Control and subversion: gender, islam, and socialism in Tajikistan
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CHAPTER 1
CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Theoretical Framework

Power Relations

Zora and her husband Fayziddin are from two different parts of Tajikistan. She from the town of Ura Tyube in the north, while he is from a village near Kurg Teppa in the south. They met and married at university and afterwards stayed in Dushanbe. They have two children, a daughter Dila, and a son, Ali. Although Fayziddin earned much less money than Zora he considered himself head of the family and insisted that everyone should obey him, so that despite the fact that his wife held a taxing job, he always refused to help in the house. It was not business to do "women's" work. On the contrary Zora must wait on him, as a woman should. If she protested he would beat her. Zora was often very tired and could cope with all the housework on her own. With only one daughter to help her, she found herself forced to co-opt her son into assisting her as well.

Fayziddin, however, was more concerned with the effect this was having on children's upbringing and especially on the family image. It made him very nervous to imagine the neighbours' comments about them. Therefore, whenever he came home and found Ali helping his mother he would beat Zora and threaten to repeat this if he caught her encouraging her son to behave in 'womanly' ways again. 'Boys do not do housework', Fayziddin told Ali over and over and, just in case telling was not enough, he beat it into him also. Eventually Ali learned his lesson, so that even in his father's absence he would categorically refuse to do any sort of work in the home, including taking out the refuse, ignoring his mother when she told him this was a man's job.

Fayziddin never laid a finger on Dila because her upbringing was her mother's responsibility. It is not a man's job to raise his daughter. He did, however, check how Zora was fulfilling her task. Fayziddin was a very strict father and wanted his children to behave as he and his siblings had done in the village where he grew up. Zora was strict with her daughter, but Fayziddin was much stricter. Although they lived in Dushanbe he would have preferred her to dress in traditional clothes all the time, even at university. In Soviet times there had been a rule that all students must wear Russian dress. Dila had been allowed to comply with this at school but by the time she attended university the Soviet Union had ended, and its rules were no longer important. Fayziddin was determined that his daughter was not going to show her legs in front of the male students. She was going to wear the traditional bag trousers under her dress. Dila was very upset at the idea of being the only girl in her class to wear traditional dress, but she could not oppose her father directly. Instead she begged her mother to intercede with him.
Foucault’s theories on power (1980a, 1990) provide useful insights into family dynamics such as these. According to him, all social intercourse is shot through with power relations (Foucault 1980a: 90). These are never simply one-sided, rather in all personal interactions a dominant position of power tends to be met with a corresponding counter force, so that the whole social system functions by way of a multiplicity of points of pressure and resistance (Foucault 1990: 94-96), just as can be found in Zora’s family.

But the power exerted by these family members is far from equal. The fact that Dila is unable to use speech to articulate her opinions to her father demonstrates her relative powerlessness, since the ability to perform speech acts, that is, the capacity people have to express themselves in words in front of others, is an important measure of their relative power (Langton 1993: 314-5 in Butler 1997a: 86). Speech acts are, in my view, not limited to linguistic speech but can also be carried out through actions. Dila may have been silenced linguistically but she could legitimately show her resentment at her father’s injunctions by, for instance, refusing to eat, or to do housework. These are both strategies Tajik girls traditionally use to express feelings when they are verbally silenced (Peshcherova 1976: 37).

The ability to perform speech acts is not fixed but varies with circumstances. Almost everyone experiences both situations in which they are permitted to express themselves in speech acts and others when they are silenced. Thus, while Dila cannot directly oppose her father she is able to scold her brother, since although male he is younger than she is. Nevertheless, it is clear that at all times girls possess less linguistic power than their parents, particularly their fathers. Fayziddin and his family do not live in a social vacuum. As head of the family he may be powerful at home but outside it he is vulnerable to pressure from the community, which censures fathers whose children do not conform. Therefore, to keep his own place in society he has to put constraints on his children. Foucault (1980a) explains that power is something that circulates, that it functions during everyday interactions at the level of the family, the community, and other basic units of society, through strategies of exclusion and surveillance that he calls the ‘micro-mechanisms of power’ (1980a: 96-102). In my exploration of how these are used for the control of Tajik society I start at the lowest level of social organisation with gender norms and, following Foucault’s concept of an *ascending* analysis of power1 (op. cit: 99), work upwards to show how social control in Tajikistan is strongly organised around the dual entities of gender and age.

*Gender Norms*

Gender is a much used term but one whose definition has never been completely agreed upon. It is often used by feminists to indicate the social construction of masculinity and femininity, as opposed to the biological male/female sexed bodies. My usage does not entirely coincide with this but takes it a stage further. Starting from the ideas of Butler I define gender as: a culture-specific ideal, varying over time, that males and females are supposed to live up to in order to become intelligible to, and accepted members of, their own communities. It is an ideal that remains tenuous because it is never fully internalised, never quite lived up to (Butler 1995a: 31-2). The internalisation of gender ideals on its own is not

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1 Emphasis in the original.
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sufficient. In order to become meaningful gender must be performed, not once but reiteratively (Butler 1993: 95).

Performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act’, nor as a mechanical repetition of the norms (Butler 1997b: 16), but, rather, as ‘the reiterative and citational practice’ (1993: x) ‘which brings into being or enacts that which it names, and so marks the constitutive or productive power of discourse’ (1995b: 134). According to Butler performance cannot be assumed at will but is an integral part of the gendered subject, transformable only by way of minute variations (1993: x). But gender is not reducible merely to the performable. Performance can only reproduce an already-existing ideal. ‘The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self’ (Butler 1990: 140).

When Ali helps his mother in the house he is contravening masculine gender norms that state that it is women not men who do housework. Such norms are established ‘through a stylized repetition of acts’, sedimented into an effect of timelessness (ibid) generally called tradition. Over time this sedimentation gives the appearance of something normal and natural and once this stage has been reached it is only a very small step before what seems natural acquires regulatory force (ibid). The more each norm is reiterated, the more natural it appears and therefore the more important it becomes not to contravene it, as this will appear almost like going against nature. Maintaining such norms, therefore, comes to seem essential for human survival, which may account for Fayziddin’s apparently extreme reaction to his son’s helping in the home.

The appearance of timelessness given by social norms is always deceptive. What actually happens is that variations continually insinuate themselves, only to be apparently seamlessly resedimented and equally seamlessly accepted as tradition, as if no change had taken place. Nevertheless, looking back in time it is possible to discern differences (Butler 1995b: 135).

The norms regulating Ali’s and Dila’s subordination are politically formed expressions of the social ideals that have developed in Tajikistan. The behavioural patterns that upon repetition form norms are not a matter of arbitrary choice but are directly related to the hegemonic ideology of each society (Gramsci 1971: 12), which, in effect, is ‘the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas’ (Marx 1846a: 64). Changes in ideas will be related to changes in material circumstances (Marx 1846b: 3). This does not mean that it is only the material that counts but rather that ideology and the material situation cannot be viewed as disjunct phenomena. They are both effects of the same cultural processes. Variations in gender norms are an inevitable concomitant of material change. At the same time subjects can use variation for deliberate subversion of the norms.

When gender norms are well established it may not be necessary to articulate them. They may simply be taken for granted. It is only through tension around some aspect of them that they enter public discourse. The result of this is that they gain explicit definition, after which silent variation becomes considerably more difficult. Since they have been publicly defined everyone knows what they should be and their preservation can become a weapon in power struggles (cf. Foucault 1990: 101-2). Upholding the norms then becomes all the more vital since any change can be exploited as a weakness in the society’s defences.

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2 Emphasis in the original.
De Vries recounts how among the Turkish community in the Netherlands self-styled arbiters of community values would spy on youngsters, particularly on girls, pouncing on the slightest contraventions of the norms and making the consequences as painful as possible, in order to discourage others. Through such communal policing these people would exert power on the community as a whole with the aim of preserving its cultural values. The potential for the values of the host community to appear seductive to the youth of the immigrant community made it all the more imperative to guard against change. Meanwhile, in Turkey itself changes in gender performance occurred so gradually that people were often not even aware that they had taken place. Thus, while at home the traditions have been varied, the community in diaspora attempts to maintain those they originally brought with them when they emigrated (De Vries 1987: 19, 23, 25, 27).

Invaded and colonised by the culturally alien Russians, the Tajik people were turned into a minority almost over night when their homeland was incorporated into the huge Soviet Union. The same tension over values occurred here as with the minority communities in the West, except that here the entire Tajik nation was at risk and furthermore, unlike the Netherlands, the 'host' community made a determined and organised onslaught on the minority community’s values. Withstanding this required an especially strong resistance, which took the form of hardening the social norms. In face of the alien values of the 'host' community, the Tajik minority, like the Turkish one, could not afford to make any changes in their own norms that would appear as an acceptance of the host communities’ ideology. It has been noted for Turks living in the Netherlands, that behaviour that in Turkey would be considered 'modern' is in this case labelled 'Dutch', and thus virtually by definition interdicted (Brouwer 1998: 154). Likewise, in Tajikistan behaviour that otherwise might have been considered modern is labelled 'Russian'. If a difference in norms between the Turkish community in diaspora and that in the homeland can already be seen in the relatively short time that these communities have been in the West imagine what the much longer period of Soviet rule must have done for the Tajik community. In both these cases, it is notable that it was gender identities, particularly feminine gender identities, that were central to the struggles around community values (cf. Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1992: 113ff).

Gender Identity and the Theories of Butler

The work of Butler has been invaluable in helping me conceptualise a number of important aspects of the functioning of Tajik social norms for which I have been able to find no other convincing theoretical framework that has enabled me to make sense of my observations in Tajikistan. There are, however, several aspects of her work that I find problematic.

The first of these is her approach to the relation of such modalities as ethnicity, class, and race to gender identity. Having stated that she finds these indispensable (Butler 1990: 3) she then proceeds to ignore them throughout the remainder of her discussions. This may well be intentional because Butler is exploring psychological categories and at the level she is doing this, she may feel that these modalities do not exist as overt signifiers.

But in my view the influence of class, race, and ethnicity is important enough that we cannot afford to ignore them as completely as Butler does. As Moore states, there can be no discourse on gender outside discourses of these modalities (1994b: 20), since there can be no
subject outside them. To assume otherwise is to perpetuate the hegemonic gaze of an elite. In this respect, and contrary to the universalistic approach of most psychoanalytical theory, including that posited by Butler (eg. in 1997b), I believe the psychological development of infants through childhood to adulthood to be culture dependent (cf. Ross & Rapp 1997). In those communities that prize group identity and conformity over all else, it seems likely that individuals, and most especially the young, will be kept subjected to their parents as long as possible so that they develop agency much more slowly than the average middle-class white Westerner.

