

# “If It Happens Again” Everyday Responses of the Ruzabon to Existential Dangers in Dushanbe

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## Abstract

This article discusses how Russian and Russian-speaking (Ruzabon) inhabitants of Dushanbe, the capital city of Tajikistan, shape and maintain their securityscapes through languages, identities, memories, networks and physical structures of the urban space. Securityscapes are physically built and mentally imagined spaces securing individual or collective life from what people perceive as existential dangers. These dangers reflect both objective and imagined conditions threatening individual and collective extinction. Depending on different existential contexts, securityscapes serve either as distinct or as merged and intertwined spatial categories of individuals and collectives. When the Ruzabon face violence in public due to their ethnic and religious origins, they hide their identities or adapt their lifestyle to the hegemonic demands of the Muslim society. Social networks and the physical structures of urban neighbourhoods shape inner securityscapes, as reflected in the physical isolation of individuals and segregation of families, family friends and religious communities from the public. In particular, the memories of the interethnic clashes in the 1990s in Dushanbe, which are substantially influenced by political interpretations, condition and diminish the everyday practices and future expectations of the Ruzabon.

**Keywords:** Tajikistan, Dushanbe, Ruzabon, securityscapes, existential dangers, everyday practices

## Introduction

Through different sections of the novel *Khurramabad* by Andrei Volos, which represents Tajikistan in “the literature map of the world” (Jones 2017), the Russian writer emphasises the February Events in 1990 and the subsequent Civil War (1992–1997) in Tajikistan. His attention reflects the concerns of many Russian and Russian-speaking (Ruzabon) informants in the Tajik capital, Dushanbe, who often interpret these events as an interethnic clash between themselves and the *natsionaly*, as they define the Muslim majority, including Tajiks and Uzbeks. They also link hegemonic practices, such as symbolic nationalism, the destruction of Soviet material and immaterial lega-

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cies, the discrimination against minority groups, and even criminal incidents involving Ruzabon as different forms of the continuation of these February Events. Besides connecting to past events, their memories, which are also evoked by the politicised Russian-speaking mass media, prompt visions of the future as a sudden renewed outburst of past violent events.

Spurred by this retrospective perception of current incidents and imagination of future events, Ruzabon residents of the city of Dushanbe shape their securitescapes by adopting a range of boundary-drawing and boundary-crossing strategies. Marc von Boemcken and colleagues (Boemcken et al. 2016) elaborated the concept of securitescapes, inspired by Arjun Appadurai's (1990) notion of "scape". Multiple and fluid scapes thus reflect "imagined worlds", that is, the multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe" (Appadurai 1990: 296). These imagined worlds are both subjectively internalised and shared across larger groups that also contest and subvert the "imagined communities" of the state, such as "nation" (ibid.: 297). In everyday life they provide people with a "map" to navigate through diverse and ambivalent social fields reflected in materialised spaces, social networks and collective identities (Johansson / Vinthagen 2016).

As "imagined worlds", securitescapes reflect people's everyday practices to secure their physical and social vicinities as well as to fulfil their "metaphysical desire for certitude" (Gough et al. 2016: 350). The existential dangers are not limited to external and structural conditions, referred to, for example, by the concept "existential risks" (Bostrom 2002), which especially characterise threats that people perceive to result in the physical, social and afterlife discontinuities<sup>1</sup> which they necessarily face in their everyday lives (Haubrich 2012, Gough et al. 2016). Along with the threatening objective conditions, the subjective and intersubjective assessments of in/security play a decisive role in resisting what Anthony Giddens defines as "ontological anxiety", i.e. the situation when people lose confidence "in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action" (Giddens 1990: 92). Bearing in mind the crucial role of existential dangers, the search for a "desirable existential state" should build a conceptual basis of "a broader comparative ethnography" (Wilson / Bakker 2016: 292).

The purpose of this article is to understand how the search for this "desirable existential state" is reflected through the everyday security practices of the people. Adam Crawford and Steven Hutchinson (2016: 1190) define these "mundane and quotidian practices", including rituals and routines, as "secu-

1 While physical discontinuity refers to physical injury, punishment and death of an individual caused by natural or societal dangers, social discontinuity is the exclusion of individuals or groups from larger society by categorising them as others and cutting them off from social networks. Afterlife discontinuity describes the threat that an individual will not be saved and resurrected after death if he or she fails to live a "proper" religious life.

urity from below”. People employ both habitual practices and conscious strategies to avoid certain spaces, objects and interactions (Haubrich 2012). Sometimes avoidance leads people to isolated or segregated spaces (Crawford / Hutchinson 2016), while often resulting in the practices of drawing and crossing boundaries (Wilson / Bakker 2016).

The perspective of securityscapes is taken as a vantage point to discuss “state performance” (Heathershaw 2014: 39), which is one of the central topics of security studies of the Central Asian region. The everyday security practices of people adapt to the performance of the state and other external actors and intersect their imposed boundaries and structures. Some scholars (cf. Reeves et al. 2014, Humphrey / Skvirskaja 2012, Boboyorov 2018) have discussed how the Central Asian peoples struggle to shape their securityscapes partly by transgressing the increasingly securitised internal posts and international borders of their states. These people seek to secure their everyday trans-local life by illegally obtaining passports, resettling in border zones, visiting relatives, shrines or doctors, irrigating domestic plots or allocating remittances. Reeves (2011: 313) depicts how the local populations in these cross-border fields imagine and practice trans-border “places”, such as shrines, agricultural fields, pastures, border zones or labour migration. Others (Sahadeo 2011, Isabaeva 2011, Manetta 2011, Beyer 2011) discuss – albeit implicitly – how both local and translocal meanings of “home” relate to the security concerns of ethnic or religious groups, shrine visitors, traders and migrants. For this reason, the boundaries of “home” are fluid and contingent, characterising multiple places.

