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English, motility and Ismaili transnationalism

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Abstract: The transnational Ismaili community is made up of local communities of Ismailis living in over 25 countries around the world. Despite diversity within and between these communities, the 2.5–12 million Ismailis worldwide share a common identity as Ismaili. Various structures and resources are used to construct and maintain the community. These include an official language – English. In this article, I aim to explore the role of English in connection with Ismaili transnationalism. Drawing on ethnographic data collected during fieldwork in Northern Pakistan and Eastern Tajikistan, and on data taken from digital spaces, I will focus on the movement of local Ismailis away from Northern Pakistan and Eastern Tajikistan, and on the movement of people and ideas to Northern Pakistan and Eastern Tajikistan. I will thereby argue for the importance of including non-mobile individuals in conceptualizations of Ismaili transnationalism. In doing so, I will apply the concept of "motility", which points to interconnections between social and spatial mobility, and highlights the potential for mobility; and I will underline the role local settings play for transnational processes. In the course of the article, I also demonstrate that Ismaili transnationalism is not homogeneous. Instead, certain people, places and spaces emerge as more relevant to its construction and maintenance. This becomes coupled with access to English and has implications for this issue's focus on the relationship between South and Central Asian spaces.

Keywords: English, Ismaili, transnationalism, motility, local

1 Introduction

The transnational Ismaili Muslim community consists of between 2.5–12 million individuals living in over 25 countries around the world. While there is widespread diversity within and between local communities, for example, with respect to ethnicity and local languages, Ismailis share a

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common identity as Ismaili. The community is led by the Aga Khan IV, spiritual leader and 49th Imam, whose lineage is traced back to the Prophet Muhammad. As stated in the Ismaili constitution, "[b]y virtue of his office and in accordance with the faith and belief of the Ismaili Muslims, the Imam enjoys full authority of governance over and in respect of all religious and Jamati [community] matters of the Ismaili Muslims" (Ismailia Constitution 1986: preamble). He also has the authority to appoint members of "National, Regional and Local Councils", which are responsible for the "social governance of the Jamat [community]" (Ismailia Constitution 1986, article 5), and of "Tariqah and Religious Education Boards", which are responsible "for the training of religion teachers and waezeen [trained preachers], for research and publication, and for the performance of such functions in relation to the Ismaili Tariqah [persuasion] as Mawlana Hazar Imam may deem necessary" (Ismailia Constitution 1986: article 8).

Today sizeable communities of Ismailis live in North America, Europe and Australia; they first migrated from Gujarat in India to East Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century, and then on to Europe, North America and Australia in the second half of the twentieth century as a result of decolonization and related movements to expulse Indians from East Africa (Mukadam and Mawani 2007; Daftary 2011; Karim 2011; Steinberg 2011). There are also sizeable communities of Ismailis residing in various parts of South Asia (e.g., in Pakistan and India) and Central Asia (e.g., in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, western China), in particular; and in Western Asia (e.g., Iran and Syria). For Steinberg (2011: 16) the co-existence of these different types of communities means that "Ism'ili globality cannot be characterized solely as emerging from diaspora; rather it is an interaction between a diaspora and less-mobile autochthonous communities whose ties to the places they inhabit are very old indeed". These latter communities are particularly interesting with respect to processes of transnationalism, since transnationalism is not *per se* achieved by means of migration from one nation to another. Instead these local communities become integrated "into the fold of the imamate" (Steinberg 2011: 15) in other ways, for example, via educational programs, speeches by the Aga Khan, humanitarian aid and infrastructure projects (cf. for example, Mostowlansky, this issue).

