

Gender in Détente and Disaster: Women Climbers in the Soviet International Pamir Camp 1974

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ABSTRACT

In the summer of 1974, the Soviet Union first opened its borders to a large number of climbers from the west. In a special camp in the Soviet Pamir mountains, climbers from ten different Western nations, were to climb and live side by side with each other and with Soviet and Polish climbers nearby. Inscribed in the context of political détente, the Pamir camp allowed for more cultural contact across the Cold War divides. It can thus be seen as a microcosm of different climbing communities, sometimes overcoming, but some- times also divided by the lines of nationality, language, political system, and last but not least by gender. From the camp, two all- women groups attempted to reach Pik Lenin: a Soviet team of eight women led by El'vira Shataeva, and a mixed international women's team composed of the Swiss Heidi Lüdi and Eva Isenschmid and the American Arlene Blum. Their attempts ended with the tragic death of all eight Soviet women and of Eva Isenschmid. This article looks at the camp as an intersectional place between political systems and gendered climbing by analyzing and comparing the women's climbing biographies, their interaction and the interpretations their all-women climbing parties were attributed.

On July 16, 1974, in a remote corner of the Soviet Union on the Kirgiz-Tadzhik border, the first Soviet 'International Mountaineering Camp Pamir' (IMC Pamir) was officially opened. It accommodated 160 climbers from ten different Western nations, who were to climb and live side by side with each other and with Soviet and Polish climbers nearby over the course of the next four weeks. Set up as an opportunity for Western climbers to visit the Soviet Union, this mountaineering camp was an arena of both sports and systemic competition: a microcosm of different climbing communities, sometimes overcoming, but sometimes also divided by the lines of nationality, language, political system, by individual and group ambitions and last but not least by gender.¹

In this summer, both East-West-relations and gender roles were in flux. The years of political *détente* not only led to the establishment of more frequent, eventually more or less regularized meetings between the leaders of the USSR and the US, most notably the summits leading to the SALT agreements.² They also allowed for more cultural contact across the Cold War divide in general, including the areas of sports and leisure. Sports meetings and travel between socialist and non-socialist countries enabled contacts and exchanges not only between sports professionals, but also to a certain extent between 'ordinary people' – such as the climbers, both male and female, which met in 1974.³

At the same time, women mountaineers in different countries around the world were increasingly pushing for a larger share and more responsibilities in high-altitude climbing. The almost universal exclusion of women from the large-scale post-war Himalayan expeditions had led them to form all-female high-altitude 'women's expeditions', starting 1955. By the early 1970s, the discussion about women's share in mountaineering and their roles on the mountain had been increasingly interwoven with discussions and reflections about women's role in society in general, reflecting the rise of feminist movements.⁴ Female mountaineers like the American Arlene Blum or the Polish mountaineer Wanda Rutkiewicz were actively advocating for women in mountaineering and climbing increasingly in female-only ropes.⁵

During the IMC Pamir in 1974, two all-women groups attempted to reach Pik Lenin (7134 m), the most prominent peak in the camp area: a Soviet team of eight women led by El'vira Shataeva, and a mixed international women's team composed of the Swiss Heidi Lüdi and Eva Isenschmid and the American Arlene Blum. Their attempts ended with the tragic death of all eight Soviet women and of Eva Isenschmid. They were not the only victims in a season with unusually harsh weather conditions, fierce snowstorms and avalanches triggered by several earthquakes which claimed 15 lives. Nevertheless, it was the women's deaths which were the most visible and the most discussed, with both immediate and long-term repercussions on women's climbing in East and West.⁶

The life and death of El'vira Shataeva have not gone unnoticed in popular climbing literature,⁷ but the camp itself has not received much attention, considered that it marked a significant point in Soviet-Western climbing relations. The camp served as an intersectional place between political systems and

gendered climbing. What influence did gender have on access to this camp? How did politics and gender influence strategies and practices of women climbers, and (last but not least): how did gender influence the ‘writing of the camp’, both its successes and failures?

Women’s participation in elite mountaineering was and is not a natural given, since female climbers struggled and still struggle with inequality of access, of treatment and of recognition within mountaineering.⁸ Looking at the Soviet women climbers in comparison to the American and Swiss women reveals how their backgrounds - which differed considerably both in terms of country and political system of origin as in age and experience - influenced their choices and reflected in their way of pursuing their sport.

The deaths of the Soviet women’s team – in context with the other deaths at the camp – have been depicted, analyzed, and interpreted by contemporary and later accounts of camp participants and witnesses, almost all of them men. The long-time repercussions on Soviet climbing and especially on women’s expeditions signal the importance of this episode in the gendered history of mountaineering.

Mountaineering⁹ has been described as a form of ‘serious leisure’, that is, a form of activity requiring systematic, long-run, in-depth, time-consuming commitment, yet so fulfilling and meaningful to its practitioners that it becomes central to who they are, where they feel they belong and how they organize their lives.¹⁰ This applies both to Western and Eastern climbers: Despite Soviet attempts to change the social basis of *alpinism* in the early Soviet Union and to give it a ‘proletarian’ character, mountaineering remained a pastime strongly dominated by university graduates, academics, and professionals in the Soviet Union as well and became even more so in the postwar years. Both in the West and the Soviet Union mountaineering was also an activity dominated by men, especially at top-level positions in the organizational hierarchy.¹¹ Importantly, reading and writing about ascents and routes has been an integral part of mountaineering since its early days, stemming from a need to prove and document an exploit.¹² This, too, was true for the Soviet Union, where questions of authorship and voice within mountaineering communities intersected with gender, as the development of the International Pamir Camp reveals.

The Pamir Camp: A Space between Cold War Rivalries and for Cultural Contact

With the construction of the International Pamir Camp of 1974, the Soviet Pamir mountain region (divided between the Soviet Socialist republics of Tadzhikistan and Kirgistan) was for the first time opened to a large number of climbers from the capitalist bloc. Indeed, it was the first ‘commercial’ large-scale possibility for climbers to go to the Soviet Union at all – so far, only select climbers had been invited. While the Himalayas held the most attraction for high-altitude

mountaineers worldwide, the Pamir ranges had always been more accessible to climbers from socialist countries, while for Westerners they were a hitherto forbidden and 'exotic' playground. The Pamir was home to the highest peaks of the Soviet Union, including three of the five 7000-meter-summits¹³: Pik Communism (russ. Pik Kommunizma, 7495 m, formerly known as Pik Stalin, now Pik Ismoil Somoni); Pik Lenin (russ. Pik Lenina, 7134 m, now officially Pik Abuali ibni Sino) and Pik Evgeniia Korzhenevskaiia (russ. Pik Evgenii Korzhenevskoi, 7105 m).¹⁴ Of these three, Pik Lenin was the most accessible and popular mountain; both the goal of many foreign mountaineers as well as the showcase of the Soviet authorities for their guests (its name obviously invested it with additional symbolic weight). Pik Lenin was the only 7000-meter-mountain where mass ascents had been undertaken, the last one in 1967 where 229 climbers had scaled it for the fifty-year anniversary of the Revolution.¹⁵ The Soviet penchant for commemorating anniversaries was present during the camp as well: 1974 marked the 40-year-anniversary of the first Soviet ascent to Pik Lenin.¹⁶

By establishing the IMC in 1974, a long integration process of the Soviet mountaineering world into international structures and organizations of mountaineering had reached another important milestone. While the early Russian pioneers of mountaineering had seen themselves as part of a worldwide climbing community, this had changed after 1917. Reinvented as first 'proletarian', then 'Soviet' *al'pinizm*, mountaineering had been increasingly defined as something inherently different from its 'bourgeois' and 'decadent' Western counterparts since the late 1920s. After the mid-1930s, visits of international climbers to the Soviet Union had become impossible. Only after Stalin's death in 1953 did contacts between Soviet and Western climbers slowly improve. At the end of the 1950s, a few select foreign mountaineers were allowed to climb in the Soviet Union again.¹⁷ In 1967 the Soviet official mountaineering association, the so-called 'Mountaineering Federation', finally became a member of the International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation, the Union Internationale des Associations d'Alpinisme (UIAA).¹⁸ The UIAA, the umbrella organization of all mountaineering associations and clubs, became a long-awaited window to the world for Soviet climbers, an intermediary to establish contact and organize exchange with international partners. Once the Soviet Union joined its ranks, it quickly became a member of the executive committee and hosted the UIAA general assembly in October 1973 in Tbilisi, Georgia.¹⁹ In addition, the opportunities for exchanges between mountaineers were becoming more numerous. In 1962, a joint British-Soviet expedition had tackled Pik Communism.²⁰ In 1967, the Soviet Union had invited several mountaineers from other Socialist countries as well as a few Italians to the anniversary climbs on Pik Lenin.²¹ In 1972, a big mountaineering gathering, a so-called *al'piniada*, reuniting almost one hundred climbers from Socialist countries, had taken place in the region around Pik Communism, giving the Soviet authorities ample opportunities to practice hosting large mountaineering groups.²²