Weyland (1994) notes that it was traditional in rural Egypt for (male) heads of families to exert strict control over all family members, including adult sons. They did this partly through psychological pressures and partly through their control over economic resources, such as land (Weyland 1994: 163-66). Fayziddin and Zora equally expect their children to remain dependent on them even though the latter are now both in their twenties, and their upbringing has been aimed at preventing them from wishing to break away. This is all the more vital since Tajik parents who cannot keep control over their children, no matter how old, come under strong community censure.

These modalities thus produce highly significant variations in gender identities (Fraser 1995: 159; Chhachhi & Pittin 1996: 93ff; Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994b: 40). In fact, gender performance is always mediated through the cultural behaviour of the individual’s social group, and this group will be qualitatively different depending on ethnicity and class (cf. Schrijvers 1999).

The struggle between Fayziddin and Dila over the type of clothes she should wear to university emphasises the cultural differences between the Russo-Soviet identity emphasised by the state and that of the Tajik community, differences symbolised by whether or not a woman should show her legs in public, something which may appear trivial but which is fundamental to the different concepts of femininity in these two communities. In other words a fundamental cultural difference, perhaps the most fundamental difference is contained within these divergent gender performances. What is at stake here is not just the distinctive traits of each social group’s specific gender norms, but also the strength of the pressure towards conformity, the range of variations in performance acceptable for each gender, and the degree to which performances reflect internalised ideals. Each community is distinctive in respect of these values and they constitute some of the most important features that distinguish societies from one another.

I take issue again with Butler, or at least with Wittig’s position as cited by Butler, on a third point. According to Wittig (heterosexual) men should always be considered to constitute a universal from which all other types, being relative and particular, deviate. As a result there is only one sex, the female since a condition of the existence of sex, and with it gender, is that they must be particular (Butler 1990: 115ff). However, in my opinion, man cannot be considered as a universal either. To do so is to follow the position taken by the elite classes, who consider that their ideals should form the norms to be accepted by the whole of society (cf. Gramsci 1971: 12; Marx 1846a: 64). In practice there are actually significant differences in male gender norms among men from varying ethnic groups and classes. Even within each one of these there may also be marked distinctions in male gender identities. For instance, in Tajikistan the constraints put upon young men such as Ali and other young Tajik men, and
their subordinate relationships in respect of their fathers\(^3\) would suggest that the young of both sexes are subordinated, not just women, so that neither can be said to be without compulsion to perform according to specific communal norms. I would therefore beg to differ from Wittig and say that although there may be a case for male heterosexuality constituting a universal\(^4\), the same cannot be said for masculine gender. The power differential between the hegemonic masculine gender identity (cf. Carrigan et al 1987) of Fayziddin and the subordinate one (cf. Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994a: 3) of his son make it difficult to conceive of men in Tajikistan as a universal ungendered category.

**The Formation of Human Identity**

Something all communities have in common is that their members have to conform to certain traits in order to become intelligible. It is vital for each community that all its members be taught to assume the 'socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility' that will enable them to be recognisable as 'persons' (Butler 1990: 17). And this is fundamentally dependent on their performing gender in accordance with its meaning within that specific social group.

In most societies the first criterion necessary for this is a correctly sexed body, of which social norms generally permit only two types, the male and the female\(^5\). All bodies, whether or not they possess the appropriate genitalia at birth, have to be subsumed under one or other of these labels. While in the West the power to decide the sex of babies with indeterminate sexual organs is invested in the medical profession\(^6\), in the Muslim world this has long been the prerogative of Islamic jurists, who in the Middle Ages produced an immense literature on the subject (Sanders 1991). Nowhere, from mediaeval Islam to modern Europe, is there any suggestion that the opposite approach might be taken and the social categories increased to include persons whose material bodies do not fit into one of the standard two. On the contrary, the material body has consistently been forced to fit into the limited categories of social acceptability\(^7\).

The 'naming' of a baby’s sex at birth (Butler 1997a: 49, 51) is only the start of the process of gendering, whereby children learn to perform the characteristics appropriate for their sex. The second criterion for human intelligibility is that individuals must carry out gender performances in line with the standards for their type of sexed body within that social group. Fayziddin is preoccupied with his children's gender performances precisely because it is only by learning to perform correctly that they can become acceptable members of the Tajik community. Their failure to do so will bring down disgrace on his head.

\(^3\) Compare Kandiyotti's findings that the male child takes on a subservient attitude vis-à-vis adult males similar to that expected of women (1994: 207).

\(^4\) Although even here it seems to me that more fine-grained research into how the members of different groups of heterosexual males experience their sexuality will very likely disprove this as also, of course, the concept of a universal female heterosexuality.

\(^5\) There appear to be some societies, however, where this may be less straightforward (Moore 1994b: 36ff).

\(^6\) See Turner (1999) for a detailed account of how this is done in the West.

\(^7\) For an inside look at the psychological problems this can produce see Turner (1999), as also Foucault on the subject of hermaphroditism (1980b) and Butler’s commentary on it (1990: 93ff).
When Fayziddin beats out of his son the notion that it is acceptable for males to do housework he is endeavouring to inculcate in him those gender norms prevalent in Tajikistan. He has recourse to physical violence to counteract the influence of Zora and ensure that Ali learns to associate doing housework with negative consequences. As Butler states, children internalise gender identities through the reiteration of compulsion to do so (Butler 1993: 94ff), although this does not have to be physical as it was in Ali’s case. Usually constant repetition in itself is sufficient, and indeed more effective, since inducement functions the better the less obvious it is (1997b: 21). When parents subjugate their children in this way, inculcating in them their community’s regulatory norms, they are in essence forming them into what linguistic theory terms subjects (Butler 1995b: 134-6; 1997b: 7-12). Without this effect of subjugation individuals would be as unintelligible to human society as Tarzan, or Romulus and Remus after being raised by the wolf.

Now, thanks to his father’s pressures, Ali has internalised Tajik gender norms and is thus recognisable as a man within this society. Although his internalisation of the norms was originally induced coercively Ali now thinks of them as just the way things are. This does not, however, necessarily mean he has fully accepted them. His sister, Dila, certainly has not completely internalised the norms that maintain that girls should be silent and submissive, or she would not try to contravene them by finding a way to get round her father’s interdictions. Nor would she be capable of facing up to her brother. This goes to prove Butler’s contention that norms are never wholeheartedly embraced, always being imbued with force and constraint (1993: 94ff). It is for this reason that parents always have to be on guard to see that, irrespective of the extent of internalisation, the norms are always appropriately performed.

Just as Ali cannot entirely free himself psychologically from his parents, Butler’s subjects can never completely free themselves from the subjugation that formed them and they develop a passionate attachment to their subjugators, which renders them vulnerable to subordination and exploitation (Butler 1997b: 7). It is this attachment that gives parents so much power over their children. The child that has not detached itself from its parents will not be able to give up its state of dependence on them and therefore its vulnerability to exploitation by them. Even when a subject has been freed from direct dependence there will always be an ambiguity at the heart of any subject who has been formed according to regulatory norms, which can never be completely escaped.

As Ali and Dila grow up they start to develop a sense of individuality, and to be able to assert themselves somewhat. Through their experiences of their parents’ power, they are gradually starting to assume what Butler calls agency, and I call will power. This occurs when individuals have internalised the power through which their parents first subjected them. This then becomes the basis on which they can start to develop their own separate individual power, which will constitute the instrument of their learning to separate from their parents, and eventually to develop independently (Butler 1997b: 1-6) or, as Foucault puts it, ‘the individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle’ (1980a: 98). The rate of development is not the same for everyone and is dependent on many variables, including ethnicity, class, age, and gender.

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8 The two are not identical but similar enough for present purposes (cf. Butler 1997b: 12).
9 Since agency is exerted through the ego which is ‘first and foremost a bodily ego’ (Freud 1960: 16 in Butler 1993: 13) and since gender is also inscribed on that body, it follows that both the formation of the ego and the subsequent development of agency must be gendered.
Variant Gender Performances

Gender norms in Tajikistan are very much dependent on that ruling principle of Tajik society the honour-and-shame system\(^\text{10}\). As a result of this system's influence the most important gender characteristics are those related to male honour. There are two basic and interlinked masculine gender traits. These are in the first place, control over women and the younger members of their families, and in the second place virility, this last chiefly expressed through impregnation of their wives. For females the corresponding characteristics are submission and virginity/chastity/fertility. In other words male control is dependent on female submission, and virility contingent on female virginity, fertility, and faithfulness. A very important point in all this is that image is vital. To be acceptable, therefore, Dila must *visibly* display submission in front of her father.

Dila is not submissive in her behaviour with the less powerful members of her family. She is submissive with the one member, her father, who demands that she live up to the appropriate performance of gender as demanded by society, in order not to shame him. If she is capable of behaving non-submissively towards her brother, surely this proves that she has not entirely internalised submissiveness. Thus, when she performs submissively in front of her father she is doing this *intentionally*.

I have not been able to find a theory of gender that exactly covers this use of gender performance for the intentional projection of an image. Theorists of Western society, including Butler, do not deal with this dimension of gender, although the suggestion by Riley (1988) and Moore (1994a) that there is a gap between discourse and practice in regard to the performance of gender comes close. There are also some relevant notions in some of the recent work on Muslim societies, particularly in that on masculinities. Cornwall and Lindisfarne's notion that subordinate males respond to situations of dominance by creating variant masculinities and other gendered identities' (Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994b: 24) is useful here, as is also the idea of different subjectivities embodied within one individual (Shire 1994: 152) and of the 'façade that hides profound ambiguities' (Kandiyotti 1994: 212). Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994a) raise almost identical questions to those I deal with here, in particular 'How do individuals present and negotiate a gendered identity?' and how do these 'change before different audiences and in different settings?' (Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994a: 3).