Only powerful states in the region can transform a few, mainly urban spaces and thus confine the securityscapes of “citizens” within their established boundaries. In the Chinese city of Koshgar, “the bulldozer state” destroys the townspeople’s “intimate spaces”, including ancestral houses, tombs and mosques (Beller-Hann 2014: 187–188). This is also to some extent relevant to the urban space of Astana in Kazakhstan (Laszszkowski 2014, Bissenova 2014). However, in most other urban settings the people struggle to shape their securityscapes by cutting across state boundaries themselves. In Uzbekistan, the people use “oscillating” strategies (Trevisani 2014) to adapt state structures to their needs. In Tajikistan, Ibañez-Tirado (2015: 550ff.) observes how in the southern city of Kulob people secure their life vis-à-vis “everyday disasters”, such as flood and taxation, by “acts of cunning/cheating” the government, religious and international development institutions, and kinship networks.

Of course, the state adapts its local practices to these strategies, which the scholars define as “patronage politics” (McGlinchey 2014: 4). A *mahalla* (semi-self-governance body of rural and urban neighbourhoods) serves to legitimise the political claims of the ruling elites in return for the provision of

security and protection to the residents (Rasanayagam 2009, Noori 2006). Minority groups cannot always embed their security practices among such networks and structures of what my Ruzabon informants called the “patriarchal” society and state. Additionally the hegemonic discourses consider them often a danger to “traditional” family values, moral norms and social ideals (Boemcken et al. 2018: 69). Whereas in such a situation the Pamiris, for example, rely on “multivalent and complex strategies through which they seek to negotiate city life” (Marsden 2012: 218) and thus shape their closed networks across different urban spaces within and beyond Tajikistan (ibid.), the Lyuli and LGBT people in Kyrgyzstan rely on “creative practices of avoidance, boundary-making and withdrawal alongside social adaptation and mimicry” (Boemcken et al. 2018: 69). This paper will examine yet another Central Asian minority group and its strategies – the Ruzabon in Tajikistan.

## The Ruzabon in Dushanbe and other urban spaces of Central Asia

In Dushanbe most of the Ruzabon belong to the Russian ethnicity while some of them have kinship ties with other ethnic groups who also speak Russian (including Tajik, Uyghur, Ukrainian, Armenian, Uzbek, Tatar and Georgian). In English literature the term “Rusophone” has been adopted to denote these groups (Peyrouse 2008, Hays 2008). In Tajikistan they inhabit urban spaces and subsist on professional work, petty trade and religious charity. They adhere to Russian language, culture and Orthodox Christianity. The post-Soviet ethno-political transformations left this minority group to struggle for their everyday survival and security. These transformations, such as ethnonational policies and Islamic resurgence, contributed to interethnic tensions and divisions in some Central Asian countries (Abazov 2007), and subsequently led to the emergence of “ethnocracies” (Juska 1999: 524). These first shrank the space for Ruzabon in state institutions, as the post-Soviet institutions and practices reduced power and resources for titular ethnic groups. Moreover, ethnonational practices excluded ethnic minorities from the category of “nation” and thus legitimised political and economic discrimination against them (Akçali 2003, Abashin 2011, Bandey / Rather 2013).

Abashin observes that the political and ideological transformations of the newly established Central Asian states have led to a “massive reconstruction and renaming of spaces, destruction of all symbolic places of memory about the Soviet period” (Abashin 2011: 201–202). The particularities of these post-Soviet developments, he argues, depend on the different sizes of the Russian-speaking population in each country: “Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

have large Russian-speaking communities, including Russian-speaking Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, therefore, national powers do not want traumatising of the process of de-sovietisation to be the source of internal social tensions” (ibid.: 203). While these countries are searching for coexistence with the Russian community, in Tajikistan this minority group desperately fights against the dominant group’s discriminatory practices of what Abashin defines as “the Muslim alternative” (ibid.: 209).

Under the Soviet Union most of the Ruzsabon citizens occupied professional and decision-making positions in political, administrative and economic sectors (Peyrouse 2008: 2–3, Bandey / Rather 2013: 150–151). After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the outbreak of the Civil War (1992–1997) in Tajikistan the majority of them emigrated to the Russian Federation. Radnitz considers rapid economic decline as a primary factor motivating Ruzsabon to leave some Central Asian states (Bandey / Rather 2013: 152). In Tajikistan not only economic factors but especially the climate of fear created by ethnic riots were important for the large-scale emigration of Ruzsabon. As Bandey and Rather acknowledge, due to the nationalist movements and political Islam “many people envisaged eruption of ethnic clashes and this fear forced many to out migrate to a country of their origin” (Bandey / Rather 2013: 150). In 2010 there were 35,000 Russians registered in the entire country, comprising 0.5 per cent of its total population, as compared to 388,000 or 7.6 per cent in 1989. In Dushanbe there are currently about 20,000 Russians, whereas in 1989 they made up 33 per cent (about 200,000) of its 600,000 inhabitants (Population Census 1989, 2012; see also Peyrouse 2008: 5, Bandey / Rather 2013: 147 for comparisons).

