Control and subversion: gender, islam, and socialism in Tajikistan
Harris, C.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
CHAPTER 2
THE BOLSHEVIKS ATTACK

The Power of the State

'The role of political power ... is perpetually to re-inscribe [the] `definite relation of forces that is established ... in war and by war', through a form of unspoken warfare; to re-inscribe it in social institutions, ... and in language, in the bodies themselves of each and everyone of us' (Foucault 1980a: 90).

This passage might almost have been written with the Bolsheviks in mind, so well does it correspond to their policies in Central Asia. In the early post-revolutionary days they had used the Red Army, first to fight the civil war, then to put down general local unrest, and finally to suppress basmachiim. But as soon as this had been achieved the Bolsheviks started substituting political for military warfare, making use of every one of the methods Foucault lists.

The Bolsheviks made laws, set up courts and a police service, established schools and women's clubs. They made much of language both in political discourse and in their specific linguistic policies for Central Asia. They even went so far as virtually to attack the bodies of Central Asians through their policy of forced unveiling, in their attempt to destroy local family structures. They did all this with the aim of inscribing on these bodies the cultural values of the Russian rulers. It is no coincidence that the name the Bolsheviks gave to the most active thrust of their policy was a military term - hujum, attack.

However, as I discussed in chapter 1, Foucault also suggests that power does not go unopposed (1990: 95). The harder the Bolsheviks pressed, the harder the Central Asians resisted.

Life before Socialism

Bolshevik political discourse suggested that before their 'emancipation' by the Soviet state women in Central Asia had almost universally been abused. This propaganda has been extremely influential in the former Soviet Union and even Tajiks themselves sometimes appear to believe it. However, this does not tally with the accounts of people living and travelling in the region at the time.

Karomat had a formidable memory. She could recall almost everything that had happened to her since her fifth birthday and even a few things before that. She told me a good deal about her early life and that of her parents.

1 In this chapter I discuss that part of Central Asia culturally similar to Tajikistan, essentially comprising modern Tajikistan and the South Eastern part of Uzbekistan, including Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent, and the Fergana Valley. The Bolshevik policies, as well as the local responses, were very much the same over all this area, except for the southern and eastern parts of Tajikistan, which were the last fully to be brought under Soviet rule.
Karomat's mother was born of a well-to-do family in the northern Tajik village of Zarkhok. Her childhood had been happy. Life had seemed pretty good. Their family had their own farm, the land was fertile, and they had enough livestock to supply them with meat for festive occasions. She had many girlfriends of her own age with whom she spent much of her time. When any major task had to be undertaken in the house or garden, all the women of the neighbourhood would rally round and help, so that it would be accomplished quickly and without too much effort. In this way work was shared and they all had fun doing it together.

On feast days and holidays there would be amusements. Perhaps a travelling entertainer would come to the village with his bear. The men never showed any interest but the women and children would go and watch, the women sitting there covered by their faranjas. The entertainer would climb trees with the bear after him and play the fool in other ways. He would also play a sort of fipple flute and then the bear would dance.

But life was not always so rosy. Girls and boys were not supposed to mix after the onset of puberty. If they did so it could spell disaster. An unmarried girl found to be pregnant would be stoned to death, although the boy would probably escape more or less unscathed. Young folk were not allowed any say as to whom they married. That was up to the older generation. Even if a girl loved a boy very much her parents would not necessarily allow her to marry him. However, if the girl felt very deeply about her friend, she might even commit suicide rather than marry someone else. Once, when Karomat's mother was a teenager, she and her friends were present when one of their group deliberately drowned herself in the river to avoid an unwanted marriage, and this upset them very much. They were also often sad because of the death of one of their sisters or brothers.

At age eighteen, she married a relatively educated young man from a well-to-do clerical family, who had himself studied at a medressa. Although she did not love him at the time, afterwards she came to care for him very much. Karomat, their eldest child, was born in 1925.

Karomat's stories about her childhood and that of her mother are congruent with the stories told by other women in Tajikistan, as well as with the accounts of Westerners who travelled in the area in pre-revolutionary times (cf. Harris 1996a). They show the lives of women in Turkestan to have been very circumscribed, especially in the towns, where, unlike in Karomat's village, women spent almost all their time enclosed within the women's quarters of their houses. Their greatest pleasure was receiving visits from relatives and friends, which provided almost the only contact with the world beyond the courtyard. Upper-class women were usually educated and often spent a great deal of time reading, some managing to gain

---

2 All Karomat's mother's nine siblings died in infancy or childhood and all but one of those of Karomat's father. Five of Karomat's own siblings, including all four boys, died in childhood.

Nazira, whose family came from Bukhara, had a great aunt who gave birth to 17 children, all of whom died young, many in epidemics. Her grandmother had 11 children, of whom only one survived to adulthood. Both these last two women married around the age of 13 and became pregnant soon after.
considerable knowledge of the world from books, despite never leaving home (Meakin 1903: 87-90).