Although situated within a somewhat different framework and in no way applied to gender identities\(^\text{11}\), Scott's (1990) conceptualisation of the way subordinates deal with the need for public display of submission as theatrical-like public performances in which their unacceptable and insubordinate real faces are hidden by 'stereotyped, ritualistic casts... the more menacing the power, the thicker the mask' (Scott 1990: 3-4) has provided a useful notion that I have drawn on in my analyses of subordinate gender performances in

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\(^{10}\) See chapter 4 for a detailed explanation of this.

\(^{11}\) Even if Scott himself deliberately refuses to consider gender as a factor in dominant power relations (1990: 22) his premises are none the less useful for those of us who wish to employ them in this way (cf. Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994b: 46).
Tajikistan\textsuperscript{12}. This comes very near to my analysis of the behaviour of Dila, assuming a thicker mask in front of her father from the one she uses in front of her mother.

Taken together, these concepts have led me to elaborate a theory of variant gender performances for both sexes that is enabled by the use of what, following Scott, I have labelled 'gender masks'. In my view it is not only men to whom variant identity positions are open. Women can also assume positions of dominance as well as ones of subordination. Moreover, variations exist within both dominant and subordinate gender positions. What I call variant gender performances are (semi-conscious) enactments of characteristics associated with the appropriate sexed body, which are varied by the actors according to situation and audience. This notion of gender masks has been further influenced by Butler's concepts of performativity and the impossibility of fully internalising gender (1995a: 31-2).

I conceive of these masks as closely resembling the use of the mask in classical Greek tragedy, that is as a shorthand way to portray stock characters. The masks inform the audience exactly what sort of character they are looking at. Its traits are delineated boldly in order to be easily intelligible. This is, I believe, what Dila is doing in her portrayal of submission, using a mask in such a way as to make her performance visible enough so that her father will not mistake it for anything else. Like the Greek masks the Tajik ones are also assumed intentionally. Consider the remarks of an Azeri woman interviewed by Tohidi - 'Every day we [Azeri women] have to wear different masks and juggle multiple identities' (Tohidi 1997: 147). This suggests both consciousness and intention. What is more it shows that my concept of gender masks speaks to the lived experiences of women in such societies, the culture of (Soviet) Azerbaijan bearing a close resemblance to that of Tajikistan, especially as far as basic gender norms are concerned.

Tohidi (1996) explains how Azeri women understand themselves to have taken on a Sovietised gender identity in public, while retaining their Azeri gender identities in private. Their Soviet identity allows them to be strong, controlling, to take charge openly, and even give orders to men. Their Azeri identities are more varied (cf. Tohidi 1997) but generally much meeker, including one where they play a subservient role to their menfolk, never overtly showing themselves strong or controlling but rather subtly manipulating them, while feigning powerlessness (Tohidi 1997: 160). The fact that these women are conscious of their performances of variant identities to the point where they are able to discuss them, implies that none of these identities has been completely internalised, that the women are deliberately performing.

This contradicts Butler's position that gender performances cannot be assumed at will and can differ from the internalised ideal only by way of minute variations (1993: x). According to her the person carrying out the performance is unable to step outside the character being played, since individuals cannot step outside the discursive conventions through which they are constituted. Performance is not so much akin to theatre as linguistically derived. There is no subject who can be behind the act, since it is the performance that constitutes the subject (Butler 1995b: 134-136).

It is my contention that this is only partially true. The power regimes that constitute subjects (ibid) may also force them into displays of characteristics other than, or perhaps it might be more accurate to say beyond, those that have been internalised, in order to be

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\textsuperscript{12}I wish to thank Lorraine Nencel for bringing this passage to my attention.
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accepted within their own communities. That is to say that people do not necessarily internalise everything that is supposed to constitute their (gender) identity. Examining the performances of Dila it can be seen that she projects different images depending on the necessity of the moment. Not all these images live up to the ideal of the submissive Tajik girl.

In Tajikistan, the gender norms are too narrow for people to internalise completely and too extreme to be accepted as corresponding to the way people really experience themselves. To do so would be tantamount to becoming the stock characters that such norms appear to demand. What is vital here is the element of image. It should be understood that what is important for the maintenance of Tajik social norms is not so much the rooting out of aberrations as their concealment, that, as long as people are willing to present themselves on the surface as stock characters, what they do underneath, beneath their gender masks, as it were, is not socially important. Thus, by supporting the preservation of the appropriate surface, gender masks aid in proclaiming their wearers’ agreement not overtly to do anything to destroy the norms. This is essentially what Dila is doing in enacting submission in front of her father. It is irrelevant that she may not be submissive at all in other interactions and that she may not experience herself as submissive.

Like the Azeri women Dila is capable of intentionally varying her gender performance. Thus, while at the deepest level of the psyche no doubt Butler’s claim that there is no ‘intentional subject behind the deed’ (Butler 1995: 136) is correct, at the level of social interaction I believe this may no longer be so. I would suggest that, like Dila, subjects can, and do, deliberately vary their gender performances according to their public. Of course, Dila’s own self is inevitably always present and her performances are not merely assumed at whim but inevitably constrained by pressures, both psychological and external. In fact her enactments are likely always to consist of a combination of the compulsory, the internalised, and the intentional, but this last element is definitely present and it is this that allows her to assume the mask.

Although Butler talks about drag as the only conscious parody on gender performance (1993: 124ff) it could be said that Dila and the Azeri women are in fact producing intentional parodies on their gender identities as defined by the ruling discourse. Dila clearly does not experience herself as merely meek and submissive, since she performs quite differently when with her brother, but she must portray such characteristics in order to be accepted by her father, for fear of the consequences of acting otherwise. However, she is not just pretending to do so. Nor is she actively trying to rebel when she behaves otherwise with Ali. Moreover, it is clearly not possible freely to choose the identity one wishes to enact. Dila is severely constrained, not just by her father but also by the context she is performing in, as well as by her internalised identity. Moreover, Ali also has to behave submissively before his father, so he too learns to assume gender masks, the use of which is thus not limited to females.

It seems to me, therefore, that the theatrical analogy is more apt than Butler would like to admit. In this respect perhaps that technique which in the United States theatre world is known as method acting might be a helpful metaphor. Method acting stresses the impossibility of an actor giving a believable performance unless the identity of the character being displayed has first been internalised. In other words, to give a convincing performance
the actor has to 'be' that character. In reality, of course, the actor is not that character, however much s/he may 'believe' it at the time and there will inevitably be inconsistencies between the 'real person' and the character portrayed.

Tajik gender performance could be said to bear a strong resemblance to this. Some performances are largely internalised and others more consciously enacted. As Dila's story demonstrates, the same individual presents variants on their gender performances at different times in front of different audiences, with varied levels of internalisation. But I would again stress that such performances are not enacted at whim but under constraint, in order to avoid the negative consequences of performing otherwise (Butler 1997b: 28). Thus, Dila might prefer to abandon her masks but if she were to do so the penalties would be too great. In order to remain acceptable she *must* wear them. This is in fact vital to the preservation of order in Tajik society. In other words, the gender masks assumed by Tajik women today are a symbolic version of the veils of pre-revolutionary times. The assumption of both demonstrates willingness to accept the norms, however their wearers may experience themselves underneath.

**The Research Setting**

What must never be forgotten when addressing the subject of the performance of gender in Tajikistan is that people here can never be regarded simply as individuals standing before society as independent human beings. Everyone is at all times subject to the controlling force of being included within a family hierarchy. Even a head of family is constrained by this because his very position as the ultimate controller makes him vulnerable (*cf.* Gilmore 1987: 4). Should anything go wrong he is the one who in the first place will be blamed. This not only goes to show why it was so crucial to Fayziddin that his children perform gender according to the norms but also to prove once more Foucault's point that nobody, however powerful, can escape being pressured themselves (1990: 92-97). Furthermore, in Tajikistan it must always be born in mind that beyond all social norms stands Islam, the tenets of which are ultimately the arbiter of all community standards.

It is for this reason that, in order to grasp the dynamics of life in Tajikistan, it is first necessary to know something of the country's history and also to be aware of the conceptual frameworks around Islam and the Tajik family, both in their socio-historical contexts, and as regards their connection to gender relations.

**A Brief History of Tajikistan**

The Republic of Tajikistan is a small, very mountainous country, with a mere 7% of its land suitable for arable usage. Its capital is Dushanbe. Culturally it is divided into two parts. The Tajik majority speaks Tajik, a Western Iranian language, and is Sunni. The Pamiri minority speaks Eastern Iranian dialects and is Ismaili Shiite. This division is not clear-cut, some of the Sunni Tajik-speaking (semi-) mountainous peoples owing a great deal to Pamiri

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15 Except where otherwise indicated the current work does not deal at all with the peoples of this region.
culture, as the differences mentioned in many pre-revolutionary sources between the plains Tajiks or Sarts and the mountain ones suggests (cf. Shishov 1904, 1910).

The question of ethnicities in Tajikistan is a delicate one, especially since the recent civil war. Pamiris and Tajiks are considered to be ethnically distinct. However, it is much stressed in the Republic today that the latter should be considered to form a single ethnic group, albeit with regional/local distinctions, mahalchigi in Tajik. The most important of these regional groups are Hujantis, Hisoris, Kulobis, and Gharmis. While there are definite differences among these groups it is difficult to say how much these are indigenous and how much due to the different relationship each group had with the Soviet state. Top government officials were chosen from Hujantis, the majority of policemen were Kulobis, while the Gharmis largely opted to remain isolated from the state and were the most faithfully religious. In addition, there are many Uzbeks in Tajikistan, and the main difference between them and the plains Tajiks lies in language rather than in cultural practices. The groups that have been singled out here are only the largest of many, and moreover within each grouping there are many shades of differences.

There are, for instance, quite clear distinctions between the semi-mountainous people of the village Tett studied (1994, 1995), and the southern villages where I have worked. The latter are largely inhabited by Gharmis, one of the most religious and thus most conservative groups, while the former are heavily influenced by the more liberal culture of the mountain regions. These differences will be discussed in greater detail during the course of this book. It should further be noted that large numbers of Tajiks live in the historically important areas of Uzbekistan, Bukhara and Samarkand, included within the latter Republic owing to the powerful position of Uzbeks vis-à-vis the Bolsheviks. Moreover, during the early post-revolutionary years many Tajiks fled over their southern border into Afghanistan, where there is also a significant Tajik minority.

