main gates of the Ghissar Fortress (Ark), Madrassah Kuhna (old) and Madrassah Nav (new), Mosque Sangin, elements of Caravan Saray Hishtin, and a 16th-century *tahoratkhona* — an inner court or a room for ablution ritual. Tajik historians ascribe great religious importance to Qalai Hisor — in the 16th century it hosted one of the prominent Shaikhs of Naqshbandi sufi order Lutfulloh Justi who left many murids (followers) and at the same time Qalai Hisor was the residence of Hisor Bek, usually a son of an Emir of Bukhara.[352] In 1982 after its restoration the Ghissar complex was transformed into an open air museum with only two buildings allowing visitors, increasingly international and domestic tourists, and wedding processions as the newly wedded took advantage of the picturesque nature and ancient buildings for their photosets. While the site could no longer serve any actual religious purpose the weddings and accompanying rituals had transformed the local meaning of Qalai Hisor. There still stands an old tree, purportedly from the pre-Soviet time which locals and tourists transformed into a wishing tree by tying pieces of colored fabric to its branches for good

[351] Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia*, First Edition, Reissue, With a New Afterword (University of California Press, 2014), pp. 84-115, Paolo Sartori, *A Soviet Sultanate: Islam in Socialist Uzbekistan (1943–1991)*, Sitzungsberichte / Österreichische Akademie Der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, 937. Band (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2024)6 p. 159.
[352] Rustam Mukimov and Nurali Khakimov, *Stroitelnaia Kultura Ghissarskoi Doliny X-XX Vv.* (NIIPAG, 2003).

luck. The belief among the visitors of the site was that the tying of cloths to the wishing tree was a source of blessing (*baraqat*) along with releasing doves into the sky and parents' prayer (*duo*).[353]

Figure 36. Sharora resident Liudmila Saltaieva at the Ghissar Fortress in 1982.

[353] Information about the spiritual meaning of Qalai Hisor and other sites of spiritual importance was received in multiple conversations with residents of the Ghissar district and site visit to the complex and observation of past and present visitors of the site.

Figure 37. Wedding at the Ghissar Fortress in 1983 (source RGAKFD)[354]

In Sharora proper, throughout the Soviet period there were three mosques: an old mosque near *Eshoni Devona* neighborhood in the southern part of the *posëlok*, newer mosque near the center, and Kyrgyz mosque Manas (*Masjidi mahallai Manas*) in the easternmost part of Sharora. From conversations with the present-day informal religious authorities and their descendants,[355] *hojji* and *eshons* in Tajik, Tajik mosques were simple buildings dating back to the post-war period, roughly the 1950s-1960s. Indistinguishable from other private residences and without traditional domes or minarets the congregation could easily change mosques by moving from one such building to another. The Kyrgyz Mosque was built in 1980 according to traditional Islamic architecture and had never changed location. The Kyrgyz Mosque boasted authentic interior design

[354] Russian State Archive of Film and Audio Documents http://photo.rgakfd.ru

[355] Davlatior Odinaev, Conversation with the author, 2020; Mahmadi, Conversation with the author, 2020; Nodir Khabibov, "Conversation with the Author on February 15" (Dushanbe, 2020); Hudoior Odinaev, Conversation with the author, 2020.

and carved wooden pillars.[356] Sharora's Pamiri population, some of whom were agricultural scientists and teachers, had never had a mosque of their own, despite the notable differences in Ismaili theology and rituals. The informal religious leaders, *mullahs* and *eshons*, congregated at the mosques but more habitually officiated life-cycle events funerals, circumcisions and initiation ceremonies for boys (*tui*), and delivered on-site prayers at key Muslim holidays *Idi Ramazon* and *Idid Qurbon*.[357] Sharora mullahs were well integrated into sovkhoz economy and politics as honorable workers. Many of Sharora's present-day influential residents trace their ancestry to religious figures. In fact, there are reasons to believe that a part of their professional and social success had something to do with their devout genealogy and their parents' acceptance of the Soviet order.[358] Brothers Davlatior and Hudoior Odinaevs shared that their grandfather Mulloh Akhund Odina, a graduate of one of Bukhara's pre-revolutionary madrassahs, was a self-employed carpenter and handyman (*usto*).[359] Nodir Khabibov also described his grandfather as a mullah from Garm region. Teacher Venera Sadykova mentioned her grandfather who was a mullah and teacher in Bukhara. The informants further explained that in small isolated mountainous qishlaks mullah was a self-proclaimed social role: "anyone who could read, count, followed the Hijri calendar and could tell people when to start Ramadan fast and when to end it, anyone who had the knowledge of medicinal herbs and could help fellow-villagers with health problems was proclaimed a

[356] Avvalbekov, Conversation with the author.
[357] Muslim funerals in the Soviet period required two sets of prayers (*janoza*) at a home of a diseased person during the preparation of the body for the burial and enroute to the cemetery in a nearest mosque. The prayers and *quran* reading (*hatm*) were also integral for commemoration feasts on the day of a funeral, on the fortieth day and on each anniversary of a death. Prayers on the occasion of Islamic holidays were by invitation to a feast (*dastarkhon*). As for the *tui* prayers, mullahs specializing in circumcision ceremonies would read the required prayer and perform circumcisions. In a group interview, men from Sharora born between 1978 and 1984 shared that their circumcision ceremonies took place in their homes and involved a special mullah. In rare exceptions circumcisions were performed in hospitals but the *tui* was still required to complete a boy's initiation.
[358] A phenomenon well-studied in Flora J. Roberts, "Old Elites under Communism: Soviet Rule in Leninobod" (PhD dissertation, Chicago, University of Chicago, 2016).
[359] Reportedly, Mullo Akhund Odina left many pupils including the Mulloh Sirojiddin of Sharora. A small shrine, a garden, next to the School #14 in Sharora was dedicated to Mullo Akhund.

mullah."[360] Hence, thanks to their literacy, useful skills, social standing, and ethics, mullahs were an integral part of any sovkhoz community.[361] Furthermore, the so-called mullahs practiced what Sergei Abashin has termed "tactics of reticence" to maintain the collectivist and community sentiment using Islamic rituals while at the same time serving the interest of the state.[362] From conversations with many mullahs and eshons of Shorara or their children one can grasp that they adjusted their religious life to living and working in the Soviet state — building Sharora's *klub*, organizing *khashar* campaigns and Soviet *subbotniki*, and fighting various Soviet wars, WWII, suppression of Budapest and Prague uprisings, invasion of Afghanistan. Each of these life experiences brought Sharora's elders and mullahs closer to their European neighbors as they shared both burdens and rewards of living in the USSR.

It is important that during the Soviet period Sharora's Christian (Russian Orthodox and German Catholic) community never had any kind of clergy to lead their religious affairs and rituals. Nor was there a church or place of congregation. Soviet Koreans living in Sharora were left without any idea of their national or ancestral faiths all together. This situation speaks of inequality in access to religious learning and practice among natives and Europeans in Soviet Tajikistan, with the former being privileged.

[360] Khabibov, "Conversation with the Author on February 15."
[361] Stéphane A. Dudoignon and Christian Noack, eds., *Allah's Kolkhozes: Migration, De-Stalinisation, Privatisation, and the New Muslim Congregations in the Soviet Realm (1950s-2000s)*, First edition, Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, Band 314 (Berlin: KS, Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2014), pp. 18-20.
[362] S. Abashin, "A Prayer for Rain: Practising Being Soviet and Muslim," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 25, no. 2 (May 1, 2014): 178–200, p. 189.

Figure 38. Celebrating eshon-veterans of Sharora (sic. 1990s).

Outside of mosques and beyond individual religious authority Islam in Sharora functioned as an element of everyday life magic.[363] Like elsewhere in Soviet Central Asia mullahs were often approached not for religious reasons or to officiate lifecycle events but also for help with personal problems and health issues. Islamic magic practices and superstitions included special prayers for elevating difficult life circumstances such as *mushkilkusho*, a universal prayer against evil spell, an evil eye, infertility, unfulfilling sex life and impotence.[364] Some of the most intriguing artefacts from Sharora's spiritual past, particularly in the late Soviet period and the early 1990s were Islamic amulets *tumor* and *kusi gurg*. *Tumor* is a triangular envelope made purportedly of a hajji's robe enclosing a short Quranic prayer written in Arabic alphabet. The exact content of the prayer remains secret to anyone including the owner of *tumor*, except for the mullah who writes it. *Tumor* is believed to bring good luck and blessing (*baraqat*) even though the official Islam condemns all sorts of amulets to be *shirk* or polytheism. *Kusi gurg* literally means wolf's womb consists of a

[363] This part of research data was collected partly from unrecorded interviews and conversations due to the intimate nature of information.

[364] Soviet ethnographers documented many magic rituals and superstitions incorporated into Central Asian syncretic Islam. See Oksana Sukhareva, "Perezhitki Demonologii i Shamanstva u Ravninnykh Tadzhikov," in *Domusulmanskie Verovaniia i Obriady v Srednei Azii* (Moscow: GRVL, 1975), 5–93.

piece of a she-wolf's reproductive organ wrapped in a piece of fabric and sewed to a rubber band loop, typically worn on a young man's arm near shoulder. *Kusi gurg* was believed to increase a man's sex appeal and make him sexually attractive to many women. Despite the obviously obscene nature of the amulet, according to some of Sharora men it was usually sold by a mullah, however not in mosques.[365]

Among other notable magical notions originating in Soviet Sharora are *ubol, khudo mezanat,* and *ajina*.[366] Soviet ethnographers noted that the meaning of notions describing the spiritual world employ local vocabulary.[367] In the case of Sharora the local vocabulary for spirituality took shape in a context of trans-confessionalism i.e. coexistence of Islam and Christianity and represents failure of both modern religion and socialist atheism to uproot superstition and animism.[368]

Ubol in colloquial Tajik means punishable sin or unholy action very close in meaning to the notion sin (Russian *grekh*) but is used in everyday situations outside sacral context for which the word *gunogh* (sin) is used. *Ubol* is used first and foremost as a didactic device for children and youth to teach them off bad behavior. Sharora-specific types of *ubol* were urinating into water and dropping bread on the ground. *Khudo mezanat* (Tajik God will punish you) is a punishment for *ubol.* The word *khudo* is an everyday notion for God very close in meaning to the Russian *Bozhe* or *Bog*. Usually, an individual allowing *ubol* and suffering consequences such as bad luck or disease is called *khudo zadagi* (struck by God). Finally, *ajina* in Sharora is a version of genie an

[365] I have made multiple attempts to track down mullahs or their family members who made and sold amulets in the past. While many Muslim interlocutors confession to have owned amulets they never shared names of individuals supplying their amulets. The cause of this secrecy is the ongoing crackdown on informal mullahs, healers, and fortunetellers in Tajikistan and the widespread fear it has caused across the country.
[366] I encountered these notions in my childhood in Sharora during Soviet period in the 1980s and 1990s and discussed them with Sharora's residents during my seven-month fieldwork there in 2020 in conversations with each other and group interviews when they talked to each other rather than respond to my answers.
[367]Sukhareva, "Perezhitki Demonologii i Shamanstva u Ravninnykh Tadzhikov."
[368] Ibid. p. 11.

evil spirit or devil in Islamic cosmology. All major schools of Islamic theology and sects accept the existence of genie. Genie are believed to be the opposites of angels (Tajik *maloika*) existing in the parallel spiritual world capable of crossing the border between the world of spirits and humans to cause mischief and possess human bodies. The belief is that *ajina* can curse a human or cause disease by a single touch of her hair. [369] There are mullahs who specialize in exorcism rituals against ajina.[370] Sharora Muslims had their own local beliefs about *ajina* mixed with beliefs in another mythic entity *albasty* — a spirit that manifests itself as a young woman that can both harm and assist people. In Sharora they believe that *ajina* are active after dark and populate deserted places, usually near bodies of water such as canals, lakes, or rivers. Ajina represents a departure of Tajik Muslims from other Muslim communities who believe in jinn or genie to be male while *ajina* is an explicitly female entity.[371] In Sharora there is a belief that *ajina* are fond of walnut trees where they spend nights awaiting their human victims. The evidence of deeply entrenched fear of *ajina* in Sharora is that walnut trees are always planted in the farthest conner of inner gardens nowhere near pathways, toilets, outside beds (*tapchan* or *kat*) and that Central Asians are extremely reluctant to leave homes or walk alone in the dark. People with mental disabilities in Sharora are often called *ajinazadagi* struck or possessed by *ajina*.[372]

Sharora Christians encountered their version of *ajina* as a Russian folkloric entity *domovoĭ* a typically home spirit similar to European poltergeist dwelling in people's homes. *Domovoĭ* is believed to be an amiable spirit protecting human housing from other entities, intrusions, and

[369] Oksana Sukhareva, "Perezhitki Demonologii i Shamanstva u Ravninnykh Tadzhikov," in *Domusulmanskie Verovaniia i Obriady v Srednei Azii* (Moscow: GRVL, 1975), p. 15.
[370] Robert Lebling, *Legends of the Fire Spirits: Jinn and Genies from Arabia to Zanzibar* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010); Mirzo Mirzoev, "Vklad Olgi Alexandrovny Sukharevoi v Izuchenie Istorii i Etnografii Tadzhikov Bukhary i Samarkanda" (PhD dissertation, Dushanbe, Tajik State University, 2024). Female victims of *ajina zad* and possessions are helped by Bibi Otin — Central Asian female elders.
[371] Lali Ibragimova, "Otrazhenie Gendernykh Rolei v Tadzhikskikh Skazkakh" (PhD dissertation, Dushanbe, Institut Istorii, Arheologii i etnografii Akademiya Nauk Respubliki Tajikistan., 2003).
[372] One such individual, a single native woman living an isolated life in the 1980s, was believed to be struck by *ajina*.

accidents. When displeased, however, *domovoĭ* turns vicious and menacing. In an interview, Nina Drofa shared that her apartment had been invaded by *domovoĭ* since the Soviet time. She shared that both she and her late husband encountered *domovoĭ* in various ways, hearing steps and noise in the kitchen at nights, feeling kicks and pokes while sleeping. Nina's friend Tatiana, present at the interview, noted that she still hears steps and noise in Nina's kitchen and always leaves tea and candy in the kitchen to appease *domovoĭ*. My interlocutors explained that in cases when *domovoĭ* is unruly he can be expelled by an orthodox priest (*batiushka*) performing a consecration prayer or by inviting a cat. Sharora version of *domovoĭ* is a departure of traditional Slavic *domovoĭ* an exclusively domestic ghost. Sharora *domovoĭ* has acquired features of ajina as it can be encountered in places outside of home. Nina related that a Tajik acquaintance of hers encountered *domovoĭ* in the inner court of his home as a "black puppy that appeared out of thin air and disappeared without a trace." At the same conversation Nina and Galina mentioned that Sharora school is haunted by either *domovoĭ* or *ajina* using both terms interchangeably and that their friend Chomba was the only man in Sharora who dares to work in school as a night guard.[373]

5.4. Sharora Cemeteries

The following subsection explores the available histories of the three cemeteries of Sharora: Russian or Orthodox cemetery, Muslim or Tajik cemetery, and a mixed cemetery where Muslims, people from mixed families, and Soviet soldiers are buried.[374] The very existence of cemeteries represents the failure of Bolshevik ideologues to eradicate religion and superstition and create a new Soviet man because Soviet people, Christian and Muslim alike, had retained their belief in the hereafter and insisted that funerals abide by their respective traditions. The Bolshevik

[373] Group interview Nina Drofa, Tatiana, Galina, 2020.
[374] There is also a collective gravesite of the Sharora Earthquake and its memorial complex which I will discuss in the following chapter.

government took the first legal efforts to strip funerals off religious ritualism on 7 December 1918 by passing the Decree on Cemeteries and Funerals which canceled confessional control over family affairs and funeral ceremonies.[375] In the 1920s and 1930s Soviet authorities experimented with the new rituals for funerals such as civil funeral (*grazhdanskaia panihida*), red or revolutionary funerals, preservation of embalmed dead bodies (*mumifikatsia*), and cremation. The First crematoria were built in Petrograd and Moscow. Between 1920 and 1988 there were opened 9 crematoria in the European part of the USSR including the largest in Europe Nikolo-Arkhangelskiĭ Crematorium in Balashikha, Moscow Oblast. There was no place for cemeteries in the new socialist towns and cities as the urban planners presupposed that cremation would be the only way to dispose of human bodies across the Soviet Union.[376]

In Central Asia, however, there has never been a functioning crematorium, and in Tajikistan, even with its perennial land shortage, traditional burial has never given way to secular funerals and instead played a role of realms of spirituality — *lieux de spiritualité* where people could practice their faith. The most important aspect of this faith was belief that an individual's life continues after physical death and that afterlife needs to be supported by worldly means. In Sharora, moreover, the orthodox cemetery was the place to be Christian without a church or clergy by amplifying orthodox rituals of care for the dead.

The orthodox cemetery, the oldest of the three, occupies the slanting hills to the South of Sharora (*bagara*) stretching along a section of the Ghissar-Kurgan Tiube Road, overlooking the *posëlok* and much of the Ghissar Valley. It is not known when exactly the cemetery emerged, and it is conspicuously absent from all available Soviet-era maps of the area in question despite its size and importance for the community. Nor is it mentioned in any archival documents, even in the

[375] Anna Sokolova, *Novomu Cheloveku - Novaia Smert'? Pokhoronnaía Kul'tura Rannego SSSR*, Studia Religiosa (Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2022), p. 61.
[376] Ibid., p. 84.

files containing land surveys of the Central Ghissar Valley. The now extremely small Russian-speaking population visits the cemetery two-three times a year: collectively to prepare the graves for the Orthodox Easter, for Easter celebration, and individually throughout the year.[377] The oldest graves in the cemetery date back to the 1950s but according to the Sharora elderly there used to be older graves dating back to the 1930s but those were subsumed by later burials due to land shortage. The territory occupied by the cemetery is adjacent to the rainfed fields (*zaminhoi lalmi*) that in the past were under cultivation by Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskoko and Institut Zemledelia and are presently used as pastures by the local community. Today, the cemetery is overgrown with grass and suffers from lack of care. With only a handful of families still tending their graves the vast majority of burials are no longer identifiable. To make matters worse, someone from the local community vandalizes the graves, steals metal fences around graves, and lets cattle graze on the cemetery. The only way to somehow identify the religious affiliation of the burials is that Russian orthodox graves are oriented towards the East and a minority of German Catholic graves are oriented towards the West. Next to the orthodox cemetery there is a smaller graveyard that started off as a military cemetery for Muslim soldiers of the Soviet-Afghan war with the local hero Oleg Kassimov's burial as its landmark. Muslim military graves are oriented towards the South as required by the Muslim funerary canons.