The IMC Pamir was announced a year in advance, in August 1973, in the UIAA's bulletin, under the title 'Alpiniade internationale au Pamir'; invitations were sent out directly to the clubs even before that.²³ The rhetoric surrounding the camp was one of mountain camaraderie - 'to develop sports relations between mountaineers of different countries'. While certainly Soviet climbers were eager to get to know Western climbers, their equipment, technique and strategy, the IMC was also to be a vehicle for raising hard currency for the Soviet mountaineering federation, on which all travel in non-socialist countries depended.²⁴ For both political and financial reasons, Soviet mountaineers still had only very limited possibilities to climb abroad. While Polish climbers had started to climb in the Afghan Hindukush in the 1960s and later moved into Pakistan,²⁵ the Soviet authorities still had not given their consent to mounting a full Himalayan expedition, even though mountaineering associations had lobbied for it in the past decades.²⁶ This explains also why after the 1972 *al'piniada*, the Soviet mountaineering federation had even suggested that the UIAA might organize a similar event in the Himalaya, but this had never been realized.²⁷

Women's Access to the Pamir Camp

The camp included participants from the US, the United Kingdom, France, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Japan, Italy and Liechtenstein. They were distributed to (pre-installed) tents according to nationalities and organized groups within the compound. Non-western climbers – a group of Siberian mountaineers, Estonians, Poles and the Russian women's team – did not stay within the camp but adjacent to it; however, they at least partly used the camp's main infrastructure like the canteens and showers. The camp thus provided a space of contact between East and West as well as between different Western groups.

Inclusiveness as a Political Statement: The US Team to the Pamir Camp

The United States' team to the Pamir camp shows how by the early 1970s, the 'women's question' had become politicized enough to be a political factor. In contrast to other nations, the American Alpine club and its representatives regarded their team as at least a semi-official sports delegation, as it was the first official mountaineering contact between the US and the USSR - so far, no US citizens, only Europeans, had been invited to climb in the Soviet Union.

Given the constant and latent rivalry between the two superpowers even in the years of *Détente*, the American Alpine club was intent on assembling a strong 'team of the best American climbers'.²⁸ The team leaders managed to expand their original contingent of 12 places with the thought of gaining altitude experience for a young cohort of climbers: they, too, had their eyes on the Himalayas in the years to come. On their call, they received over 200 applications for spots,²⁹

including a separate list of a dozen qualified women climbers.³⁰ For the final team, 19 participants were selected, but only two of them women. One of the participants, John Evans, later recalled the selection process:

Despite the traditional male dominance in the mountaineering realm, the modern climbing achievements of American women essentially ensured that the USA would be represented by a mixed-gender team—even if the mix was to be blatantly uneven. At the start, a single woman was invited—the highly skilled Mount Rainier mountaineering guide, Marty Hoey. Then, almost as an afterthought, the male organizers came to the conclusion that another woman should be added, for which I recommended Molly Higgins, a fellow mountain instructor at the Colorado Outward Bound School.³¹

Since the Soviet Union publicly emphasized the equal opportunities of women in the socialist countries and regularly won medal counts in international competitions not least due to its strong women athletes, a US team consisting of men only would have probably looked poorly not only vis-à-vis their hosts, but would have also not fitted the *zeitgeist* of the early 1970s anymore.³² That such considerations were relevant to the selection is indicated by one participants' account according to which the organizers added a second woman only at the last moment, realizing that including just one woman would look like tokenism.³³

The two women included in the team were not the obvious candidates. The US mountaineer Arlene Blum, then 29, had applied for a spot on the American team but had not been accepted despite her substantial high-altitude record including, for example, such as the deputy lead of the 1970 all-women ascent of Denali or her recent climbs in Afghanistan in 1972. Blum would later hear that her application was turned down because she was not considered 'ladylike' enough.³⁴ Instead the leaders picked 24-year old Marty Hoey, described by Bob Craig as 'something of an All-American girl', a mountain guide with alpine climbing experience, and Molly Higgins, 25, 'the "baby" of the expedition' [sic], who came from rock climbing and outdoor education, but had no experience either on an expedition in ice and snow or at high altitude.³⁵ These women would turn out to be very substantial climbers, but at the time, they were included by the (senior) expedition leaders as (younger) women whom they knew and trusted personally, but who had no *independent* record as climbers. Unsurprisingly, to Blum it looked as if 'likeability' and personal connection trumped hard-won experience.

As in many such settings – on and off the mountain – the importance of 'group cohesion' was invoked to justify groups based mostly on personal connections which resulted in groups lacking diversity. This is seen in other self-constituted groups in the camp who were all-male – such as the fifteen Japanese participants³⁶ or the French party from Grenoble (nine men).³⁷ Since neither the Japanese nor the French did regard the camp as a politically charged encounter but as a personal climbing opportunity, this might just have been what John Evans called the 'traditional male dominance', i.e. the traditional way of setting up a group through male networks. But it could also be a deliberate exclusion: the British climber Doug Scott told Arlene Blum that he didn't include any women in the British party

because he thought that ‘most women climbers aren’t first-rate’ and ‘so eager to succeed ... that they don’t use good judgement’.³⁸

The International Women’s Team (Rendez-vous Hautes Montagnes)

Altogether, about ten percent of the 160 foreign mountaineers were women. Female climbers were included in the German, Dutch, Swiss, American contingents, and probably in the Austrian group.³⁹ Most climbed in a smaller mixed private group or as part of a climbing couple, as the Germans Gerhard and Hannelore Schmatz who successfully climbed Peak Lenin on July 31, 1974.⁴⁰ Additionally, four Western women in the camp climbed as an ‘International Women’s Team’ under the auspices of ‘Rendez-vous Hautes Montagnes’ (RHM). This women’s climbing network was initiated in 1968 by the tireless German baroness, journalist, and climber Felicitas von Reznicek (1904-1997).⁴¹ It started out as a one time-event in Reznicek’s home town, the Swiss mountain resort of Engelberg where Reznicek’s had invited over 60 women climbers to celebrate the publication of her 1967 book on the history of women mountaineering.⁴² ‘We are not an association, but a group’, von Reznicek insisted - a network without fixed structures, by and for women, but also open to men who climbed with them.⁴³

From the beginning, RHM had been intended as a meeting ground for women from both sides of the Iron Curtain – very much in the spirit of *Détente*, but ‘grassroots’ and unofficial. It counted members from Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Poland, the Soviet Union, and other Socialist countries, among them climbers Wanda Rutkiewicz and Halina Krüger-Syrokomska, as well as the Russian climber Galina Rozhal’skaia (with whom El’vira Shataeva climbed Pik Korzhenevskaja in 1972).⁴⁴ To financially support women climbers from Socialist countries who had no or very little access to hard currency, RHM provided a solidarity fund.⁴⁵

To facilitate the necessary invitations for these climbers from East bloc countries, the RHM had applied to the UIAA for membership in November 1973. While the UIAA did not support a full membership due to the RHM’s character as a loose group, RHM nevertheless became an affiliated member within the next months.⁴⁶

This in turn enabled RHM members to apply for places to the Pamir camp outside of their ‘national’ affiliations. Three Swiss women - Heidi Lüdi, Eva Isenschmid, and Margarete Münkle -, received places in the camp in the name of the UIAA. When they learned – via RHM – that Arlene Blum, another RHM member, had not been selected for the US team, they managed to secure a fourth place for her and invited her to come along which she did at short notice. Thus, the ‘international women’s team’ was born, and RHM subverted the classical division of mountaineering into national categories by effectively creating ‘women’ as a transnational category – or as a ‘nation of women’, one might say. In this way, RHM very much represented the spirit of women’s climbing of these times.⁴⁷

The three Swiss participants belonged to different generations of Swiss female

mountaineers. Margarete Mönkle was at already 54 years an experienced climber from the Eastern part of Switzerland, who had joined her local mountaineering section in 1962.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, she was strongly affected by the altitude in the Pamir and had to step back from the plan to scale Pik Lenin once she was in the camp.⁴⁹ The younger two Swiss participants Isenschmid and Lüdi, who continued, already knew each other from joint climbs. They had done ski-climbs of both Montblanc and the Dôme de Neige des Ecrins in 1974 before coming to the camp.⁵⁰ Looking at their biographies, the two young professional women were eager to travel and to climb, having grown up in Switzerland's generally mountaineering- steeped culture but also constantly exposed to its rather conservative gender norms. Switzerland had only just introduced voting rights for women in 1971, decades after most European countries, and legal clauses discriminating women would remain in place until the 1980s. Mountaineering remained in many ways an area with male privileges as well. Lüdi (then 26), who had freshly graduated from medical school, and Isenschmid (then 25), a photographer who attended the prestigious Folkwang school in Essen, had met in the youth section of the 'Schweizerischer Alpen-Club SAC' in Berne where women and men climbed together – but after women reached the age of 21, they had to leave since the SAC did not accept women members.⁵¹ After Lüdi's climbing achievements had attracted the attention of a mountain guide during a climb and she was mentioned in Felicitas von Reznicek's book, she was invited to join RHM where she made contact with other women climbers.⁵² It was Lüdi who managed the paperwork with the Soviet side for the three Swiss participants – and the American Arlene Blum. The latter invitation caused much dismay of both US and Soviet climbers, for they had previously agreed that US climbers could only come as part of the official delegation.⁵³ Compared to a 'regular' expedition made up exclusively over personal networks, the camp thus offered better chances for female high-altitude climbers, since they did not depend on the inclusion into an expedition group but could apply for places in the camps both alone and in groups.