Owing to the Soviet system and to the purges both of the elites of the revolutionary period and of those of the 1930's, there is little social differentiation and no real class structure in Tajikistan at present. There is an upper layer of society, mostly very highly educated, the members of which have been associated with positions of power in the Soviet government and/or bureaucratic structures. Very often they are not pure Tajiks since, in their pursuit of advancement, many of the highest level officials married Tatar or sometimes Russian women, in order to show willing to break with local traditions. Nevertheless, their offspring count themselves as Tajiks and are labelled as such in their internal passports. This is the group that I refer to as 'elite'. One of the main distinctions between them and the majority is their relatively relaxed attitude towards the gender norms.

For the rest, even those with doctorates mostly live according to the same set of norms as everyone else. Thus, I do not equate high educational levels on their own with the elite. Indeed, it is often quite difficult to assess whether a family belongs to the elite or not and, as in many countries in social transition, there are cases of siblings where one has a higher degree and another remains an uneducated peasant. Outside the elite there are some indications of differential social groupings but these remain undefined. This relatively classless situation means that groups who in other societies might be counted working-class and those who might be counted middle-class may intermarry and lead a very similar lifestyle in ways that in classed societies would be highly unlikely.
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Currently Tajikistan has a total population of slightly over six million, roughly 64% of which is Tajik, the rest Uzbek, Russian, Tatar, etc. Male adult literacy rate is 99%, female 96%, with the teenage literacy rate falling rapidly as the post-Soviet system falls apart. 70% of the population lives in rural areas and cotton is the country's main product. The largest industrial enterprise is the aluminium plant in Tursun Zade (Human Development Report 1997).

That part of Central Asia now called Tajikistan was formerly part of Western or Russian Turkestan. The region's oldest excavated settlements date from the 5th century BC, and in the 4th century it was incorporated into the Empire of Alexander the Great. Starting in the 7th century AD Islam slowly took over this formerly Zoroastrian and Buddhist region. Between the 10th and 13th centuries the Tajik city of Bukhara, now in the Republic of Uzbekistan, was the cultural capital of the world, its intellectual leader Ibn Sino (Avicenna), one of the greatest of all mediaeval philosophers and scientists. In the 12th century Genghis Khan and his Mongol hordes conquered the region. From the 14-17th centuries the region was ruled by the Timurids and subsequently the region split into small khanates, which were vanquished by the Russian conquests of the 1860's-1870's.

Bukhara lay on the silk route between China and the West, which no doubt accounted for the region's tremendous flourishing during the Middle Ages. However, the development of alternative maritime routes in the late 15th century effectively destroyed its pre-eminence. The Iranian adoption of Shiite Islam around 1500 put a stop to that country's former easy interaction with the Sunni Muslims to the north. The result was the almost total isolation of Turkestan. For almost 400 years there were practically no foreign visitors and most of the few there were, were either enslaved or killed (Adshead 1993).

In 1865 the Russians conquered Tashkent and in the following decades took over the entire region. Some of it, including Tashkent and the Fergana Valley, part of the latter later being incorporated into Tajikistan's Leninobod oblast, came under direct Russian rule. Most of the rest of the territory that makes up Tajikistan today remained in the Emirate of Bukhara until after the Revolution.

In the late nineteenth century the legal code of the Emirate of Bukhara was based on a strict version of shari'ah law, especially in the city of Bukhara itself, where the police enforced it rigidly. Women were discouraged from leaving their homes. Any found unaccompanied on the street were liable to questioning as to their reasons for being there. Men caught avoiding the mosque at prayer times were liable to whipping. Stoning to death, or being thrown from the top of the Emir's tall towers were punishments for many a crime (Meakin 1903: 65; Meyendorff 1870: 60).

Life expectation was extremely low. There were many major health problems, including malaria, typhoid, smallpox, cholera, tuberculosis, syphilis, the Guinea worm, and leprosy. Epidemics, many of which had entered the region along with the Russian conquerors, wiped out vast numbers of the population (Meakin 1903: 166; Meyendorff 1870: 29; Olufsen 1911: 444; Shishov 1904: 464) Such epidemics especially affected children, of whom measles, scarlet fever, influenza and dropsy were major killers (Nalivkin & Nalivkina 1886: 180). Infant and maternal mortality rates were not improved by early marriage and frequent childbirth.

In the late nineteenth century Russian physicians established clinics and hospitals in the region. There were a general and even a special women's hospital in Bukhara (Christie 1925:
In the Fergana valley there were five hospitals, and a number of women's clinics, as well as two rest homes (Turkestanskie Vedomosti 1903b: 368-9). Although the numbers that could be reached by these remained small\textsuperscript{16} they were certainly much larger than the figures given by the Soviet state in their accounts of the pre-revolutionary period.

Except for a very few 'new-method' schools run by Egyptian-influenced jadidists, who were trying to bring more modern ways to the Tashkent region, as well as to other parts of the Russian Muslim Empire, the curricula of these schools (maktabs) were entirely religious in content. The concept of secular education, as indeed of any separation between religious and other institutions, did not exist. Some girls were able to attend school, others were educated privately, but the vast majority of educational establishments were for boys. Once again the numbers were much greater than Soviet statistics allow (Williams 1965).

The contents of the maktab curriculum varied but they almost always had as their main feature the rote repetition of qur'anic texts. The better schools taught rather more than this and those students who went on to the next level or medressa could receive a highly sophisticated education there (Meakin 1903: 80).

When the Emirate of Bukhara was invaded by the Bolsheviks in September 1920 a movement towards change already existed, led by the Young-Bukharan party, which had much in common with the jadidists. But the Bolsheviks pre-empted both these movements, and put their own cadres in charge (Massell 1974: 33-36).

By the time of World War I poverty levels had enormously increased, especially in those parts under direct Russian rule. This was largely due to policies which had made land formerly owned by the state or the Muslim ulama and allotted for life to individuals for their own use, into private property, and pushed more and more farmers into producing cotton as an export crop. Nearly 90% of all irrigated land had become private property, largely in the hands of a newly developing bourgeoisie, and increasing numbers of peasants were forced into lives of sharecropping and agricultural labouring on the land of the wealthy (Sharma 1979: viii, 10, 12; Vaidyanath 1967: 45 note 51).

The Central Asians had been able to produce such large quantities of cotton only because the Russians were importing grain for them in return. However, during World War I and the ensuing civil war the wheat-producing regions were cut off from Central Asia. The result was a severe famine, which was responsible for the deaths of perhaps as many as 900,000 Central Asians, leaving the population decimated. One of the reasons the famine affected such large numbers was that the local Bolsheviks gave food supplies only to those who agreed to join them (Etherton 1925: 154).

The period immediately after the Revolution was one of extreme chaos. In addition to the famine, conditions in these years were extremely adverse, owing to the civil war, the military actions undertaken to bring the whole area under Bolshevik control, and the hunting down of the enemies of the new state (Caroe 1967; Nazaroff 1993).

\textsuperscript{16}There was one doctor for each 137,000-356,000 inhabitants spread over an area of 13,000-23,000 sq. verst - (a verst measures 3,500 feet, or almost a mile). The women's treatment centres in the town had to make do with four women doctors between them. Each had to treat from 40,000-86,500 inhabitants. In 1900 in Fergana 103,452.5 roubles were spent on medicine for a population of 1,670,369, that meant around 6.2 kopecks a head. Russian doctors in the area were fighting to upgrade these services (Turkestanskie Vedomosti 1903a: 142).
The chauvinistic attitude of the Bolsheviks of Turkestan, almost all of whom were Russians, created a barrier between them and the local population. They treated what was supposed to be a class war more as a Russian-Muslim conflict, displaying strongly eurocentric attitudes to the native population. By late 1919 Moscow was worried enough about the results of such treatment to try to bring increasing numbers of Muslims into the Party and government and restore their right to trade freely (Rakowska-Harmstone 1970: 21-22).

The person who did most to re-organise the non-Slavic states, and especially Central Asia, was the Georgian Stalin. He decided to divide up Turkestan into separate republics and encourage each of these to take pride in a separate nationality, in order to discourage pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism that he feared might otherwise be strong enough to remove Turkestan from Soviet influence. By 1925 the new borders had largely been drawn. Tajikistan became an Autonomous Republic within the Union Republic of Uzbekistan until 1929, when it too attained full Union status.

By the early 1920’s Lenin’s expectations that Germany or the United States would join in the socialist revolution had foundered (Goldman 1924: 32). Moreover, the failure of the Baku Comintern Conference of Islamic Representatives in September 1920 made it obvious that it was not going to be easy to get the support of Asian and African countries either (Spector 1959: 47-58). Both Stalin and Lenin held Central Asia to be vital in the Soviet struggles to win Asia over to their camp, particularly India (Massell 1974: 41-55; Rakowska-Harmstone 1970: 72) and there is evidence to show that Tajikistan was made into a separate Union Republic precisely in order to bolster the Soviet position in relation to Asia (Kolarz 1952: 282).

Stalin’s policy was to permit each republic its own language, in the hope of forestalling nationalist, anti-colonialist insurrection (Stalin 1971: 90). The modern Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Turkmen languages were born from local Turkic dialects, deliberately chosen to be as different from each other as possible, so as to make communication difficult. Being Iranian-based the Tajik language was already different from the others. In order to try to separate the peoples from the Islamic side of their culture and from the influence of other Muslim states these languages were transcribed first into a Latin alphabet, around 1930, and then ten years later into Cyrillic (Fierman 1991b: 45).

Despite this careful planning, all did not run smoothly in Central Asia. Soon after the Revolution abuse of the local population had sparked off a guerrilla resistance movement known as basmachi. Its mainstay was the conservative elite, backed up by tremendous popular support, which had been fuelled by opposition to policies denying local peoples the right to freedom of worship and trying to destroy their traditions.

The more conciliatory policies put in place at the end of 1919 helped to reduce support for the resistance. However, the conquest of Bukhara in 1920 was responsible for its revival. The Emir fled to Dushanbe where he assembled an army which, however, was defeated soon afterwards. Subsequently, popular support vacillated, depending on the strength of the Red Army and the attitudes of the Bolsheviks at the time. The more conciliatory the latter the less the backing for the basmachi. The Bolsheviks officially declared the resistance movement defeated in 1926 but it continued in Southern Tajikistan until 1931, fuelled by the special dislike the brutal behaviour of the Red Army had earned the Russians (Caroe 1967: 114-130; Rakowska-Harmstone 1970: 20-36).
Conceptual Background

Besides the basmachis Moscow had many other problems to deal with in Central Asia in the period leading up to World War II. According to the korenizatsiya (nativisation) policies of the early 1920's, as many locals as possible were to be recruited into the local Party and educated to fill leadership posts. This was particularly difficult in Tajikistan because of the strong resistance to Bolshevism. Later when the collectivisation drive got underway at the end of the 1920's the Tajiks made it as difficult and as slow as they could.