To fully understand the spiritual role of the cemetery and the ways it shaped intra-communal relations in Sharora one needs to explore the culture of the dead of Sharora's Orthodox community.[378] Christians took death seriously and neither Soviet anti-religious policy nor atheist propaganda could put an end to the deeply entrenched fear of death without proper funeral. The

[377] I visited the cemetery three times in 2020 during the fieldwork in January, March, and April and recorded conversations and documented local past and present religious practices at the cemetery.
[378] This subsection is based on multiple conversations and correspondence with Sharora's current and former residents and onsite observation of their religious rituals or memories thereof.

elderly would make arrangements about their funerals long in advance by saving money for funerals (*pokhoroniye*) to be followed by funeral feasts (*pominki*)[379] and leaving instructions as to how the ceremony was to proceed.

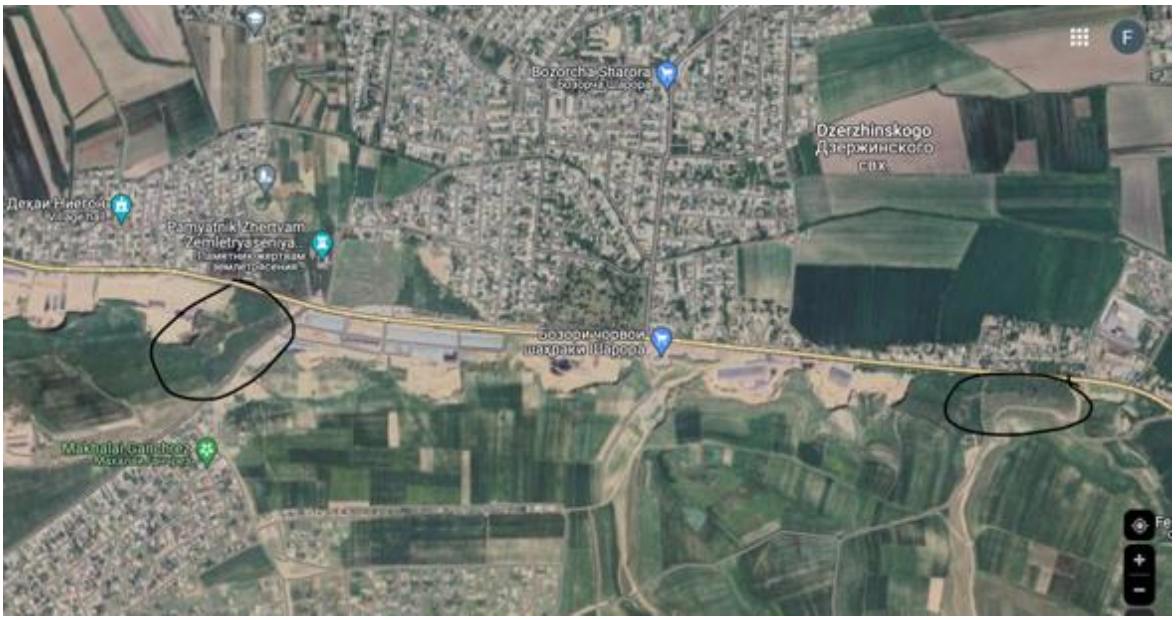


Figure 39. Two Sharora cemeteries: Muslim (circled area on the left) and Russian (circled area on the right).

The mourning must continue for 40 days as it is believed that the soul remains on Earth for that period and any failure of the burial ritual might dissatisfy the soul and tie it to this world permanently causing it to disturb the living (*neupokoi*). More importantly, the commemoration feasts and Easter celebration were directly linked to the comfort of the dead in the afterlife. The orthodox *pominki* are held on the third day, on the nineth, and on the fortieth day, and on the anniversary of a death.[380] There is a menu of foods and beverages pertinent to the funeral feats which includes kutia, a rice kasha with dried fruit, bliny, noodle soup or borsch, and the main course stuffed peppers, cutlets, in mixed families *plov*. Vodka is allowed for *pominki*, albeit

[379] Held on the third, ninth, fortieth day and on anniversary of the passing.
[380] See chapter 3, subchapter Leisure.

consumed in moderation, typically three shots without touching glasses (*ne chokaias*'). The atmosphere at the table during *pominki* is somber with most of the talks dedicated to memories of a diseased. Several times good wishes to a diseased are pronounced: *tsarstvie nebesnoie* or *pust' zemlia budet pukhom* (heavenly kingdom and let the soil be soft as fur). During conversations in Sharora it was shared that the souls of the dead are nurtured and pleased when people eat and drink in their honor.

Orthodox Easter in Sharora, which combines both commemorative practices at the cemetery and celebration of the Passover, bears striking resemblance to the cult of the dead in the Americas (*Pan de Muerte*). According to the orthodox conventions Easter is the celebration on the first Sunday following the end of the great 48-day fast and involves a lavish feast and treats for children. Traditional Easter menu included kulich, died eggs, and *paskha* pyramidal cheesecake. Orthodox Easter is celebrated for several days, and the clergy explicitly prohibits mourning, attending cemeteries, and even household chores on that day. The Soviet order, while unable to fully exasperate religious holidays, did intervene into the ways Easter is celebrated in Tajikistan and led to the invention of new rituals and belief systems. There are two Eaters in Orthodox tradition, Easter on Sunday celebrating the end of the fast and Parents' Easter (*Roditelskaia paskha* or *Radonitsa*) on the 9th day after Sunday Easter to commemorate the dead at a cemetery. Parent's Easter always falls on a working day thereby forcing believers in Sharora to merge both Easters into an unconventional Easter Sunday at the cemetery very much like Mexican *Pan de Muerte*.[381]

[381] Irina, Galina, Alla, Oksana, Juma, Nodir, Group interview, 2020., Agopov, Conversation with the author.

Figure 40. Easter at Sharora cemetery 2020.

Figure 41. On the way to the cemetery and picnic at the cemetery, 1973.

In Soviet Sharora Easter was the major holiday with preparations taking at least three days spent on baking and cooking. My interlocutors at the cemetery during Easter shared that they used to spend enormous effort to prepare to the Easter celebration: kneading three buckets of sweet dough to bake pies, rolled cakes, and kulich, and dying 200-300 eggs.[382] Easter Sunday would start before sunrise with children's trick-or-treating — knocking from door to door saying *khristos*

[382] According to the respondents food and pastry prepared for Easter had to last for at least a week. Babaeva, "Conversation with the Auhtor on February 16"; Babaeva, "Conversation with the Author on July 27, 2020."

voskrese (Christ has resurrected) and receiving a dyed egg or piece of pastry and a return phrase *voistinu vostrese* (Indeed he has resurrected). After that families would walk to the cemetery and have picnic on the graves of their kin. Many graves were equipped with small metal or wooden tables and benches for dining. During the dining small amount of food and alcohol would be scattered on the graves "to nourish the dead." The belief is that insects and birds by consuming the offering transform it into nourishment for the souls. At one point during the Easter picnic in 2020 one of the participants dropped a glass of vodka and exclaimed: "Nikolai Ivanovich (the man at whose grave we were sitting) has claimed his share because we forgot to offer him some." Remarkably and quite ironically, Orthodox Easter at Sharora cemetery and the magnitude of religious rituals and celebrations Soviet people could afford in the past constitutes a major narrative in Soviet nostalgia in present-day Sharora.

Easter celebration along with funeral feast and other rituals were taking place in situations of "public privacy" i.e. personal lifecycle events and rituals organized in public and often for the public.[383] As was shown in chapter 3, food was one of the most powerful social lubricants bringing various parts of Sharora community closer. During the Easter picnic at the cemetery several children from the village approached the grave saying *id muborak* (happy holiday) and received treats. My interlocutors said that natives (Tajiks or locals) have always shown great interest in attending Easter picnic at the cemetery as Easter foods and pastry must have felt irresistible to the native population living in the vicinity of the Russian cemetery. Furthermore, members of mixed families had to participate in both Muslim and Christian holidays which allowed for the reciprocal transfer of rituals and traditions within extended families.

[383]For similar analysis of public privacy among Central Asian Muslim in the Soviet period see S. Abashin, "A Prayer for Rain: Practising Being Soviet and Muslim," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 25, no. 2 (May 1, 2014): 178–200.

The Muslim cemetery located three kilometers away from the Russian cemetery is another intriguing spiritual site evincing convergence and reciprocity between Christianity and Islam in Soviet period. Unfortunately, visual evidence could not be collected from the site because Muslims condemn photographing cemeteries and view any intrusion as disrespectful. The basic fact about Sharora's Muslim cemetery is that it replicates the Orthodox design of gravestones and some of the spiritual and religious practices such as visitation and commemoration of the dead. Sharora Muslims follow the convectional funeral protocol common in Central Asia. In Central Asian Islamic burial, the process begins with Ghusl, where the body of the deceased is washed by family or community members of the same gender. This washing is performed three or more times using clean and scented water to ensure purity, followed by Shrouding (Kafan) involving wrapping the body in a plain white shroud; men are typically wrapped in three pieces of cloth, while women are wrapped in five. The next step is the Funeral Prayer (Janoza), a communal prayer usually held at a mosque or in an open space, focusing on seeking forgiveness for the deceased. Finally, during the burial, the body is transported to the cemetery and laid in the grave on its right side, facing Mecca (qibla). In Shrora I witnessed that the main part of the grave is *khona* a small chamber or shelf dug at an angle where a body is placed and bricked up.

Traditionally Islam precludes marking graves. An old Muslim cemetery in Dushanbe in the 84th micro-district is an illustrative case in point as the old graves are only marked with simple sticks and pieces of fabric tied to them. There are no dates of birth and death to be found anywhere leave alone images of the people buried there. The cemetery is poorly if at all designed for visitation and lacks pathways and steps. Sharora's Soviet Muslim cemetery in contrast exemplifies a new funerary material and immaterial culture surrounding death. Soviet ethnographers collecting funerary traditions and rituals in the 1960s and 1970s in various parts of Tajikistan, including the Ghissar Valley noted that Soviet order had a notable impact on the traditions and superstitions

related to death evolving in the Soviet period that would be unequivocally condemned in orthodox Islam. For example, it had become common for Tajiks to use images, photographs and portraits in various funerary rituals, placing the picture of a diseased near the grave or on gravestones, keeping a small corner dedicated to a diseased containing his or her belongings and portrait photograph inside a home for the duration of mourning (40 days).[384] Furthermore, some of Tajik funerary rituals, such as visitation of and feasting at cemeteries on religious holidays as a way to nourish the dead and socialize with buried kin and family, wishing them happy holidays and soon resurrection, had become ubiquitous. In Sharora cemetery visitation takes place on Idi Qurbon (Eid al-Adha) which in local tradition is understood as a Tajik version of Christian Easter and bares striking resemblance to the Orthodox rituals discussed earlier.

Muslims of Sharora have had various distinct rituals and traditions practiced during religious holidays invented during the Soviet period[385] resulting from Sharora's international populace. The way Islamic holidays *Idi Ramazon* (Eid al-Fitr) and *Idi Qurbon* (Eid al-Adha) were celebrated in Soviet Tajikistan are quite unique. Despite the difference in the original meaning of the holidays — *Idi Ramazon* celebrates the end of the fast *Ruza* while *Idi Qurbon* is the day of sacrifice, the meaning of the two holidays for Sharora community underwent transformations very similar to those of the Christian traditions. Observing *Ramadan* in Soviet-era Tajikistan posed significant challenges due to the discouragement of public religious observance, leading many Tajiks to fast in secret, typically eating before dawn and after dusk to avoid drawing attention. Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of Ramadan, traditionally includes communal prayers; however, during Soviet times, these prayers were often conducted in private homes or less conspicuous

[384] O. Murodov and A. Mardonova, "Nekotoryie Traditsionnye Pogrebalnyie Obychai i Obriady u Tadzhikov," *Etnografia v Tadzhikistane*, October 25, 1989б p. 120.
[385] On the impact of Soviet policies and everyday life on Islam see Paolo Sartori, "Of Saints, Shrines, and Tractors: Untangling the Meaning of Islam in Soviet Central Asia," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 30, no. 3 (September 2019): 367–405.

locations to evade authorities. Several respondents have shared that in Sharora during the Soviet period they were not particularly concerned with the regularity and consistency of their prayers and took advantage of what they believed to be the proper Muslim way to deal with state restrictions on religious observance: "In Islam it is allowed to only perform the number of prayers that the circumstances permit, for example the first prayer of the day *namozi peshin* and the last prayer *namozi shom*." Similarly, Eid al-Adha, the Festival of Sacrifice involving the ritual slaughter of an animal, was driven underground, with families performing the sacrifice discreetly in rural areas or within their property confines. The distribution of meat, a crucial part of Eid al-Adha, continued quietly, with meat being shared with family, friends, and the needy to avoid repercussions from the authorities.

Id Gardak, a Soviet-era addition to the two sacred holidays, is a unique cultural and religious ritual observed in most parts of Tajikistan. Although it coincides with the two religious holidays *Id Gardak* is more of a cultural event with local significance rather than a religious practice. It is highly community-oriented, involving visits to neighbors and relatives, and emphasizes social bonds and the reaffirmation of community ties. Children play a central role by going house to house, singing traditional songs, and receiving small gifts or treats, reminiscent of Halloween's trick-or-treating in Western cultures and *krestnyi khod* on Orthodox Easter discussed earlier. The festivities include cultural performances, songs, and traditional games designed to foster community spirit and joy. Sharing food is a major component, with families preparing special dishes and sweets to share with visitors, emphasizing hospitality and communal participation. Based on oral evidence from Sharora elderly the nuances of each holiday were blurred in the Soviet period and both *Idi Ramazon* and *Idi Qurbon* shared the same pattern — a communal meal at a *dastarkhan* with a prayer and *id gardak* for children. The earliest memories of *id gardak* in Shaora date back to the 1960s and coalesce with the ways Sharora Christians

celebrated Easter. Celebrations would continue for three days and involve lavish feasts, children's trick-or-treating and, particularly on *Idi Qurbon*, visiting and feasting at the cemetery.[386] If the holiday fell on a working day the celebration at the *dastarkhan* and trick-or-treating would start and end before sunrise.[387] Because of the floating date of Islamic holidays they sometimes coincide with the Orthodox Easter and on at least two occasions in the 20th century *Id Gardak* and *Krestnyi Khod* both took Sharora streets on the same Sunday. Such occasions presented yet another opportunity for Sharora denizens to experience spirituality and traditions of their neighbors of other faiths. Children from mixed marriages had a unique chance to receive treats from both Muslim and Christian families on the same day.

Figure 42. (left) Soviet-Afghan War veterans at a rally in honor of local hero Oleg Kassymov, (right) reenactment of the mourning scene of Kassymov's mother at Sharora school.[388]

What could explain these similarities of the cults of the dead shared by Christians and Muslims in Sharora? Of course, both Christianity and Islam are Abrahamic religions sharing many

[386] As I was writing this chapter in June 2024 *id gardak* and many other aspects of Islamic ritualism and celebrations was banned in Tajikistan and I found it necessary to anonymize and paraphrase the information received from Sharora's residents.

[387] Samandar, Rahmon, Vahid, Firuz, Akbar, Sabit, Stas, Correspondence with the author (Sharora group chat), 2024 2024; Nodir Khabiboy shared that in the 1960s his mother would dye 500 eggs to distribute for children's *Id Gardak*, "Conversation with the Author on February 15" (Dushanbe, 2020).

[388] During my fieldwork I accessed videos of two commemoration ceremonies of Soviet-Afghan War from 2013 and 2014 and attended one such ceremony myself in 2020.

theological aspects and some superstitions. However, it is more sensible to consider that religious practices and beliefs in Soviet Sharora were shaped in the process of reciprocation between Christians and Muslims taking place in symbolic borderlands such as military cemetery for Muslim soldiers adjacent to the Russian cemetery where new hybrid spiritual practices emerged and transmitted to the wider community. Soldiers killed at war in Afghanistan in the 1980s and their families had little agency in deciding the form and ritual of their funerals as the bodies were also claimed by their fellow-servicemen and the local state authorities. To satisfy all, the soldiers were buried partly according to the Muslim tradition, yet their graves have become sites of Soviet commemoration with secular gravestones, collective visitation and speeches, while in public reenactments of grief taking place in Sharora school #14 traditional Tajik Muslim lamentation and bewailing for the diseased young unmarried youths are performed:

> Oh, my dear son, mother's hero, how could you die?! I have made you a brooms gown. I wanted to see you wedded, oh your mother's young son. Oh God! I am mother who has given her child away.[389]

5.5. Humans as Spirituality: Chomba the Gravedigger and Nodir the Drinking Poet

While quiet and lifeless for the most time cemeteries produce social and economic links and attract individuals and groups such as caretakers and gravediggers and shape their religiosity and spirituality. Sharora's Russian cemetery has shaped the life of Juma Kuziev,[390] also known as Chomba the Gravedigger, by giving him a social role and a place of importance for the Christian part of Sharora community. He was born in 1953 in Sharora into the family of the WWII veteran

[389] From the video recording of the reenactment of the death of Oleg Kassymov at Sharora school #14 in 2013 and 2014.

[390] Juma Kuziev is my uncle. His story is based on my conversations with him in 2020, with his sister-in-law, his brother and two still-living friends. Due to the intimate nature of information the data from the interviews is anonymized and paraphrased.

and sovkhoz worker Tuichi. He finished 8 classes of school, however, reportedly, he only completed four years of school learning and for the most part had remained illiterate. He grew up with his Russian classmates Genka, Yurka, Boris, and Gona from whom he learned colloquial Russian and the essentials of Slavic and Christian traditions. Although his spoken Russian was fluent, he confessed he could barely read or write in Russian. Perhaps for that reason, Chomba served in the army in *stroibat* (construction battalion) as a private — a kind of service that required little literacy. Like most of his Tajik peers, he had to marry his cousin Shahri Kuzieva and would otherwise live a life of a low-key yet respected Soviet Muslim. However, a constellation of Soviet experiences such as growing up with European neighbors, military service abroad, and vibrant culture in Sharora had compelled Chomba to live a different life of social drinking, having a Russian concubine, and moonlighting with his friends.