The Soviet Women's Team: Building a Female Collective

Of all the groups present in the International Pamir camp in 1974, the Soviet all- women team under the leadership of El'vira Shataeva attracted the most attention, due to the tragic deaths of the whole group in a violent snow storm on their way down from the summit. Shataeva and her teammates – Nina Vasil'eva, Valentina Fateeva, Irina Liubimtseva, Galina Perekhodiuk, Tat'iana Bardasheva, Il'siar Mukhamedova, and Liudmila Manzharova – were attempting the first all-women ascent of Pik Lenin, and also a traverse of the summit, going up from the east side via the Lipkin ridge and planning to descend by way of Razdel'naya.⁵⁴

Shataeva and her teammates were coming out of the Soviet sports system of the post-war years, all of them born between 1935 and 1947, with most being over thirty years old in 1974 – slightly older than the Western women climbers.⁵⁵ In

those post- War years, opportunities for women in Soviet climbing had expanded: at first partly from a demographical lack of men after the war, but also through the rebuilt infrastructure of mountaineering camps and sports sections which were a possibility for women to intensify their links to mountaineering. Sometimes this allowed them to engage in it semi-professionally or professionally by working as an instructor as Shataeva did (working for the Moscow section of *Iunost* and later *Spartak*, arguably the biggest and most well-endowed of the Soviet mountaineering organizations in the Soviet Union). Shataeva had been climbing for a number of years, and had been awarded the title *master sporta*, ‘Master of Sports’, the highest grade in the hierarchical Soviet sports system, which allowed her to climb any mountain within the Soviet Union (however, mountaineers still had to get their plans and routes officially approved).⁵⁶

Shataeva’s former tours certainly placed her among the elite of Soviet climbers. In 1971, she had reached Pik Communism in a mixed group led by her husband Vladimir Shataev. El’vira and Vladimir Shataev were one of many prominent climbing couples in the Soviet Union. Vladimir Shataev had risen to prominence as a top climber in the 1960s – in 1964, he belonged to an early and exclusive group of Soviet climbers who had the chance to climb in Italy. He went on to occupy important positions within the Soviet mountaineering federation, being an official trainer and later president.⁵⁷ His standing certainly facilitated Shataeva’s plans, for other women climbers were not successful in organizing all-female groups.⁵⁸ It also explains at least partially the strong focus in all accounts on El’vira Shataeva. There is little to no information on the other seven participants of the 1974 expedition in Soviet, in Russian or in Western literature.⁵⁹

In 1972, Shataeva was one of the four women who successfully climbed Pik Korzhenevskaiia in an all-women group, together with Antonina Son, Il’siar Mukhamedova and leader Galina Rozhal’skaia – the first women’s group to scale a ‘seven-thousander’ anywhere in the world. (Pik Korzhenevskaiia, by the way, is the only high peak in the Soviet Union named after a woman). This took place within the framework of the *al’piniada* of 1972, and the four women were awarded an official Soviet medal for ‘outstanding achievements in sports’.⁶⁰ A year later, Shataeva lead a party of five women on a north-south traverse of the iconic Caucasus peak Ushba.⁶¹ It seems, however, to have been the success of the 1972 expedition that opened the doors for the Pik Lenin group. Shataeva started putting together her team members for 1974 already early in 1973, after a glowing portrait of the 1972 scaling of Pik Korzhenevskaiia appeared in the popular women’s magazine *Rabotnitsa* in December 1972.⁶² *Rabotnitsa* had also promised ‘patronage’ – a Socialist equivalent of sponsorship – for Pik Lenin in 1974. Since there was no private large-scale financing or sponsorship, Soviet climbers needed one or preferably several institutional frameworks into which they could ascribe their exploits – an anniversary, a large ‘al’piniada’ such as the one in 1972, or/and the support of official Soviet institutions.⁶³ Shataeva’s plan for 1974 was also supported by the *Spartak* sports society of Moscow, headed by the ‘great old man’ in Soviet mountaineering, Vitalii Abalakov, who was present in the camp as

well.⁶⁴

Women's Expeditions in the East and West: Similarities and Differences

Women's climbing was obviously on the rise in the Soviet Union just as it was in other countries. By 1974, when Shataeva's team was preparing for Pik Lenin, five Soviet women had already been awarded the Soviet title 'Snow Leopard' given out to mountaineers who had climbed all five Soviet 7000-meter mountains.⁶⁵ Most of those women, however, climbed in mixed groups. Shataeva's idea of all-women's expeditions was unusual by Soviet standards of the 1960s/70s. By her husband Vladimir's account, it was him who gave El'vira the initial idea of an all-women mountaineering expedition. From then on, El'vira was the driving force behind the 1972 group on Pik Korzhenevskaja.⁶⁶ Shataeva also had contacts with Western climbers, especially female mountaineers, before 1974. She had been to Austria, and to the Swiss alps in 1973, the latter together with Galina Rozhal'skaia. This was possibly through RHM - her climbing companion Rozhal'skaia was an RHM member.⁶⁷

Despite different political systems, both Soviet and Western women mountaineers had to fight with similar prejudices (from both men and women). They had difficulties being included in mixed groups, were not given (or were not taking) adequate roles and responsibilities and felt that they were being 'overprotected' by male authorities.⁶⁸ All-women's teams such as Shataeva's were also not taken seriously, as she confided to Blum.⁶⁹

During the camp, such topics were discussed openly among the women climbers, who did visit each other and the Soviet women's team, despite a language barrier which made communication sometimes difficult. Being in a very visible minority role, most women climbers in the camp seem to have met and moved in and out both of mixed-gender and female spaces, to different degrees and mostly individually. While the Swiss women had much contact with both the German, Austrian and especially the Dutch team,⁷⁰ Blum socialized with the English-speaking participants within the camp. Thus, while the RHM team did intend a joint climb, they did not spend much time in the camp together.⁷¹

The Soviet women's team separated themselves much more clearly from not only the Western camp, but also all other groups staying in the valley. When El'vira's husband and his climbing partner arrived in the camp on July 25, they were told that 'Shataeva's team lives on the other side of the river, behind a fortress wall, and the entry there is by special permit only'. . . . They found the wall – about one brick wide, but due to the absence of bricks composed of small stones in a circular way:

‘The watch, at the same time acting cook, Ira ... , armed with a smoking hot ... frying pan, had heard our steps, jumped out of the mess tent and gave an alarm signal. From the storm tents (*pamirki*), the garrison emerged. Dainius, who had accidentally overstepped the ‘wall’, was immediately taken and put outside of the fortress’ boundaries again.

Elvira ... came out ceremoniously and, looking at the ‘foreigners’, asked: ‘Who are you? What do you want?’

‘To come to visit, that’s what it looks like ... ‘replied Ella Muchamedova

‘As guests?’ ...

They let us wait for 15 minutes. We heard female ... laughter from the tents. Then Liuda M. came with blank white papers and pens in her hands. Not looking at us, she gave them to Fateeva and said:

‘They shall write a *zaiavlenie* (an official application). Each one an for themselves. You can do it in one exemplar – we’re no bureaucrats.’

Finally Nina V. came out and announced: ‘The *soviet* has looked through your request and has found your reason to be valid. The *soviet* has announced: give out a special permit’.⁷²

Shataeva’s women make fun of the bureaucratic Soviet system with permits and decisions – and they invert power structures since normally it was the men who gave out those permits. In creating such a separate space, even a ‘counterworld’, they fostered a feeling of togetherness, an almost subversive female cosmos - a ‘sisterhood’, one might say, maybe not so different from RHM, but framed in Soviet collectivist language. Many other camp participants reported how close-knit their community had seemed, laughing, singing, relaxing together. This is also captured in the newsreel film of them in the camp which shows them also, like so many representations of women’s expeditions, combing their hair and doing domestic work.⁷³

In this spirit, Shataeva also placed a very high focus on discipline in her own group, expelled one member who they felt was too egotistic, and tried to foster very open communications. Just as in men’s groups, personal relations were paramount for the selection of group members.⁷⁴ Their strong adherence to group discipline also stems from the fact that Shataeva and her teammates had come this far by knowing the official rules, both written and unwritten, very well. They were very aware that if they were, not: were they to deviate from the rules, their project would be over very quickly. This may explain why Shataeva was adamantly clear when she said to Arlene Blum ‘We cannot climb together, but we can celebrate together.’⁷⁵ While they could easily climb together outside the Soviet Union, for example on an RHM meet, on Soviet ground they were Soviet citizens first: any female solidarity which threatened to override allegiance to the state was unthinkable. Sisterhood was possible, but only within the system.