Friction between the Soviet regime and top Tajik officials was particularly strong. As a result there were a number of purges between the late 1920's and the end of the 1930's. Party membership also was cut, by around two thirds between 1933 and 1935 alone. After this, Russians were appointed to lead the most important republican organs, while Tajiks were trained to fill lesser posts as teachers, medical workers, agronomists, and other low and middle level officials, and were also put in charge of local Soviets (Caroe 1967: 151; Rakowska-Harmstone 1970: 20-43).

Gradually, increasing numbers of Russians and other nationalities - Ukrainians, Tatars, Germans, Jews - came to settle in Tajikistan in answer to the demand for industrial workers, as at first there was no local labour force equipped to do this. The majority of these Russian-speakers settled in the towns. They brought their own cultures with them and this produced considerable friction with the local population.

Dushanbe had been a large market village, which was developed into the Tajik capital after the drawing of the republican borders in the mid 1920's by the addition of a number of imposing public buildings and many apartment blocks. Since then it has further expanded and by the end of the Soviet era had a population of just over half a million. Although traditional houses still exist in some areas, the majority of the town is Russian built. Most people live in apartment blocks supplied with gas, electricity, indoor plumbing, and central heating. The town centre is dominated by such monuments as the opera house, the university, the Academy of Sciences, the KGB building, the National Library, various theatres, and the Supreme Soviet, most of these built after World War II.

Until 1990 Dushanbe was so Russianised that for every local person one met walking down the street one would meet 10-20 Russian speakers. Russian was almost the only language heard. When a Dushanbe-born Russian friend of mine returned in 1995 for her first visit since the civil war she was shocked to hear mostly Tajik spoken in the streets; she said she had never even noticed anyone speaking Tajik previously, it had been so rare.

In 1987 63% of all agricultural work was carried out by Tajiks, with most of the rest being done by members of other Central-Asian nationalities. On the other hand around 50% of the jobs in industry were held by Russian speakers (Liebowitz 1992: 122). In 1990 75% of people of all nationalities of working age living in Tajikistan were employed by the state. Of these almost half were in agriculture, and a quarter were employed in non-material work. 22% of Tajiks worked in co-operatives or private farming. Tajikistan had one of the highest percentages of private farms in the former Soviet Union (IMF 1992: 2, 40; World Bank 1994), much of the work being done by women. Tajikistan had one of the lowest levels of formal female employment in the FSU, with an official rate of 38% for the last two decades of Soviet rule. This was largely urban, since agricultural labouring was not considered as formal employment. In effect this means that the majority of formal jobs were held by

17 However, such Party purges occurred all over the Union and the All-Union membership dropped 750,000 during this period (Malia 1994: 248).
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Russian speakers, most of whom have since emigrated (Human Development Report 1995: 44).

The educational and medical systems grew especially fast in the post-World War II period. Even most villagers gained access to 10-year basic schooling. A university, pedagogical and medical institutes, and various technical schools were established in Dushanbe. Scholarships were set up to send the best students to Moscow or Leningrad for post-graduate studies although eventually this became possible also in Dushanbe (Rakowska-Harmstone 1970: 133-137). Hospitals, clinics, women's consultations, and maternity homes were built, and large villages had their own small medical centres (Ministry of Health 1967). However, these services remained inadequate both in quality and quantity, the latter in part because of the rapid increase in the size of the population. From the start of the 1960's, in response to improved living conditions coupled with the government's strong pronatalist policies, Tajikistan's population started to shoot up (Harris 1996b).

The surplus of un- and underemployed young men created by this has been a contributory factor to the violence that has dogged the republic in the last few years. This began in February 1990 when riots were sparked off in Dushanbe, ostensibly over the offer of housing to newly arrived refugees from Armenia, bypassing Tajiks who had been on the waiting list for years. In reality these riots had more to do with local power politics, with rival groups jockeying for position as Soviet control waned.

In August 1991 the Soviet Union disintegrated and on September 9th Tajikistan declared its Independence from the Union. The ensuing economic collapse precipitated struggles between the newly established democratic, nationalist, and Islamic parties on the one hand and the Communist Party and their followers on the other. The former formed a coalition demanding religious and cultural freedom. The history of the demonstrations that took place in Dushanbe in mid 1992 and the subsequent civil war that broke out later that same year, has been told many times and I will summarize here only those points germane to the present work.

The protests started because the Communist Party leaders wished to hold on to the power they had inherited from the Soviet Union and refused to make space for other parties and leaders. Popular feeling was the more strongly aroused because of the poor state of the economy. The most serious fighting took place between mid-1992 and early 1993 and was at its fiercest in the Kurgan Teppa area of Khatlon.

Although it did not originate as regional conflict, by the end of the main fighting the lineup of forces was Hujantis, Hisonis, and Kulobis on the winning Communist or government side and Gharmis and Pamiris for the Opposition. This division occurred as long-standing regional tensions were aggravated by the war. Tajikistan had never been nationally integrated. The concept of Tajik nationality was invented by Stalin and the people took little notice of it, preferring to refer to themselves by their locality or region rather than their nationality. Tensions between regions were exacerbated by the unequal treatment meted out by the Soviet government which gave political leadership and economic preference to the Hujantis (Tadjbakhsh 1996). Regional favouritism has been continued under the current

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18 Personal communication from the former head of the Dushanbe Institute of Maternity and Childcare, Sofia H. Hakimova.
government of Emomali Rakhmonov, whose members have been drawn almost entirely from his native region of Kulob. During and after the civil war large numbers of Garmis and Pamiris were forced to flee the country, along with the opposition leadership, which remained in exile until mid 1997. With the signing of a peace accord on June 27th of that year people gradually started to return to Tajikistan. By mid 1999 around 700,000 refugees had been repatriated20. Meanwhile, Tajikistan was beset by increasing numbers of splinter groups, each of whose leaders was attempting to gain a slice of the power pie, usually by violent means. In fact everyday violence (cf. Schrijvers 1993) in the form of murders, brutal robberies, abductions and rapes, has now become a way of life in Tajikistan.

The post-war period has been difficult in many other ways also. In a repeat of the earlier problems of World War I a food shortage occurred when the government could no longer afford to import grain. This time it did not reach famine proportions only because of help from international relief agencies, but for a long time bread, the staple food of most Tajiks, was severely rationed and many people suffered significant hunger over a period of many months.

As a result of the previous integrated economic and productive system Tajikistan is highly dependent on other former Soviet republics. Grain has to be imported from Kazakhstan and gas piped in from Uzbekistan. Whenever Tajikistan’s debt becomes too large Uzbekistan shuts off supplies, sometimes right in the middle of the worst cold spells of the winter, resulting in the death from hypothermia of many young children and old people.

Since the mid 1990’s there have been several major epidemics, most notably typhoid and malaria21. Infant and maternal mortality are on the rise. Poor nutritional levels have additionally increased morbidity rates, just when the health system is deteriorating fast.

After the Soviet Union collapsed the Tajik government could no longer rely on Moscow to provide raw materials, co-ordinate the production and distribution of goods, and make up budget deficits. The nationalised economy meant that there was no other employer to take over any of the load and the government did not have the funds to continue paying employees at a living wage. The downward turn had started with the economic policies of the perestroika period. Between 1985 and 1992 the already low national per-capita income decreased by around 50% and this tendency has continued at an accelerated rate. In 1997 the average pension fell to US$1-1.50 a month and many state wages were less than $10 a month. At the same time inflation has been extremely high, in some years well over 1000% (Human Development Report 1995: 16-17). This was exacerbated by the introduction of the Tajik rouble in May 1995. For most people it is a constant struggle to find ways to feed themselves and their families. Many are reduced to one rather meagre meal a day usually of watery vegetable soup with an occasional chunk of meat in it, with bread and tea at other times.

20 According to estimates of UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross.
21 In 1997 alone over 17,000 people went down with typhoid nation-wide, mostly in Dushanbe, where the government could no longer afford to chlorinate the water supply and damaged pipes allowed crossover between sewage and drinking water (figures from the estimates of the International Federation of the Red Cross). Since the government cannot afford to continue spraying against mosquitoes either, malaria has now taken hold in the villages and towns of Khatlon, in some places almost 100% of villagers being affected, although a donation of drugs by the Japanese government helped to ease the situation in 1999.
The economic situation has been worsened by a major exodus of Russian speakers, starting with the 1990 riots and further encouraged by the civil war. This has left the country with a huge shortage of engineers and technicians. For instance, one of the few local chief engineers in the Tajik telephone company was a Pamiri, who was forced into exile in 1992. Most of the remaining chief engineers have emigrated. This has hastened the collapse of the antiquated telephone system, which is being revived only with foreign aid. Many of the top local professionals in every field have also emigrated, including the best doctors and teachers. Without these specialists the entire infrastructure of the country is having a hard time surviving. Due to lack of funds and poor management the medical services are struggling, and many schools have been closed down. The already low educational levels have dropped drastically, to the point where many of the current generation of school children, especially in rural areas, are functionally illiterate.

The exodus of the Russian speakers was accompanied by their selling their flats at knock-down prices to locals, often from rural areas. The numbers of Tajiks in Dushanbe have, therefore, increased enormously, and the town has now at least double the number of inhabitants it had only seven years ago. This is partly because Tajik families are so much larger than Russian ones, so that each flat now holds two or more times the numbers it previously did.

New ways of earning a living are being sought, since the government can no longer afford to pay most of its workers. Factories are closing because of a lack of resources, raw materials and parts, most of which formerly came from other regions of the Soviet Union, as well as of engineers and other skilled workers. Between 1985 and 1993 per capita industrial production declined 45% and agricultural production 47%. By 1995 industrial capacity had declined to less than 30% of its potential full level (Human Development Report 1995: 14). Privatisation is proceeding very slowly.

It has been estimated that over half the men between the ages of 18 and 50 and a good few women now migrate regularly to other parts of the CIS, mainly Russia, for work purposes. The ‘new’ Tajiks who earn a living through importing and selling foreign goods are growing steadily richer and the mafia is strongly entrenched in the drug trade. Tajikistan is the first step on the new drugs route that has developed between Afghanistan and the West, which has enormously increased the supply of heroin to Europe.