The post-Soviet developments in Tajikistan, especially economic decline, ethnonational policies and religious radicalism, have excluded, marginalised and stigmatised many of those who did not leave the country. This situation “looked as if ethnic cleansing had taken place in public/private sectors, administration or elsewhere and thus Russians were reduced to non-significant minorities” (Bandey / Rather 2013: 150). Only some of the Ruzsabon have developed kinship and patronage ties with the Muslim majority, which embeds them into “patriarchal” or patron-client (both state and non-state) structures. Also, media reports claim that some segments of the Ruzsabon population represent a high proportion of the homeless and unemployed individuals, isolated families and segregated religious minorities (e.g., Tsherbakova 2013, Ol’khovaya et al. 2004, Rudenko / Sorokin 1993).

Also the hegemonic demands of the Muslim majority reflected in ethnic nationalism and political Islam increasingly expose the Ruzsabon to danger in everyday life. My informants categorise the Muslim majority as *natsionaly* (literally “national peoples”), a term with which they refer to all groups who adopt the hegemonic way of life as well as engage in repressing minority

groups. As Abashin also observes, “the nationalistic and religious spirit” of the Central Asian societies has caused “acute concern about the demographic and cultural threat from other-ethnic minorities. [...] We see fierce battles in the mass media and on the Internet, where participants choose their opponents based on their ethnic origin and threaten them with revenge” (Abashin 2011: 196–197). These hegemonic discourses and practices “strengthen each other, spread to other spheres, shape memory about certain events and interpret them” (ibid.).

Notably, the Russian mass media also contributes to the hegemonic discourses. Regular reports (cf. Tsherbakova 2013, Tul’skij 2005, Ol’khovaya et al. 2004, Rudenko / Sorokin 1993) and abundant Internet sources, for example, frequently refer to religious hatred, ethnic cleansing and sexual assaults during the February Events of 1990 in the city of Dushanbe. They spread stories by Russian and Russian-speaking witnesses to ethnic, religious and sexual violence. The dominant view among the Ruzabon is that the February Events and their interethnic logic have given rise to all successive clashes, including the Civil War and post-Civil War nationalist and religious developments. This hegemonic discourse, as reflected and highlighted in the Russian media, also accuses interethnic tensions of leading to criminal incidents (such as murder and sexual assault), which happen from time to time. This politicised topic, which also legitimises the political and military presence of Russia in Tajikistan, provokes distrust between the Ruzabon and the Muslim majority. It also interprets the acts of national and religious revival of the latter (such as shifting educational policies, promoting native languages, removing Russian endings in family names, changing the names of streets and the demolishing Soviet buildings) as being directed against Russians and the Soviet-origin middle class (see also Beeman 1999, Pavlenko 2008, Bandey / Rather 2013).

Apart from the general and historical observations of some scholars and the politicised accounts of media reports, this study is the first of its kind to examine the marginalised Ruzabon group in the urban space of Tajikistan. From December 2015 to May 2016, I conducted an ethnographic field study among the Ruzabon group in Dushanbe. The research started with a focus on a neighbourhood of houses and building blocks administered by a single *mahalla* and expanded its scope to the inhabitants’ networks of families, friends, professional circles and religious communities. For my research, I interviewed 21 Ruzabon residents, including 6 key informants and their family members, with whom I had frequent interactions. As the cases below manifest, the Ruzabon react and respond differently to existential dangers in everyday life due to their individual and family situations, as well as due to their ethnic and religious affiliations.

## Translocal families

More than half of the Ruzsabon families that I interviewed in Dushanbe live a translocal life, with some of their family members permanently residing in the Russian Federation, supporting their family members in Tajikistan both financially and morally. These belong to the half million people who left Tajikistan in the post-Soviet period. Although the critical periods of outmigration of the Ruzsabon were February 1990 (about 100,000) and the Civil War in 1992 (150,000) (Bandey / Rather 2013: 147), the process continues until today. Thus not only these critical periods of ethnic and religious conflict but also the memories of these notorious events shape certain patterns of security practices of Ruzsabon families. The individual and social memory and experience of existential dangers in the past, generated and interpreted through hegemonic discourses and practices, influence the way in which the Ruzsabon imagine and respond to current and future threats. Translocality, on the one hand, and spatial proximity, on the other, are important patterns that shape security practices of some Russian-speaking people. Translocal mobility, utilised by many Russian speakers since the collapse of the Soviet Union, allows them to generate remittances and thus improve their socio-economic security, and has been the focus of many publications, especially on labour migration (for literature review see, e.g., Boboyorov 2018).

My informants asserted that their translocal mobility gives them a feeling of physical security, in part, by having a place to flee to in the case of another outbreak of civil unrest. They define this security strategy as an “option in reserve” (*rezervnyj variant*). The family members live in different countries, especially Tajikistan and Russia, obtain Russian or dual citizenship and sometimes residence permits in both countries. Often the informants consider Russia as “a country of escape”, a country to which they can flee “in the event of a force majeure”. As a 49-year-old man expressed, “I am not sure if [another civil war] can happen again, since the civil war blew up so suddenly. What can I do? I feel that my life and the future of my family are at risk” (interview by author, 16 December 2015).