Dealing with Disaster: Writing and Interpreting the Pamir Camp

From the beginning, the weather conditions in the camp had been difficult, with unusually high amounts of snow. Several earthquakes triggered avalanches,

which killed five Estonian mountaineers on the other side of Pik Lenin and one camp participant, the American Gary Ullin. When the weather finally cleared up at the end of July, many groups swarmed out on their way to Pik Lenin and other summits, coordinated by the camp leadership which had to approve routes and consult on the conditions. On August 5, the International Women's team tried for the summit of Pik Lenin, having jointly come up to about 1000 meters below the summit. The morning of August 5 was clear and beautiful, which made the storm warning from the Russian base maybe look less urgent. While the weather was windy, it did at first not look like a substantial storm, as Lüdi recalls. However, the warning led to different approaches to the top and the splitting up of the group. While Arlene Blum decided to make a short and quick dash for the top – hoping to meet the Soviet women there - Eva Isenschmid and Heidi Lüdi decided to pack up extra gear and food so they could stay the night close to the top.⁷⁶

Meanwhile, from the other side, the Soviet women's team had reached the summit of Pik Lenin on August 5 after taking an extra 'rest day' the day before. They put up camp a bit below the summit, intending to descend in the morning. So far, everything went according to the plan. But overnight an exceptionally heavy storm came up. On August 6, the Soviet women's team reported one of their members ill. Attempts to descend in the storm were unsuccessful, and rescue missions had to be aborted because of the violent storms. Locked in place with inadequate equipment, the team members one by one died from cold and exhaustion over the course of the next two days. While the Soviet women had lost part of their equipment and tents on their desperate attempt to descend, the radio worked until the last moment. A large part of the assembled climbers in the base camp were by radio intimately connected with the women stranded on the top of the mountain and could hear their desperation and slow death - El'vira Shataeva and Galina Perekhodiuk were heard saying 'goodbye' and 'we're sorry we failed you'.⁷⁷

The same storm had also affected Eva Isenschmid, Heidi Lüdi, and Anja Vögele, a German climber who had joined Lüdi and Isenschmid on the way to the top.⁷⁸ Arlene Blum met them later on August 5 on her way down after an unsuccessful attempt at the peak when the storm came up. Lüdi, Isenschmid and Vögele had spent the night in a tent left by Sepp Schwankner, intending to acclimatize, but on the morning of August 6, started to go down as Eva Isenschmid was already increasingly affected by the altitude. On the descent she became increasingly weak and confused, so much that she refused to collaborate which made for a difficult descent. They lost their bivy bag and Heidi Lüdi lost her mittens, resulting in frostbitten fingers. Eventually, Eva Isenschmid lost consciousness. Despite the help of other climbers who managed to lower the women to another camp, Isenschmid died of high-altitude exposure on August 6.⁷⁹

‘We Will Never Forget Our Brave Girls’: The Immediate Aftermath of the Deaths

By August 8, ten participants of the camp had died – a tragedy that not only needed to be communicated within the camp, but also to the outside world. Since the American mountaineering team included a journalist, Chris Wren, it was only a matter of days until his article appeared in the *New York Times* (on August 13).⁸⁰ This forced the hand of the Soviet authorities to also comment on the events in the press. On August 14, 1974, a lengthy article appeared in *Sovetskii sport*, the popular sports daily, under the title ‘Take the mountains seriously’. It started out with a short account of the first successful ascent of women to an eight-thousand-meter peak, the Japanese Manaslu expedition of May 1974, in which, sadly, one participant had lost her life. The author also recalled the tragic end of the 1959 Cho Oyu women’s expedition but pointed out how far the ‘fair sex’ had come in the 15 years since. The death of the eight Soviet women was discreetly communicated towards the middle of the article:

‘We will never forget our brave girls. The names of the masters of sport [El’vira Shataeva, etc. ...] will be forever inscribed into the chronicles of Soviet and international mountaineering together with the names of many [other] brave [people] who gave their lives for the conquest of the planet’s mountain giants. ... Since the first ascent, about 1500 people have reached Pik Lenin by different routes, among them 100 women. In all the previous years, only two people perished during the ascent (in 1936 and 1969).’⁸¹

The author proceeded to an overview over recent accidents in the Alps to insist on the necessity of having a good ‘control-preventive’ mountain safety system, as it was called in the Soviet Union. He explained the deaths in the Pamir by the exceptional force of the blizzard and the generally difficult weather situation. However, the camp as a whole was considered a success, the author affirmed, and should be repeated.⁸²

Soviet mountaineering had always explicitly aimed to be ‘accident-free’ and placed a high premium on safety and control.⁸³ Public reporting on accidents had never been part of Soviet mountaineering (indeed, of Soviet life in general). Accidents happened, of course, but they were not even analyzed in mountaineering yearbooks, let alone in the press. Also, risky events or plans were kept secret until after their successful termination or fulfillment. If a project was not successful, it was not publicly reported on afterwards – and that would probably also have happened to the women’s group. But due to the international attention, the Soviet authorities were forced to concede what they could not conceal. By placing the death of the Soviet women’s team within a larger context, the author managed to present Shataeva’s team as part of a larger international women’s movement for the highest summits – in fact, the whole article very much places Soviet climbing in the context of international mountaineering - if only to lessen the blame of

the Soviet side.⁸⁴

Not only Soviet but also Western climbers were aware of the strain and moral pressure the camp organizers were under, since these accidents did not only sadden them very much but could also incur professional consequences for them. Any accident in Soviet climbing was followed by an administrative inquest with a committee of experts looking for possible causes and culprits. Jean Juge, president of the UIAA, wrote to Vitaly Abalakov in September 1974 regretting that the camp – which he had visited during its last days – had been overshadowed by the death of several ‘*camarades*’. ‘I hope that these events did not cause you serious trouble, because you are not responsible for the bad luck (*malchance*).’⁸⁵ The result of the inquest, however, did not place any burden or blame on the camp organizers. Rather it confirmed the weather conditions as the main cause of the accident and fully exonerated the camp leadership and mountain safety, blaming the women only for their insistence on completing the traverse instead of turning around and descending the route they came up. One year later, in July 1975, the bodies of the eight women were recovered and brought down for burial by a group of top climbers led by Vladimir Shataev.⁸⁶

Looking Back on a Fateful Summer: Later Interpretations

Over the next few years, the events of this camp (mostly referred to as ‘ill-fated’) were retold in three longer accounts: *Pamir: escalade d’un 7000 au pays des Kirghizes* by the French climbers François Valla and Jean-Paul Zuanon (1976), *Storm and Sorrow* by Bob Craig (1977) and Vladimir Shataev’s *Kategoriia trudnosti* (1977). Another American participant John Evans published a short memoir and his climbing journals in 2015.⁸⁷ How did these accounts interpret the events?

Neither the French nor the US commentators questioned the women’s physical ability, preparedness or determination; on their strategy and tactics they were divided. However, many commentators pointed out the dire quality of the Soviet women’s equipment (cotton tents with wooden duffel closures etc.). It is difficult to ascertain today whether their equipment reflected the usual standard of Soviet-produced mountaineering equipment (which had been a sore point in Soviet mountaineering ever since its early days) or whether it was even more inadequate than the Soviet standard fare. Overall, however, the Western commentators considered the women’s deaths to be sad, yet an inevitable part of the risk all mountaineers take. Indeed, sexist prejudices were absent from these books written by climbers. Conversely, they could easily be found in the Swiss press dealing with Eva Isenschmid’s death. In that case male commentators insinuated that the women had brought their misfortune on them by climbing without male company and that they were not ‘ready’ yet for going manless.⁸⁸