Side jobs were a norm in Soviet Union as there were significant segments in the USSR's enormous and bulky economy that were not catered to, for example, private construction and home improvement, handyman services and small repairs, and funerary services.[391] Since the 1970s, the first generation of Sharora's residents grew old, the mortality rates spiked thereby increasing the demand for funerary services. As the cemetery was an informal site and none of the organizations in Sharora was responsible for funerary services, citizens were left to themselves to make the necessary arrangements. For Muslims, who had more children and closer kinship networks, the matters of burial and accompanying rites were quite expedient. In contrast, the Slavic population was unable to maintain their cemetery because of the low life expectancy among European men due to alcohol consumption and smoking and otherwise risky lifestyles. Furthermore, the European

[391] This phenomenon of temporary and informal self-employment is widely known in the post-Soviet space as *khaltura* or moonlighting. The phenomenon was epitomized by Georgy Danelia's popular comedy *Afonia* (1975). More on informal and temporary employment in the USSR see William Moskoff, "Seasonal and Temporary Work," in *Labour and Leisure in the Soviet Union*, by William Moskoff (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1984), 51–65.

family model with less children and often childless couples and singles, precluded the transfer knowledge and skills about orthodox funeral preparation to the younger generation. Hence, Christians had to rely on hired labor to dig graves, make coffins, gravestones, and other elements of proper burial. Boris, Gona, Yurka, Genka, and Chomba were the men who filled this new niche and now specialized in grave digging and other burial services. Chomba has outlived and buried all of his Russian friends and since the late 1980s has been the only one who takes the dead to the final place of rest.

Without being a part of the Orthodox community, Chomba has been a crucial part of the Christian ritual economy. Still living Russian Tajikistanis from the capital have heard of Chomba and discovered Sharora's cemetery as more available and affordable than the Orthodox cemetery in Dushanbe. When they come to Sharora to make arrangements they ask around: "Where can we find Chomba the Gravedigger?" Thus, Juma Kuziev, a Tajik peasant, is known today as Chomba the Gravedigger. While his acquaintances explain Chomba's occupation as economically motivated to sustain his leisure and independence, he himself talks of his profession in spiritual terms: "Of course, the families [of diseased] offered us food, vodka, and money. Sometimes they only gave us some money so we could go have a drink in *bufet*. But we took this money not as a fee or salary. If a person dies, no matter if he's a Tajik or Russian, he needs a proper burial. It is inhumane (*nepochelovecheski*) otherwise."[392]

It is probable that through his work at the cemetery, co-attending orthodox commemorative rituals and handling the dead, Chomba had developed a kind of spirituality. Today Chomba is the only man in Sharora who dares to work as a nightguard in its school, which is believed to be haunted by *ajina* — in Tajik tradition an unequivocally vicious and deadly spirit. Chomba in

[392] Kuziev, "Conversation with the Author."

contrast to other Tajiks has acquired a different view of the ghost that haunts the school that is closer to the Slavic *domovoiĭ* — a mostly benevolent home spirit that can be appeased. Hence, when working night shifts as a school guard Chomba sees himself as invincible to the restless souls thanks to his noble occupation and unlike his Tajik predecessors who had fled the school in horror, Chomba sleeps through the night on the desks and whenever disturbed by the dreadful sounds of howling, whistles, footsteps etc. simply shouts: "If you have nothing better to do than banging all night long come have a drink with me!"[393] Chomba's place in Sharora is not accidental but a sum of opportunities engendered by the USSR's post-war transformations such as internationalism and the erosion of ethnic and confessional divisions, universal employment, modern housing and welfare combined with the economy of favors. Chomba, free from both party-state and Muslim-Tajik restraints, seemed to have satisfied both worlds, while living a third life.

Another Sharora character worth mentioning in the context of religiosity and spirituality in Soviet Sharora is Nodir Khabibov. Born in 1961 in a family of a former mullah from Qamarob, Gharm, one of the most conservative regions in Tajikistan, Nodir exemplifies the broadest understanding of religiosity of a Soviet Central Asian and late Soviet literary milieu. Memories of Nodir's social behavior in the past reflect a significant part of Soviet culture that reconciled vodka, Persian poetry, and personal relations with the divine epitomized in the oeuvre of the Persian poet, philosopher, and Muslim mystic Umari Khayyom (Umar Khayyam).

Nodir is a retired engineer who lived most of his Soviet year as a member of Sharora's technical elite. From many interviews and conversations with him I concluded that his life in Soviet Tajikistan was full of privileges, he drove Volga automobile, was a guest of honor in every other home in the Ghissar Valley, and traveled to Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Baltic states on many

[393] Chomba was mentioned many times by other informants, his friends and family, but most of the insights about the character were shared in Group interview Nina Drofa, Tatiana, Galina.

occasions. Nodir has attended countless gatherings in his youth years and collected innumerable jokes and anecdotes, fables, and poems, representing a mixture of life-affirming philosophy, religious mysticism, and hedonism, which he shared with me on every occasion in Sharora.[394] Many of his Soviet spiritual views were formed by Umar Khayyam's Rubaiyat which he cited in both modern Tajik and Russian. Umar Khayyam has been popular in Europe and Russia since the 19th century, particularly among reformist intellectual and cultural elites.[395] The role Khayyam's poetry and its translation and adaptation in the USSR is yet to be discovered. However, it is clear that his poetic influence emphasizing personal relations with the divine, importance of friendship and love, and more importantly demystifying and downplaying the role of clergy in Islam was formative for many Soviet people. Tajik scholars and poets have contributed greatly to promotion of Khayyam in the USSR and *Rubayat* editions of 1982 and 1986 were among the most widely read.

Nodir Khabibov has been fluent in both Tajik and Russian versions of *Rubayat* citing them at various social situations often to add philosophical air to his drinking occasions. One of his favorite quatrains ascribed to Khayyam calls for prioritizing enjoyment and pleasures of lifetime on Earth instead of betting on afterlife:

let us drink here
because they will not let us drink there
and if they will,
we'll drink both here and there[396]

[394] I should declare that I hired Nodir as a chauffeur to drive me around multiple locations in the Ghissar Valley and spent many hours with individual.
[395] F. Abdullaeva, N Chalisova, and Ch Chalisova, "The Russian Perception of Khayyæm: From Text to Image," in *The Great ʿUmar Khayyām: A Global Reception of the Rubáiyát*, ed. A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, Iranian Studies Series (Leiden: Leiden Univ. Press, 2012).
[396] Here and hereinafter Khabibov, "Conversation with the Author on February 15."

Similarly, Khayyam's other famous verse compares a human body to a wine cup as God created either of water and clay, and wine represents the spirit, living force or energy, and wisdom that fills human body and mind like a vessel:

The man was made of clay and to clay he will return
I beg of the Creator, when I die, to take my ash and make of it a jug
Fill up this jug with sweetest wine
So I could dwell like this for endless time

On many occasions during interviews Nodir questioned the division of things and deeds into halal (good and godly) and haram (sinful and evil) crucial for Islam. Nodir, cited a part of Khayyam's verse:

Why is fermented milk halal
And fermented grape juice haram?

While Nodir is presently an exceptional character of Sharora community he insisted that in the past, he was far from unique but represented a collectivity as the poems and anecdotes had been passing from one speaker to another for many decades. From many conversations with Nodir I have concluded that Soviet adaptation and popularization of Khayyam's mysticism and anticlericalism among Soviet Tajiks as their religious past and spiritual legacy of great Persianate poets played a key role in forming his subjectivity. In essence Nodir's version of religious life is about a connection with the divine on a personal level. Here is one of Nodir's anecdotes exemplifying this belief:

> One day the prophet Moses (Muso) walked in the desert and found a Shepard who was arranging a picnic serving milk, bread, cream, cheese, yogurt and other treats. As the *dastarkhan* was ready the Shepard began summoning God to attend his picnic:
> Oh lord why are you not coming down to enjoy this food?
> Moses was indignant:
> You fool think God has time to come to this desert to eat your stuff? You must be mad!
> That night Moses saw a dream in which God told him:
> That man you yelled at in the desert… why did you scold him? Did you not see that he loves me earnestly and wants to share with me whatever little he has? His faith is pure, and you should learn from him.

For Moses that was the most valuable lesson about the meaning of faith and love.

Nodir Khabibov also embodies the local variation of Soviet social habit of telling jokes (*travit' anekdoty*) as he enjoys a reputation of someone who knows a lot of them (*khodiachiĭ anekdot* or lit. *walking anecdote*). Specificity of Central Asian joke-telling is that rather than sharing ready-made jokes Nodir and others like him merge traditional form of transmitting religious and spiritual knowledge (*nasikhat*) with popular poetry and social drinking.

To conclude the chapter, Adeeb Khalid in his now classic Islam after Communism has described the impact of communism on Islam in Central Asia as destructive and resulting in the loss of authenticity of Islam in this region. It is true, as has been shown in this chapter, that socialist policies, institutions, internationalism and transconfessionalism of new Soviet families and *byt* had intervened with the local practice of Islam and traditional knowledge. However, in line with Paolo Sartori's work, I argue that Islam, like any other religion, constitutes a constantly mutating social process rather than a permanent norm. Religion understood broadly as spirituality and religiosity, had an enormous place in Sharora's everyday life and worldviews of its denizens, Christian and Muslim alike. Rather than writing another eulogy for the loss of Central Asian Islam this chapter has celebrated the successful marriage of Islam, Christianity, and Communism in a short-lived time and space of materialized Soviet utopia.

Thanks to atheist policies of the Soviet state that limited access to religious learning and guidance, in Soviet Sharora both Christians and Muslims had notably departed from orthodoxies of their respective faiths, however, not towards secularism but towards new forms of spiritualities. Traditions around the Russian cemetery have transformed local Islam in profound ways, and it is through analysis of Sharora's Christian traditions that Central Asian Islam becomes more intelligible. It is true that religion in the Soviet Union withdrew from the position of authority and power as a result of the party-state policies and propaganda. Yet, the place allotted for religion in

the USSR was far from private as many have argued in the past. Individual and collective expressions of religiosity in the post-WWII era should be conceptualized as an episteme.[397] My humble contribution to the now dynamically evolving debate around the place of religion on the Soviet Union and the nature of the Soviet empire in Central Asia is that the way religious field functioned on the microlevel represents the major, albeit unintended, success of the Soviet aspiration for building a sense of belonging to a common whole — the Soviet people. Religion cannot be adequately understood without stories of people living it. I could only name a handful of individuals who, in my mind, embody this Soviet spirituality in full, women and men celebrating their religious holidays, children claiming their gifts and treats, Chomba burying the dead and Nodir sharing his poems and anecdotes over a feast, and the spirits of the dead awaiting their share.

The vignette of religious and spiritual life drawn here is very problematic. The memory of the spiritual and religious life in Sharora is not organized chronologically and the resulting picture from the interviews appears as static rather than historical. Many scholars of religion in the USSR have noted that oral history seems to defy trajectory, ignores milestones, and tends to homogenize the past. Furthermore, the very process of spiritual reciprocation between various parts of the Sharora community has been only outlined and not described in all details. Finally, the representativity of my respondents leaves much to be desired as due to my own gender and background and because of the current demographic situation in Sharora I only accessed Muslim men and Christian women which has limited the diversity of voices speaking of Sharora's past. Nonetheless, this vignette is suggestive of how diverse and vibrant Sharora's spiritual and religious life used to be in the post-WWII Central Asia and helps our understanding of how both institutionalized and lived religions of various parts of Sharora community intersected.

[397] Paolo Sartori, "Of Saints, Shrines, and Tractors: Untangling the Meaning of Islam in Soviet Central Asia," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 30, no. 3 (September 2019): 367–405.

Chapter 6. Sharora Earthquake — Soviet Pompeii

On Monday January 23rd 1989, Nadezhda Priadannikova woke up at 3 o'clock in the morning to take her usual shift at the milk farm at the foot of the Urtabuz elevation. As usual she woke up her eight-year-old son Rustam to accompany her on her walk to the farm in the dark winter night. Her other children could not go with her that night. Her eldest Oleg Kassymov was killed in Afghanistan in 1985. Her 17-year-old daughter Rano stayed home with their 90-year-old grandmother, and her middle son Igor served in the army.

The large red moon lit their way into the milk farm. In anticipation of soon relief from the burden of milk the 760 cows greeted Nadezhda and Rustam with bows and moo. At 5:02 am, when Nadezhda let her skilled hands prepare the milking machinery she felt subtle tremor and the cows' moos turned into roars as the animals stormed and broke through the farm gates in panic. Suddenly a flash of light and thunder of explosion blinded and deafened the helpless people and animals. Little Rustam turned and looked at his mother but all he could see was a tall steaming wall of land moving onto him. He ran after the cows and grabbed one of them by the tail to escape the roaring landslide. He was nearly reaching safety when he stumbled and was consumed by the wave of dirt and rubble. His body was recovered a few days later, still clasping the cow's tail.[398] Rustam and his mother Nadezhda, members of one of the most international families of Sharora, were the first victims of the infamous Sharora Earthquake that claimed 276 lives. While not the greatest natural disasters in the USSR, the Sharora Earthquake accompanied by landslides and mud floods, eruption and explosion, was a spectacular event that symbolized the end of the socialism and

[398] Details of this, obviously fictionalized episode, came from various sources but mostly from conversations with a still living member of Kassymovs family Igor Kassymov, Conversation with the author, 2020; and Sharora resident Svetlana Riazaieva, Conversation with the author, 2020.

internationalism in the Ghissar Valley despite the enormous international relief effort spent to rebuild the devastated community.

The historiography of natural and human-made disasters in the USSR has explored how these events were recorded, perceived, and managed within the context of Soviet society and governance. This academic field has addressed themes such as government response, propaganda, documentation practices, socio-political implications, and the interaction between human activity and the environment in the Soviet Union. The way the Soviet State responded to the disasters in its various parts reflects the evolution of the Soviet empire.[399] For example, the human-made femines of the 1930s in Ukraine and Kazakhstan resulting from the policy of War Communism and collectivization are udnerstood today as genocidal wars on the countryside and pre-Soviet lifeways, private farming of kulaks and pastoral nomadism.[400]

Mass media silence and public ignorance about Soviet disasters is also meaningful as the lack of statements about an event is an expression of indifference or evidence that under Stalin natural disasters in the perhiperies were indeed peripheral issues. The Cold War climate implied that the the Soviet Union was facing an existantial threat from without, hence, in late Stalinism destructive and lethal calamities inside the USSR faced silent treatment and are still awaiting the attention of historians despite the scale of destruction and the death toll they had wrought.[401] The enourmous Ashghabad Earthquake of 1948[402] that is believed to have killed from 10,000 to

[399] Serhii Plokhy, *Chernobyl: The History of a Nuclear Catastrophe*, First edition (New York: Basic Books, 2018); Kate Brown, *Manual for Survival: A Chernobyl Guide to the Future* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019); Mark B. Tauger, "Natural Disasters and Human Actions in the Soviet Famine of 1931–33," *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies* 1506 (2001); Nicholas Ganson, *The Soviet Famine of 1946–47 in Global and Historical Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Robert William Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931–1933* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[400] Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*; Cameron, *The Hungry Steppe Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan*.

[401] Nigel A. Raab, *All Shook up: The Shifting Soviet Response to Catastrophes, 1917-1991* (Montreal ; Kingston ; London ; Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), p. 8.

[402] "1948 Ashgabat Earthquake - Disasters with Highest Death Tolls - Historydraft," accessed July 19, 2024, https://historydraft.com/story/disasters-with-highest-death-tolls/1948-ashgabat-earthquake/481/7503.

110,000 people and the Hayyit Earthquake of 1949[403] that had leveled 33 villages, killed 28,000 people and rendered much of the Gharm region of Tajikistan uninhabitable were met with surprising silence and indifference in the Soviet Press. Tajik social media users still lament the lack of information about the Hayyit Earthquake. A characteristic comment to a story about earthquakes in Tajikistan by user Zarina Vakhobova about the Hayyit Earthquake says:

> Was [it] necessary to forget about it? The tragedy of the country cannot be forgotten where the people throughout the entire period cannot come to terms with this. Half of Hayyit in [Tajikistan], half in the entire region of the country [devastated]. They did not even make a film or sympathize with this region for the 70th anniversary, it is a shame.

In contrast, natural disasters striking Soviet peripheries in Late Socialism played two important ideological functions — revitalizing the sense of belonging to a Soviet whole and eliminating the remainders of pre-Soviet neighborhoods and lifeways in Soviet towns. For example, the highly publicized Tashkent Earthquake of 1966, by wiping out much of the old city offered a new space for the construction of the new showcase socialist capital.[404] Emergency response and relief operation were a symbolic glue that helped hold the Soviet empire together through mutual obligations and the movement of people and goods from one disaster site to another.

The movement of people and emergency aid was multidirectional and Sharora, as this subchapter demonstrates, was a part of this exchange network. Men and women of Sharora have given their health and lives in Chernobyl, Ukrainian SSR as part of the relief operation there.[405] In Sharora there are histories of several individuals who took part in the operation (*likvidatsyia posledstviĭ avarii na Chernobylskoĭ AS*) and passed away shortly after their return. Later, in December 1988, a construction brigade from Sharora was sent to Spitak, Armenia to work at the

[403] "Khait.Pdf."
[404] Nigel Raab, "The Tashkent Earthquake of 1966: The Advantages and Disadvantages of a Natural Tragedy," *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas* Themenschwerpunkt: Katastrophen im östlichen Europa, no. Bd. 62, H. 2 (2014): 273–94; Raab, *All Shook Up*.
[405] At the time of my field research in Sharora in 2020 there were no survivors among those who had worked at the site of the Chernobyl disaster (likvidatory).

site of the earthquake. They were still in Armenia when their own hometown was hit by the earthquake less than two months later.

In the context of Perestroika natural and especially human-made disasters such as Chernobyl ushered in new forms of dissidence against the Soviet authorities, the demands for greater transparency and accountability of the state, more independence for the Soviet constituent Republics, and are believed to have contributed to the disintegration of the USSR.[406] Marc Elie has shown that the important feature of disaster management in Perestroika era was that natural and human-made disasters had become "objects of centralized state action."[407] While centrifugal forces were driving the Soviet Union apart economically and politically the disaster agencies such as State Committee for Emergency Situations (GKCHS) and Civil Defense had remained centralized thereby leading to further contestation between the breakaway republics and "Soviet center."