Drawing on data taken from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a village in Hunza, Northern Pakistan, and the city of Khorog, Eastern Tajikistan, and research on digital spaces and secondary literature, this article exemplifies ties between English and Ismaili transnationalism. It thereby argues for the importance of conceptualizing transnationalism as connected to physical movement and mobility, as well as to the spread of ideas and beliefs (about Ismaili

transnationalism and the role of English). This entails taking into account the movement of people and ideas *to* local communities of Ismailis in Northern Pakistan and Eastern Tajikistan, and the movement of local Ismailis away *from* Northern Pakistan and Eastern Tajikistan. It also underscores the need to include non-mobile individuals in conceptualizations of Ismaili transnationalism. In discussing Ismaili transnationalism I draw on Kaufmann et al.'s (2004) concept of "motility", which points to interconnections between social and spatial mobility, and highlights the potential for mobility; and I underline the role local settings play for transnational processes (cf. also Guarnizo and Smith 2009). In the course of the article, I also demonstrate that Ismaili transnationalism is not homogeneous. Instead, certain people, places and spaces emerge as more relevant to its construction and maintenance. This becomes coupled with access to English and has implications for this issue's focus on the relationship between South and Central Asian spaces.

2 Data

One of the main sources of data used in this article was collected during ethnographic fieldwork in 2012 and 2013 in Pakistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The majority of the fieldwork was conducted in a village in Central Hunza, Northern Pakistan, and the city of Khorog, in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO), Eastern Tajikistan. During fieldwork, I lived with local families and participated in daily events (for example, weddings, visits to family and friends, shopping, school/English language learning); and I conducted individual qualitative interviews (N = 19) and group interviews (N = 2; with two participants in each interview). I also conducted two group discussions in Khorog (with six young women, and with nine young women and two young men, respectively).[1]

Both the village in central Hunza and the city of Khorog have majority Ismaili populations (Kreutzmann 1995; Bliss 2006; Steinberg 2011) and neither of the Ismaili communities has English as a first language (although English has official status in Pakistan). Amongst the Ismaili population of Central Hunza, the first

1 Since the interviews and group discussions were largely held in English ethnographic fieldwork was important. Two interviews in Hunza were held in Burushaski and simultaneously translated for me by a research assistant. By being a participant observer, I was able to contextualise interlocutors' views on English within their day-to-day practices and appreciate gaps between "saying" and "doing", i.e., between how important my interlocutors said English was for their day-to-day life, and how widely they and other community members used English in those domains I became privy to.

language is typically Burushaski (an as yet unclassified language) with the majority of the local population being proficient in the national language, Urdu, which, as demonstrated in Backstrom and Radloff's (1992) sociolinguistic survey of the languages of the Northern Areas, was already then seen as important for economic opportunity within Pakistan (Backstrom 1992a; 1992b).[2] In Khorog, local Ismailis predominantly have Shughni (a Southeastern Iranian language) as their first language, followed by Russian (formerly the language of interethnic communication in Tajikistan) and Tajik (the sole official language of Tajikistan since 2009).[3] Overall English typically has third language status in Hunza and fourth language status in Khorog. Yet English is growing progressively more important. This can be linked to the rise in institutions since the 1990s (early 1990s in Hunza, and late 1990s and 2000s in Khorog) offering English-medium instruction and English-language training, for example, the Aga Khan Lycée, Khorog. Many of these are run or facilitated by the Aga Khan Education Services, itself part of the Aga Khan Development Network. The fact that English is not the first language of these Ismailis makes them particularly interesting with respect to the role language plays in "the intensive and continual process of incorporating disparate and scattered communities into the Ismaʿili complex, of bringing them into the fold of the imamate" (Steinberg 2011: 15). Since Central Hunza and Khorog are traditionally labeled as belonging to South Asia (Pakistan) and Central Asia (Tajikistan), respectively, this process is also interesting in light of this issue's aim of going beyond a treatment of the two regions as separate entities (cf. Marsden 2012; Bolander and Mostowlansky 2013; this issue; Mostowlansky 2014; this issue). Indeed, despite relative geographical proximity and awareness of other Ismaili communities living over the border in Pakistan or Tajikistan, my fieldwork suggests that ties between these spaces are created not via movement between Hunza and Khorog, but via mobility facilitated by Aga Khan institutions to, for example, London, where Ismailis from Hunza and Khorog (as well as from other places around the world) can meet and forge new ties.