A different, but arguably more important book dealing with the IMC Pamir was Vladimir Shataev’s climbing autobiography *Kategoriia trudnosti* (Degrees of difficulty) which appeared in 1977. In this book, he traces not only his own

mountaineering career but also that of his wife – from their first meeting to El’vira’s death in 1974 and the mission to get their bodies down one year later. *Kategoriia trudnosti* was the first full Soviet mountaineering autobiography. Before it was published there had only been shorter, very normative accounts of climbers’ lives which were idealized Soviet (auto)biographies rather than real experienced lives. In general, there is a distinctive absence of non-formulaic sports autobiographies in the Soviet Union.⁸⁹ Shataev’s book was something really new: a modern, colloquial-literary style autobiography including personal reflection, philosophical musings, difficult emotions and personal foibles, tackling the big questions of life and often leaving room for the reader’s own judgment. Shataev extensively discussed the questions of women’s climbing and the male prejudices Elvira met with her projects and her ambitions, including her own reactions to it. This was something new as well in a society where officially, women had had full equality for decades - which made it very difficult to complain about a discrimination which was not supposed to exist. Shataev critically reflected on their own – male – attempts to ‘have an additional eye’ on the women during the climb of 1974 by making sure that some other Soviet men’s group was always not too far away:

‘But, however careful the fact of their ‘reinsurance’ (*perestrahovka*) was hidden, there, on the spot, it became obvious. And it is possible that exactly because of that the women dragged out the ascent, trying to get away from under the watch/guard (*opeka*), choosing to march in moments where their ‘nannies’ were as far away as possible.’⁹⁰

Such hitherto unexplored themes in Soviet mountaineering literature - bureaucracy, accidents, prejudices, wrong decisions and failures – made the book initially difficult to publish.⁹¹ But it was exactly those topics, together with the book’s style, its romantic and intellectual sensibilities, which put it in line with the values of the ‘*shestidesiatniki*’, the 1960s generation, that made *Kategoriia trudnosti* very popular even outside mountaineering circles. The book came out in a first edition of 100,000 copies in 1977 and in a second, updated edition with the same print run in 1982. It was the first (and only) Soviet mountaineering book to be translated into English in 1987 and is still reprinted today in the 6th edition, with a Polish translation having come out in 2015.⁹²

The Missing Voices: Reflections on Women’s Silences in Mountaineering

Shataev’s book certainly opened up the discourse about climbing and safety in the Soviet Union, but it also allowed for rare glimpses into inequality in the Soviet sports world. In hindsight, only a male mountaineer as widely respected as Shataev could have written such a book in the Soviet Union. A woman’s own account of the male perceptions and prejudices would probably not even have been considered for printing. It is the most detailed insight we have into Elvira

Shataeva's life and thinking, her motivation, experience, character and preparation for the route - but it is not her own voice or her own writing. Indeed, neither she nor any one of her seven teammates (of which several had already been on very ambitious climbs) left written traces by their own hands, continuing a tradition of silence and invisibility around (not only) Soviet women climbing. Even the outspoken Arlene Blum, the only woman to leave an account of the Pamir camp, did so only in 2005 in her memoir *Breaking Trail*.⁹³ The American poet Adrienne Rich who wrote a moving poem on the group's deaths in 1974, imagines Shataeva writing in her diary in the tent, just as these tents are being ripped apart by the wind.⁹⁴

This Soviet female silence can be read as many things: as a strategy for 'flying under the radar', as an - almost superstitious - caution to not endanger one's plans, maybe also to keep the excitement and optimism and not let the enthusiasm be curbed by a mostly negative environment: Shataeva herself had insisted on 'not a word to the press' before the event.⁹⁵ Partly, the no-risk attitude of Soviet climbing almost demanded to keep silent before the expedition, in case it would fail. The pressure to conform was high on all Soviet athletes, and individual 'stardom' was discouraged, even though sportsmen and sportswomen were presented as role models to a domestic public and enjoyed certain privileges. An individualistic, outspoken female climber like Wanda Rutkiewicz, who eagerly and skillfully used press and publicity to support her climbing ambitions, would have been very hard to imagine in the Soviet Union.

The self-organizing bodies of Soviet mountaineering had also not done very much to include women in their public representation. Women were almost completely absent from the official hierarchies in the Federation or (as authors or subjects) in the mountaineering yearbook *Pobezhdennye vershiny*. Not only were the exploits of Soviet women little noted, Western women's climbs were also hardly covered, even though the mountaineering yearbooks had started to report on foreign mountaineering in the 1950s. If women climbers were featured in the (sports or popular) press, it was usually in the issues celebrating Women's Day on March 8. There, Soviet women mountaineers served as living proof for the full equality of women in the Soviet Union and were generally portrayed by men. They were depicted with both attributes of an avid, heroic and brave climber and at the same time those expected of a Soviet woman (to be feminine, a good wife and mother or, if childless, a good teacher). Western feminism, so important in these years, had not yet made it to the Soviet Union. While the official Soviet propaganda praised the Soviet Union as a progressive nation where women enjoyed equal rights and possibilities, the everyday of Soviet women looked very differently. Professional opportunities were restricted, gender norms in the Soviet Union were still very traditional and almost universally considered as biologically determined, while sexuality was mostly a taboo topic in public discourse. To actively reflect on and question the gender norms around her as El'vira Shataeva did, was exceptional. It explains also why her women's teams had to be framed

within the Soviet discourses of collective strength and disciplined sportsmanship and any exploits as Soviet, rather than as female, successes.

On the other hand, women's silence and unwillingness to engage themselves in such male-dominated structures as yearbooks or formal organization posts – something that is not restricted to the Soviet Union - must not only be read as a one-sided exclusion. They can also be interpreted as a refusal to engage in structures and practices which some, even many, women climbers found unattractive. At their 50th anniversary meet, RHM members proudly announced that they still do not have statutes, formal written procedures, protocols or most other attributes of a 'proper' organization.⁹⁶ Shataeva's women's group, too, in their makeshift separate 'commune' mocked the masculine Soviet (climbing) world of rules, regulations and permits and tried to separate themselves from it, at least temporarily.

All-women groups could find a place in the Soviet sports universe if they inscribed themselves in the official Soviet narrative that the socialist system provided the conditions for women to succeed. Thus, the successful 1972 summiting of Pik Korzhenevskaja was promoted as a *world-wide first*: it was the *Soviet Union* who had 'put' the first four women on this mountain, therefore underlining once more the superiority of its system.⁹⁷ Apart from that, in the Soviet Union, just as everywhere else, women climbers could be included in mixed groups and especially as part of a (familial) couple without shaking the established order. But any all-women group, self-organized and self-reliant, had an inherently subversive aspect. After all, if such a group worked and possibly even worked well, how did that reflect on the patriarchal, male-dominated Soviet system as a whole?

A Success, but not for Soviet Women

The premiere of the Pamir camp seems to have been deemed successful by the mountaineering authorities, despite the many fatalities. It was repeated the following year, this time accompanied by a second international camp in the Caucasus. Over the next years, several hundred foreign mountaineers visited the Soviet Union this way each summer, often combining their climbing stays with excursions to cultural or natural sights, combining sports and leisure.⁹⁸ The camp administration was to rest in the same trusted hands for many years to come, building up a continuing level of expertise. After the end of the Soviet Union, the Pamir camp went into private ownership but still exists today.⁹⁹ The income derived from these camps helped to build up Soviet mountaineering's international activities, while the contacts established in 1974 led to successive meetings. Vladimir Shataev and other (male) Soviet climbers travelled to the US several times, meeting and climbing with members of the former American team with which they had formed good relationships. US climbers in turn visited the Soviet Union again.¹⁰⁰ While Soviet- American political relations were becoming more strained after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, contacts and

visiting possibilities for climbers and tourists (albeit always strongly monitored and restrained) were to remain until the end of the Soviet Union – in this regard, the results of political *Détente* were lasting, if limited.

Women's share in high-altitude climbing continued to develop and become more visible. Wanda Rutkiewicz – who visited the Pamir camp shortly after the disaster – realized the first climb of Gasherbrum III in 1975 together with Alison Chatwick-Oniszkiewicz, and Krzysztof Zdzitowiecki. Arlene Blum successfully led the first women's expedition on Annapurna in 1978. Heidi Lüdi went on to climb many more mountains all over the world. She was and still is an active member of RHM and an avid sportswoman after her professional retirement.¹⁰¹

In the Soviet Union, however, it would take until the late 1980s until the concept of women's expedition mountaineering was taken up again. As they began the inquest into the Pamir fatalities, the Soviet authorities (temporarily) banned women's groups from high-altitude climbing.¹⁰² This was never made an official policy – it would have been in blatant opposition to the Soviet Union's proclaimed gender equality. But after the deaths of 1974, all-women's high-altitude climbing completely disappeared in the Soviet Union, as both Soviet and Western mountaineers noted.¹⁰³ It took until the late 1980s to change this. At last, in the summer of 1991, the accomplished Russian mountaineer and 'snow leopard' El'vira Nasonova (b. 1941) led a group of ten women successfully to the top of the Soviet Union's highest mountain, Pik Communism. With this success, a Soviet women's expedition to Everest finally seemed in sight - even the Soviet sports ministry was open to the idea. By the end of the year, however, the Soviet Union was no more.¹⁰⁴ It had neither kept its promise to liberate women from dreary housework nor had it really allowed them the same chances as men, despite constantly pronouncing to be the land of equality for women. However, the official denial of any discrimination against women within the Soviet Union made it difficult to even address this gap, as the (very) few feminist activists in the Soviet Union were to learn.¹⁰⁵ Mostly, women's achievements, and especially achievements of women-only groups were only promoted by the state if they could be used as proof of Soviet superiority over the West. With official permits required for every undertaking and the state as the sole sponsor of expeditions, Soviet women climbers were possibly even more dependent on men's decisions than Western women.