The more recent works on natural and human-made disasters in the USSR that engaged with local sources and oral history have offered new insights into spiritual and religious response to catastrophic events that had shaken the Soviet state.[408] One important takeaway from this new scholarship is that earthquakes and technogenic catastrophes striking disparate Soviet communities in the various corners of the Soviet empire in the context of heightened spirituality and free speech had found lasting religious expressions in the form of Orthodox icons, poems and songs, personal

[406] Jane I. Dawson, *Eco-Nationalism Anti-Nuclear Activism and National Identity in Russia, Lithuania, and Ukraine* (Duke University Press, 1996); Serhii Plokhy, *Chernobyl: The History of a Nuclear Catastrophe*, First edition (New York: Basic Books, 2018); Nigel A. Raab, *All Shook up: The Shifting Soviet Response to Catastrophes, 1917-1991* (Montreal ; Kingston ; London ; Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), p. 19. Natural and industrial disasters also provoked what Marc Beissinger termed "nationalist events" Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[407] Marc Elie, "Late Soviet Responses to Disasters, 1989-1991: A New Approach to Crisis Management or the Acme of Soviet Technocratic Thinking?," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 40, no. 2 (2013): 214–38.

[408] Elena Romashko, "Russian Orthodox Icons of Chernobyl as Visual Narratives about Women at the Center of Nuclear Disaster," in *Orthodox Christianity and Gender*, by Helena Kupari and Elina Vuola, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2019), 190–209.

diaries and letters. The prevailing sentiment of these expressions is that the Soviet Union was a doomed and cursed formation facing its own apocalypse. The online archive of Soviet diaries *Prozhito* has documented thousands of personal diary entries of elite and rank-and-file Soviet citizens permeated with a feeling that a series of unfortunate events were somehow linked to the nature of the Soviet state:

> Valentin, passing through Leningrad, stopped with us for four days. He told me how he transported meat from Gomel to Armenia by refrigerated train. It was beef prepared after the Chernobyl accident and unfit for food: contaminated with radioactivity, it was sold to the Armenians affected by the earthquake under the guise of "help." And no one protested this.
> Amazing manifestations of anger that Valik observed along the way: "This is what the Armenians deserve!", "Let them all die!"... Here is our new morality, not written, but in force: death to the victim!
> In the railway crowd near Rostov, Valik met a rescue team from Tyumen. They left literally a few hours after the disaster was reported - and for a month and a half they had been on the road, unable to reach their destination. The inertia, sluggishness, and helplessness of the System are clearly manifested in such extreme situations. And not only in extreme cases - a small push from the outside is enough, and everything goes topsy-turvy, the hidden absurdity turns out.
> An eerie view of the destroyed Spitak. The panel houses, assembled using a living thread, collapsed instantly. Not only the assembly turned out to be poor, but also the quality of the panels: when they were now lifted by cranes, clearing the rubble, they scattered in the air. They raised such a panel, under which there were an old woman, a woman and two children, still alive, - and it, crumbling, collapsed on them and this time buried them. People rushed to clear the debris with their hands, but they could not save anyone. The woman had gold rings on her fingers and earrings in her ears. A man from the crowd shouted "This is my wife!" He threw himself on his knees in front of her, sobbing, and began to pull off her jewelry. When he had finished this, the woman's husband, who had been standing silently in the crowd, came forward and denounced him. The marauder was immediately torn to pieces.
> On the train that Valik was returning from Yerevan, all the windows were broken (given the cold on the passes, this was a serious test): beyond the Bzovdal ridge, on the territory of Azerbaijan, Yerevan trains are being thrown with stones. The half-mad old woman teacher muttered something about the "Basmachi"[409]

This is but one of the thousands of diary pages Soviet people kept in the last years of the Soviet Union encompassing the three major calamities of the USSR in the 1980s — Chernobyl, Spitak

[409] Sergei Popadiuk, "Zapis' Dnevnika Prozhito," Corpus Prozhito, 18.02.1989., https://corpus.prozhito.org/note/621365.

Earthquake in Armenia, and interethnic cleansings in the Caucasus and Central Asia. This excerpt illustrates the ways Soviet people reacted to natural and human-made disasters and contains the four major grievances of Soviet people against their state — the USSR was cursed and dying under the weight of its many sins, the Soviet system was inadequate to address ordinary matters, leave alone the extraordinary ones, the Soviet nations were far from merging and the wars between them were around the corner, the Soviet state had failed and corrupted its people. My goal in writing the following is to foreground the local voices affected by both a natural disaster and Soviet response to it and show on the microlevel how the victims and survivors of the Sharora Earthquake experienced and remembered both the destruction and death that befell them, and the rescue and care offered to them by the state.

Sharora Earthquake of the 23rd of January 1989 is also known as Ghissar Earthquake affected several villages and towns in the Ghissar Valley, but was most lethal and destructive in Sharora, Okuli Bolo and Okuli Poion. As Sharora bore the heaviest blow of the calamity it is now the primary commemorative site for all those claimed by the disaster and for this reason I refer to the event as the Sharora Earthquake. In a way, it was the last Soviet disaster and the culmination of local experience of socialism and internationalism, the event that challenged the Soviet authorities and Soviet people to reconstitute the Soviet Empire in the middle of its disintegration while at the same time to experience a national trauma. The driving question of this chapter is how the local response to disasters in the USSR and spiritual movement they provoked impacted the lingering sense of internationalism. In the following chapter I argue that Sharora Earthquake was a new kind of Soviet catastrophe — a man-made natural disaster — an event that involved both human factor and natural causes. It was a symbolic end of the local communism and that the successful rebuilding of the devastated Sharora was paradoxically concurrent with the USSR's failure to rebuild the relations between its constituent states.

6.1. The Secrecy and Publicity of the Sharora Earthquake

When I arrived to Sharora on the afternoon of the 23rd of January 2020 the community had already marked the 31st anniversary if its Earthquake at the site of the disaster. Ghissar district and Sharora's local officials were wrapping up their conversations at the earthquake memorial while a few men were praying in various spots of the collective gravesite where houses of their families and kin used to stand. People buried under a thick, 18-meter blanket of earth are commemorated both in an official secular manner with rallies, speeches and recitals, and in religious and private manner by those who survived the tragedy and still mourns their close ones. While much has been said about the Sharora Earthquake locally, regionally, and globally, the memory about the event presents a curious dance between publicity and secrecy. There is at least one long article and three books about the Earthquake: *Ghissarskaia Tragediia* (1990) by the Geologist Nobgorodtsev N, a member of the investigation of the disaster, *Tragediia i bol' Ghissara* (1992) by a collective of Sharora residents and scientists, *Sharora ëdho* by Iskhok Sabzov (undated), and *Zilzilai Hisor* (2008) by Ghissar district official and member of the relief operation in 1989, as well as hundreds of stories in Soviet press, and dozens of online publications. The books and articles provide detailed explanations of the mechanism of the earthquake, its geological causes and human factors involved. However, the more information has been made available to the public, the greater mist has surrounded the event.

The first known newspaper story about the earthquake came out on the 25th of January, 2 days after the earthquake declaring the 25th of January, 1989 the day of mourning across the Republic.[410] The next day an article announced that on the day of the earthquake the Council of

[410] "V TsK Kompartii Tadzhikistana, Prezidiume Verhovnogo Soveta Tadzhikskoi SSR i Sovete Ministrov Tadzhikskoi SSR.," January 25, 1989.

Ministers of Tajik SSR had called up a commission including major Tajik seismologists and geologists from *Tadzhikgeologia* Institute to investigate the causes of the disaster.[411] The commission investigating the disaster from the *Tadzhikgeologia* Institute that arrived in Sharora on the 26th of January 1989 and worked on the site for several days interviewing witnesses, examining the landscape on the ground and from a helicopter, drawing maps and schemes explaining the disaster mechanisms. The final report of the commission was published in full in all books mentioned above. The investigation established that the earthquake measured 5-6 points on the Richter scale, being the main trigger of the event was not the primary cause of the deaths of 226 people (other count 274 deaths).[412] Only three individuals, two little children and a senior citizen Pushkariova, died in their collapsed homes. All the other victims died buried in the two-kilometer-wide and up to 18-meter-high landslide or drowned in a six million cubic meters of mud that flooded houses up to rooves leaving no chance for survival.[413] The commission voiced the two potential causes of the disaster both involving human and non-human factors: irrigational and geothermal.

Irrigational theory claims that the primary cause of the landslide was "irresponsible and short-sighted" (*amali kutohandeshii inson*)[414] irrigation of the Urtabuz plateau, known locally as *Bagara*, by the *Institut Zemliadelia* (See chapter 3). The institute had around 800 hectares of land in the hillside to the South of Sharora where its researchers experimented with various rainfed crops. In the 1960s Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo build a pumping station and dug two unfortified canals, below and across the plateau to bring water to this arid land massive. Additionally, taking

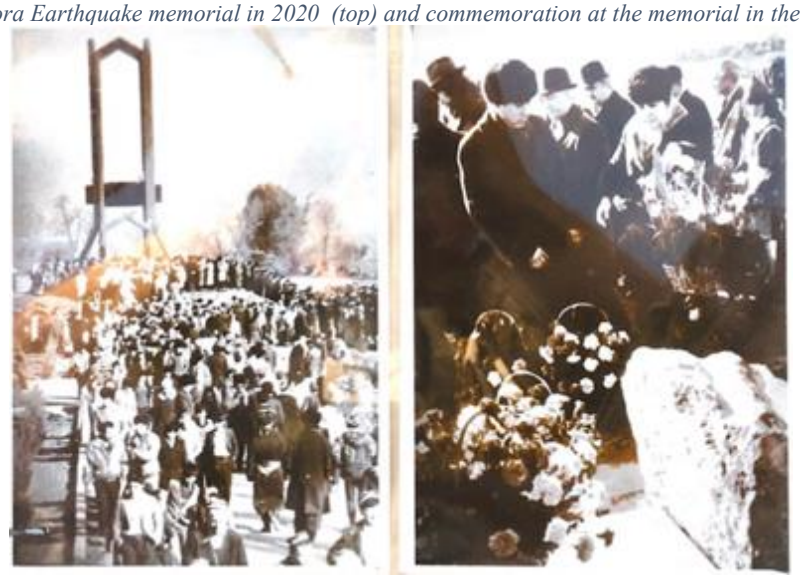
[411] Tadzhik TA, "Komissia Pristupila k Rabote," *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, January 28, 1989.
[412] I. Eshanov, A. F. Loshkareva, and L. Karamhudoev, *Tragediya i Bol' Gissara (O Zemletryasenii 23 Yanvarya 1989 g.)*, 1992, p. 42.
[413] N. Novgorodtsev, "Ghissarskaia Katastrofa," *Vokrug Sveta*, no. 11 (January 10, 1990), https://www.vokrugsveta.ru/vs/article/6458/.
[414] Sultonmurod Odina, *Zilzilai Hissor* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 2008), p. 42.

advantage of this irrigation scheme, some local farmers cultivated grapes and vegetables in various parts of Urtabuz.[415] Neither the Institute nor private farmers were aware of the composition of the soil they dealt with. Loamy soils (*suglinki*) did not absorb moisture evenly but rather channeled it downwards into the depth of the Urtabuz elevation where it could accumulate for 20 years. With the benefit of the hindsight after the earthquake many people claimed to have criticized the irrigation of *Bagara*. For example:

> According to the elder of the village Okuli Bolo Radzhabov Nusrat, the village land of 8 hectares does not need irrigation. He repeatedly emphasized the constant moisture of the soil. According to many, when building this canal, which passed through the northern part of the hill, they did not pay attention to the type of the soil of this place. Over time, the water settled in the silt (or yellow soil) and saturated its layer deep in the earth, turned the surrounding soil into silt and eventually caused landslides and mudflows. Due to the mud pit under the hill, the shock of the earthquake pushed the porous soil and carried the mud out.
>
> The same Radzhabov Nusrat told us the story of a geologist. That geologist (unfortunately, N. Radzhabov does not remember his name and place of work) said that at the foot of Mount Ortabuz there is coke ore, and water from the canal seeps through cracks and reaches the ore. Coke ore mixes with water, boils, expands due to the release of heat and steam and bursts out. And the cause of the vibration and sound of the explosion, as well as the outpouring of flame and black whirlwind.[416]

[415] Agopov, Conversation with the author; Agopova and Agopov, "Conversation with the Author on June 29-30."
[416] Sultonmurod Odina, *Zilzilai Hissor* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 2008), p. 47.

Figure 43.Sharora Earthquake memorial in 2020 (top) and commemoration at the memorial in the 1990s (bottom).



The theory that irrigation had caused the disaster, however convincing to both specialists and regular farmers, would have been more accepted if it wasn't for the powerful explosion that nearly all witnesses claimed had preceded the earthquake. Their testimonies suggests that the catastrophe was a volcanic event. Several residents of Sharora and Okuli Bolo and Poion were outdoors the moment of the beginning of the disaster and saw a blinding flash of bright red flame and heard a

loud explosion. In his article Novgorodtsev sites an artist from Tomsk named G. Burtsev who traveled to the site of the disaster and collected testimonies of the locals. Burtsev recorded that several witnesses saw an enormous bright red flare, flames and thick black smoke at the top of the hill *Pervomaiskaia gorka* seconds before they felt the earthquake shocks.

A farmer Mukhamedkadyr Basitov recalled: "I stood up and there was a bang, I thought something exploded. It often shakes here, but this time there was something wrong. People thought a meteorite had fallen. After the bang, everything lit up." Another local farmer Sultan Altynbaev shared: "I woke up from a jolt, which was accompanied by an explosion. After the jolt, everything lit up, but when I got up, there was no light anymore."[417] Others reported having seen streams of red lava flowing down towards their villages.

Cattle farm worker Bobonazar Khudoinazarov shared what he saw on the night of the disaster: "I stood up and went outside. At that moment I heard a roar, a push, saw a blinding flash on Bagara, and something dark rose up, blocking the sky. I wondered if an atomic bomb had exploded?"[418] Viktor Agopov shared a similar impression in his testimony to Sultoni Odina that the explosion he saw on the night of the earthquake looked very much like a nuclear bomb detonation: "I have seen many of those [nuclear explosions] in the movies."[419]

[417] Novgorodtsev, "Ghissarskaia Katastrofa."
[418] I. Eshanov, A. F. Loshkareva, and L. Karamhudoev, *Tragediya i Bol' Gissara (O Zemletryasenii 23 Yanvarya 1989 g.)*, 1992, p. 31.
[419] Sultonmurod Odina, *Zilzilai Hissor* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 2008), p. 80. It should be noted that Viktor Fiodorovich had taught Early Military Training (*Nachalnaia voiennaia podgotovka*) at Sharora school, a course that included nuclear warfare.

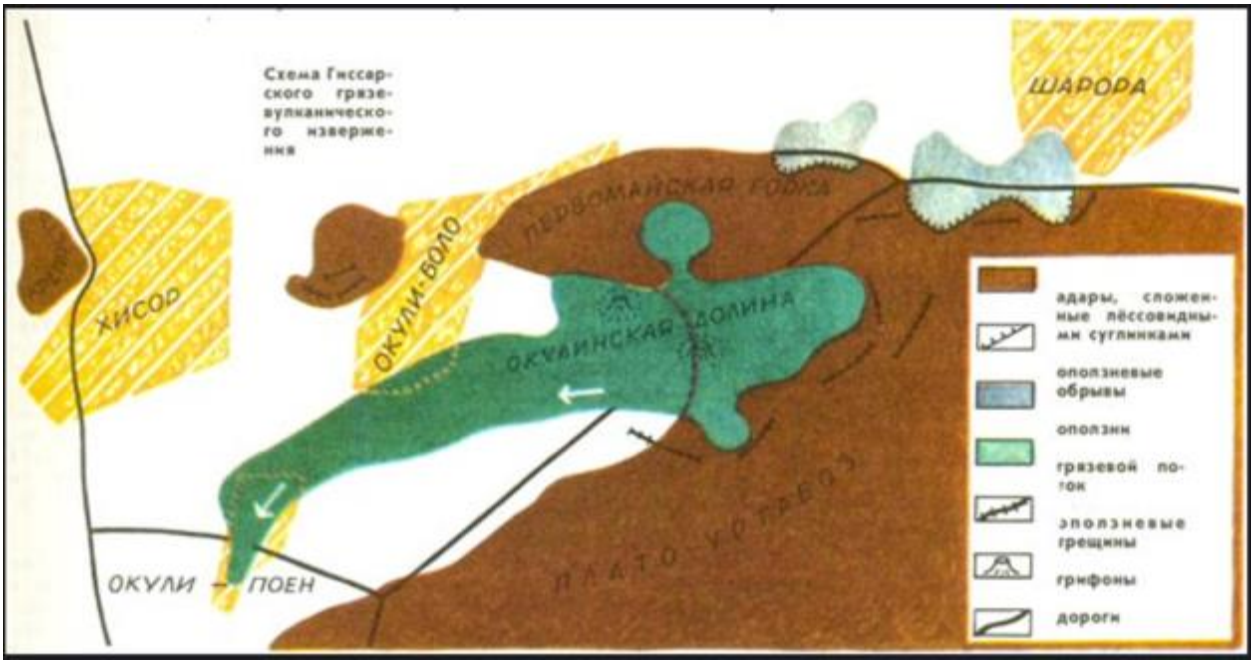


Figure 44. Novgorodtsev's scheme of the Sharora disaster showing landslide in yellow and mud floods in green. Source journal Vokrug sveta, November 1990.

All witnesses report the heavy chemical smell of the dirt and soil that flooded their villages and that the mud was steaming hot hours after the flooding. Explosion, fire, and high temperature of the mud burying and flooding the villages compelled Novgorodtsev to pay closer attention to the terrain of the earthquake site and adjacent areas not affected and study the geological maps of Urtabuz. He noted that the geological landscape of the area is layered and characteristic of mud volcanism and found traces of past eruptions of mud volcanoes at the bottom of the elevation. He concluded that products of underground volcanism, such as hot water, silt, and gases had natural outlets in the form of smaller springs (*kainar*). However, excess water from the irrigation system of Bagara sipped through dense soil strata and accumulated in layers thereby blocking the way to upward products of vulcanism. The enormous pressure resulting from accumulation of products of vulcanism was released in a form of eruption and explosion, landslides and mud floods. From Novgorodtsev's study, the commission's report, and later investigations it is still unclear whether the earthquake was the trigger, or the result of the volcanic disaster and it is possible that

contemporaneous observers remained dissatisfied with the conclusions of the investigation. One thing was obvious, while the event was unpredictable and therefore unpreventable the natural forces alone are not to blame for the loss of lives. Novgorodtsev was the only member of the commission who insinuated that the pattern of dense settlement of large families in a seismically and volcanically active zone was the real cause of tragic deaths. The average death count per family was 8 deaths while some households of 14 people were wiped out. Novgorodtsev concludes his article with the following realization:

> Over the last 10 years, the population of Tajikistan has increased by a third. No other republic in the Union has seen such growth. In ten years, the population here should increase by almost two million people. The question involuntarily arises: where to build housing for people? In the cotton fields? And the eye immediately helpfully finds adyrs.[420] Build them up with nine-story buildings - and the problem is solved. With these thoughts I drove up to Sharora.[421]

Despite the publicity of the earthquake and its impact on the local economy and abundance of information regarding the investigation into the causes of the disaster the local response to the event was full of rumors and gossips, legends, and even conspiracies reflecting the lack of complete and exhaustive explanations.