For a long time the government of Rakhmonov barely controlled a fraction of the country. It is only since the signing of the peace accord with the Opposition in June 1997, followed by the integration of the Opposition into the government in spring and summer 1999, that some degree of law and order has begun to be restored. Large amounts of resources are being supplied from the outside, for instance, in the shape of loans from the IMF, the EU, and other foreign donors. UNDP and the Red Cross have offices in Dushanbe, as do many international relief and development NGO's. Russia still supplies some funds, and is planning on building a new military base in Tajikistan. Its 201st brigade currently forms part of the force guarding the Tajik-Afghan border. Moscow finds it in its best interests to continue to defend the borders of the former Soviet Union. In this case it is particularly anxious about possible

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22 In the Khatlon villages where I have worked almost none of the girls under 15 is functionally literate and many of the boys have also very low literacy standards. This is in stark contrast to the much higher educational levels of their mothers and even grandmothers.
attempts of an Islamist government in Afghanistan to invade Tajikistan and possibly other Central Asian states.

**Islam in Tajikistan**

The Soviet government tried very hard to destroy religious belief in all its citizens and replace this with atheism. In Central Asia it closed down *medressas* and most mosques and allowed only a few official *mullahs* to carry out religious rituals on special occasions. The ban on the public practice of Islam and the closing down of religious schools has left most Tajiks with little knowledge of the *qur'an* and other religious texts.

No outside pressure, however, could change the attitudes of the Tajik people towards Islam. To them being part of a local ethnic group was synonymous with being a Muslim. Even non-believers who neither pray or fast, call themselves Muslims and have their sons circumcised. Central Asians have remained so attached to their religion that the Soviet government has periodically been forced to make certain concessions, since attacking it too strongly aroused extreme opposition. The Soviet regime eventually learned how to manipulate the good will of the Central Asian peoples by allowing them greater religious freedom whenever greater support for the regime was necessary - for instance in World War II\(^2\) - and then tightening controls later on.

In this way the Soviet government was able to keep the Tajiks from serious opposition that might well have led to a determined onslaught on the state. As it was, a working compromise was reached that permitted the government to keep peace with Tajikistan and to use the republic as a tool of propaganda in its attempts to win over the East. At the same time Tajiks managed to preserve a considerable level of religious practice as long as they managed this discreetly and out of plain sight.

Thus, for instance, women were able to pray at home. People who did not hold formal jobs managed to fast on *ramadan*. Islamic rites of passage were secretly carried out when no officials were around. In this way boys were circumcised, *mullahs* officiated at weddings, and Islamic funeral rites were carried out.

It was understood that many people, especially men, were obliged to transgress Islamic laws in order to keep their positions. Quite a common practice was for a man who wanted to build a career to leave off religious observance as long as he was looking for advancement and then, later on, and certainly at retirement, to return to it. It was even not unknown for former high ranking Soviet officials to become *mullahs* in later life. Karomat's father had a similar history:

*Before the Revolution had gained much of a hold on Central Asia Karomat's father had been educated in a medressa and subsequently became a cleric. In 1929 the Soviet government sent him on army service to Dushanbe. During his year of service he became a Communist-Party novice, one of the very few Tajiks chosen from the army, because he was so active. After he left the army he continued as a novice and eventually was formally inducted into the Party. At first he worked in his local area but after 18 months he and his wife were sent to Dushanbe to study. After three years*\(^2\)
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study he was sent to organise branches of the Communist Party in a succession of villages in the South, where his wife would establish and run a school for the children during the day and adult literacy courses in the evenings.

During all the time Karomat's father was rising through the Party ranks Islam was not practised in his home at all. His wife was also a Communist and the whole family was brought up according to the new practices - the family often talked Russian at home, the daughters dressed in Russian style and wore their hair short, the whole family would drink wine at Soviet parties, and nobody fasted on ramadan. However, as soon as he was no longer so much in the public eye Karomat's father resumed his religious life, praying, fasting, wearing national dress, and no longer consuming alcohol, while his wife as she grew older also gradually started to wear national dress albeit in the modernised and Sovietised form, and practising Islam. Karomat's father subsequently taught her and her sisters to pray, and one of his grandsons even became a mullah. Long before he died, in December 1995 at the age of 94, he had completely abandoned socialism in favour of dedicating himself to Islam. He even refused to go outside his flat for fear of laying eyes on a kofir.

When the strictest controls over Soviet society were lifted in the mid 1980's the main demand in Tajikistan was for freedom of worship. Gorbachev was praised mainly for his role in allowing the open practice of Islam24. This was especially significant for the men, whose religious practices centred round the mosque, while many women had in any case continued their private practices in the home (Tett 1994).

The men in the village Tett studied used the lack of a mosque to justify their not praying during the Soviet period, insisting that their role was to pray in public; praying at home was for women. In order to justify their abandonment of these practices, while insisting on their womenfolk complying with them, men would claim that women were more sinful and therefore needed to make more of an effort to expiate their sins. Women accepted this, believing menstruation and childbirth rendered them more impure than men (ibid). However, in Dushanbe I found it quite common for men to pray at home, even though there was a mosque open for worship, and in Sayot they took risks to preserve their mosques, calling them tea houses to evade Soviet controls, so that the men were able to continue their religious practices virtually unabated.

The relation of Tajiks to Islam in the late 1990's has been complicated by the civil war and its aftermath. Islam was one of the concerns the civil war of 1992-3 was fought over. Since the war it has remained a hot issue. Many people, especially the more educated urban women, greatly fear being forced into an Islamic lifestyle similar to that of Iran or worse still, Afghanistan. It is very possible that this is the ultimate aim of the opposition leaders. At any rate this could be inferred from their insistence in spring 1999 on trying to remove the clause in the Tajik constitution that stipulates that the republic must remain secular.

It is difficult to know how much support there might be for an Islamic Tajikistan. There has certainly been a significant increase in the public practice of Islam over the last few years of the 1990's. Religious schools have been re-opened. Many people are learning to read Arabic letters, so they can recite the qur'an, including otherwise illiterate village children.

24 While excoriated for his role in breaking up the Soviet Union and hence his indirect responsibility for the civil war and the economic hardships.
Even those who do not consider themselves particularly religious and who do not pray, are starting to fast on *ramadan*. The reasons they give for this are varied. Marifat, a sophisticated 45-year-old from the Dushanbe elite, fasts because she started when her mother was ill and asked the family to fast with her. Since her mother’s death she and her family have continued the practice. Dila fasts because many of her fellow students do and they consider that all the other students should fast as well. Her mother fasts because everyone at work does and her friends there, as well as those who might come to call at the house, would not understand if she did not go along with this. However, if she is really hungry and no one is likely to catch her out, she sometimes does eat during the day.

Despite the increased interest, intellectual understanding of Islam in Tajikistan remains at a low level. Under the Soviet regime religious practices of all kinds were condemned as superstitions and the main public religious debates were on the theme of atheism and how far it had penetrated Tajik society. The sorts of sophisticated debates on religious matters that take place in the Egyptian press (Karam 1998) have no place here. It will be a long time before there is sufficient level of understanding of such matters within the Tajik population for them to have the capacity to take any part in or even appreciate such discussions, if indeed the political climate ever permits this.

At present the post-Communist government of Rakhmonov continues to take a strong stance against Islam, reaching beyond purely private practices in the home and the mosque. To this end the wearing of beards in the military has been forbidden (Act of September 1998), presumably either to keep out the more religious or at least to cut down on their ‘contaminating’ young recruits, beards for men presenting as potent a symbol of attitudes towards Islam as veils for women. On the whole even the more religious men and women with whom I have discussed the idea of Tajikistan formally becoming an Islamic republic have been against it. They say the people are far from ready for such a step after the decades of secularisation.

The Family and Women's Role in Islam

For Islam the family is of supreme importance and is considered the centre of life. It is said that the first Muslim community in Medina was founded around the family and owes its survival to this. The basis of Islam is its legal code, with at its core family law. At the centre of family law is, of course, gender identity. It is no doubt for this reason that Islamic family law has been preserved in their legal codes by Muslim states that have otherwise adopted secular Westernised codes of law. Attempts to alter family law have generally been opposed by the clergy and any changes later overturned. For instance, Egypt’s 1979 code giving women greater rights in divorce etc. was largely rescinded in 1985 (El Dawkam, Hadi & Wahab 1998: 74). Iranian family laws passed during the Shah’s time were among the first to be abolished after Khomeini took power, although new laws have recently been adopted that are more favourable to women. The Western powers see little importance in those aspects of law dealing with the family and so, as long as other segments of the law have been ‘modernised’, they have not pressured Muslim countries into changing family law (Dahl 1997: 61). However, as I discuss in the following chapter, the Soviet government (like the government of Ataturk) thought otherwise, insisting that the family laws were at the heart of Muslim identity. In order to destroy the one it was necessary to abolish the other.
Control and Subversion

The Qur'an exorts all the single to marry if they possibly can and as soon as they can unless there are good reasons for avoiding it (Dahl 1997: 49-50, 141). According to the Qur'an the purpose of marriage is first and foremost to bring love and mercy (interpreted as passion, friendship and companionship plus understanding, tolerance, and forgiveness) to the married couple. Women should not be forced into marriage; their consent is always necessary. Where a minor has been married without her consent she can ask for her marriage to be annulled on reaching the age of majority (Omran 1992: 15ff, 49ff). Nevertheless, most Muslim marriages today, in Tajikistan as elsewhere, have been contracted in contravention of these injunctions. Women, and even men, are more often than not married off against their will.

It is believed that the Qur'an defines the female age of majority as nine, and that this may then be taken to be an acceptable age for girls to contract marriage. However, there is in fact no mention in the Qur'an of a specific age. The statement that orphans should be married at an age when it might be expected for them to demonstrate sound judgement (sura 4:6) makes it unlikely that the marital age could have been anything like so young. The only texts that actually mention the age of nine are some of the fiqh's, which, however, also talk of the dangers of such young girls having sexual intercourse, as this is liable to tear the vaginal wall. Therefore, they do not recommend the practice of such early marriage. Ottoman family law before 1914 decrees 18 as the minimum age of marriage for men and 17 for women (Omran 1992: 18-19).