Notes

1. For an outline of the camp's activities, see the Russian brochure 'Pamir 74'. Folder "Camps", archive of the "Union Internationale des Associations d'Alpinisme", Berne, Switzerland. (Hereafter, UIAA archives.). The autobiographical accounts dealing with the camp will be explored in detail below.
2. A good overview on the paradoxes of *Détente*: Jussi M. Hanhimäki, 'Conservative Goals, Revolutionary Outcomes: The Paradox of *Détente*: *Détente*: A Three-Way Discussion', *Cold War History* 8, no. 4 (November 2008): 503–12.

3. On cultural contacts, leisure and travel in Détente, see Simo Mikkonen and Pia Koivunen, *Beyond the Divide: Entangled Histories of Cold War Europe* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018) which especially highlights the role of European actors within this period of Cold War history. I have also very much profited from the presentations of Sylvain Dufraisse, 'L'évènement sportif fut-il un espace d'échanges au moment de la Détente? Regard soviétiques' and Sonja Grossmann, 'Rencontrer des amis. Helsinki et les activités d'amitié soviétiques' (papers presented at 'Réseaux transnationaux et échanges culturels Est-Ouest pendant la Détente', Fribourg, Switzerland, November 12, 2018).
4. On women's expeditions see Martina Gugglberger, 'Climbing Beyond the Summits: Social and Global Aspects of Women's Expeditions in the Himalayas', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 4 (2015): 597–613; Sherry B. Ortner, *Life and Death on Mt. Everest: Sherpas and Himalayan Mountaineering*, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 217–47.
5. On Rutkiewicz see Martina Gugglberger, 'Wanda Rutkiewicz – Crossing Boundaries in Women's Mountaineering', *Sport in Society* 20, no. 8 (2017): 1059–76.
6. Important printed autobiographical accounts of the camp include François Valla and Jean-Paul Zuanon, *Pamir: Escalade d'un 7000 au pays des Kirghizes* (Domène: Sogirep, 1976); Robert W. Craig, *Storm and Sorrow in the High Pamirs* (Seattle, WA: Mountaineers, 1977); Arlene Blum, *Breaking Trail: A Climbing Life* (New York: Scribner, 2005); John Evans, *The Pamirs: 1974 USA-USSR Pamirs Expedition*, Climbing Journals of John Evans, vol. 4 (Westwater Books/amazon.com Kindle, 2015).
7. Shataeva has especially attracted the attention of writers on female mountaineering outside the Soviet Union or Russia respectively. See for a recent biography Karin Steinbach and Caroline Fink, *Erste am Seil: Pionierinnen in Fels und Eis. Wenn Frauen in den Bergen ihren eigenen Weg gehen* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2013), 127–33; Caroline Fink, 'Die unbekante Russin: Elvira Shataeva gehörte Anfang der siebziger Jahre zu den besten Bergsteigerinnen ihrer Zeit', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, June 3, 2011, sec. Reisen- Freizeit, <http://www.nzz.ch/lebensart/reisen-freizeit/die-unbekante-russin-1.10798982> (accessed January 12, 2015). A good overview of the events and an assessment is Frith Maier, 'A Women's Climbing Tragedy Remembered: Peak Lenin, 20 Years Ago', *Climbing Magazine*, August/September 1994, 30–3. All accounts are based on the recollections of El'vira Shataeva's husband, Vladimir N. Shataev, *Kategoriia trudnosti*, 3rd ed. (Moskva: I.V. Balabanov, 2001) which was originally published in 1977. One exception is the Italian climber and mountain journalist Linda Cottino who had access to materials and information personally provided by Vladimir Shataev in addition to the printed narrative. Linda Cottino, *Qui Elja, mi sentite?: otto donne sul Pik Lenin* (Torino: Vivalda, 2001). Her account explicitly includes fictionalized sections, however, and since it does not contain footnotes, it is at times difficult to ascertain which sections are more closely based on the sources and which are purely fictional (personal discussion with Linda Cottino, August 18, 2018, Meiringen). On the absence of other sources, see section 'The missing voices'.
8. The separate analysis of access, treatment and recognition was suggested by Eric Boutroy (with Cécile Ottogalli), 'Female Rope-Teams: A Social Innovation between Emancipation and Domination' (paper presented at "Women and Mountaineering", Hittisau, Austria, November 22, 2018).
9. I will use the term mountaineering interchangeably with climbing throughout the essay.
10. Rachel Elizabeth Dilley and Sheila Janet Scraton, 'Women, Climbing and Serious Leisure', *Leisure Studies* 29, no. 2 (2010): 125–41.

11. See Eva Maurer, 'An Academic Escape to the Periphery? The Social and Cultural Milieu of Soviet Mountaineering from the 1920s to the 1960s', in *Euphoria and Exhaustion. Modern Sport in Soviet Culture and Society*, ed. Sandra Budy, Nikolaus Katzer, Alexandra Köhring, and Manfred Zeller. (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2010), 159–78; Eva Maurer, 'Männerurlaub? Geschlechterkonstruktionen im sowjetischen Alpinistenlager der Nachkriegszeit, 1945-1956' *Voyage: Jahrbuch für Reise- und Tourismusforschung* 8 (2009): 70–85.
12. This again was reinforced by the early association with exploration and the socio-cultural milieu from which they stemmed: more educated than average, male, urban and middle-class. On these topics, see for example Dagmar Günther, *Alpine Quergänge : Kulturgeschichte des bürgerlichen Alpinismus (1870-1930)* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1998); Tanja Wirz, *Gipfelstürmerinnen: Eine Geschlechtergeschichte des Alpinismus in der Schweiz 1840-1940* (Baden: Hier Jetzt, Verlag für Kultur und Geschichte, 2007), esp. 71-87.
13. In addition to the mentioned three peaks, the five 7000-meter mountains encompassed Pik Pobedy (now Jengish Chokusu) (7439 m) as well as Khan-Tengri (7010 m), both in the Tien Shan. Despite the fact that the height of Khan Tengri could also be calculated at 6695 m, during the existence of the Soviet Union, Khan-Tengri was considered a 7000-meter mountain. See <https://www.summitpost.org/page/150339> (accessed March 4, 2019).
14. To facilitate legibility, I will use simplified mountain names as above.
15. Russian brochure 'Pamir 74', 3. Folder "Camps", UIAA archives. Mass ascents were popular mostly in the Stalinist 1930s, but existed until the end of the Soviet Union.
16. Actually, Pik Lenin had already been scaled by German members of a mixed German- Soviet team in 1928. Eva Maurer, *Wege zum Pik Stalin : Sowjetische Alpinisten, 1928- 1953* (Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2010), 115–22.
17. Eva Maurer, 'Cold War, 'Thaw' and 'Everlasting Friendship': Soviet Mountaineers and Mount Everest, 1953–1960', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 4 (2009): 484–500.
18. On the prolonged process of application and acceptance, see the correspondence in folder 'URSS / Bulgarie', 1956 – 1967, UIAA Archives. On the UIAA, see Jon Mathieu, 'Globalisation of Alpinism in the Twentieth Century: Publicity and Organisational Endeavours' (author's manuscript), *The International Journal of the History of Sport* (forthcoming 2020): 6–10. Many thanks to Jon Mathieu for sharing his manuscript with me.
19. Correspondence between M. Anufrikov / A. Borovikov (Fédération soviétique d'alpinisme) et J. Juge / P. Bossus (UIAA) concerning the General Assembly in Tbilissi, Georgia, in 1973. Unpaginated, November 1973. Folder 'URSS - Bulgarie', UIAA Archives.
20. See for a personal account Malcolm Slessor, *Red Peak* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964).
21. Valla and Zuanon, *Pamir*.
22. Vitaly Abalakov and Anatolii Ovchinnikov, 'Alpiniade internationale au Pamir', *Union Internationale des Associations d'alpinisme Bulletin / The International Union of Alpinist Associations Bulletin / Internationaler Verein der Alpinistenverbände: Bulletin* 54 (1973): 9–10.
23. Union Internationale des Associations d'alpinisme Bulletin / The International Union of Alpinist Associations Bulletin / Internationaler Verein der Alpinistenverbände, *Bulletin* 54 (June 1973): 9; and 55 (August 1973): 2–3. Possibly the name *alpiniade* (an allusion to *spartakiada*, a classic Socialist sports term) was considered too ideologically charged, since the authorities afterwards simply called it a 'camp'.