The sense of secrecy still surrounds the local memory of the earthquake in Sharora. Two months after my arrival in Sharora a resident took me to his shed and out of a pile of used tires produced a stack of photographs of the Sharora Earthquake. Some of the images displayed elderly men in Muslim attires holding a rally at the site of the disaster. It struck me that photographs, still framed and glassed, that used to be a part of the local history exhibit, had to be concealed in a private residence in a pile of tires. Some members of the local Muslim authorities such as Hoji Turajon and openly religious people and the power they exhibited back in 1989 are banned from Tajik national version of the past.

[420] Hillside or hills.
[421] Novgorodtsev, "Ghissarskaia Katastrofa."

Figure 45. Local religious authorities at the site of Sharora Earthquake in 1989.

Furthermore, according to an official of the Ghissar district authorities and the author of the latest book on Sharora Earthquake *Zilzilai Hissor* who in 1989 took part in the relief effort at the site of the disaster all the minutes and documents regarding the earthquake were locked in a special chest *sanduk* in the relief headquarters (*sitod*). He could access and use only a handful of those thousands of pages while working on his book. When I asked the chief archivist at Ghissar district archive about the *fond* on the Sharora Earhquake he said that no such record existed.

In conversations with Sharora residents and reading their testimonies in published sources I have narrowed down three popular versions of the causes of the calamity: meteor impact, airplane crash, missile detonation. The first two conspiracy theories are well grounded in the local landscape of knowledge, though there is no direct link. The space observatory of Astrophysics Institute specializing in small celestial objects such as meteors and astronomy classes and clubs at school #14 popularized knowledge about meteors and it was predictable for some people in Sharora to arrive at an explanation that one of the meteors orbiting the Earth hit our planet near Sharora. It is remarkable that even peasants living in rural part of the Sharora area not only were

aware of asteroids but even found this theory sensible.[422] Those who believed that the explosion preceding the earthquake resulted from an airplane crash were aware of the Aini airfield near Sharora and perhaps even saw soldiers and pilots from the field attend leisure events at the Sharora *klub*.

An idea that the calamity was caused by a missile strike on Sharora has more complex and intricate roots. Some believed it was a Soviet spaceship launched from Baikonur but deflected from its course due to malfunction or equipment failure and instead of reaching the Earth orbit the ship collapsed in Sharora and trigged the landslide. Sultonmurodi Odina has collected local rumors still circulating in Ghissar; "that foreign radio stations reported that a space rocket had fallen on this site on the night of January 24, but we were unable to find any direct witnesses who heard it."[423]

During my fieldwork I was fortunate to encounter the full version of the missile theory shared with me in an interview with the local veteran of law enforcement Davlatior Odinaiev who, in 1989, was among the very first members of the community to respond to the disaster and coordinate the relief effort. Like many others he recalled waking up in his house in Sharora to the explosive sound and thick smoke that covered the town. He ran to the Sharora ROVD (*Raionnyĭ otdel vnitrennih del*) to report the event to Ghissar and joined the crowd of residents who hurried to the rescue of their friends and families buried by the landslide. In the course of the rescue activity Davlatior was in charge of securing public order and identifying marauders who took advantage of the commotion and deaths to burgle wrecked homes and steal cattle.[424] Davlatior had to be

[422] Dmitry Okunev, "Dumali Upal Meteorit: Posledniaia Katastrofa SSSR.," Gazeta.ru, January 23, 2019, https://www.gazeta.ru/science/2019/01/23_a_12139363.shtml
[423] Sultonmurod Odina, *Zilzilai Hissor* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 2008), p. 42-43.
[424] Mentions of itinerant marauders traveling from one disaster to another to steal valuables from wrecked or abandoned homes are abundant in interviews and published sources not only in relation to Sharora but other Soviet towns.

vigilant as rumors about the riches of Sharora's families had spread nationwide and he had already caught one man digging for a safe, allegedly full of cash, in the house of the head of construction company Kalandarov.

While monitoring the situation on the ground Davlatior noted the presence of suspicious soldiers in capes. Unlike other military men the soldiers in capes did not have identifiers or shoulder straps and did not take part in the rescue activities. The strange military gathered behind the hill *Pervomaiskaia gorka* that had crumbled and buried Sharora and blocked passage to the area. When Davlatior tried to inquire about the purpose of the military on the hill an unidentified officer refused to explain their mission and made Davlatior sign a non-disclosure agreement. In 2020 the terms of the NDA expired and Davlatior agreed to share his memories:

> That event was not an Earthquake. It was a missile detonation, and the soldiers were guarding the site of the explosion behind the hill. They did not let me through to see the site and made me sign the NDA (*raspiska o nerazglashenii*) but I think they were collecting the missile wreckage. You can still see a big pit (*yama*) in that area. After everything… a couple of years later I saw on TV a program aired from Afghanistan. They said that a soldier at a missile base somewhere in Kazakhstan got drunk or fell asleep on the keyboard and launched a missile by accident and that missile landed here.[425]

I should add that Davlatior Odinaev confessed having survived two strokes prior to our meeting and his speech was slightly impaired. Yet he assured me that everything he said was true. I, however, had to take his narrative with a grain of doubt even though many elements of the story seemed sensible. There were indeed radio and Television broadcasts from Afghanistan targeting Central Asian population in border areas. And indeed, other members of the Sharora community, when describing their youths as conscripts and active military in combat operations mentioned drinking alcohol and other subversive behaviors. But initiating a missile launch requires more than one soldier, but a chain of commands and approvals.

[425] Odinaev, Conversation with the author, 2020.

One way or another, the existence of local, personal and collective, explanations of the causes of the disaster, along-side already abundant and nearly daily Mass Media coverage and specialists' reports suggests a cleavage between the official effort to explain the causes of the calamity and the local attempts to validate or discredit the explanations provided by the state. Furthermore, the local conspiracy theories sought to add new knowledge to the unique event that had struck them by engaging international sources and expanding their imagination far beyond the Ghissar Valley.

Even though both theories of the causes of the disaster had been presented to the public only the first one, irrigational, stuck with the public in Sharora.[426] The irrigational factor of the Shaora disaster currently stands as the most accepted because it is the most convenient. *Insitut Zemledelia* has reduced or discontinued many of its research projects on Bagada thereby eliminating the risk of future landslides. Besides, the pumping stations that used to stream water upwards have been out of order since the 1990s and there has never been steady supply of power and fuel for those stations since Tajikistan's independence. The volcanic explanation of the disaster is downplayed if not completely forgotten precisely because vulcanism is outside human control, no matter the effort, and because the Central Ghissar Valley is a potential risk zone. Crucially, regardless of the cause of the disaster there was a significant human factor that had led to the loss of life and destruction — irrigation of the Urtabuz hillside near living quarters without proper inspection and analysis of the soil structure, allowing dense construction beneath the hills, neglecting the quality of home construction in the areas affected by the quake, not conducting seismological studies and mapping for safe population distribution prior to the quake should have been questioned and

[426] In my interviews my interlocutors and respondents recalled only that the cause of the landslide was irrigation of Bagara even though the detailed study by Novgorodtsev was published alongside both in Russian and Tajik.

investigated to serve restorative justice. However, no one from the local or republican authorities has even been investigated, brought to justice, or removed from public office.

6.2. Disasters as a Glue for the Empire

In a way, the Sharora Earthquake was the most international moment in local history. The media coverage of the Sharora Earthquake deserves a chapter of its own as it represents a diversity of voices and significant differences in the *modi* of speaking about the event on the local, national, and international levels. The event transpired in the context of late Perestroika when centrifugal forces were pulling the Union apart at the time of solidification and centralization of the emergency response agency (GKCHs). The challenge for the Soviet Mass media was to report the measures taken by the local and Union authorities, reflect the involvement of all Union republics to rebuild Sharora and other villages, while at the same time to acknowledge the victims of the disaster and give voice to a collective trauma. The Soviet press used Sharora stories to glue the empire together spinning the disaster and tragedy to project a sense of optimism and the benefits of sharing a common Soviet home. The national and local voices, on the contrary, emphasized sorrow and grief, episodic criticism of local and Soviet authorities and made use of traditional oral mourning culture *falaq* to publicize a sense of tragedy. Only local voices paid tribute to individual lives and families claimed by the disaster and to those who miraculously survived it.

While human-made (*tehnogennye)* disasters such as Chernobyl posed a challenge to the Soviet state as a whole because they were often explained as failures of Soviet people or Soviet institutions, natural disasters were "an act of God" and an opportunity for the Soviet empire to reconstitute itself back into relevancy. Unlike human-made disasters that were silenced or underreported, natural disasters, and especially Soviet emergency response and relief operations were publicized at every opportunity. For example, the Earthquake that hit Spitak and Leninakan,

Armenia, in December 1988 was covered daily in Soviet press, including in Tajikistan. The purpose of such coverage was to advertise the benefits of retaining close economic and political ties between the Union Republics in the context of growing demand for greater, if not full, independence.

A very characteristic publication in Tajik press is a lead article *Zhizn' podnimaietsia* (Life is Coming Back) in *Kommunist Tadzhikistana* from the 16th of January 1989, only a week before the Sharora Earthquake, reported the progress of reconstruction of the Armenian towns and boasted many achievements of the all-Union effort, such as the birth of 78 babies in the local hospital that had miraculously survived the earthquake, the tent classrooms for 500 children, the 600 workers employed to clean up the wreckage and more:

> The members of the commission visited other sites in Spitak, familiarized themselves with the work on dismantling the shops of the grain processing plant, held working meetings with the heads of the city headquarters. On the same day, meetings and conversations were held with residents of Kirovakan, N. I. Ryzhkov and the members of the commission took part in the laying of concrete in the foundation of the first residential building erected by Ukrainian builders. A capsule with an appeal to descendants was laid in the foundation. The text of the document in Russian, Ukrainian and Armenian languages is permeated with the idea of strengthening the fraternal union of the peoples of the USSR.[427]

Soviet Television backed the newspaper stories with news broadcast and documentaries highlighting the benefits of common all-Union response to natural disasters. What's more, the Armenian earthquake was an important argument in the discussions about the Perestroika economic policies that would balance the interest of the "strong center" and economic independence of the constituent republics. At the TV program Perestroika: Problems and Solutions aired in March 1989 the chairman of Gosplan and deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Armenian SSR used the response to the Spitak earthquake to advocate for maintaining strong

[427] TASS, "Zhizn' Podnimaietsia," *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, January 16, 1989.

Union ties and staying in the USSR because no nation could face such calamities and rebuilt itself alone:

> The advantages of the mutual help of the fraternal nations. It is impossible to overestimate the benefits [*znachenie*] of this mutual help which became ever more obvious due to the disaster that hit Armenia. Unprecedented Earthquake has left many thousands dead and caused great economic damage. In such circumstances, without that enormous aid offered to Armenia by all Union Republics, and without large-scale measures taken by the central committee the recovery from the destruction would be unthinkable.[428]

Soviet response to the earthquake in Armenia and the interethnic conflicts that it flared were at the core of covering the Sharora disaster. The chairman of the Union Committee for Peace G.A. Borovik in his interview to Tadzhik Tass at the site of the earthquake contrasts the catastrophes in the two countries:

> I have seen a lot of human suffering. Have seen the tragedy of Armenia. But trust me, I have never seen anything like it. Yes, earthquakes happen; we can all be victims of natural forces. But here… such peaceful gentle hills, a bucolic landscape indeed, and under a layer of earth, is a dead kishlak. A shared grave for everyone who lived here. It's a dreary feeling!
> Grief is grief. But there is a fact that gives me hope. There is no epidemy that threatened us from underneath the ruins of Leninaqan.[429]

Borovik used Sharora as a cautionary tale to promote internal peace in the USSR having witnessed how the earthquake in Armenia had aggravated the conflict with Azerbaijan. Borovik's concern that Sharora Earthquake might potentially lead to interethnic hostilities in Tajikistan were not trivial. In January and February 1989, the hitherto tranquil Tajik SSR saw not only active public debates on the status of Tajik language in republican newspapers[430] and the emergence of

[428] "Perestroika: Problems and Solutions 1988-03-29 - 1990-03-29," *Perestroyka: Problemy i Resheniya*, March 29, 1989.
[429] V. Zhukov, "Chem Eshe Pomoch?," *Tadzhik TA*, 1989.
[430] M. Muradov and M. Berdiev, "Gosudarstvennyi Iazyk," *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, February 23, 1989; Yu. Iskhaki, M. Guliamov, and Kh. Karimov, "Pravo Vybora," *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, February 22, 1989.

nationalist opposition groups such as Rastohez but also sporadic street violence which Soviet press claimed to be inspired by ethnic hatred.[431]

Hence, the coverage of the Sharora Earthquake was to follow a measured pattern by overviewing the damage and victimhood, enlisting humanitarian aid from the Union Republics, and inspiring a sense of optimism and normalcy. The greater part of covering the earthquake and emergency aid were reports on international delegations visiting the disaster site and pledging humanitarian aid for the reconstruction. Among the very first Union republics to visit Sharora on the 25th of January, two days after the Earthquake, were the First Secretary of CP of the Kyrgyz Republic A. Masaliev and Kyrgyz Chairman of the Council of Ministers Jumagulov. *Pravda* reported the freight aircrafts from the Kyrgyz SSR carrying 50 shepherd houses, 100 tents, 20 yurts.[432] On the 26th of January Tadzhik TA reported the visit of the Uzbek delegation including the First Secretary of Uzbek CP Rafiq Nishanov, Chairman of the Council of Ministers G. Kadyrov who came to announce a three-million-ruble pledge to finance the reconstruction of the destroyed villages and additional one and a half million rubles from the workers of Uzbekistan. The Uzbek delegation added that the Uzbek people "are ready to help victims to heal the wounds of the earthquake as soon as possible."[433]

Telegrams of condolences from foreign nations and incoming bank transfers of donations were published in Tajik and Union papers daily. *Kommunist Tadzhikistana* reported telegrams of condolences and donations from all Union republics, and Socialist block, as well as several telegrams from Afghanistan, and major Soviet organizations including the KGB and the office of

[431] In winter 1989 there were several instances of street violence in Dushanbe involving thousands of people and hundreds of wounded, see Isaac McKean Scarborough, *Moscow's Heavy Shadow: The Violent Collapse of the USSR* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023); M. Lebedev and A. Cherepanov, "V Bolnitse i Militsii," *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 24.02.1989.
[432] Yu. Razguliaev, "Bratskaia Pomosh," *Pravda*, January 25, 1989.
[433] Tadzhik TA, "Pomosh Bratskogo Uzbekistana," *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, January 28, 1989.

Mikhail Gorbachev.[434] TASS published incoming telegrams from Tokyo, Rabat, Vienna, Bucharest, Prague, Beijing, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Ecuador, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Ireland and many other countries.[435] Telegrams kept arriving throughout February 1989.

Two months after the disaster the stories about the Sharora earthquake were growing optimistic. While many of its residents were still living in temporary shelters and tents Sharora held its district elections and one of the tents housed the voting station #7. The story titled *We are Voting for Change [in] Tent Sharora* drew a pleasing picture of Sharora's active citizenry taking part in the ritual of elections while the photographer caught a moment when Sharora's mailwoman V. Silantieva marched out of the voting tent with an air of accomplishment. The chair of the local election committee Yarash Pulatov acknowledged that it was not easy to involve the earthquake victims into the election campaign as "many people lived in temporary housing and others left the area." His assistant Oinisso added that there was a "psychological problem. Many have lost their families, relatives, and neighbors."[436] This response betrays the local sentiment that the optimism of the elections was untimely, if not inappropriate.

[434] Tadzhik TA, "My s Vami Budte Muzhestvenny," *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, January 28, 1989.
[435] TASS, "Sochuvstvie Postradavshym," n.d.
[436] I. Kozlova, "We Are Voting for Change Tent Sharora," *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, 1989.

2. «КОММУНИСТ

ГОЛОСУЕМ ЗА ПЕРЕМЕНЫ, ВЫДВИ

ПАЛАТОЧНАЯ ШАРОРА

Гиссар

Первый раз в жизни переступала я порог такого необычного избирательного участка. Над входом в большую солдатскую палатку закреплена красная табличка — «Избирательный участок № 7».

В палатках, действительно полевых условиях проходят нынешние выборы в поселке Шарора Гиссарского района.

И хотя по-настоящему весенний день только-только разгорается, людей в палатке и около нее много. Периодически у кабин для голосования выстраивается небольшая очередь. Вот выходит из палатки пожилая женщина в форме, с большой сумкой через плечо — отдала свой голос почтальон Валентина Васильевна Салаатьева. Она пенсионерка, но продолжает работать, хотя за плечами участие в Великой Отечественной войне, нелегкая мате-

Figure 38. Voting day in Sharora. Spring 1989.

Finally, Sharora children were Soviet media stars as their images and stories were widely used to project Sharora's recovery from the disaster and its bright future. On the 21st of February 1989 Kommunist Tadzhikistanana featured a frontpage article about Sharora's children returning to schools one month after the earthquake. The reporter G. Davronov wrote that classes were organized in army tents by the military, other children were bused to Karatag recreation zone for classes. The story claimed that children received all the necessary school supplied and that their studies had not been interrupted for a single day. The article was decorated by a photograph titled The Children of Sharora by V. Ivashenko capturing their smiling faces.[437] Yet, the most remarkable child of Sharora was a six-day-old girl Parvina, known today as Sharora.

[437] G. Davronov, "I Snova Seli Za Party," *Kommunist Tadzhikistana*, February 21, 1989.


ЕЛИ

И СНОВА СЕЛИ ЗА ПАРТЫ

Figure 39. Newspaper front-page featuring children of Sharora.

6.3. The Girl Named Sharora

In many books and publications about the history of Sharora and its earthquake the story of a girl named Sharora, or Parvina Khojaeva at birth, takes its own chapter. She has been the most famous child of Sharora whose miraculous survival and tragic loss of the entire family made her known worldwide. She lost her father, mother, two brothers and one sister, grandmother and uncle in one instant. Together with her closest kin Sharora lost 16 people to the earthquake, consumed by the landslide and never recovered. Sharora's parents worked at the farm, mother Muhabbat was a milkmaid and father Saifulloh was a herdsman. They had returned home with the newborn Parvina two days before the earthquake. It is still unclear how exactly the family perished, and Parvina survived, but the neighbors who came to their rescue believe the following to be the true account.