In addition to translocal mobility, the other important security strategy of translocal families is their settlement in the city centre of Dushanbe. My informants from this group consider this space one of the most important conditions of their everyday security. They seek to move to this part of the city and to find jobs within the international organisations concentrated there. Since the Civil War (1992–1997) part of the city centre, which extends along the main street, Rudaki Avenue, has become more securitised by both civilian and military structures of the state. The political and economic elites as well as the diplomatic representatives reside in this protected area. By the early

2000s many central neighbourhoods were blocked off from other parts of the city by traffic barriers, concrete walls and iron or wire fences. Police patrols, police checkpoints or the guard posts of soldiers and security officers on street corners protected certain areas and buildings of the city centre from paramilitary and criminal groups. The central buildings, which house government offices, embassies and NGOs, were isolated by iron fences or blocked off from other parts of the city by traffic barriers on the connecting roads. Inside these protected areas there were residential buildings. Although some of these material barriers and military personnel have since been removed, government buildings and residential houses retain their iron or concrete walls, checkpoints and sometimes traffic barriers on street corners, hampering free movement into the neighbourhoods.

To become embedded in this highly protected city centre, some Ruzabon have taken employment with foreign embassies, international organisations and their local branches. The elite international institutions serve as a securityscape for their local employees by providing them not only with financial protection but also physical security, which is also observed in other contexts (see e.g. Gough et al. 2016).

One 42-year-old man described how his employment with a UN organisation enabled his family and the family of his mother-in-law to resettle in a more secured neighbourhood of the city centre (personal interview, 16 December 2015). He also maintains a circle of Ruzabon friends, who work in the NGO sector and often have translocal families. They regularly visit each other, share networking in the international sector, talk about the criminal situation in the city and recall the traumas of the Civil War. Memory of these traumas is an important reference to particular events and incidents, and maintains securityscapes created in a certain past. The informant recalls that after a colleague in his musical band was shot dead by a stray bullet during the Civil War, most of the colleagues as well as his family members left the country. He remained because he managed to be recruited by a UN organisation. So far he considers the international organisations as the only effective structure providing financial and physical protection for employees. He has revived the musical group, which performs in an elite café, enabling him and his friends to socialise with the high-ranking staff of foreign (N)GOs and local elites.

### **“International” families**

Six of my Ruzabon informants have developed kinship ties with the Muslim population who thus identify them as “international” (ethnically mixed) families. All of them have relatives in Russia but what is different from other



translocal families is their embeddedness within their extended family and the *mahalla* neighbourhood. Also, their economic situation makes them rely on these “patriarchal” structures of everyday security. Like most urban residents, they cannot afford to move to the city centre and to seal off their private houses. Beyond the city centre, other parts of the central areas and neighbourhoods of the city comprise multifaceted and divided spaces with different levels of in/security. Often the “international” families develop their securityscapes in a neighbourhood by sharing their private spaces with extended families and neighbours and collectively isolating themselves from the outside. Compared to the inviolable mansions of the elites and their international tenants, the neighbourhood that was studied consists of three building blocks and adjacent private houses, set apart by walls, iron gates, fences, traffic barriers and dead ends. These material barriers demarcate the *mahalla*, i.e. the collective administrative body of the neighbourhood. Consequently they transform the Soviet functionalist-constructivist standard and easy-access style of their houses, building blocks, neighbourhoods, streets and public places.

During the time of the Soviet Union, the urban middle class, including the Ruzabon, settled in *mikrorayons* or “micro-regions”, i.e. the primary structural elements of residential areas often adjacent to the workplaces of the residents, thus reflecting their social classes and types of employment. From the beginning of the Civil War some Ruzabon families who could not leave the country moved to central neighbourhoods in Dushanbe. For many groups the *mahalla*-style congestion of families in the same neighbourhood is not directly related to ethnic or religious segregation nor to moral commitment of the residents to the *mahalla* but rather due to the shared security practices of families and “family members”. Such practices do result in an increasing concentration of ethnic and religious groups in distinct urban spaces, but the primary factor behind this concentration is the objective of family security.

Collective life in the *mahalla* neighbourhood, in particular, subjugates Ruzabon “international” families to the hegemonic demands of the Muslim majority. This supersedes the division between Islam and Christianity or strong attachment to either, in order to preserve individual and family destinies. In the neighbourhood examined, the members of the “international” families do not actively live their religious life and do not openly divulge their faiths. They do not visit the mosque or church for regular prayer but rather celebrate the selected feasts and rites of passage of both religions (including Kurban, Easter, weddings and funerals). This religious mimicry serves as a security strategy, given that they do not believe in these religious practices due to being either Christian or atheist. Notably, this is more of a security concern, as they perceive that the open practice of non-Muslim faiths in particular, or rejection of any religious practice, endangers their lives vis-à-vis the Muslim extremists in their neighbourhood and beyond. As they see it, these

Muslim “extremists” do not represent a specific group but rather consist of all who demonstratively practice Islam and thus impose their dominance over other religious minorities (interviews by author with a 42-year-old and a 69-year-old man, 16 December 2015 and 14 April 2016).