Most Muslims are not aware that the Qur'an stresses the importance of the human side of the marital relationship. Instead they believe that the major purpose of marriage is for the benefit of the family, not the couple concerned. Therefore, procreation and control over sexuality take precedence over all else (Dahl 1997: 54, 95, 103) and parents and other senior family members assume they have the right to decide on marital partners for the younger generation.

It is also believed that the Qur'an easily licenses both polygyny and divorce. Neither is true. Divorce is permissible although the Prophet did not favour it, saying that marriage should not be abandoned lightly. There is nothing in the Qur'an to suggest that polygyny is something that is unconditionally the entitlement of every man who can afford it; it is permitted only according to very strict rules, mainly for the protection and support of women and children, for instance when there are not enough males to go round in times of war (Omran 1992: 18-22).

Widespread in the Islamic world is marriage between first cousins. The scriptures take the same point of view as modern medicine, that marriage between close relations is likely to

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25 See sura 24:32 - 'marry the single among you'  
26 See sura 30:31 - 'And one of [Allah's] signs is, that He has created for you mates from yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and has ordained between you Love and Mercy.'  
   Sura 7:189 - 'It is He who created you from a single soul (nafs) and therefrom did make his mate, that he might dwell in tranquillity with her' (Omran 1992: 14).  
27 Cousin marriage is traditional in Maghreb families (Bouama & Saoud 1996: 40). In Egypt marriages among peasants and lower-class urban families are almost always between cousins. Only educated girls can marry exogamously (Zénie-Zielger 1988: 23; Rugh 1984: 11, 133). Cousin marriage is also common in Iran and throughout Central Asia.
result in diseased offspring. Therefore, in general this is frowned upon, especially where the family is not completely healthy (Omran 1992: 22).

There is considerable confusion about the role of women in Islamic society. There is nothing in the scriptures to suggest that women should limit themselves to the roles of wives and mothers. Indeed, there is a great deal to suggest that women, as well as men, should be educated and that they have the right to work, even if men hold the primary responsibility for the family's economic support. It is, therefore, contravening the scriptures to refuse girls and women the right to go to school and to work. In the early days of Islam women appeared at public social functions, studied, took jobs, and even participated in battles and served as council members (Omran 1992: 50).

The concept of veiling seems to have been adopted by Arabs from other cultures, and the Qur'an subsequently reinterpreted to read as if it were referring to veiling. In the sixteenth century Muslim women used often to dress more revealingly than Western women. There is evidence that the coming of Westerners to some Muslim countries resulted in an increase in veiling as a protective mechanism (Keddie 1992: 47ff). It is likely that the honour-and-shame system bears the chief responsibility for legitimising strict control over females (cf. chapter 4). However, most Muslims believe that they are acting in accordance with the scriptures when they deny (unveiled) women access to the world outside the family compound.

Popular Muslim belief maintains that men and women should inhabit separate worlds and that each sex has its own distinct functions. Within marriage a man's function is to provide for the family economically and to ensure order. A woman's function is to carry out all domestic tasks, bear, breastfeed, and rear her children, to show obedience to her husband and fulfil all his needs, including sexual ones (Siddiqui 1996: 54). Women are supposed to be emotional rather than rational like men and it is this, together with their disturbing sexuality, which makes them appear dangerous to men and why the latter have been granted the right of control over them. The main function of a wife should be the provision of services for her husband not companionship, since it is considered that women are liable to corrupt men who spend too much time with them (Dahl 1997: 139, 147, 179).

I do not mean to suggest that the whole community of Muslims world-wide hold exactly the same beliefs. However, the aspects I have noted here seem to be adhered to by and large by most of the dominant social groups in the majority of Muslim societies, from North Africa through the Middle East, Turkey, and on into the Gulf States, Iran, the Indian Sub-Continent, Soviet Central Asia, and Chinese Xinjiang, although they are considerably less relevant in Malaysia, Indonesia (except for Aceh), and the remaining Muslim areas of China and Africa. This is most probably because for the former group their approach to everyday Islam is largely mediated through the honour-and-shame system, which has become intimately bound up with their local customary laws. As a result their basic gender norms tend to be very similar. The fact that such gender norms are not necessarily always and solely directly linked to religion in people's minds is born out by the fact that Tajiks who consider themselves atheists still believe it vital to enforce and obey the social norms based on this system. This is not to deny the fact that each community has its own individual culture and that there are many important differences among Muslim societies.

According to al-Bukhari the Prophet said 'Learning is a duty for every Muslim [male and female]' (Omran 1992: 46).
Control and Subversion

As can be seen from this brief discussion the difference between what is written in the scriptures and the everyday beliefs of the average Muslim is very large. This is one of the reasons that many young Muslims today study Islam, in order the better to understand what their rights and duties are. By referring to the scriptures they can justify considerably greater space for personal decision-making than their parents are willing to allow them. This is especially true for those young people living in non-Muslim countries, such as Western Europe (cf. Brouwer 1998; Jacobson 1998) whose parents are often inclined to keep their children more closely controlled than in the homeland.

At least as much as other Muslims Tajiks tend to conflate Islamic laws and local customary law. Moreover, there the environment does not permit young people to use scriptures to legitimise demands for greater freedoms and in any case the few medressas that have now been established tend to follow the very strict Afghan or Pakistani schools of Islam, which are even more stifling than Tajik customary law.

It can nevertheless be empowering for women and young people to learn to distinguish between these two bodies of law. For instance, there is nothing in Islamic law to suggest that parents have the sole right to decide their children’s choice of spouse. In the villages of Khatlon where the health project has worked, however, this is fundamental to community life. The experience of the project workers has been that for young women and men merely learning to differentiate between Tajik customary and Islamic law makes them feel more in control. They feel good knowing that Islam gives them the right to protest, even if they are unable to make immediate practical use of this knowledge.

The Tajik Family as Institution

The family is the most powerful institution in Tajik society. Tajiks draw an analogy between it and the state, insisting that a family needs the same kind of firm hand in its leader that a state does, and that democracy is out of place in both. This leader is in both cases conceptualised as an adult male. The strict hierarchy of the Soviet state is reflected in the family, or rather the other way round, since the latter long precedes the former. To Tajiks this hierarchy appears completely natural. It is, after all, dominated by a ruling ‘class’ that has produced the ideology it is based on and to which it has been able to give the force of ‘eternal laws’ (cf. Marx 1846a: 64ff).

The ‘ruling class’ here consists of mature29 males. Ideologically it is they alone who are eligible to become heads of family, to whom the remaining members are subordinated. While young men may eventually have the chance to become heads of family themselves, women cannot, nor can they ever become full mature adults in the same sense as men in relation to public life. The fact that women heads of family exist, that women can, and sometimes do, earn more than their husbands, and that according to the Tajik constitution they have equal rights with men, does not change the ideology that disenfranchises them. Nor does it prevent men from trying to stop women heading up enterprises, becoming members of parliament and taking on other high-ranking positions.

However, it is the women who are largely responsible for carrying out the most critical family functions - the running of the home and the social reproduction of its members, that is

29 I use the word mature to apply to persons whose (eldest) children have gained marriageable age.
to say, the production of intelligible social subjects from their 'named' babies (Butler 1990: 16). Men have relatively few functions in relation to their families, their main function being as breadwinners and as the ultimate bearers of responsibility for control.

For community survival it is important that its children be subjected to its regulatory norms. Although the chief responsibility for this lies with families, they are not expected to do it completely unaided. They can fall back for help on a number of institutions, of which religion has traditionally been the most important. In Tajikistan the basis of the regulatory norms, according to which children are formed into socially intelligible persons, is traditional law, essentially a combination of Islam and the honour-and-shame system (cf. chapter 4). Central to Islam is submission to the will of God, and by extension to the will of parents. In pre-Revolutionary days mullahs, atun-bibis, mosques, and religious schools aided parents in imparting such values to their children.30

Before the Revolution

The Tajik family is patrilineal and patrilocal. Soviet ethnographers have identified three different types - the small or nuclear family, the large or extended family, and the extended patriarchal family, where several married sons and at times uncles/aunts will live in the same house/compound with a patriarchal family head, usually the oldest man. Before the Revolution the local tax system made big families more advantageous (Kislyakov 1935: 121). Often between 30 and 40, and at times as many as 60 people, all lived in the same compound, but even today 30 are not unheard of (Kislyakov 1959; Monogarova 1982; Pisarchik 1976). All monies earned by family members were placed together in one large pot,31 controlled by the head of the family, with major spending decisions being taken in family council32 (cf. Monogarova 1982: I, 91-2; Pisarchik 1976:17).

Parents chose their children’s spouses, except in the case of men old enough to be independent of their fathers, and divorced or widowed women, who had become independent of their parents. Girls might be betrothed at birth, or married as young as nine, although the marriage usually would not be consummated before puberty (Peshcherova 1976: 34; Yusufbekova 1989: 147-8). Even when adults were able to arrange their own marriages the ban on social intercourse between the sexes made a go-between necessary and the couple often had not met before the wedding. Among the wealthier Tajiks divorce and polygyny were frequent (cf. chapter 2).

In some families even after marriage husbands and wives socialised relatively little (Schwarz 1900: 194).

30 A useful summary of the central tenets of Islam can be found in Jacobson (1998: 26ff).
31 Aside from the earnings of women, for instance, from breeding silk worms or embroidering hats, etc. These earnings were considered to be private and thus not to be absorbed into general family finances (Meakin 1903: 100-101). Under Islamic law the husband is supposed to be the sole financial supporter of the family. However, in Turkestan in cases of great poverty, disability, widows without families, etc. a woman's earnings might have to go towards the provision of basic family needs (Harris 1996a: 91).
32 Here the women might sit in but often had no active voice. However, if they got on well with their husbands they might be able to influence them in private discussions outside the family meetings.
Not long since, when a wealthy citizen was asked how often he conversed with his wife, he replied - 'About three or four times a year. Why should I talk to her? She is an uneducated and ignorant person' (Meakin 1903: 284).

However, in the family where Nazaroff (1993: 51) took refuge from the Bolsheviks the husbands and wives spent considerable amounts of time socialising together. Infant mortality rates were so high that women usually had large numbers of pregnancies - ten to twenty were not uncommon - in the hope that at least one child would survive to reproduce him or herself (Harris 1996b). In this setting it is not unreasonable to expect that parents would not invest much affection in the person of a child likely soon to be taken from them.