On the night of the tragedy the Khojaevs gathered and invited close relatives for a ceremony of putting their newborn Parvina into the Tajik traditional wooden cradle *gahvorabandi.* That was also the night when Sharora was given her first name. One of the elderly women who were officiating the ceremony named the baby Parvina (Tajik for constellation) in the hope that the girl's life would be miraculous and bright. Some of the guests stayed overnight after the ceremony. The Khojaevs' home was close to the hill *Pervomaiskaia gorka* and when the earthquake struck their street was the first one on the way of the landslide. Upon the first shocks the father, Saifulloh grabbed the cradle and ran off towards the neighbor's house while the rest of the family ran outside the yard towards the street because they did not know that the landslide was coming and were consumed by it instantly. The mistake Saifulloh made by running in the opposite direction was in fact fateful. As Saifulloh ran away from the landslide a wall collapsed on him and he threw the cradle (*gahvora*) off as far as he could. The landslide picked the cradle and it floated a few meters away from Parvina's family home, already deep under the wave of dirt.

Sultonmurod Odina, the author of the book *Zilzilai Hissor* (The Ghissar Earthquake) who witnessed the rescue efforts in the morning of the 23rd of January recalls that after several hours of search there were no signs of the Khojaevs and their guests and that Saifulloh's brother Khabibulloh with the rest of the rescue squad, were losing all hope until someone cried out: "We have found the cradle! The cradle! The child is alive! Little Parvina was fast asleep and unharmed, the only damage being a broken leg of her cradle. This find reignited the team to continue the search. The baby's first cries filled her uncles' eyes with tears of both joy and mourning as it was clear the baby was the sole survivor out of 17 people, including her three siblings."[438]

[438] Sultonmurod Odina, *Zilzilai Hissor* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 2008), p. 133.

While Parvina was in the hospital her uncle Khabibulloh showed up in the district office (*Raiispolkom*) with a request to adopt his niece and rename her as Sharora in memory of all the victims of the Earthquake. Khabibulloh and his wife Rozia had been married for 7 years and had no children and Raiispolkom approved their request. Only five days after the adoption was approved a Georgian man Vakhtang Basilashvili, lawyer at Telavi textile combine, arrived at Ghissar district authorities with the same request. He and his wife Liudmila wanted to adopt little Sharora. Although the Ghissar Raiispolkom declined his request Vakhtang Bashilashvili was proclaimed Sharora's named father (*padarkhond*). He set up a bank account #19 in Ghissar state bank for Sharora and deposited the first installment. Soviet newspapers picked up that story and published bank details and every incoming transfer to the account. One of the articles called Sharora "daughter of the Children's Fund of Tajikistan" (*dukhtarkhondi khazinai kudakii Tojikiston*) as the girl helped raise thousands of rubles daily. Vakhtang and Liudmila visited Sharora several times and the Soviet press covered at least two of those visits, during the first week after the earthquake and on Sharora's second birthday in 1991.

Another request for adopting Sharora came from an Austrian Leopold Gugen Bergen from Klagenfurt, Dushanbe's sister town. Leopold was the father of seven children and was deeply moved by Sharora's story circulating foreign press. He took several trips to Tajikistan to visit Sharora and called her regularly. Later in life, Sharora took two trips to Austria to visit her named parents and decided to major in German language in her university years. Thus, within the first year of her life Sharora was a daughter in four families. Mass media publications remind her of her blood parents claimed by the Earthquake and every year Sharora visits the earthquake memorial, a tall monument representing a cradle *gahvora* with a broken leg, and the gravestone over her family home. The second family was her uncle and aunt who officially adopted and raised

Sharora and the third and fourth were a Georgian couple and Austrian family who claimed Sharora as their named daughter.

Figure 46. Sharora in Soviet press: (left) Sharora and Vakhtang and Liudmila Basilashvili in January 1991, (right) Sharora's first birthday.[439]

While the Soviet media had turned Sharora into a celebrity of global renown and a symbol of optimism for the future of *posëlok* Sharora, her personal life has been surrounded by mystique and superstition and she has been treated as a miracle child since the moment she was found and rescued. The very circumstances of Sharora's survival led many to believe that Sharora was marked by the divine and in books and poems published in the aftermath of the earthquake Sharora was called *nishona az raftagon* the symbol of the departed ones. This local spiritual notion denotes that God left Sharora alive as a living representation of the souls claimed and that Sharora is a

[439] I. Eshanov, A. F. Loshkareva, and L. Karamhudoev, *Tragediya i Bol' Gissara (O Zemletryasenii 23 Yanvarya 1989 g.)*, 1992, p. 52-53.

human connector to those diseased in the earthquake. In one of the interviews Sharora confessed that people from all corners of Tajikistan come to visit her as a form of pilgrimage.[440]

Another local notion that surrounds Sharora is *sharorae ki ba chashmo nur bahshid* — a sparkle that brough light to eyes. The belief ascribes to Sharora abilities to remedy life hardships and bring luck. Because her uncle and aunt who adopted Sharora had been childless for seven years of living together and had three children after adopting Sharora many people believe that it was Shaora who broke the spell of childlessness.[441]

6.4. Falaq for Sharora during Tajik-style Perestroika

The way the Sharora Earthquake was covered in the Tajik language was very different from the Russophone publications in Soviet press. While Russophone publications sought to inspire hope and confidence into the rescue operation and international reconstruction effort and aid to Tajikistan, many publications in Tajik language pursued the opposite goal, to nationalize the Sharora disaster, and monumentalize the sense of loss and trauma in poetry. Furthermore, the newspaper stories in Russian covering the earthquake and its aftermath lacked criticism of and inquisitiveness towards regional, national, and all-Soviet authorities and response agencies despite the Perestroika policy of glasnost.[442]

Within this study I have found over 20 poems about the Sharora Earthquake. Only two of those were in languages other than Tajik, one in Russian and one in Uzbek. The motifs of the poems emulated the pace and tone of Tajik traditional genre falaq — the Arabic word فلک denoting sky, universe, and connoting providence and fate. Falaq is a musical form of prayer and falaq songs

[440] "Sharora 27 let posle tragedii," *Radio Ozodi* (Tajikistan, June 2, 2016).
[441] Sultonmurod Odina, *Zilzilai Hissor* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 2008), p. 133-134.
[442] On the specificity of Perestroika in Tajikistan see Isaac McKean Scarborough, *Moscow's Heavy Shadow: The Violent Collapse of the USSR* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023), pp. 46-60.

are usually sung upwards towards the sky or atop of mountains at times of grief and hardships. The poems were published in various newspapers and partly republished in two books about the earthquake *Tragediia i bol' Ghissara* and *Zilzilai Hisor*.

Some of the poems were part of newspaper articles. For example, the piece titled *Dar sugi Hisor suht jonam* (In the flames of Ghissar my soul burned) by Abdukahhor Khalili started with the message of condolences to Tajik people from Afghanistan and Iran whom the author referred to as *khamzaboni mo* (those who speak the same language). Khalili appealed to the sense of internationalism, not with other socialist countries, but with Persianate nations who share with Tajikistan their language and faith and for this reason "they also share our pain, our grief, and solidarity with the Tajik nation" (*hamdardi, hambastagi va ghamshariki khudro ba millati Tojik*).[443] Both the article and the enclosed poem contained explicitly religious terms such as shahid (martyr) to refer to the earthquake victims, hijra (migration or a journey to the land of the prophet), shuhada (witnessing Allah) intelligible only to Tajik-speakers who understand the basic Islamic vocabulary.

Similarly, another popular poet Mirzo Toshbekov penned a poem *Honai dardu alam* (The home of pain and grief) that aimed at emotional impact by using the same spiritual notions.

Sharora honai dardu alam, maidoni hijron shud
Zieratgohi mardum, gumbazi hoki shohidon shud
(Sharora has become the home of pain and grief, and field of hijron
It has become the holly site for people and the dome for the land of martyrs)[444]

There was no room for references to the productive role of the communist party or Soviet authorities anywhere in the poems about Sharora. There were no mentions of the reconstruction aid and rescue efforts in the poems except for Ahtam Sharifi who in his poem *Nolai modar*

[443] I. Eshanov, A. F. Loshkareva, and L. Karamhudoev, *Tragediya i Bol' Gissara (O Zemletryasenii 23 Yanvarya 1989 g.)*, 1992, p.54.
[444] Ibid, p. 55.

(Mother's cry) mentions digging machinery (*tehnika ham bisior shud*) at the site of the landslide as well as people of authority casually and laconically: "This and that head of the city and district, Were present. Seeing the disaster. They became restless. They bowed their heads. And despaired (made cold) everyone." Ahtam mentions authorities not as leaders of the rescue efforts but as equally helpless onlookers. Finally, one part of Ahtam's poem sited below describes an incident of interaction between Soviet authorities and the local men of the rescue party in which the decision to discontinue the digging and turn the disaster site into a collective graveyard was taken:

Afsus guyon yaki on,	Unfortunately, one of them
Ru ovard, bar khoziron,	Turned his face to the crowd.
Gufto, ki ey rafikom,	He said, my friends,
Azob doded murdagon.	you have tormented the dead.
Onho khud dar azoband,	They themselves are in pain.
Moned, barohat khoband.	Let them rest in peace.
In jo shahid beshumor,	There are countless martyrs here.
Az loy giriftan dushvor.	Difficult to get out of mud.
Khubash, ki in makonro,	It's good that this place
Oromgohi ononro,	Became their place of rest,
E'lon kunem, kabriston,	Let's proclaim the cemetery,
Kabristoni shahidon.	The cemetery for Martyrs.
Taklifi on javonmard,	The proposal of that young man
Ba khoziron khush omad.	Was good for the people.
Joi deh shud guriston,	What was a village is now a graveyard
Gasht maskani shahidon.	and a visit place of martyrs.

While it is not clear whether or not Ahtam Sharifi was present at the event, but he explains in his poem that the main argument leading to the decision to stop digging was that there were no survivors among those recovered from underground and the excavators mutilated and disfigured bodies of the diseased.

Not all of the poets were professional literati. One poem was penned by a driver Sulton Murodov. His poem used colloquial words and simple structure to render the main information about the disaster and tell two stories of people claimed by the disaster: a fleshly wedded couple and their guests who had celebrated their wedding right before the earthquake and a law

enforcement officer (*militsioneri safdar*) who vanished with his entire family. Sulton Murodov's humble poetic attempt is a notable local cultural artefact because stories of individuals and families claimed by the earthquake and the ensuing landslide were not told by the Russophone Soviet newspapers.

Poet Saidulloh Amin in his *Ruboët* approached the Sharora tragedy as a collective Tajik drama:

Barjasta alanga az Sharora ba jahon,
Gūyo, ki Sharora shud ba mo ham manzil!
A bright flame from Sharora to the world,
as if Sharora has become our home![445]

Some recall having heard poems recited at the disaster site. When the search for survivors was discontinued on January 26 and the part of Sharora buried by the landslide was to be walled off, an old man looking for the remains of his family digging near what used to be his family home allegedly pronounced the following lines:

Mo lū'batakonemu falak lū'batboz,
Az rūyi haqīqat, na ki az rūyi majoz.
(We are puppets and of the fate is the puppeteer
This is the truth and not a simile)

The tragic events in Sharora continued to inspire Tajik poets for years after the disaster and cause broader reverberations in Tajikistan's cultural and political landscape. In early 1990s the main square in front of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Tajikistan was renamed *Shohidon*, the martyrs, and, given the ubiquity of the word in Tajik press and poetry it is very tempting to associate the renaming of the square with the Sharora Earthquake. Furthermore, the renowned Tajik opposition poet Bozor Sobir wrote a poem *Zilzila* inspired by Sharora and included

[445] The word Sharora also means sparkle and the poet uses both meanings of the word in these two lines.

this work into his book *Chashmi Safedor* (Poplar's Eye) along with other critical and anti-Soviet pieces such as *Zani Tojik va pakhta* (Tajik woman and cotton), *Tiflis*, and *Deputat*.[446] In the context of other critical poems, *Zilzila* assumed very subversive meaning and the Sharora Earthquake served as a powerful symbol of the crumbling of the state in "the age of earthquakes."[447]

Figure 47. Pravda at the rescue effort.

Finally, criticism of the Soviet and Republican authorities was situational and on-site. The photograph above is an example of communicating visually the various local emotional responses to the Sharora tragedy. The newspaper issue of Pravda is thrown into dirt, partly covered with pieces of soil, resting on the ground while men are digging for people buried underground. While

[446] Zani Tojik va Pakhta is a poem about the burden of cotton cultivation and harvesting on Tajik women, Tiflis was about violent suppression of protests in Tbilisi (Tbilisi Massacre) in April 1989, Deputat is a caricature on Soviet Tajik official, Bozor Sobir, *Chashmi Safedor (Poplar's Eye)* (Dushanbe: Adolat, 1991).
[447] Bozor Sobir, *Chashmi Safedor (Poplar's Eye)* (Dushanbe: Adolat, 1991), p. 13.

it is unclear whether this set up was intentional or coincidental it is obvious that the depicted scene was of interest to the photographer and local memorial enthusiasts who exhibited it.

On the 3rd day after the Earthquake Sharora was proclaimed a cemetery-village (*kabristondeha*). The history of that single day is meaningful for the understanding of the relations between Soviet officials and religious authorities and how Soviet citizens also acted as Muslims. That day the entire Republican party apparatus and district party representatives, including First Secretary of the Tajik SSR Makhkamov K.M., Chairman of Sovmin Khaëev I.Kh., the first deputy of Sovmin Koshlakov G.V., Ghissar district party heads Gafurov R.G., Kossimov Kh.I., Kaiumov R.D., visited Sharora to oversee the search and rescue effort. The last survivor was excavated alive on the day of the disaster and only a few dead bodies were recovered afterwards. In the meantime, disorganized groups of diggers, mostly family and friends of the diseased kept on arriving, including Tajik emergency response workers who had been dispatched to Armenia one month prior. The overwhelming majority of the diggers were Muslims striving to give their family members and neighbors a proper Muslim funeral. The republican authorities wanted to put an end to this irrational cause of exhuming the dead to bury them back the same day. Sultonmurodi Odina has reported the following exchange between the republican and district officials and the local ulama led by Hoji Akbar Turajonzoda, the Mufti of Tajik SSR and the future spiritual leader of the Tajik opposition in the 1990s.

> Kosimov: People are still digging and looking.
> Makhkamov: We need to explain to them
> Gafurov: At the site of the Gurdara landslide in the Soviet district we fenced off the buried houses and declared them graves.
> Khaëev: We have the same intention.
> At that moment, the Republican mufti, Haji Akbar Turajonzoda, joined the leaders.
> Kakhorov: What do you say, domulla?
> Turajonzoda: We have been explaining the pillars of Sharia to people for several days, but not everyone listens. Today, we continue to work.
> Khaëev: Even rescuers from Armenia said that there is no other way to find living people. The tragedy occurred in December in Leninakan. It gave them a lot of bitter experience.

We climbed the elevation. Several days of rain and the movement of people and equipment formed paths between the hills. In three or four places, earthmoving equipment was working above the houses. At one point there was a commotion and someone reported that a tractor had torn off a corpse's leg.
Haji Akbar Turajonzoda took the loudspeaker and addressed the people:
-O people of Islam! Now wait a moment! Let's read a verse from the Holy Quran and then talk to each other.
I do not know whether it was he or someone else who read this verse in a voice that everyone liked. The mechanisms stopped; people sat down. After reading the verse of the Quran and praying, Haji Akbar Turajonzoda addressed the crowd:
- Those who, by the will of God, were buried under this earth are innocent martyrs (*ghaflatshohidon*). Because of the disaster that befell them, they passed from this world at the behest of the Creator. According to the law, harming them is a sin.
He spoke for some time, quoting the words of the Lord and the hadiths of the Prophet, and at the end he made a speech:
- Now we read the funeral prayer (*janoza*) over every house. Those who have performed ablution (*tahorat*) should join us.

With these words, the first thing he did was rush to the roof of the house, where a tractor had pulled out a piece of a human body. Old and young, rich and poor from all around joined him.

When the funeral prayer started, where there was no coffin in front of him and prayers were directed to the corpses under a pile of dust, everyone calmed down, as if they had surrendered to their fate, and focused on him [Hoji].
On the instructions of the leadership, the construction of the wall around the Sharora cemetery began that same day.[448]

Figure 48. Mufti of Tajik SSR Hoji Akbar Turajhonzoda and other members of the muftiate at the site of Sharora Earthquake.

[448] Odina, Zilzilai Khisor, pp. 155-157.

6.5. Rebuilding Sharora in the Crumbling USSR

Sharora Earthquake was a unique event as it struck Tajikistan when the USSR began disintegrating and it allows to foreground both the power and limits of the Soviet internationalism and preparedness to respond to disasters in its various constituent parts. The Sharora Earthquake blanketed not only a portion of the village and its residents but also the ideology of internationalism and intracommunal peace in Sharora. Even after rebuilding Sharora and flooding the community with millions of rubles Sharora that had existed as an international community without a majority was no more.

The estimate of the material damage caused by the earthquake was among the first orders of business for local and republican authorities. Chairman of the Sovmin of Tajik SSR V. Kashlakov, member of the earthquake commission reported that the estimate damage throughout the Ghissar Valley was around 11-12 million rubles.[449] The destruction spread out across 1952 farms and included damage or complete ruin of 4512 buildings, leaving 4500 families homeless, as well as significant damage to 53 schools, 24 medical facilities, 2 kindergartens, 18 stores, one canteen, 45 kilometers of powerlines, 50 kilometers of telephone lines, 7 kilometers of water supply pipes, 15 kilometers of roads, 14 kilometers of irrigation canals, 9 klubs, 761 of state-owned and 470 of private livestock.[450] The damage value was constantly recalculated and swelled up to 260 million rubles.

The response committee convened at 8:00 in the morning, three hours after the earthquake and occupied the building of *Institut Zemliadelia* that was notably damaged but was the only safe

[449] Otahon Latifi, "V Ghissare Posle Stihii," *Pravda*, 1989.
[450] Usmon Sabzov, *Sharorai Iodho*, 2014., p. 24.

public premises in Sharora. The team included the first secretary of the CP in Ghissar district H.I. Kassimov, the head of the district executive committee of the CP R.D. Kaiumov. At 16:00 the same day the first open meeting of the commission on response to the earthquake, including chairman of the Sovmin I.H. Haëev, secretaries of the central committee of the CP G.G. Veselkov and D.D. Dadabaev, Sovmin deputies V.V. Vohidov, G.V. Kashlakov, R.F. Gafurov and all local executives of all organizations. Importantly, the response headquarters at *Institut Zemledelia* was equipped with a direct phoneline to Moscow to the office of N.I. Ryzhkov, the then Soviet Premier. Ryzhkov was the man of borderlands in Gorbachev's government as he traveled to Soviet peripheries in response to disasters and interethnic conflicts in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Smaller headquarters opened in sovkhoz offices in all affected towns and villages: Ghissar, Okuli Bolo and Okuli Poion to oversee the rescue operation, list the victims, evaluate damages of individual households. It should be noted, that households, not production facilities were the priority for aid distribution and reconstruction effort.