As the informants often warn, “fanatical” young Muslims threaten them, their families and friends. They believe that open dislike and even loathing on the street is due to religious fanaticism (*religioznyj fanatizm*). Obviously the role of memory and political propaganda with reference to the ethnic and religious clashes during the February Events and the Civil War in the 1990s is vital in provoking this imagined danger. In response to this danger, the members of “international” families manifest their adaptation with certain practices of social mimicry, including linguistic and behavioural code switching and body display. Their linguistic adaptation to the majority requires speaking the local languages and dialects as well as jargon.

A 30-year-old electrician from a Russian-Armenian family (interview by author, 18 December 2015), who is married to a Tajik woman and has three children, speaks the local (*Dushanbinskiy*) dialect and the jargon of the so-called “city orphans” (Tajik: *saqirahoi šahrī*). “City orphans” refer to the network of young urban residents who control the everyday movement of “others” in their “zones of influence”. Some other informants define them as “aggressive youth” or more formally as “juvenile delinquents”. The electrician’s linguistic skills help him to maintain and widen the network of clients whose appliances he repairs. Besides this socio-economic aspect, as he mentioned, speaking the local dialect and especially jargon is necessary for moving around more securely during the late evening when he often visits his private clients after his day job in a city electric company. He meets the “city orphans” at every corner and has to find a “common language”: “It happens sometimes, especially at a late hour and somewhere hidden from view. They stop and try to entrap you by hinting at your faith.” The dialect and jargon he uses show his belonging or respect to this group. Besides using the local dialect and jargon, in this case he introduces himself as a Tatar, an ethnic group of Muslims of Russian appearance.

In the circles of families and in the neighbourhood, Russian-speaking “international” families celebrate the Islamic festivities, wear “national” (Tajik) clothes, and conceal their religious or non-religious views. Thereby they adapt to hegemonic religious demands in order to avoid such religious condemnations as “infidel” or “apostate”. Not all informants can give concrete examples of violent outcomes of such condemnations but rather refer to strict surveillance in their neighbourhood and in public. However, some informants, who have already experienced some incidents especially during religious gatherings, point to both the 1990 February Events and to incidents of religious hatred. Indeed, some converted followers and missionaries of minority reli-

gions (such as Zoroastrianism, the Baha'i faith and Evangelism) have been shot dead in public, stabbed in the entryways of their apartment buildings or persecuted and detained by the state authorities on charges of "incitement of religious and ethnic hatred" (cf. USCIRF 2016, The US Embassy 2009). The members of "international" families therefore adapt their appearance and lifestyle to Islamic practices. Although sometimes the adaptation to Islamic practices reflects an actual conversion to Islam, in some cases, it is a matter of outward mimicry to protect oneself from physical assault and social exclusion.

A 69-year-old man from a mixed family (himself Tajik) expressed his concern that "Mullahs have threatened not to perform [for us] *janoza* [the Islamic funeral service]. This fanaticism gives rise to pietism and hypocrisy. I am not free anymore with what I want to do and where I want to go" (interview by author, 14 April 2016). He and some other informants reported that they avoid regularly visiting religious rituals that demand strict religious observance. Nevertheless, they cannot miss funeral and other important liminal services, which ensure social inclusion and religious salvation – which are provided in return for following the hegemonic demands.

A Christian-Armenian informant, who has a Muslim bride and thus close ties with her extended family, reflected upon his experience of "tolerance" as religious adaptation due to the "aggressive" demands of both neighbours and all who know the family. He defined this one-sided condition thusly: "I am unchurched but I have to respect believers who do not respect me" (interview by author, 2–4 December 2015). Obviously he adapts to the hegemonic demands not because he accepts them but rather to avoid social exclusion and physical assault. Another, 69-year-old man said that he must follow his neighbours to observe religious norms in public and sometimes to visit and pray in the mosque. He adapts his behaviour not for religious salvation, nor primarily for his personal security but for his family's security:

I perform these [religious practices] [...] in order to prevent rumours that I do not observe them. During Ramadan I do not fast, and I do smoke but do not show this outside just because I respect my neighbours and do not want them to distrust and despise me. My acquaintances visit the mosque and wear beards because they expect these from each other. Otherwise, the aggressive youth, who these days are hunting infidels, would call not only me "infidel" but also my family. Let them kill me but I do not want the neighbours to despise my children because their infidel father would not be given a funeral. (interview by author, 14 April 2016)

Besides the general fear of the religious "fanaticism", concerns about vulnerable members – especially children, adolescents and women – forces the "international" families to adapt their lifestyle in the neighbourhood and beyond. A 30-year old man told me that, "one must think in advance about the family's wellbeing and security, especially about the children's" (interview by

author, 18 December 2015). The physical boundaries and architectural styles of the *mahalla* neighbourhood help to territorialise the space and thus to secure the inhabitants. The neighbours set codes and locks on the main doors of the building blocks and maintain high walls and iron gates around them. The families who live on the lower floors or close to the streets additionally equip their homes with barbed wire fences, iron gates and doors. Wealthier families might install a surveillance camera at the entrance door or keep a guard dog in the backyard – both also providing protection for other neighbours. Recently, the *mahalla* collected money from neighbours to replace the old barricades on the street inside the neighbourhood, which slows down the speed of the cars.

Such organisation of the neighbourhood by the urban middle class has also been observed in other contexts (Haubrich 2012, Crawford / Hutchinson 2015). The measures taken contribute to securing the everyday life of especially children, adolescents and women from such street dangers such as juvenile delinquency, drug addiction, sexual assault and human trafficking.