24. Brochure 'Pamir-74: International Alpine Camp USSR'. Participants paid the sum of \$750 USD which included everything but the flight to Moscow – including a three-day stay in Moscow with a full program, all transports within the Soviet Union, food and lodgings as well as medical support. On the difficulties of procuring convertible foreign currencies see also Gugglberger, 'Wanda Rutkiewicz – Crossing Boundaries in Women's Mountaineering', 1063f.
25. Aneta Marek, 'Pasma Hindukusz jako cel eksploracji polskiej w latach 1960-1983 / Hindu Kush range as a destination of the Polish exploration in 1960-1983', *Ślupskie Prace Geograficzne* 10 (2013): 89–108: 92f.
26. See for example Maurer, 'Cold War, "Thaw" and "Everlasting Friendship"'.
27. Abalakov and Ovchinnikov, 'Alpiniade international au Pamir'.
28. Craig, *Storm and Sorrow in the High Pamirs*, 4. 29. Ibid., 4–8.
30. Blum, *Breaking Trail*, 161.
31. Evans, *The Pamirs*, sec. 96,
https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00V58XK90/ref=as_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B00V58XK90&linkCode=as2&tag=backleft-20&linkId=Y5W5WX4ZTQHDGOCN (accessed May 2, 2018).
32. On the role of women in Soviet Sports, see among others Stefan Wiederkehr, "'We Shall Never Know the Exact Number of Men Who Have Competed in the Olympics Posing as Women': Sport, Gender Verification and the Cold War', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 4 (2009): 556–72.
33. Evans, *The Pamirs: 1974 USA-USSR Pamirs Expedition*, sec. 112.
34. Blum, *Breaking Trail*, 161.
35. Craig, *Storm and Sorrow in the High Pamirs*, 11.
36. See their interesting reminiscences: 'Pamir-74 glazami iaponskikh uchastnikov', *Pamir / Gory Mira / mountain.ru*, http://www.mountain.ru/world_mounts/pamirs/2004/Shataeva_pamir1974/ (accessed March 4, 2019).
37. Valla and Zuanon, *Pamir*, 11, 20–23.
38. Blum, *Breaking Trail*, 162.
39. On the different groups within the camp, see Valla and Zuanon, *Pamir*, 108–10. The number of women is calculated from various accounts and statistics of participants themselves. For a table of ascents, see 'Pamir-74 glazami iaponskikh uchastnikov'. By far the largest foreign group was formed by Austrians who sent over 60 participants. All other nationalities came in smaller groups of maximum 20–30 people. According to one calculation, 9 women reached the summit of Peak Lenin. We know of at least 12 foreign women who were present in the camp, but I could not verify the numbers without access to the official Soviet list of participants.
40. On the composition of the Dutch group: Interview with Heidi Lüdi, Gerzensee, 14 November 2018, recording in the possession of the author. For an incomplete overview of the Swiss participants of 1974 see: Willy Blaser, 'Verzeichnis der Schweizer 7000er Expeditionen', January 1, 2015. <http://www.willyblaser.ch/media/ch8000/7000erExpeditionen.pdf>, 26–7 (Münkle is missing); and Gerhard Schmatz's account of the camp: 'Dr. Gerhard Schmatz - Pik Lenin', http://www.schmatz-online.com/expeditionen/pik_lenin/pik_lenin.html (accessed August 3, 2018).
41. On RHM, see Nicole Eller Risi, 'Sekt-Picknick auf dem Klein-Titlis - 40 Jahre "Rendez- Vous Hautes Montagnes"', *Ängelberger Zeyt: Engelberger Jahrbuch* 2 (2009): 81–7; Karin Steinbach Tarnutzer, 'Wenn das Klettererlebnis Frauen verbindet', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, September 20, 2013, <https://www.nzz.ch/wenn-das-klettererlebnis->

- frauen-
verbindet-1.18153007 (accessed November 11, 2018); web page 'History', *RHM - Rendez Vous Hautes Montagnes*, <https://www.rhm-climbing.net/history/> (accessed August 6, 2018).
42. See Felicitas von Reznicek, *Von der Krinoline zum sechsten Grad: Leistungen der Frau am Berg* (Salzburg, Stuttgart: Das Bergland-Buch, 1967).
 43. Indeed, Reznicek thought that women would be more likely to be accepted if they were 'charming' and would not 'pursue radical principles': Felicitas von Reznicek, 'Rendez- Vous Hautes Montagnes', *RHM Journal* 1 (1969): 6.
 44. [RHM] Mitgliederliste [1974], p. 2. Folder 'RHVM', UIAA Archives.
 45. There is no central archive of RHM, given the 'unofficial' nature - various longtime members have partial archives. I had access to many materials from Heidi Lüdi as well as to parts of the RHM correspondence with the UIAA and joined materials in the UIAA archives in Berne.
 46. F. v. Reznicek (RHM) to J. Juge (UIAA), 11 November 1973 (and following correspondence), Folder 'RVHM', UIAA Archives.
 47. Blum, *Breaking Trail*, 153f., 161.
 48. The 40th anniversary of Margarete Münkle's membership was noted in *Club-Nachrichten: Sektion Piz Platta SAC* 14, No. 56, October 2002, p. 12, <http://www.sacpizplatta.ch/wp/wp-content/uploads/Nachrichten/Okt2002/Nachrichten.pdf> (accessed August 18, 2019). Unfortunately, I could not gather much information about Münkle's mountaineering career and due to her age it was not possible to interview her for this article. According to Heidi Lüdi, Münkle was originally from the south of Germany and had worked at a bank as an executive secretary (Mail from Heidi Lüdi, August 5, 2019). Margarete Münkle died aged 99 in November 2019 during the final notes to this paper: see her obituaries in <https://wilhelm.gemeinsam-trauern.net/Begleiten/margarete-muenkle/Anzeigen> and <https://www.todesanzeigenportal.ch/todesanzeige/M%C3%BCnkle/Margarete/> (accessed December 21, 2019).
 49. Interview with Heidi Lüdi, Gerzensee, November 14, 2018; see also Blum, *Breaking Trail*, 157, 159.
 50. Interview with Heidi Lüdi, Gerzensee, March 11, 2019. Notes in possession of the author.
 51. The separate women's club (Schweizerischer Frauen-Alpen-Club SFAC) existed from 1918 to 1980, when the two clubs finally united, but was not a place Lüdi felt at ease. Berne's academic mountain club (Akademischer Alpenclub Bern) did accept women only in 1984 when Heidi Lüdi became its first female member: Kuhn, Jürg *100 Jahre AACB. Bern: Akademischer Alpenclub*, 2005, p. 168f. For an introduction to the SFAC see Caroline Fink, 'Auf dass der Club euch scheide', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, April 19, 2013, <https://www.nzz.ch/auf-dass-der-klub-euch-scheide-1.18066986> (accessed March 11, 2019).
 52. Interview with Heidi Lüdi, Gerzensee, March 11, 2019. Notes in possession of the author.
 53. It seems to have been Felicitas von Reznicek herself who wanted to include more women into the RHM team. A letter sent to Heidi Lüdi from the Pamir camp administration originally even spoke of three places for American women that RHM had applied for and pointed out that all American participation had to go by the official American delegation: Letter from M. Monastyrskii, Director of the Pamir camp, to Heidi Lüdi, April 30, 1974, from the personal archive of Heidi Lüdi. See also Blum, *Breaking Trail*, 161.
 54. See the literature on Shataeva in endnote 7, especially Shataev, *Kategoriia trudnosti*, 129–62.
 55. The names of Shataeva's seven team members can be found here: 'Tsena