The basic aid and services were available to victims within hours after the earthquake. Ambulances and medical teams arrived promptly from the neighboring districts Ghissar and Leninskii raiion of Dushanbe to provide intensive care for excavated survivors. On various photographs from the scene medial workers can be seen at excavations to provide first aid. On the first day of the rescue effort 73 survivors were recovered from the ruins and delivered to the hospitals in Ghissar and Dushanbe. However, many of them later died of the crush syndrome (*sindrom sdavlivania*) a disease caused by tocsins produced by dying tissues when a person is clamped in ruins. When a person is freed from a ruin trap contaminated flood from extremities flows towards internal organs causing their failure and death. Crush syndrome had manifested itself in most tragic numbers of mortality rates in Armenian Earthquake when 13,000 out of 15,000 rescued persons died in hospitals because Soviet medical professionals were unaware of the

syndrome, had no treatment protocol or the necessary equipment for dialysis and artificial kidney.[451] Authors of Tragediia i bol Ghissara were the first ones to write about the crush syndrome in the context of the Sharora Earthquake. Wihtout providing hard evidence and list of persons who were rescued and later died of the syndrome they nevertheless acknowledged that it factored in mortality rates.[452] One of the indicators of the fatal role the crush syndrom played in failing the earthqquake survivors is the varying counts of the deaths which range from 214, to 234, or 276 people. While medical records are unavailable, it is possible that many of the 73 excavated survivors died in hospitals or on the way there because of the crush syndrome. The first people who responded to calls for help were villagers who rushed to rescue their kin and neighbors digging them out with shovels and *ketmens*. They had no idea about the syndrome. The medical workers who arrived at Sharora and other affected areas were similarly ignorant of the fatal syndrome. The available literature on the Sharora Earthquake, memories and memoirs of the survivors and witnesses, and of the Soviet press show no evidence of the use service animals like rescue dogs to expedite locating and excavating survivors and victims from underground. To surmise, the Sharora Earthquake represents a major failure of the Soviet and Tajik emergency response agencies to learn the best practices not only from other countries but even from the experiences of the Union republics, most notably Armenia, where Tajik emergency workers (*spasateli*) were involved in rescue operations.

While informaiton and knowledge exchange about the life-saving equipment, techniques, and protocoles was a weakpont of Soviet emergency response and preparedness, the material aide channeled towards Ghissar was an overwhelming success. On the first days all victims whose

[451] Marc Elie, "Late Soviet Responses to Disasters, 1989-1991: A New Approach to Crisis Management or the Acme of Soviet Technocratic Thinking?," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 40, no. 2 (2013): 214–38, p. 222.
[452] I. Eshanov, A. F. Loshkareva, and L. Karamhudoev, *Tragediya i Bol' Gissara (O Zemletryasenii 23 Yanvarya 1989 g.)*, 1992, p. 34.

homes were damaged, approximately 4500 people, received temporary shelter in yurts, tents, or portable trailer homes (*vagonkhona*). The yurts, tents, and trailers were set up in the fields or in inner yards of individual homes as well as Sharora's stadium. On the first day of the disaster trucks loaded with warm clothes, blankets and mats (*kurpa*) arrived in Sharora and distributed on first come first served basis. Free hot meals for all registered survivors and members of the rescue effort and unlimited tea and bread (*nonu choi*) were available in the center of Sharora near the market.

Aid came to Sharora and other affected areas both in-kind and financial. In-kind aid and donations were ample and by January 31 or less than in 10 days after the earthquake people in Sharora and other villages received 332 shepherd's houses, 346 tents, 579 stoves, 354.5 tons of coal, 26.6 tons of kerosene, 80 cubic meters of firewood, 171 samovars, 914 folding beds, 499 kerosine lamps, 216 hats, 4388 items of warm clothes, 600 pants and skirts, 10 tons of flour, 1.6 tons of rice, 3.05 tons of sugar, 400 kilograms of tea, 202 rugs, 2838 blankets, 35 tons of fruit, 1871 tons of meat, 100 gas stoves, 3202 cans of jam, 16 kettles, 726 pairs of shoes, 1516 slates (*shifer*), and 200 electric heaters. By February 1, 1989, the neighboring republics Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan together sent hundreds of yurts, tents, and trailer homes to provide basic temporary shelter. Uzbekistan pledged to build 100 new cottages in a safer zone by the western edge of Sharora for the survivors of the villages Okuli Bolo and Poion that had been leveled by the earthquake. The new neighborhood would later be named Posëlok Uzbekistan.

The government of the Tajik SSR allocated 300,000 rubles for immediate needs of the victims and those who had lost property. Each applicant was to receive 300 rubles. Financial aid came from all Union republics, foreign states and individuals, Soviet organizations and working collectives. It is unclear how much money exactly arrived at bank accounts in Tajikistan and how much reached beneficiaries. Sultonmurodi Odina, whose job was to oversee and approve bank transactions and payments for subcontractors reports that the account number 70030 for local bank

transactions received the total of 1,500,000 rubles while the account number 70059 for international and Union transactions received 175,000,000 rubles meaning that international aid constituted 100 times of what Tajik SSR itself could muster up for the reconstruction of the Ghissar district.[453]

The Sharora Earthquake and the ensuing rescue and relief operation took place at the time when the socialist economy and concomitant control mechanisms were already disintegrating while the new economic institutions and control agencies of what in two years would become independent Tajikistan did not yet fully form. This legal and moral gray zone compelled many Soviet officials and individual citizens and households to embezzle and privatize the humanitarian aid. Because the kolkhoz and sovkhoz chairmen doubled as leadership of reconstruction and relief efforts, and their employees, farmers and other workers were at the same time victims and survivors, they engaged in similar schemes described in Chapter 3 and relations between the state representatives and people were of distrust. The problem of local corruption was aggravated by the fact that by the end of the 1980s private farming and entrepreneurship was legalized in the USSR and many farmers sought to pass their business damages as their personal household loss. Soviet newspapers chastised those engaged in scheming on the humanitarian aid. For example, an article titled *Rais* (Boss) in Tojikistoni Sovieti ran a story of Khairulloh Yuldoshev chairman of kolkhoz 50-tiletia oktiabria and the head of local earthquake relief headquarters in Okuli Bolo. The author of the article M. Mirzoev purportedly followed chairman Yuldoshev for several days in 1990 observing his work and witnessed several interactions between Yuldoshev and those affected by the earthquake. According to Mirzoev, chairman Yuldoshev has unsuccessfully petitioned his higherups for permission to leave his post and retire because of overwork and emotional burden

[453] Sultonmurod Odina, *Zilzilai Hissor* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 2008), pp.173-177.

of dealing with claimants. The article described his typical working day dealing with requests for aid:

> -Rais, why did you give me a three-room house? I should get a five-room house!
> Dealing with him was very difficult. He knew that all his relatives had died.
> -Brother, you are alone, now just get a three-room house, then we will see.
> -When I have a wife and children tomorrow, you will forget about me. If my demand is not met, I will go up. That's when you see.
> The chairman knew the father of this young man. He was a pure and modest person. But his son... They said that a distant relative is his "advisor." You can't speak harshly to this young man.

Next in line was a local farmer who demanded a compensation for the three cows and 100 fruit trees he had lost to the landslide:

> He [rais] learned that before the accident, the complainant signed a contract with the insurance office only for one cow and ten apple trees. And that too by force.
> -Why didn't you insure everything?
> -How do I know that there will be an earthquake! He protested in reply.
> Rais explained that the law required to declare and insure all property. But the claimant did not fall back: "find and give" (*biiov bideh* or *vyn' da polozh*).[454]

Many residents of affected villages including Sharora used humanitarian aid to improve their living conditions by overreporting damage or simply seizing newly built homes. One individual took advantage of the urgency and calamity and claimed a trailer (*vagon-khona*) which he added to his house. His house was later found only slightly damaged and fit for living with no risk to life. Other two individuals moved into unfinished houses in Sharora earmarked for those who had lost their homes completely. They finished the construction, kept the houses and their families still live in those cottages.

[454] M. Mirzoev, "Rais," *Tojikistoni Sovieti*, January 23, 1990.

Figure 49. The new neighborhood in Sharora built after the earthquake (photo by the author 2020).

State organizations were no less active in appropriating the aid through petty theft and large-scale embezzlement. Sharora residents shared that humanitarian aid was often distributed informally without any tracking: "Every day a truck loaded with stuff, blankets, clothes, toys etc. would come and stop nearby our building and two guys would hand aid (*gumpomosh*) to a crown of people. No one took any signatures or papers (*talon*)." Sultonmurodi Odina, member of the local response committee in Sharora recalls having found two headquarters workers eating donated jam in the storage room in Institut Zemliadelia. Besides the petty theft there were larger schemes involving republican organizations. Sultonmurodi Odina, boasts that financial aid received by the Ghissar district for reconstruction and compensations to the victims was under strict control and "not a dime was pocketed." At the same time, he recalled an episode involving *Tadzhikmatluot* — republican cooperation union:

> It was the middle of the summer of 1989. They called on behalf of the head of the district headquarters and instructed me to immediately transfer one million rubles from the

> donation account 70059 to pay for the service of Tajikmatlubot (Tadzhikpotrebsoiuz). I was responsible for the transfer of funds, and with my signature, funding was to be approved in the office of the executive committee. Of course I did not agree.
> -This is the order of the chief of staff, they said.
> -I will see them, then we will decide, I answered.
> - I gave you order. What else? Now the order has passed.
> -We'll see.
> I cut the speech short and started looking for the head of the executive committee. I was just closing the door of my office when the Minister of Finance of the Republic Lafizov Dzhanobiddin came. This middle-aged man, who is always calm, emphasized many times that we should be careful in spending the amount of charity and spend it only for a purpose. - Every penny of the people must be reported, he emphasized again and again.
> I told him the story. As always, he listened quietly and asked for the representative of Tajikmatlubot. The head of Tajikmatlubot was coming down the stairs. Janobiddin Lafizov met with him and asked:
> -Do you need money?
> -Yes, ustod. There was a lot of spending. There are documents.
> -How much did Tajikmatlubot transfer to the charity account? What…? The affected people were not your shareholders? If you need money, come to the Ministry of Finance, but don't touch a dime of charity money, it won't end well.

What Sultonmurodi Odina was most likely trying to communicate here is that Tadzhikmatlubot, whose budget was to be formed of the payments of its members and shareholders, was trying to supplement its dues to the shareholders from the accounts for incoming international donations instead of the money they had already received from members. If passed, one million rubles would have been misappropriated.

With the fall of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the Civil War in Tajikistan all documentation regarding financial aid held on accounts 70030 and 70059 were lost. The rapid economic downturn and inflation evaporated all the savings of Soviet citizens and money for the reconstruction of Sharora and other affected locales.[455] The special foundation for children of Sharora was rumored to have hold millions of rubles but the girl named Sharora, the principal benefactor of the account #19 has never seen the money:

> Everyone said that you [Sharora] have a lot of money in your account, and that you can get this money after you turn 18. After I turned 18, I needed money for my studies, I

[455] On the economic crisis unfolding in Tajik SSR in 1989 see Isaac McKean Scarborough, *Moscow's Heavy Shadow: The Violent Collapse of the USSR* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023), pp. 71-73.

> applied, but I couldn't get any information. They said that your money "burned up" (*sukht*) at one time. I don't even have information about how much money there was. There were people from other countries who said that they transferred money to my account. I demanded documents, but they didn't find any.[456]

The storage facility with construction and home improvement materials in the heart of Sharora simply vanished. Construction brigades from Uzbekistan that had pledged to build 100 new homes managed to build only 50 by the end of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, episodes of ad hoc aid distribution left many families disgruntled and on the edge of demise. Residents of the villages of Okuli Bolo and Okuli Poion complained for many months about unjust aid they had received. Normurad Gasanov's family consisted of 14 people three of whom were married. All of them received only one tent and had to sleep on a layer of straw in front of their ruins.[457]

Davlatior Odinaev, the Sharora head of law-enforcement (*milisa*) recalls that his house was severely damaged and unsafe to live in. The aid distribution office (*shtab*) gave him one yurt which he installed in his orchard and his family of seven lived in it for at least six months and the district kept failing to either restore their house or allocate construction materials. At the award ceremony for officers who responded to the disaster and took part in the rescue effort Davlatior was awarded a certificate of honor (*pochotnaia gramota*) which he folded and put on his head as a roof and declared in front of his colleagues and commanders: "Thank you. I finally have roof over my head!" He continued to express frustration in more humorous and subversive ways by naming his youngest son Ryzhkov (Tajik Rishkof), in honor of the head of the Soviet Premier charged with emergency response and scolded him for the whole neighborhood to hear: "You little bustard Rishkof. Get back to work Rishkof."[458]

[456] "Sharora 27 let posle tragedii."
[457] Sultonmurod Odina, *Zilzilai Hissor* (Dushanbe: Irfon, 2008), p. 183.
[458] Odinaev, "Conversation with the Author on March 19."

Even given the shortcomings, petty theft, and financial schemes, amidst the unfolding economic crisis, with resources coming from all around the world, Tajikistan had demonstrated impressive success in rebuilding much of the habitat in and around Sharora. More importantly, in the process of reconstruction Soviet-Tajik authorities did what they should have done when building up the Central Ghissar Valley decades before — build reinforced earthquake-proof houses fit for seismic zones away from potentially unstable land massifs. The new neighborhoods, Sharora, Haĭoti Nav, Javoni, and Uzbekistan, were erected on the agricultural lands of the nearby farms, a decision no Soviet-Tajik official would otherwise approve.

The head of the architectural section of the reconstruction committee, Leonid Kan, oversaw the design of new districts and houses. At a session discussing the design and construction plans he insisted that: "The Tajik family, has many children. Young people who have reached adulthood, they also need a home and an independent life. In particular, in the village of Sharora, this characteristic of families, the future part of people is completely taken into account." Within a year after the earthquake 1062 people of Sharora moved into 161 buildings, including 20 three-room houses, 120 four-room houses, and 21 five-room houses. In addition, the general plan of this village envisaged the construction of a kindergarten for 140 places, a shop, a teahouse, a sports complex, and a swimming pool. The swimming pool and sports center (*sportzal*) had never materialized. Each house came with a small 0.8-hectare land plot that allowed families cottage farming and livestock holding.

The noble goal of providing new housing to thousands of dispossessed people from devastated villages and relocating them into enlarged Sharora backfired because disgruntled and traumatized people found themselves in an ethnically complex environment and in a broader Soviet-wide context of interethnic tensions, hostilities, and confusion. In 1989 the internal interethnic peace and tranquility of Sharora began to degrade.

6.6. The End of Internal Peace

The history of interethnic relations in Sharora prior to 1989 can be characterized as lasting internal peace because none of the groups populating the town could make a decisive claim on the status of the majority. Interethnic and interconfessional marriage and intimacy, particularly among Europeans and their native urbanized colleagues and neighbors was a norm. Both local law enforcement and ordinary residents report having no conflicts with their neighbors or outsiders because of their difference in language or faith. Whenever recorded, conflicts and other forms of misdemeanor were of international character and in most cases involved behavior typical of any Soviet town —drinking and minor public debauchery and brawls, domestic violence and disorder, illegal abortions at private residence.[459] Davlatior Odinaev, Sharora's former head of *militisa*, claimed that there were no major conflicts or serious crimes in Sharora in the Soviet period. "There were many nationalities living here and each of these peoples wanted to show the best of their nation. Of course there is always a black sheep in a herd. There were drunken brawls, cases of domestic violence and disorder. But for the most part it was a quiet and peaceful place."[460]

Ordinary citizens concurred that what they miss the most about the Soviet time was peace and trust in other people. Liubov Alexandrovna shared: "I think we lived happily back then, and I don't know why. Maybe, because we trusted one another. There were no disasters, airplane crushes and stuff. I mean, maybe there were but we didn't know. Today, you know everything and keep stressing about the whole world." Similarly, another man observed: "Every morning the milk farm would send fresh milk to Sharora's grocery store early in the morning. People did not want to stand in line and instead left their milk containers (*bidonchik*) and some money inside and lined them up

[459] The information about the security and public order in Sharora in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s was shared by the law-enforcement veteran Davlatior Odinaev and the journal of complaints and legal actions taken against offenders (zhurnal obrashenii grazhdan).
[460] Odinaev, Conversation with the author, 2020.

in a queue. No-one was there to guard the containers and the money. After an hour or so you would come back and pick up your milk. Today, if you did something like that, you would never find your money and your container."

Sharora's interethnic idyll hinged on several crucial elements: geographic separation of different groups — more urban and European neighborhoods populated by European and mixed families of scientists, managers, and welfare workers and native, mostly Tajik and Uzbek, farmers, who lived on the outskirts and outside of Sharora, and the delayed arrival of Glasnost in Tajikistan, that had spurred debates around the nationality question across the Soviet Union. The earthquake of 1989 that had destroyed Sharora's southern outskirts and the nearby villages of Okuli Bolo and Okuli Poion was a catalyst of the very local experience of the end of interethnic peace that had lasted throughout much of the Soviet period. Factors that contributed to the erosion of the stability in Sharora were general criminalization of life in the Soviet Union, ethnicization of street violence, and imagined inequality between titular and non-titular nationalities in Tajikistan.