The second source of data I will draw on is data taken from "digital spaces", which are "situated not in specific territorial sites but in the virtual reality of mediascapes" (Jacquemet 2010: 58). In drawing on this data, I wish to highlight

2 While all my interlocutors were proficient in Urdu, I was told that there are people amongst the older generation, particularly women, who do not know Urdu.

3 In 2009 the Tajik president's Law on Language made Tajik the sole language "in all state documents and official correspondence" (Kellner-Heinkele and Landau 2012: 178). Since both Tajik and Russian had been used previously, the law was interpreted as lowering the status of Russian and removing its status as the language of "interethnic communication" (Kellner-Heinkele and Landau 2012: 178; cf. Bolander [2016b] for a detailed discussion on questions of language policy and ideology in Khorog, Tajikistan).

the importance of perceiving "digital spaces" as a valid site for fieldwork, since they facilitate and create ties between dispersed Ismailis, thereby contributing to the construction of the transnational community. Members of the Ismaili community run and host a series of websites, including, for example "The Nano Wisdoms Archive of Imamat Speeches, Interviews & Writings"; "Ismailimail", "[a] searchable blog of news, articles, pictures, and videos related to the *Ismaili* community" (Ismailimail); and "The Ismaili", or official website of the community. There are also sites devoted to the Aga Khan Development Network, "a group of development agencies with mandates that include the environment, health, education, architecture, culture, microfinance, rural development [...]", and which "conduct their programmes without regard to faith, origin or gender" (Aga Khan Development Network). One of the major organizations within this larger complex is the Aga Khan Education Services (AKES), whose online sites contain information about the over 240 schools and academies run by the AKES worldwide. In this article I will draw on data published on the Nano Wisdoms Blog and the AKES sites in particular. By working with these different sources of data, as well as with (historical and contemporary) material published in secondary sources, I am attempting to pursue "a multi-locational research strategy that crisscrosses national, cultural, and institutional boundaries" (Guarnizo and Smith 2009 [1998]: 26).

3 Transnationalism as movement from and to

Research on transnationalism within anthropology and sociology since the 1990s has underscored that the lives of people in particular localities are being "affected by geographically remote economic, social, and cultural processes" (Hurrelmann and DeBardeleben 2011: 4). Within the literature there are numerous definitions and understandings of "transnational" and "transnationalism" (cf., for example, Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Basch et al. 1994; Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996; Smith and Guarnizo 2009 [1998]; Pries 1999; Vertovec 2001; 2009; McEwan 2004). Yet a review of key publications makes manifest the close tie between transnationalism and migration, with transnationalism often being conceptualized as "another form of migration" (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 322).

As Dahinden (2009: 1366; cf. also; Smart and Smart 2009) has argued, "[t]he literature on transnationalism still suffers notably from asymmetry, focusing solely on migrants and ignoring non-migrants". Yet having transnational social relationships does not necessarily require migrating oneself, nor does migrating necessarily lead to the maintenance of transnational social relationships. Rather,

"to be transnational involves a mode of acting and performing (i.e. building up transnational social relations), as much as it does thinking, feeling and belonging" (Dahinden 2009: 1367). By placing equal emphasis on "transnational subjectivity" (Dahinden 2009: 1367; cf.; Vertovec 2009; for an analogous description of transnationalism as a "type of consciousness"), Dahinden allows for the inclusion of non-migrants, who may not move themselves, but entertain transnational social relations, or become transnational via the movement of people, ideas and matter *to* the place where they are currently living.