Moreover, neighbours, both men and women, mutually keep watch over children, adolescents and women by monitoring them – looking out of the windows, keeping tabs on their behaviour, their circle of friends and places they visit during daytime. By these means they influence the networking practices of the children, adolescents and girls, defining gender roles and setting up strict rules on making new friends from outside the neighbourhood. Within the neighbourhood they block off corners and backstreets, control the movements and daily activities of the children, provide escorts for children and allow them to share inner family spaces. Without permission and, if necessary, without an escort, children are not allowed to violate these intertwined multiple securityscapes. The blocked-off corners and backstreets also prevent them from transgressing the boundaries of these spaces. Having only a single exit to the street for three building blocks in the neighbourhood increases the opportunity to keep an eye on the movement of children and adolescents beyond the neighbourhood. The neighbours do not let them go beyond a visible distance or without adults, especially in the evenings.

## Extended families and family friends

The extended families, family friends and neighbours are also concerned about the everyday security of their children in state institutions, including kindergartens, schools and colleges. In schools and on the way back home young girls rely on their senior brothers, other relatives and neighbours who often go to the same school. An interviewee sent her daughter to study in a musical

college, because a family friend teaches there (interview by author, 18 May 2016). Another interviewed woman has a different professional background but now works in the neighbourhood kindergarten in order to take care of her own children as well as of the children of her extended family and neighbours (interview by author, 18 December 2015). The administrations of these state institutions sign an agreement with the parents or other close family members about persons responsible for picking up the children after working hours.

The category of “family friends” characterises the distinctive networking strategy of the Ruszabon, with whom they share their inner family space to mutually protect children and adolescents. This category is not intrinsic to other “patriarchal” groups, who mostly rely on their extended families alone.

When an informant’s wife passed away, an older female neighbour overtook the daily care of his small daughter until the girl was old enough to get married. Later the old woman herself was left alone when her son migrated to Russia for permanent settlement. From then on these two families have shared their household spaces in order to provide mutual support and security in their daily lives. A similar situation was described by a 63-year old woman in another building block:

We [two neighbours in the same building] are friends, we enter [each other’s apartments] without warning and our children nomadise [share] the apartments. We live this way [...] to support each other by looking after the children when an adult is absent. The neighbour looks after [the children, too]. Our sons go to the same sports club, our daughters take ballroom dancing together. You cannot trust and leave them alone or with people whom you don’t know. (interview by author, 22 January 2016).

Some might turn family friends into fictive (neither consanguineal nor affinal but rather adopted) kin: an interviewed Russian woman for example relies on two “adopted” sons – one provides protection for her within her household and the other one, a market trader, protects her when she goes to the bazaar for shopping. She has witnessed many violent incidents, she reported, including many cases of theft and even a physical assault on another old Russian woman in the nearby bazaar.

Ruszabon women frequently encounter sexual harassment, verbal insults and sometimes physical attacks during their daily movement beyond the neighbourhood. They defined several “dangerous” places in the vicinity, such as the bazaar (Bazaar Şohmansur) and two parks, the Opera Ballet Square and Lohuti Square.

Not only the current security conditions of these spaces, which have considerably improved according to the interviewees, but also the memory of the February Events influence their perception that the bazaar and the two parks are hotspots of sexual assault, drug addiction and human trafficking in the city. Indeed, several high-profile child kidnappings in the *mikrorayon*, criminal activities in the bazaar and a street of homeless and addicted people (often

Ruszabon) next to the bazaar keeps this collective memory alive. Some women adapt their behaviour and clothes to the hegemonic demands of the society. In their neighbourhood, in public and when visiting their kin and friends they wear “national” garments to avoid harassment. As a 62-year old woman (interview by author, 14 April 2016) told me, and as can be seen as a quite common belief, during the February Events the “fanatic youth” attacked especially those women in public who wore European clothes.

Thus women who do not wear “national” clothes avoid dangerous places and narrow streets. If they have to come close to these places, especially during evening hours, their brothers or husbands meet them in open areas and accompany them home. This family escort is similar to the Islamic practice of *mahram* adopted in this case by the “international” families. A 30-year old man explained:

I became a teacher in the school where my mother worked just because she wanted me to be with her, to accompany her when she goes to and returns from the school. After the civil war it was dangerous for women to go outside alone and so far I cannot let my wife and children go alone. I particularly forbid my daughter to go outside in the dark and to wander in strange places also during daytime. There are many rude youths. (interview by author, 18 December 2015).

Only a few women, who have no other choice than to venture into such places alone, rely on their own resilience to protect themselves from physical and sexual assaults. Otherwise, bad reputations spread easily in the neighbourhood, among kin and acquaintances (also see Molla et al. 2008). They try not to respond to harassment (such as calling, smacking, poking, whistling, gesturing and slowing down in cars with tinted windows and inviting the girl inside) and instead pretend they do not notice the signals but rather bend their heads and move away in advance when they see young men approaching:

I go with earphones on my ears and do not look at those who look at me. You have to not respond to such idiots. Otherwise, they will tease, insult and attack you. Even the policemen who see this do not approach (24-year-old girl, interview by author, 22 May 2016).