- voskhozhdeniia – zhizn': Tragicheskaia smert' 8 al'pinistok u Pika Lenina', *Kul' turologiia*, <https://kulturologia.ru/blogs/210116/28118/> (accessed December 16, 2019). On Liudmila Manzharova see Nasonova, El'vira, 'Nenuzhnye pobedy' in *Led i plamen'*. *Al'manakh*, ed. Al'pinistskii orden 'Edel'veys', vol. 12 (Moskva: Izd. Dom I. Balabanova 2018), 113–27.
56. On the post-war reconstruction of Soviet mountaineering infrastructure, see Maurer, *Wege zum Pik Stalin*, 229–68.
 57. See for a short biography <http://www.alpkclubspb.ru/persona/chataev.htm> and Shataev, *Kategoriia trudnosti*.
 58. Interview with El'vira Nasonova in Liudmila Vertiaeva, '1974: Tragediia metelicy'. *Veter stranstvii*, 2002. <https://topzvezdi.ru/watch/NIS264sCtmM> (accessed August 22, 2019).
 59. Soviet mountaineering veteran, Viktor Baybara, confirmed this in a personal discussion with the author, August 20, 2019, Bern.
 60. Antonina Son, 'K 45-letii voskhozhdeniia zhenskoi komandy na Pik Evgenii Korzhenevskoi', in *Led i plamen'*. *Al'manakh*, ed. Al'pinistskii orden 'Edel'veys', vol. 12 (Moskva: Izd. Dom I. Balabanova 2018), 108–12; 'Zhenshchiny v istorii al'pinizma I skalolazaniia', *Forum saita Baurock.ru* <http://www.baurock.ru/phforum/index.php?s=9c5fe8a80e6ecddc29b7d49d9f2e071e&automodule=blog&blogid=113&showentry=981> (accessed December 28, 2014); 'Rozhalskaia Galina Konstantinovna', *Necropolural*, <https://sites.google.com/site/necropolural/gorodarossii/celabinsk/mitrofanovskoe-kladbise/alfavitnyj-spisok-zahoroneni/rozalskaagalina-konstantinovna> (accessed November 19, 2018); Jurij Tsenin, 'Semitysjachnik vzjat!' *Rabotnitsa*, no. 12 (1972): 21–2.
 61. Gennadii Starikov, 'Tragedija na Pike Lenina 1974. Ljudi i gori. Mountain.RU', http://www.mountain.ru/article/article_display1.php?article_id=3873 (accessed March 11, 2019).
 62. Tsenin, 'Semitysiachnik vziat!', 21–2.
 63. This is mentioned in Cottino, *Qui Elja, mi sentite?*, 16.
 64. On Vitalii Abalakov (1906–1986) see for example <http://www.alpkclubspb.ru/persona/abalakov-v.htm> (accessed January 4, 2019).
 65. 'Snow Leopards (Snezhny bars). [List of Awarded Titles since 1961]', <http://www.russianclimb.com/snowleopard/table.htm> (accessed March 4, 2019).
 66. See the narrative in Cottino, *Qui Elja, mi sentite?*, 8–10; the latter is corroborated by Son, 'K 45-letii voskhozhdeniia zhenskoi komandy na Pik Evgenii Korzhenevskoi'.
 67. Personal communication from Vladimir Shataev and Viktor Baibara, e-mail to the author, August 20, 2019; see also Steinbach and Fink, *Erste am Seil*, 128;
 68. See Gugglberger, *Climbing Beyond the Summits*. For 'overprotection', see Blum's account of their Annapurna expedition: Blum, *Breaking Trail*, 218.
 69. Blum, *Breaking Trail*, 156f.
 70. Interview with Heidi Lüdi, Gerzensee, November 14, 2018. Notes in possession of the author.
 71. Blum, *Breaking Trail*, 156f.
 72. Shataev, *Kategoriia trudnosti*, 132f.
 73. *Buriam i vetram naperekor (In Spite of Storms and Winds)*, dir. by P Viainastu, (TsSDF: 1974), <http://net-film.ru/en/film-7460/> (accessed January 12, 2015).
 74. The high importance of personal relations in Soviet mountaineering was stressed by Viktor Baybara in an interview, Bern, August 20, 2019. El'vira Nasonova – possibly the strongest woman climber in the Soviet Union at that time – was not invited to come along. Interview in Vertiaeva, '1974: Tragediia metelicy'.

75. Blum, *Breaking Trail*, 156.
76. *Ibid.*, 169.
77. For accounts, see for example Craig, *Storm and Sorrow in the High Pamirs*; Evans, *The Pamirs: 1974 USA-USSR Pamirs Expedition*.
78. On Anja Vögele, see 'Frauen: Konkurrenz am Berg', *Der Spiegel* 35, August 26, 1974, 112 <https://magazin.spiegel.de/EpubDelivery/spiegel/pdf/41651461> (accessed August 18, 2019).
79. Blum, *Breaking Trail*, 168–74.
80. Christopher S. Wren, '8 Soviet Women Climbers Killed By Storm in Lenin Peak Ascent', *The New York Times*, August 13, 1974, in *New York Times Archives*: <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/08/13/archives/8-sovietwomen-climbers-killed-by-storm-in-lenin-peak-ascent.html> (accessed November 19, 2018).
81. A. Poliakov, 'S goriami ne shutiat', *Sovetskij sport*, August 14, 1974.
82. The author was an experienced mountaineer himself. On his biography, see Maurer, *Wege zum Pik Stalin*, 196f.
83. See Maurer, *Wege zum Pik Stalin*, esp. 202–6.
84. Poliakov, 'S goriami ne shutiat'.
85. Jean Juge, 'Letter to Vitaly Abalakov', September 2, 1974, Folder 'Camps', UIAA Archives, Berne accessed (Translation from the French Eva Maurer). Juge addressed Abalakov as 'Mon cher Vitali' and used the *tu* form of address reserved for close friends and family.
86. Shataev, *Kategoriia Trudnosti*, 156f. Only in 1985 did an article in the national newspaper 'Literaturnaya gazeta' write about this mission: Gennadij Bocharov, 'Poka stoit Pamir', *Literaturnaya gazeta*, March 27, 1985, p. 13. Eva Isenschmid's body could not be found a year later: personal communication from Heidi Lüdi and Viktor Baybara, August 20, 2019. Notes in possession of the author.
87. Valla and Zuanon, *Pamir*; Craig, *Storm and Sorrow in the High Pamirs*; Shataev, *Kategoriia trudnosti*; Evans, *The Pamirs*.
88. U. Achermann, 'Ein Schweizer schildert die Bergtragödie am Pik Lenin', *Tagesanzeiger*, August 15, 1974, p. 12 and a short notice in *Der Bund*, August 16, 1974. From the personal archive of Heidi Lüdi.
89. Many thanks to Sylvain Dufraisse for the discussion and for confirming my thoughts on this topic.
90. Shataev, *Kategoriia trudnosti*, 147. The book has been translated into Polish in 2015 and reprinted in Russia several times, the last (6th) edition in 2018. Shataev here alludes to the 'rest day' the women took immediately before the storm of the summit. However, as one US reviewer pointed out when the English translation came out in 1987, Shataev's endorsement of women's expeditions is never explicit but rather inferred by his discussions of women's achievements: William Garner, 'Review: Degrees of Difficulty', *The American Alpine Journal* 62 (1988): 303–4. Indeed, Shataev had to fight in 1977 to include his reflections on the death of his wife: Maier, 'A Women's Climbing Tragedy Remembered', 33.
91. See the notes in Cottino, *Qui Elja, mi sentite?*, 160.
92. On the relevance of Shataev's book, see also Ekaterina Ch., 'Al'pinisty knizhek ne chitaiut [Interview with Grigorii Sid'ko]', *4sport.Ua*, <https://4sport.ua/articles?id=14393> (accessed March 9, 2019).
93. Blum, *Breaking Trail*.
94. See Cheri Colby Langdell, *Adrienne Rich: The Moment of Change* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 145f.
95. Shataev, *Kategoriia trudnosti*, 138.
96. 50th anniversary meet of RHM in Innertkirchen, August 8, 2018. See also their

- RHM: About us, <https://www.rhm-climbing.net/about-us/> (accessed October 7, 2019).
97. Tsenin, 'Semitysiachnik vziat!', 21–22.
 98. See the correspondence in folder 'Camps', 1974-1984, UIAA archives.
 99. 'IMC Pamir About Company', <http://www.tundukconcept.com/imcpamir/index.htm> (accessed February 25, 2019).
 100. Shataev, *Kategoriia trudnosti*, chaps. 13, 14 and 16; interview with Viktor Baybara on the 1976 US mountaineering visit to the USSR, August 20, 2019, Bern. Notes in possession of the author.
 101. Gugglberger, 'Wanda Rutkiewicz', 1064; Blum, *Breaking Trail*, 182, 216–36. Interviews with Heidi Lüdi, November 14, 2018, March 11, 2019. Notes in possession of the author.
 102. Cottino, *Qui Elja, mi sentite?*, 155.
 103. Interview with Viktor Baybara, August 20, 2019, see also Garner, 'Review: Degrees of Difficulty', 303–4; Frith Maier, 'A Women's Climbing Tragedy Remembered: Peak Lenin, 20 Years Ago', 33. In 2002, Vladimir Shataev confirmed the existence of this former Soviet policy on female groups in an interview: Vertiaeva, '1974: Tragediia metelicy'.
 104. Pavel P. Zacharov and El'vira T. Nasonova, 'Vydaiushchiesia semeinye pary otechestvennogo al'pinizma – Balinskii Anatolii Pavlovich – Nasonova El'vira Timofeevna. Liudi i gori', *mountain.ru*, http://www.mountain.ru/article/article_display1.php?article_id=5775&code=1 (accessed December 28, 2014).
 105. 'Feminism in the Soviet Union [Interview with Tatyana Mamonova]', *Harvard International Review* 3, no. 3 (1980): 6–7.

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