4 Motility and transnationalism

The notion of "motility" (Kaufmann et al. 2004) is compatible with this understanding of transnationalism since it does not prioritize movement in the physical sense. At the same time, it highlights the importance of power and questions of social equality, which are intricately connected to transnationalism (cf. for example Guarnizo and Smith 2009 [1998]; and Hurrelmann and DeBardeleben 2011). Kaufmann et al. (2004: 75) define motility as "as the capacity of entities (e.g., goods, information or persons) to be mobile in social and geographic space, or as the way in which entities access and appropriate the capacity for socio-spatial mobility according to their circumstances". Thus, on the one hand, the concept of motility refers to the fact that "the spatial distribution of goods, information and people forms dynamic interdependencies with social structures" (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 745). And on the other hand, it refers to the importance of the movement of "concrete" (e.g., people) and "abstract" (e.g. information) entities (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 746) in space – geographical and social – and time; and to the "potential" for movement (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 749). This means that "mobility is not limited to actual or past displacements" (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 749–750). As a result, it becomes important to address the possibility of movement, which is related to the conditions framing local Ismailis' possibilities to become mobile, the resources and skills viewed as prerequisites for their mobility, and the institutional frameworks and networks which facilitate but also act as gatekeepers to mobility. In this sense motility can be conceptualized as a form of capital which both "links with, and can be exchanged for, other types of capital" (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 752), and which can be understood with respect to issues of "access", "competence" (i.e. the skills needed to participate in motility), and "appropriation" (i.e. the process of "interpret[ing] and act[ing] upon perceived or real access and skills") (Kaufmann et al. 2004: 750).

As I demonstrate in Section 7, motility plays an important role for Ismaili transnationalism, since young Ismailis are encouraged to go abroad to study

(spatial mobility), but to then return home to help their community, or other rural communities by contributing to local development, e.g., through teaching English to local children in rural communities, or working in NGOs (social mobility). This process of going abroad is intricately connected with learning English, and English thus becomes bound with motility.

5 English and the modern Ismaili community

The "modern period" (Daftary 2011: 4) of Ismaili history begins with the permanent settlement of the Aga Khan I in Bombay in 1848, and the later shift of "the residence" of the Aga Khans to Europe (Daftary 2011: 4).[4] It is intricately connected with and "shaped by the colonial experience" (Karim 2011: 213), notably with the British Raj in India (1858–1947). During this time close ties were established between the Ismaili elite and the British colonial administration. The Aga Khan III (Imam from 1885–1957),[5] for example, was educated at Eton and Cambridge, and made a member of the Imperial Legislative Council in 1902 (Van Grondelle 2009: 25). These ties were maintained after independence, and today such ties still exist between the current Aga Khan IV (a British national)[6] and the British government. It is probable that these relationships have contributed to the progressive adoption of English as the community's official language (cf. Bolander 2016a).

In a language article "Governing Language and Publication" in the global Ismaili constitution (ordained by the Aga Khan IV in 1986), English is labeled the constitution's sole "authoritative language" (Ismailia Constitution 1986: Article 20.1). And in a 2011 interview with the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation,[7] the Aga Khan IV refers to English as the community's "second language" (with Ismailis from around the world having different first languages); a decision he

4 By virtue of the emergence of English in close connection with the rise of the modern Ismaili community I will not deal with Ismaili history prior to 1848. Cf. for example, Daftary (2011) for early Ismailism.

5 The Aga Khan II succeeded his father, Aga Khan I, in 1881, but died three years later (Van Grondelle 2009: 22). The Aga Khan III became the Imam of the Ismaili community at the age of eight.

6 The Aga Khan IV was born in 1936 in Switzerland; his mother was British and his father, Prince Aly Khan, was the son of the Aga Khan III. According to a UK press interview conducted in 1958, he can speak English and French "relatively fluently", as well as "a smattering of Urdu, a smattering of Spanish and a little bit of Italian" (Nano Wisdoms Blog a), and an entry about him on an Ismaili online site maintains that he was taught Arabic, Urdu, and Islamic history by a private tutor at home, alongside his schooling. http://www.ismaili.net/histoire/history08/history836.html

7 The original interview is in French, but an official English translation is provided on Nano Wisdoms Blog.

links to a "language policy" (cf. Bolander 2016b) pursued with the aim of preventing the community from "dissociat[ing] itself from its development potential" (Nano Wisdoms Blog b). The status of English as an official language also finds its expression in other domains, for example, in educational policy and practice. Thus, the brochure about the Aga Khan Academies or schools of excellence (of which there are currently three in Mombasa, Maputo and Hyderabad) states that "[t]he Academies will provide an education that fosters *multilingualism*, starting with a policy of dual-language instruction in the Junior School, with English as the *lingua franca* across the network of Academies combined with *local language* instruction[8] at each Academy, thus bridging the global with the local" (Excellence in Education, emphasis added).