## Isolated and segregated individuals

Some of my Ruszabon informants living in Dushanbe are unable to resort to translocal mobility nor to find support in the networks of relatives and family friends. People belonging to ethnically mixed families, particularly the elderly, (Peyrose 2008: 5, Bandey / Rather 2013: 153) represent the most isolated and segregated segments of Ruszabon who live in different parts of the city. Not being embedded in family and neighbourhood networks and having lost ties with their relatives in other countries, their social isolation has turned them

into one of the most impoverished groups in the society. Unemployment, homelessness and alcoholism are quite common problems. Often they subsist on petty trade, charities, remains of food and alms that passers-by and traders give to them. My personal survey in a park near the Sadbarg trading centre, a place where many impoverished people gather, showed that most of them were Ruzabon.

For example, an old woman begs for alms half a day on the main street of the trading centre. This retired pharmacist gets only 200 TJ Somoni (about 22 USD) as a monthly pension, which is not enough for her survival. The State Department of Social Provision rejected her appeals for extra social support or employment. Moreover, she could not independently find any appropriate job because of her age. Her only daughter left two children with her, moved to Moscow and disappeared there without a trace. One of the granddaughters works at a nightclub and the other married a man who already had two other wives. The couple sold her private house and now she rents an apartment in the downtown neighbourhood. The granddaughter works as a waitress in a restaurant to pay for the rent. Not only this family “shame” but also her economic deprivation make it important for her to hide her ethnic and religious origin, which is Tatar (Russian-speaking Muslim). As described previously, Ruzabon from “international” families, who seem Tajik in outward appearance, often pretend to be Muslim to fit in with the hegemonic demands. However, the only chance for a Tatar Muslim, who does not speak Tajik and is clearly not a local – and thus will not be accepted as part of the local Muslim community – is to act as a Christian. She uses this strategy to be accepted in the Russian Orthodox Church, where she feels a sense of mutual inclusion and helpfulness with other impoverished visitors. She visits the Church on a regular basis where she regularly receives food and clothes and psychological support. With begging she earns a small income in order to provide daily meals for herself and her great-grandchildren. Due to this aggravating insecurity she has lost her sense of family attachment and affiliation to Islam. She is extremely wary of other people due to the bad experiences of her daughter’s disappearance, the polygamous marriage of her granddaughter and her own begging on the street. She does not trust neighbours or the generous individuals on streets and bazaars who give her alms. Rather, during her begging she does not tell the truth about her family but rather changes her facial expression and abruptly cries in order to hide her true identity.

Although most Tajiks and Uzbeks would never lose their ties with their families and neighbours, in the Ruzabon community, this is not the case. A lonely old woman who agreed to be interviewed lives on her pension and rejects any protection from family members, friends and neighbours. In her opinion, family, neighbourhood and religious community present a danger to her “self-dignity”. She does not believe in any faith: “I am atheist [...] and I

do not understand that the former strict communists have become democrats or that atheists have become converts. How can they be devout?” (interview by author, 2–4 December 2015). She lives alone, isolated from her kinsmen, neighbours and colleagues. As she noted,

My interaction with the neighbours is limited to mutual greetings, not more. I don't like if someone barges into my personal life and in return I don't intervene in a stranger's life. I perceive good-neighbourliness as mutual non-interference.

To avoid intrusion into her personal life, she reduces her individual security-scape to the physical boundaries of her apartment. She often keeps her apartment locked and limits her contact to a few people by landline phone and avoids any face-to-face encounter if not agreed in advance. She does not accept new information and communication technologies which again she fears might violate her self-dignity. In the neighbourhood only a Russian-Armenian family takes care of her in urgent situations, especially when she is sick.

Two other Ruzabon informants with an ethnically mixed background, known as “Metis”, seek to break the social isolation by developing completely different security practices. The notion of “Metis” is a stigmatised reference to the offspring of different ethnic groups, who did not develop “international” families and networks with the Muslim majority. Especially for Muslims this notion implies religious and ethnic inferiority. The Metis thus conceal their religious and ethnic belonging in order to shun this stigma and the social exclusion and physical assaults that result. Nowicki's concept of *l'homme des confins* (“man of borders”) suggests how also in another context the “Mestizo” (from which the term “Metis” derives) – the offspring of Spaniards and American Indians – hide or reject their distinct identities, such as race, class, place of birth and religious affiliation (see Grillo 2007: 202–204).

Very similar strategies can be found among the Metis in Dushanbe: A 54-year-old Metis man – “half-Tajik, half-Russian” as he described himself – returned to Tajikistan after having migrated to Russia for a short period, because he could not find a permanent job there (interview by author, 8 February 2016). Now back, he adapts his personal behaviour and family lifestyle to what the Muslim majority expect or demand, in order to keep his job in an art institution. For this reason, he speaks only Tajik language and dialects, observes the religious rituals, celebrates feasts, and participates in neighbourhood exchanges. With these practices he imitates the ethnic and religious identities of the dominant population, i.e. Tajiks and Uzbeks.