In Soviet Times

After the October Revolution the new state established universal schooling, a major function of which was the Sovietisation of the nation's youngest generation (Heller 1988: 148ff). While appreciating some aspects of the school system, as members of a colonised nation Tajik parents found themselves fighting against the alien values inculcated by it. The ensuing struggle between Tajik parents and the Soviet state over control of their children's minds made it necessary for parents to be much more authoritarian than might otherwise have been the case. Furthermore, for most Tajik children their parents were also the sole source of their religious training.

Before the Revolution the nuclear family had been practically non-existent in the area that is now Tajikistan. The Soviet government wanted to establish in Tajikistan the type of family idealised in one of the main sources of Marxist-Leninist ideology, Engels' *The Origins of the Family* (1972). In effect, the ideal Soviet family was to be the bourgeois nuclear family beloved of capitalist states with, instead of a purely domesticated wife, one who took an equal part in 'social production' alongside her household and child-rearing tasks.

Therefore, the government's policy was to encourage young Tajiks to relocate as nuclear families in separate households. The idea was that their resultant liberation from parental control would open them to persuasion to abandon their traditions in favour of a more 'rational', modernised and Sovietised way of life. Thus the government tried to get young people to live as far as possible from their parents, in the hope that geographical distance would breed other distances (Bacon 1966: 168). Unfortunately, in the early Soviet period it was simply not possible to provide enough apartments for this policy to be carried out (Rakowska-Harmstone 1970: 62, 275). Eventually, although it never gained much of a hold in rural areas, the policy of providing urban families with flats just large enough to hold one small family did oblige increasing numbers of young urban inhabitants to live neolocally.

Inevitably, this had some effect on the independence of younger people but, as I point out in chapter 5, this very often remained slight. Furthermore, nuclear families are still in the minority even today and major decision-making for almost all families is carried out in family council, not in individual nuclear units. Thus, senior family members retain a lifetime's veto power over the actions of younger members and always have a call on their children's

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33 Compare the attitudes of the Tajik men returning from Russia today (cf. chapter 6).
34 The same was true in Europe until child mortality rates started to fall sharply in the 18th century (Stone 1977: 68).
resources, even when the latter keep their finances separate. The only way they can protect these is to conceal them from the rest of the family, something which few people can bring themselves to do. In other words, the Soviet State clearly failed in its efforts to remove the younger generation from the influence of their elders and in this way to decrease the power of tradition.

As marriage in the Soviet Union was seen as a civil affair it had to be registered in the civil registry office (ZAGS). In Tajikistan this was one way the government tried to control both age at marriage and polygyny, although Tajik practices made a mockery of this. For a long time many families continued to marry their daughters off below the legal age. In rural areas it was common to perform the religious ceremony (nikoh) first, after which a couple would begin to live together, and only register with ZAGS when the wife was old enough and had produced (male) children\(^35\) (Monogarova 1982: II, 78). Some couples disregarded ZAGS altogether - Karomat's marriage was never registered, for instance. In the 1920's parents would simply take along an older sister or cousin to the marriage commission, registering her in the name of the younger one, who was the actual bride (Nukhrai 1930: 63). In the 1930's the law was changed to require a doctor's certification of the bride's age before marriage could be registered, but here too an older woman was often substituted for the younger one. Later, birth certificates were introduced which made registration of the marriages of under-age girls more difficult (Kislyakov & Pisarchik 1976: 33).

Polygynous wives would be married by nikhoh, the only legitimate marriage ceremony as far as Tajiks were concerned, and introduced in front of Soviet officials as relatives of the registered marital couple (Tett 1995: 111). Civil registration was valued rather for providing access to family allowances than as a rite of passage.

The birth rate in Tajikistan remained high until very recently even though, since the late 1950's, it has no longer been offset by high infant and child mortality rates, so that it is now not uncommon for rural families to have 10-14 living children. This is in part due to a preference for large families and in part to Soviet policies rewarding 'heroine mothers'. According to a decree of July 4, 1944, the award of heroine mother was given to women who had born and raised ten children or more to maturity. Mothers of seven to nine children received awards of 'motherhood glory', mothers of 5 and 6 children the 'motherhood medal'. The idea was that this would encourage Russian women to have large families to replace some of the almost 40 million lost to the Soviet Union through the purges of the 1930's and World War II. However, these incentives were not sufficient to compensate Russians for the difficult material conditions they lived under (Meek 1957: 204-5).

The measures produced the desired results only in the Caucasus and Central Asia, areas that have traditionally favoured large families, where the birth rates became spectacularly high. Heroine mothers received gold medals, free accommodation, cars, money payments and other material rewards (Heer & Bryden 1966; Patnaik 1989). For many Tajik women this, coupled with the cultural emphasis on big families, was sufficient encouragement to produce very large families indeed. The maximum number of children born to one woman I have heard of in Tajikistan is 24, including three sets of twins\(^36\).

\(^35\) For this reason official marriage statistics correspond only very partially with reality. When babies are born at home (which frequently occurs in rural areas) they are also often not registered.

\(^36\) Personal communication from Zukhra Akhmedova, gynaecologist, who came across this woman some twenty years ago when she first started working in rural areas.
Post-Soviet Times

The Tajik family is the site where the ‘ruling ideas’ of Tajik society are internalised by children of both sexes, where they learn the appropriate gender performances. This depends not only on sex but also on age, defined not so much by calendar years as by generational positioning. This gives mature women an ambivalent position within the family, since their generational position gives them partial membership in the dominant group. Moreover, struggles over the performance of gender are not limited to women but are basic to the conflicts between fathers and sons, as will be shown in chapter 5.

For Tajiks the family circle is the centre of their lives. Most are unable to move outside it other than in a very transitory manner, for instance to attend school or to spend time with their friends. The physical mobility of young men is rarely matched by psychological mobility and is always subordinated to their obligations to behave correctly within the family, where they may have only the smallest room for negotiation. Moreover, it is limited by lack of access to housing and nowadays to jobs also, that would make it possible for young men to establish their own independent households. By the time people have attained the age and position where they can make their own decisions, their parents will have long since ensnared them in a web of familial ties that virtually make mockery of their current options. In most cases, by then they will in any case have already forgotten the desire to rebel and will be chiefly concerned with reproducing conformity in their own children.

The above discussion should not be read as an indication that all children are simply only submissive to their parents, nor that all parents are equally autocratic. That the young can develop their own ideas and that they rarely acquiesce completely in their subordination can be seen from many of the stories narrated in this book. In some circumstances girls may even find a space in which to ‘voice’ their disagreement to their elders, even though this will rarely consist of verbal opposition. It is rare for children explicitly to defy their parents. More drastically, it is traditional in Tajikistan, as in other countries of the region, for serious protest to take the form of attempted or actual suicide (cf. chapter 6).

The extent to which young Tajiks are able to have input into major life-decisions depends on many factors, including how their gender/ethnic performances interact with other modalities such as urban/rural, low/high educational levels, and locality (mahalchigi), as well as the dynamics within the individual family. This is, for instance, illustrated by the relatively greater freedom of the young people in the mountain village studied by Tett to choose their own marriage partners than even the young people from Dushanbe whose stories are narrated in this book were given (Tett 1995: 102).

Generation and sex are both integral to gender performance. In fact even the small age difference between siblings is important in power ranking. In Tajik, and culturally related languages, there are no words simply for brother or sister, there are only words for older or

37 China, Iran, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan to name a few, have long histories of young people’s and especially young women’s suicides for much the same reasons as in Tajikistan (cf. Afshar 1987: 76; Lajoinie 1980: 82).
38 According to Monogarova 53.5% of marriages in Dushanbe are arranged by the parents but there are fairly substantial differences among the various localities (1982: II, 90, 140).
Conceptual Background

younger brother or sister\(^{39}\). That is to say, there is no word for sibling that does not carry with it the explicit power connotations of being older or younger. Even when speaking Russian or other European languages Tajiks manage to translate this into differential forms of the words. I have never heard a Tajik speaking any language, use any but power-ranking words to refer to their siblings. In fact, they use these more often than their siblings' names, even to people who know the family. Karomat, as the eldest sister, expected deference from her younger sisters, even though they were all far more highly educated than she. One of the reasons Dila was able to stand up to her brother was that, although she was a girl she was also the elder. This largely evened out the power relationship between them.

Although men are supposed to be more dominant than women of their own age and generation, they are subordinate to both older men and women. Tajik men generally can only exert control over older women in the direct matter of the latter breaching the code of family honour (cf. chapter 4). As long as this is not the case the superior power resides with the older person rather than with the dominant sex. From the books of Donish (cf. chapter 3) and the Nalivkins (cf. chapter 2) it can be seen that before the Revolution wealth and social position could make a very real contribution to the performance of gender, upsetting the usual male/female, older/younger dominant/subordinate positions. However, such differentials seem to have largely disappeared with the social equalising that occurred during the Soviet period.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sketched out the theoretical and conceptual environment of my work. Foucault's notions of power and resistance and the micromechanisms of power utilised at the lowest level of the community, Butler's concepts of performativity and the psychological development of the human subject, and my own variant gender performances and masks form the theoretical basis of this book. These mechanisms facilitate both social control and its subversion.

The stories I narrate in what follows all take place against the background depicted in the present chapter. Their characters live in such families as those described above and their daily existence is shaped by the constraints of power relations between themselves and the other members of their families, as also among the network of families that constitutes Tajik society, in very much the same way as it is for Fayziddin and Zora, Dila and Ali. Above all else it is gender norms that are the key to the behaviour of all the characters I introduce in this book, most of whose actions can be construed either as endeavouring to uphold or else to secretly subvert these norms.

The lives of these Tajiks are further shaped by the constraints laid on them, and the institutions provided for them, by the Soviet state. The isolation from the world outside the borders of the Soviet Union, which was imposed upon them by the regime, also helped to keep the Tajik nation from contact with both Muslim and Western societies, including new social currents such as the movements towards Islamisation, feminism, and civil rights.

The political world inhabited by the Tajiks was created by the events that were set into train by the October Revolution, most especially those that took place between the mid-1920's

\(^{39}\) Older brother is barodar or aka, younger usually dodar. Older sister is apa, younger kohar.
and the early 1930's. This was the time of the Bolshevik attack on Central-Asian gender identities (hujum), and of collectivisation.