A look at various speeches held by the Aga Khan IV makes manifest that an emphasis on English for schools and academies run by the AKES is closely linked to the perceived status of English as a "global language of diplomacy, education, transport, science, commerce and medicine" (Nano Wisdoms Blog c). Thus English is perceived "as a necessity in most areas", since, "[f]or cultures in the developing world to be globally accessible, understood, respected and admired, and to be presented in electronic communications, they must ensure that their cultures find expression not only in the national language, but also in English" (Nano Wisdoms Blog d). Access to English thus becomes coupled with a discourse of participation. Furthermore, as I was told during an interview with an Ismaili authority in Hunza, this emphasis on English is compatible with the "intellectual faith" Ismailis pursue, which emphasizes "process" (and thus change, including the progressive emergence of English) and not "product" (Bolander 2017).

6 Movement to and English

Ismaili communities living in Hunza and Khorog were primarily made aware of the importance of English via farmans (edicts) issued by the Aga Khan, which are shared with the community via media (electronic and digital today), or in person during visits to Ismaili communities. As stated by Asani (2011: 111), "[i]n the eyes of their followers, the farmans embodied the ongoing and infallible guidance of the Imams; hence obedience to them was obligatory".[9] The first

8 It is not evident from the general brochure which local languages have been privileged for local language instruction, but presumably the national languages of the respective countries.
9 While farmans are often seen to constitute religious guidance, as Adatia and King (1969: 185) point out in their article on farmans issued by Aga Khan III in East Africa, "[i]t is a constant refreshment in the *firmans* to find what westerners would call secular and religious inextricably

farmans which encouraged Ismailis to learn English were issued by the Aga Khan III (Imam from 1885 to 1957). For example, in a 1940 farman broadcast in Persian[10] by radio from Delhi to Hunza, he called on the Ismailis of Hunza to "[t]ry to educate your children and strive to learn European languages and the English language" (quoted in English in Hunzai [2004: 12]). Progressively these farmans were also issued in English (Asani 2011).

In my interview data there are numerous examples where my interlocutors make a link between motivations to learn English and speeches and farmans of the Aga Khan.[11] This is shown in Example (1).[12]

(1) Karim: And specially in these areas people ... ah people are trying, people are trying to learn English. Like they want to have a good ah grip on English and that's because- ah only because the farman of Hazir Imam [the Imam of the time], Prince Karim Aga Khan, he has a- a strongly- like he strongly wants us to speak English, like on many platforms, on many forums, he has been saying this on his farmans, [additional points]
<two additional turns>
Karim: So it's the influence of Hazir Imam.

With respect to movement, it is the farmans that have come to Hunza and to Karim. Indeed it is likely that Karim heard the farmans at his local Jamatkhana, where Ismailis gather to pray and where they hear farmans, transmitted today from the Imamat to local councils via E-mail or fax. He may also have been told about them by his parents (who may have heard the farmans when the Aga Khan IV first visited

intertwined". Extended to language, this also challenges a straightforward distinction between secular and religious languages.

10 The Aga Khan III had a Persian-speaking mother and was fluent in Persian (Aga Khan 1954). While Persian continues to be important for particular local communities of Ismailis, for example, in Iran, and by virtue of its use in ginans (devotional hymns, prayers), it has become less important overall. As I was told during fieldwork, the majority of Ismailis who were present during the broadcast of the farman in Hunza did not know Persian, and it was translated orally into the local languages by the few who could understand Persian at the time.