In another case, a 58-year-old Metis woman (interviewed by author, 7 May 2016) called this imitation practice as having “no identity” to justify her mimicry and adaptation in public. Notably, this does not mean that the Metis people do not have their own identity as lived out in private and hidden spaces. Within her “no identity” strategy, this informant told exceptionally positive



stories about her encounters with the local people, the “good-neighbourly” relations and *internatsionalizm* (“cosmopolitanism”) and the “international” families. She admitted though that this strategy is not always helpful and that in everyday life minority groups are more prone to social exclusion and denial. She further reflected on the situation: “[t]he notions of age, social status, ethnicity are tools of the bureaucratic machine. They have some function and make people different”. She struggled to reinterpret and readjust the meanings of “Metis” and “native inhabitants” (*korennye zhyteli*). Against the logic of the hegemonic discourse, she claimed that she too is a “native” (*korennoy*), which she justified by reference to her parents who “were born, lived, studied, worked and finally rested in the soil of Tajikistan”.

Both informants told me that they face discrimination due to the ethnic identification in their passports and other ID documents. To avoid such discrimination, members of Tajik-Uzbek families in particular choose the dominant (especially Tajik) ethnicity for their children. Others, who cannot choose this ethnicity due to their affiliation to a minority religion, choose a more “convenient” (that is mostly Russian) ethnicity. A family of Armenian-Russian-Tajik origin, who earlier chose the Russian ethnicity for their own children, now decided to register the grandchildren – born of a Tajik mother – as being of Tajik ethnicity. The choice of an ethnicity for official registration is thus subject to security considerations and might be used by members of mixed families to choose the ethnicity among possible alternatives that promises the least discrimination for their offspring. The regulation of Chapter 36 of the Civic Code of Tajikistan – “On Amendments, Changes and Additions to the Book of Civic Registry” – allows them to address the ZAGS (civic registry office) or court in these cases (Civic Code 2008: 236).

## Concluding remarks

This article has discussed securityscapes of Russian-speakers in a central neighbourhood in the city of Dushanbe. As defined, securityscapes are both physical manifestations and imagined boundaries that people shape and maintain in order to secure their everyday life. The search and demand for existential security is the central function of everyday security practices. People respond differently to existential threats due to their different individual situations and group affiliations. Also their memories and experiences of existential dangers influence the way in which they reflect on current and future threats. From this perspective, security practices are not only limited to the present time, but are especially future-oriented, as people undertake certain strategies to secure their future, which they view as the continuation of their

past. The role of both individual and social memory, generated and interpreted through hegemonic discourses and practices, is important when reflecting upon the future and thus in shaping current security strategies dedicated to this future.

The discussion above revealed two general types of securityscapes and inherent security practices that Russian-speakers living in Dushanbe maintain. These types can be classified as (1) boundary-drawing securityscapes and (2) boundary-crossing securityscapes.

Boundary-drawing practices maintain spatial mobility and proximity of those Russian-speakers who do not have family relations with Muslims. Instead, they build translocal networks, and try to obtain dual or Russian citizenship, residence permits in two countries and employment with international organisations. The collective memory of the Civil War is important in generating such “options in reserve” in anticipation of a possible sudden outbreak of civil unrest in the future.

Another important boundary-drawing strategy is spatial proximity, maintained especially through shared spaces of family, “family friends”, neighbours and residence in a particular part of the city (the city centre). These spaces are also multifaceted and therefore people develop inner spaces not only within their families but also through the traditional *mahalla*-style organisation of neighbourhoods. The collective maintenance of secured spaces of families and neighbourhoods has also resulted in a concentration of ethnic and religious communities in different parts of the city. The physical boundaries of a neighbourhood maintain these inner spaces, which exercise social control and thus secure the movements of in particular the more vulnerable members of the community, especially children, adolescents and women. State institutions adjacent to families and neighbourhoods also facilitate their social control. Moreover, families and neighbours establish social control through escort and social networks to secure the everyday life of vulnerable people traversing beyond the neighbourhood. Not always are these practices sufficient and therefore those who are vulnerable themselves develop individual strategies of behavioural avoidance or proactive measures in response to social exclusion and physical threats.

As some studies note, about half of the Ruszabon of Tajikistan live below the poverty line. As my cases show, some of them neither resort to translocal networking nor receive protection from family and neighbourhood. They live instead very isolated lives in their private homes or rely on the charity of strangers or of minority religions. Another segment of impoverished Ruszabon includes Metis, who either conceal or switch their ethnic identity in order to adapt to the Muslim majority.

The “international” families are the segment of Ruszabon who have developed kinship ties with Muslims. Hence, their personal behaviours and social

networking are characterised by boundary-crossing securityscapes expressed in adaptation to hegemonic demands. Their securityscapes find common ground between different ethnicities, surmount the division between Islam and Christianity or conceal strong attachment to one or the other. The members of these families might employ a hidden or “no identity” strategy and hide their faiths, celebrating selected feasts and liminal rituals of both religions and performing the restrictive norms of Islam in public. Again, collective memory and political propaganda are important in interpreting past events as recurrent dangers of ethnic and religious fanaticism. Important security practices of Russian-speaking “international” families include body display and identity switching in obedience to the hegemonic demands. In particular, female members of these families adapt to the Muslim way of life as manifested in Islamic garments and adhere to the patriarchal norms of family relations such as family escorts and early marriage.

Although the joint efforts of the Russian and Tajik governments have improved the general socio-economic conditions of the Ruzabon in recent years, the increasing nationalism and religious fanaticism still keep the memories of the February Events and the subsequent Civil War alive. Thus, the different strategies for improving the everyday security of their families and friends are still felt necessary by many Ruzabon, to keep them prepared for the future: “If it happens again”.

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