Locating interethnic tensions in Sharora is not easy because, unlike other bloody cleansings flaring in various parts of the disintegrating Soviet Union, conflicts in Sharora are remembered as a "misexperienced trauma" meaning that the quarrels, fights, and hostilities hardly ever assumed an explicitly violent form and were rather symbolic, undergirding, and petty, albeit still hurting. Furthermore, for many members of the Sharora community the history of troubled interethnic relations has remained unnoticed and overshadowed by the much bloodier and horrifying civil war in Tajikistan (circa1992-1997). Nevertheless, the evidence that Sharora's Soviet and international populace was forced out of their habitat is ample in personal archives, oral history, everyday

language and popular history, and the following subchapter relates a story of the withering away of the Soviet internationalism of Sharora.[461]

Methodologically, evidence of attitudes and relations between different ethnic groups was collected casually in unintended statements pertinent to everyday life or notable events in local history. Statements about interethnic peace and interethnic feud are part of interviews, reflections, and correspondence on other topics. I chose to precede with the collection and analysis of these memories with caution because they are not impersonal but are part of the still lived everyday life experience in Sharora. It is also generational because people whose mature life fell on the period from the 1960s to the early 1980s were less exposed to or witnessed interethnic tensions while those who were young in the late 1980s and early 1990s have vivid and emotional memories of hostility and violence. Finally, interethnic relations involve at least two sides that are typically divided into perpetrators and victims with moral sympathies usually afforded to the latter. I have given voice to both sides without moral judgement hoping to draw a balanced picture of how different elements of the ethnic landscape of Sharora populace saw and treated one another, and how they claimed their place in it.

The fabled Soviet internationalism had always been a precarious gain and what my interlocutors remember as peaceful coexistence of different nationalities was an aspiration rather than reality. Soviet Europeans and Slavs, in their majority, showed little interest in Tajik language and culture. Many of my Russophone interlocutors, having lived in Tajikistan their entire lives still do not speak Tajik language.[462] Tajik language was a mandatory subject in schools with the Russian language of learning and there was never lack of exposure to Tajik language from fellow-

[461] Due to intimate and at times unsettling nature of the stories shared in these interviews the names of the interlocutors have been anonymized.

[462] With the exception of Liubov Agopova (Gushina) who spoke Tajik with her neighbor in my presence and Olga Shadrina who is remembered to have spoken Tajik and Shugnani languages.

workers and neighbors. However, geographic separation within the Sharora community made possible to separate the community based on the native language. My interlocutor Alla has testified:

> We rarely communicated with those who spoke Tajik. We mostly spoke Russian. Even many Tajiks spoke Russian. We heard Tajik speech very rarely. When people from the villages came. And then, when our boys, elite Tajiks, were playing. They shouted, "Tajiks are coming." They saw that people from the village were coming, shouting, "Tajiks." They themselves were no longer Tajiks.
> They did not play [ne druzhili] with kishlachnyie. Only with our own. And where did these kishlachnyie live? Closer to bagara. Closer to the farm. Closer to Ghissar. Everything that was closer to the dry land was considered a village, and where we lived was the elite.

Viktor Agopov, retired PE teacher shared a similar story:

> Still today when I go to bazar I can only ask how much are potatoes and how much are onions and stuff. They [Tajiks] ask me, how come you still don't speak Tajik. I answer. Piss off [da poshly vy na khren]. If I learn Tajik, you will forget Russian because there will be no one to talk to you. And you need to go to Russia to work and you need to speak Russian there. And I am fine right here. In the past, 70-80 percent of the population was Russian-speaking [russkoiazychnyi] and over there (dry lands) only nationals [natsyonaly] lived.

These passages bespeak of alienation of natives and Europeans along the language skills with the Russian language or bilinguism promising class privileges such as better housing and proximity to the symbolic center of Sharora while Tajik language seemed to push natives to the outskirts. Memories among former and still living European Sharorians are myopic of the past of the Tajik part of the community and the lack of interaction with the native newcomers. In a conversation a Russian woman said: "In the past only Russians lived here, and then all of these came in from somewhere *(vse eti otkuda-to vzialis*)." In Russian the phrase "all these" or vse eti expresses unfriendly and condescending way to refer to people.

Even some of the Tajiks living in Sharora have demonstrated a distance from people moving into newly erected neighborhoods after 1989. An agricultural scientist in a conversation lamented the loss of Sharora's former grandeur and civility and linked its decline to the change of

demographics and that "There were a lot of unwanted (*nenuzhnyie*) people moving in." He promptly corrected his choice of words and instead of unwanted (*nenuzhnyie*) explained: "I mean not unwanted but people who had not lived here before."

The choice of terms with which different parts of the Sharora community identified one another is crucial as these words display a certain attitude and politics. Andrei Volos, Dushanbe-born Russian writer has epitomized the way Russophone Soviet Tajikistanis treated their Tajik compatriots in his award-winning *Khuramabad*, a series of short novels about Soviet Tajikistan in the 1980s and 1990s:

> It's not that the Tajik teachers kept leaving the school. After a while, another one would take their place – a poorly dressed, constrained person who spoke Russian poorly. They must have come to lessons as if they were in a torture chamber – the class was constantly laughing... as soon as the teacher turned away to the board, chewed paper was thrown at him... once the moron Nekrasov threw an inkwell at the blackboard, and it exploded like a bomb half a meter from the head of the next martyr... and it was simultaneously creepy and funny to look at the splattered face, on which white lips were shaking... Of course, they couldn't teach anyone anything – partly because they themselves didn't know how to do it, but most importantly – because no one wanted to learn anything. The adults also understood that no one needed Tajik. "Taji-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e?!" Why?" The secretary of the Central Committee was certainly a Tajik, and the director of the plant was certainly a Tajik, but behind their backs there were always businesslike Russian deputies. The job of the Tajiks was to know Russian in order to understand what they were advised, and not the other way around. It was valuable to be Russian, but to be a Tajik was somehow not good... it was awkward to be a Tajik... a little animal [zveriok]... And even if not in a robe [khalat], not from a village, but from a city, having learned a few things, having acquired a European appearance, but still not having lost his little animal [zverkiovskiie] qualities... "What's the point of talking! A little animal [zveriok] is a flightless bird!"[463]

This fictional excerpt from Khuramadab portraying Russians' outright hostility towards Tajik teachers is far from being fiction only. During my fieldwork in Sharora I heard several interlocutors refer to Tajiks and other natives as *zveri* (beasts or animals), *kishlachnyie* (those who live in kishlaks), sometimes *dikiie* (savage) from several interlocutors. In an interview with a group of Russophone men who grew up in Sharora and in the 1980s and attended high school in Russian

[463] Andrei Germanovich Volos, *Khurramabad: roman-punktir* (Moskva: Zebra E, 2005).

language shared that they had experienced hostility and bullying from native youths from the surrounding neighborhoods:

> -You were all of different nationalities, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Pamiris, Germans etc. how did you get along?
> -We all spoke the same Russian language. To you, now, we all seem different. Back then there was no such notion. We were children of the same Soviet people. We never identified based on nationality.
> (another man interjected) - You keep saying that we never said you are Tajik, you are Russian etc. but when the Tajiks came remember how you shouted: Run away! The Tajiks are coming! The beasts [zveri] are coming! Wasn't it like that? Such things also happened. They chased Armenians, Russians. There were February events.

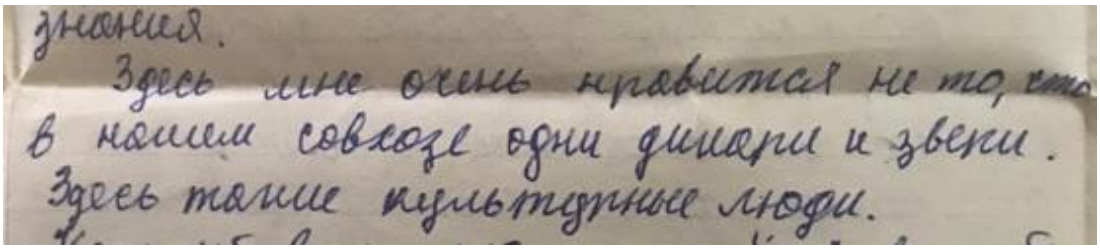
When I asked the group where did those Tajiks come from to chase them, the men identified areas of habitat of people that they recalled had bullied them and those were new neighborhoods built after the 1989 earthquake to host relocated kishlaks:

> -They came from the mountains. From Vishniovaia, Sadovaia, Kafirnigan streets. This territory with apartment buildings was something like a ghetto. When you left that area you are screwed [pizdets tebe]." said one of them. "They were zveri" he added.

Reading through the journal of citizens' complaints (*zhurnal obrasheniy*) that Sharora *militsia* kept from the 1970s through the 1990s one can see no evidence of interethnic hostilities only what one can call international public disorder — episodes of public drunkenness and misbehavior involving different nationalities. The average number of calls to the police was 6-7 per month. In 1988 there were 43 calls and in 1989 there were 22 none of which had anything to do with interethnic tensions except for one involving a Russian woman Svetlana and a Russian-speaking Tajik woman named Tanya who were often found in drunken quarrels. In the 1990s, by contrast, there were several brawls, one robbery at a gun point, cases of disposession of property and arguments over shared land and houses. One record in the book of complaints from 1993 was a collective appeal [*kollektivnoie obrasheniye*] of residents of Sovkhoz Dzerzhinskogo regarding attacks by residents of the *posëlok* Uzbekistan, the new neighborhood where residents of Okuli Bolo and Okuli Poion had been relocated after the earthquake, who insulted and harassed residents of Sharora. The

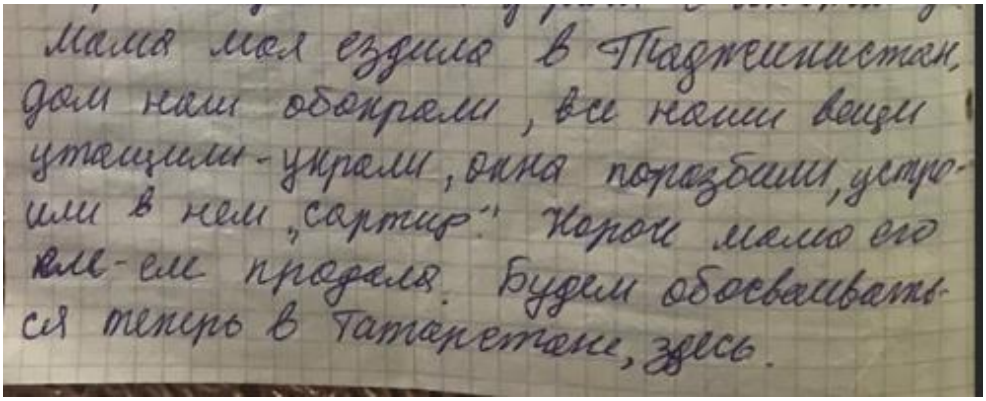
repertoire of harassment included infringement and trespassing, throwing rocks at people, killing their pets, cats and dogs, or publicly torturing and killing wild animals. The *militisia* promised to take measures to strengthen the protection of the territory of Sharora adjacent to Uzbekistan but with the levels of other forms of violent crimes and the ongoing civil war *militsia* never acted against the wrongdoers.

The men who were youth back in the early 1990s recall that the Russophone part of the community were simply forced out first of the public spaces of Sharora such as *besedka* and *polisadnik*, and later from their private homes. Participating in collective celebrations of Easter was becoming unsafe. Two women were shot at from slingshots on their way to the cemetery by native boys. The cemetery itself was raided and looted for metals. Some of those Europeans who had fled Sharora after the earthquake or during the civil war shared that their homes were raided and vandalized. In a correspondence between a Tatar-Russian M and German T, two young women who grew up in Sharora, M wrote about her life in Tatarstan after her family had fled Sharora: I really like it here [in Tatartstan], it is nothing like our sovkhoz where there are only savages [dikari] and beasts [zveri]. Here people are so well behaved [kulturnyie]."



M has also recalled that when they returned to Sharora in 1996 to sell their house they found it thoroughly looted and with floors covered with feces: "My mom went back to Tajikistan. Our home was burgled, all our stuff was grabbed and stolen, windows broken, and the place was turned into a toilet. Mom could hardly sell it. Now we will try to settle here, in Tatarstan." M has also

shared that burglars and vandals who defecated inside their home did it on purpose so no one would buy a house that was rendered *haram* and their neighbors turned a blind eye.


Мама моя ездила в Таджикистан, дом наш обокрали, все наши вещи утащили - украли, окна поразбили, устроили в нем „сартир". Хорош мама его вы-ли продала. Будем обосновываться теперь в Татарстане, здесь.

During episodes of symbolic violence and harassment Tajiks would often yell an insulting chant *Urus kukuruz haltak puri guz* that can be roughly translated as nonsensical *Russian you are corn and a sack full of farts*. The number of interethnic marriages was also declining as Tajik husbands were divorcing their Russian [*urus*] wives under peer pressure. G shared that Tajiks were pushing her husband "to leave his Russian wife and marry a Tajik because all Russians drink and fuck around. You need a Tajik wife."

Besides symbolic and physical violence non-native Sharorians were affected by the rumors about anti-Russian pogroms in increasingly unruly Tajikistan. G's shared her testimony of anti-Russian violence enmeshing her own memories and rumors:

> Russians were beaten and chased. In Dushanbe they beat up an Armenian woman, so she went death. There was a boy, and they butchered him, and he lost his jaw. Do you know about Viktor Fiodorovich's brother? He was stabbed to death in a bus in broad daylight. They [Tajiks] said, you Russians go back to Russia! And many did, even though they were born in Tajikistan. As for us, we had nowhere to go. We are mixed [metisy]."

What is notable about this statement is that G separates Tajik, Russian, and Metisy as distinct groups: "Tajiks own Tajikistan, Russians went back to Russia, and we, metisy, end up uruz kukurus here and zveri there." Here, metisy implies a third nation, product of Soviet history, and people of nonbelonging.

To conclude, each natural disaster is only part-natural when humans are involved, either causing it or responding to it. Humans are hardly ever simply humans struck by a natural catastrophe. The way they respond to it reflects social, cultural, economic, and political entanglements pertinent to a historical moment in which a catastrophe occurs. The Earthquake of 1989 was Sharora's most international moment. It opened the town to the whole Soviet Union and countries outside the USSR. It compelled a Swedish journalist to travel to Sharora to cover the disaster and relief operation, an Austrian family to seek adoption of the girl Sharora who had survived the earthquake, a Russian geologist who conducted his own investigation of the causes of the disaster. Millions of people around the world were involved as spectators of Sharora's drama or sent financial and material aid. The earthquake was also the last Soviet disaster, not only chronologically, but also the last time when the USSR threw its weight to organize relief and reconstruction. Nevertheless, the Sharora Earthquake led to national, cultural and spiritual upheaval with enormous repercussions for Tajikistan's politics in the following years. It inspired nationalist poets, empowered and gave stage to religious figures to perform their authority, and most importantly, tilted the balance in interethnic peace that was the most memorable part of the Soviet everyday life experience. Unlike the Tashkent reconstruction and building Nurek in the 1970s that brought hundreds of thousands of Soviet Europeans to Central Asia, the Sharroa Earthquake of 1989 did the opposite, chased away those who had built it decades before. Despite the enormous financial and economic resources channeled into the Ghissar Valley, and an optimistic propaganda campaign, the non-native population of Sharora Russians, Tatars, Ukrainians, Germans, Jews, Koreans, Georgians, Armenians and many others, left their micro-world behind.

Conclusions

Sharora exemplified a typical Soviet locality with a distinctive fate, encapsulating the milestones and thresholds of Soviet history. It offers lessons and poses questions that extend beyond its geographic and temporal confines, paving the way for further scholarly exploration. In Sharora, Soviet internationalism transcended ideological rhetoric to become an everyday lived experience. It fostered international networks of science, migration, labor, leisure, and even transconfessional spirituality, all while grappling with the challenges of human-made natural disasters that etched Sharora onto the world map.

Sharora's history reflects the interplay of life and death. As a microworld built from the remnants of other worlds, it became home to disenfranchised kulaks, Cossacks, clergy, intellectuals, and exiled peoples from the collapsing Russian Empire. These settlers were tasked with building socialism in the Ghissar Valley—a transformation of the so-called "Valley of Death" into a multicultural community where life was sustained and celebrated. European settlers in early Soviet Sharora internalized an imperial ethos and perceived themselves as modernizing agents.

Sharora was a nexus in the international exchange of scientific knowledge and environmental strategies during the 20th century. It symbolized the Soviet promise of creating a rational, prosperous society through transformed landscapes and human bodies, collective labor and leisure, extended childhoods, and modern lifestyles familiar in the West. This dissertation has explored these promises on-site, through institutions such as agricultural research centers, space observatories, and meteorological stations, and by examining the voices of those who manned them. This first wave of internationalism in Soviet Central Asia was dominated by European settlers, whose intellectual effort laid the groundwork for later waves of intercultural exchange.

Over time, the Ghissar Valley evolved into a neo-Europe, increasingly accommodating Central Asian natives—Tajiks, Kyrgyz, and Uzbeks. This shift undermined the privilege of Sharora's European settlers and marked the emergence of a new internationalism: one that sought to integrate European aboriginals and native newcomers. This unprecedented model promised equality and indigeneity to all, regardless of ethnicity. Yet, in practice, the failures of the Soviet state to ensure broader inclusion and equity often manifested in ethnic tensions, especially during the era of Late Socialism. While elsewhere these struggles have been interpreted as resistance against a totalitarian regime, in Sharora, they signaled the fragmentation of interethnic peace and the erosion of internationalism.

Ironically, where the Soviet state's efforts to impose control over religion led to distrust and subjugation at an institutional level, it inadvertently enabled grassroots forms of spiritual and religious conviviality. Sharora's everyday life was marked by vibrant, transconfessional exchanges between Muslims and Christians, creating a fleeting yet remarkable synthesis of Islam, Christianity, and Communism. Religion, stripped of institutional dominance, became a powerful force for maintaining communal ties and honoring the dead, further showcasing the unintended fruits of Soviet modernity.

However, not all forces of Soviet modernity fostered unity. Episodes of collective trauma, such as the Sharora Earthquake, revealed the fragile underpinnings of the community. Occurring during the tumultuous Perestroika era, the earthquake was both a natural disaster and a political crisis. While the Soviet Union's relief efforts showcased its enduring capacity, the broader cultural and political climate exacerbated divisions. The physical reconstruction of Sharora could not salvage the interethnic peace that had once been its hallmark.

Ultimately, Sharora's story raises profound questions about what it meant to be Soviet. The Soviet Union, caught between empire and nationhood, produced a people similarly suspended

between identities. To be Soviet was to navigate this liminal space: rejecting neo-imperial revanchism while also resisting an exclusive, ethnic nationalism. The Soviet person was defined by this tension and, in many ways, by their inability to fully belong to either side. For those who neither retreated to their ethnic homelands nor seamlessly transitioned to new national framework, the post-Soviet experience was one of profound dislocation. Their suffering and sense of loss illuminate the unique essence of Soviet identity: an identity forged in non-belonging, yet deeply rooted in the shared, if fractured, time and space of the Soviet world. Sharora, like the Soviet Union itself, reminds us that the fragments of a broken mechanism often reveal more about its inner workings than its functioning whole.

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