11 These instances are unprompted in the sense that I did not make the link myself between English and the guidance of the Aga Khan in my interview questions.

12 All names are pseudonyms. The transcription of the data is broad, but includes indications of false starts and repetitions (marked using single or double hyphens), overlaps (marked using square brackets) salient silences (relative to the speakers' pace of speaking) (marked using ellipsis points), and instances where the speaker laughs or his/her voice quality is suggestive of laughter (marked with an explicit comment in diamond brackets).

Hunza in 1960), or heard them himself during subsequent visits, for example, in 1997 and 2006.

As shown in Example (2), taken from an interview with Gulnoz, a woman in Khorog, motivations to learn English also emerge as coupled to the fact that the Aga Khan speaks to his followers in English.

(2) Brook: ok, wow < laughs > And um ah when did you actually hear English for the first time?
Gulnoz: It was 1995 when the Aga Khan come he– here and he speech and I really wa- I don't know what he's talking about and uh he should come- he say in 1995 he came and he promise to come 98 and in mys– in my heart I make like a promise that second time when he will be here I will understand whatever he will tell people.
Brook: Ok.
Gulnoz: Yeah. This is the- this is um how uh my English open.

As shown in Example (2), Gulnoz was not inspired to learn English because the Aga Khan told her to, but because she wanted to be able to understand him. Similarly, in a group discussion with six young women in Khorog, I was informed that some people try to learn English so they, as a young woman put it during the discussion, have *direct access* to the Aga Khan, since he speaks in English.

On 13th December 2014, the Aga Khan IV celebrated his 78th birthday. Birthday wishes and greetings were shared on various Ismaili webpages, mailing lists, blogs and Facebook pages. On the Aga Khan IV's Facebook page the respective birthday post entails a brief description of the Ismaili community and the Aga Khan, before ending with the following (Example 3).

(3) The celebration of Mawlana Hazar Imam's birthday is an occasion for Ismailis to reflect on the unique spiritual bond that links each murid [follower] to Hazar Imam. It also affords the Jamat an opportunity to express its love, loyalty and devotion to the Imamat, *which binds the Ismaili community together as one*.
(Aga Khan IV Facebook page, post on 13.12.2014, emphasis added)

Tellingly, the ending draws attention to the key role played by the Aga Khan in creating the Ismaili community – in drawing it *together as one*. By forming a link between each individual and the Imam, a further link is created between all Ismailis, and a transnational community is thereby constructed. This link can be seen to constitute transnationalism in the sense of a type of connectivity which goes beyond one geographical space, and which also has important symbolic

properties. In other words, transnationalism appears as both movement and subjectivity, and it becomes intertwined with English by virtue of the Aga Khan's use of English and the importance he places on learning English. At the same time while English is sometimes discursively constructed as a necessary condition to experience this tie (cf. Example 2), I would not wish to claim that English is a sufficient condition for the construction of the Ismaili community, since many Ismailis are part of the community yet do not know or have access to English; and many non-Ismailis are learning and/or proficient in English.

7 Movement from and English

Ismaili transnationalism is also constructed and maintained via movement of Ismailis from Northern Pakistan and Eastern Tajikistan. During my fieldwork I became aware that possibilities for spatial mobility are predominantly provided or facilitated by institutions linked to the AKDN; and that there is an intricate tie, at least at the level of ideology, between spatial mobility and social mobility (motility). English plays an important role here, since it is a prerequisite to being able to apply for programs which offer local Ismailis the possibility of studying abroad.

During the Aga Khan IV's second visit to Khorog in 1998 he inaugurated the first private school in the region – the Aga Khan Lycée Khorog – together with the Tajik president Emomali Rahmon. In 2001 English-medium education began to be provided, alongside Russian and Tajik-medium education, with students competing for places in their chosen stream.[13] The key reason for introducing English-medium instruction is described by Bahtibek (whom I interviewed in Khorog) in Example (4).

(4) Bahtibek [B]ecause it was a requirement from the ... uh ... AKES, Aga Khan Education Service, that in order ... students of Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast uh will be able to admit to the international universities, especially to the Central Asia University.

The introduction of English-medium education was thus intricately coupled with the aim to facilitate mobility of students from Gorno-Badakhshan predominantly

13 All students also receive language instruction in the other two languages for either two or three hours a week. All receive two hours of language instruction until grade 9. From grade 9 on, those who pursue humanities will receive three hours, and those who pursue maths and sciences, two hours.

to the University of Central Asia (UCA), a subsidiary of the Aga Khan Development Network. With campuses planned for Khorog and Dushanbe, Tajikistan; Naryn and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; and Tekeli and Taldykorgan, Kazakhstan (University of Central Asia, Campus Construction), UCA aims to transform these places so that they "will once again become vibrant hubs of international exchange, where knowledge is created, debates emerge and innovation drives development" (University of Central Asia, Campus Construction). International exchange is to be facilitated through English, the language of the "innovative curriculum" (University of Central Asia, About).

Since 2011 students from the English group[14] have also had the chance to participate in an exchange program with the Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa, Kenya. Each year four grade six students are selected on the basis of academic performance, social and leadership skills. These pupils spend six and a half years at the Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa completing their schooling. Within this exchange program, English thus functions as the language which links Khorog, Tajikistan with Mombasa, Kenya (cf. Section 5 for more information on the program's language policy). It also fosters geographical mobility, of a select few one must add, as well as aiming to facilitate local development on a broader scale (motility). As stated on the Aga Khan Academies website (Example 5),

(5) [i]f all goes according to plan, tomorrow's leaders, such as the Tajik pupils now studying in Mombasa, will be in a unique position to return to their home countries and make well-informed contributions to social and economic progress. 'Many of the Tajik students are saying that they ultimately want to go back and do something for their communities,' says Aziz Batada, a former Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa biology instructor who manages the programme. Perhaps one day the students will even return to East Africa as diplomats, or as business leaders seeking to strengthen trade relations.
(Aga Khan Academies. International Student Exchange at the Academy)

The theme of going abroad in order to then return and do something for one's community was prominent throughout my fieldwork in both Hunza and Khorog. Since studying abroad typically means at an English-language institution or in an English-speaking country, English becomes intricately tied to the possibility to do

14 Initially, the Aga Khan Lycée had also planned to also give students from the Russian and Tajik groups a chance to compete in the selection process, yet the committee from Mombasa which made the selection in the first year of the program decided against it because the students did not have the necessary language skills.

so, and thus to motility, as defined in Section 4 above. Since particular places (in the sense of geographical locations like Mombasa) and spaces (in the sense of institutions like the Aga Khan Lycée) become more central to this endeavor than others, Ismaili transnationalism also emerges as a heterogeneous construct.

Another important institution for Ismaili transnationalism is the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) located in London. The IIS is a research institute, established in 1977, and it plays an important role in providing graduate education to Ismailis from around the world.[15] Its overall aim is "to promote scholarship of Muslim cultures and societies, historical as well as contemporary, leading to a better understanding of their relationship with other societies and faiths" (Institute of Ismaili Studies a), and it offers two main graduate programs: a Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH), and a Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP). During my fieldwork in Khorog many of my interlocutors told me that they were studying English with the aim of being able to do an MA at IIS, and to subsequently return home to help their community, for example, via STEP (launched in 2007) which aims to "train, sustain and provide the appropriate resource base for teachers who will teach the Institute of Ismaili Studies' Secondary Curriculum to Ismaili students worldwide" (STEP prospectus 2010); and which provides employment for returnees in their home countries.

The exchange between Khorog and IIS is also facilitated via another of IIS' programs: the Khorog English Program (KEP),[16] which was set up in 1998, as I was told in an interview with Shodi in Khorog, (Example 6) with

(6) Shodi the purpose to um feed into the Institute of Ismaili Studies uh potential um scholars from the region, who lacked in uh you know language proficiency. Aaah, but otherwise had the scholarly potential um for- for research um in uh the humanities and Islamic studies.

As stated on the IIS website, over 200 pupils from Central Asia have been through the program thus far (Institute of Ismaili Studies b), the majority of them, as I was told during fieldwork, from Gorno-Badakhshan. With respect to the formation of Ismaili transnationalism the IIS clearly plays a key role, as it brings together Ismailis from all around the world. Indeed, it is more likely for students from

15 Certain programmes are also open to other Muslims, and the output generated by the research institute is made publicly available online.

16 According to the IIS website an analogous programme used to exist in Syria – the Syria Preparatory Programme – which has been discontinued.

Hunza and Khorog to meet in London, than in either Pakistan or Tajikistan, despite the relative geographical proximity of the two countries. And here, too, the process of forming ties to other Ismailis is coupled with language, specifically with the necessary skills in English to partake in the IIS programs. It is thus restricted to those individuals who have the necessary (economic) means to learn English.

8 Conclusion

In this article I explore some of the ways English becomes coupled with experiences of Ismaili transnationalism, both transnationalism as "acting and performing" and as "subjectivity" (Dahinden 2009: 1367). Drawing on this dual understanding of transnationalism, I use different sources of data to underscore the importance of movement of people and ideas to Hunza and Khorog and of local Ismailis away from Hunza and Khorog. Through the examples of the Aga Khan's farmans and his speeches in and on the importance of English, I demonstrate a close tie between the movement of the Aga Khan, English, and Ismaili transnationalism. By focusing on exchange programs provided by Aga Khan schools and facilitated by institutions like the IIS, I also discuss some of the ways movement from Khorog, in particular, forges transnational ties between Ismailis living in different parts of the world. Since English is a prerequisite to this movement, and the type of development it aims to further, I argued that English is connected to motility, in the sense proposed by Kaufmann et al. (2004). Yet possibilities for movement are not evenly distributed. Instead certain places – e.g. Mombasa and London – and spaces – e.g. Aga Khan Schools and exchange programs run by Ismaili institutions – facilitate movement and are in this sense more central to the construction and maintenance of Ismaili transnationalism.

In conclusion then, English is not a sufficient condition to be part of the transnational Ismaili community. Community belonging is predicated on a shared Ismali identity which can but need not entail learning and knowing English. And Ismailis can visit friends and family in different parts of the world, or go online and communicate with friends and family living in different geographical locations without needing English. At the same time, Ismaili transnationalism which is institutionally organized and facilitated often does depend on knowing English. Engaging in this form of transnational practice is coupled with competence in English, and those who know English are privileged within institutional networks run by organizations like the AKDN. This clearly has implications for the construction and maintenance of a class of English-speaking "haves" and non-English speaking "have-nots", which is deserving of further research and scrutiny,

particularly with respect to the ways this hierarchization enforces and/or challenges pre-existing community-internal social divisions. And from a third vantage point, English can become important to processes of Ismaili community building for reasons which have less to do with motility and more to do with personal and symbolic ties between an individual and the Aga Khan.

These findings have implications with respect to the special issue's aim of traversing the boundaries between South and Central Asia. Indeed, it is both possible to speak of Ismaili communities in Hunza and Khorog which are different from one another because of the different national contexts they are embedded in and the different socio-political and linguistic landscapes which shape their day-to-day experiences. Yet at the same time, it is possible to speak of a transnational Ismaili community which is conscious of its transnationalism, and which includes and is comprised of these same local communities, as well as others elsewhere, who may come into contact with one another via shared linguistic resources – English – and who might, for example, meet at the Institute of Ismaili studies in London. These Pakistani and Tajikistani post-Cold war borderlands are thus not connected because of the flow of people across them, but rather by virtue of their ideational and institutional embedding within a broader Ismaili complex; and via motility, which is, in turn, predicated on knowing English.

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