Karomat's family, like the majority of those visited by Western travellers, was among the more privileged, but many lived in circumstances of considerable poverty. The Nalivkins’ (1886) stories of the lives of poor families in the Fergana Valley in the late 19th century show how very tough their lives were, especially during the harsh winter months. Poor children might even be given to wealthy families when their parents could no longer afford to pay for their keep (Nalivkin & Nalivkina 1886: 175).

The customs that prevented boys and girls in love from marrying and that put them entirely in their parents' control obviously made things unbearable for some, such as Karomat's mother's friend who drowned herself to avoid being forced into marriage against her will. However, this does not mean that everyone was unhappy or badly treated. Karomat's mother herself was clearly not. She lived in apparent contentment with her husband for some seventy years. Compared with stories like this Soviet propaganda appears simplistic, one-sided, and almost like a caricature, as the following three excerpts demonstrate:

During many centuries the woman of the East was the most enslaved of an enslaved population, the most oppressed of an oppressed population. From the fact that the shari'ah serves as the basis of family and marital law arises the inequality of men and women, husbands and wives. The shari'ah not only sanctifies and legitimizes but also strengthens this inequality, reducing the wife to the status of a slave, essentially depriving her of her right to the only escape from her slavery - the right to divorce. The reactionary essence of Islam and the norms of the shari'ah, as applied in Turkestan, is marked by the obligation of the woman to wear her 'prison' on her own body - the faranja and the chachvan. The basic institutions that characterise the legal systems of the sedentary and the nomadic population of Turkestan are practically identical. These are: early marriage of underage girls from the age of nine, the payment of brideprice by the groom or his parents to the bride's parents, the absence of women's right to divorce, etc. The rules of the shari'ah regulated a woman's position in the family in detail. Essentially this consisted of a total suppression of her personality. A wife did not have the right to show herself in front of strange men, could not go out to public places. She was limited to visiting her parents and other blood relations. A woman was not allowed to seek divorce; she was considered unequal to men; she had to obey her husband; she had to pardon him if he were unfaithful while remaining faithful herself; she had to consider herself the possession of one man, her husband; a wife should be sympathetic to her husband in all his moods, her beauty, character, respectability, and tenderness greater than his ... (Tyurin 1962: 3-4, 14-18).

Marrying off young girls, bride price, polygyny and many other customs, the circumstances of daily life among the Central-Asian Muslims reduced the woman to the status of a thing... The woman who had been bought through bride price became the full possession of her husband who had the right to punish her and even kill her for adultery. ... The woman in her husband's house became a dumb slave. She had to be the first to rise in the morning, serve the family and do the housework, look after
Control and Subversion

her husband's parents, and she did not even have the right to eat at the main table. In the presence of others her husband did not talk to her, but with a threatening and stern glance would order her about. He would not defend her from the insults of his relatives or the older wives of the house. The woman submissively bore her heavy lot. All this was highly destructive for her health. By the age of thirty she was old and died young.... The Qur'an stipulated the obligatory wearing of the female ritual coverings - the chachvan and the faranja... The women of Central Asia had neither rights nor the possibility of leaving their husbands. It was extremely difficult for them to divorce, while men could do so merely by pronouncing the magic word taloq three times.... the woman and all her possessions belonged to her husband (Raskreproshchenie 1971: 4-7).

Bourgeois lovers of the exotic from time immemorial have seen the women of the East as careless nymphs, happy, secret beauties of the harems of Eastern rulers. But the monstrous reality was that these harems were seats of evil and depravity, bloody violence, wild arbitrariness, and outrages committed on women. On the female toilers of the Muslim East, constituting the vast mass of the female population, lay heavy, hard work .... All domestic work lay on the shoulders of the women. She had to cook, sew, bring up the children. .... The women did a great deal of work on the farm... Shut up in the narrow circle of their households, isolated from society, the women of the East represented the most enslaved, sluggish, backwards part of the population. ..... The basis of women's status specific to Central Asia, was the total, submissive dependence on men to whom they were considered inferior... The Central-Asian woman entered the twentieth century as the slave of her father, her husband, her father-in-law, her older brother, and even her son. The most prized characteristic of women was silence.... Seclusion, including the wearing of ritual clothing to cover the face, neck, and hands, was religiously observed in the daily life of the pre-revolutionary Central Asians... Divorce was easily obtainable, but only on the initiative of the man. Divorced women did not even have rights to their children... (Pal'vanova 1982: 5-7).

As the publication dates indicate these books were written well on into the Soviet period. They present the official position on pre-revolutionary lifestyles. This was based in part on the assumption that veiling, brideprice, polygyny, and arranged marriages especially of children, were in themselves degrading for women and made it impossible for them to be anything other than enslaved and submissive. In essence what the Bolsheviks' propaganda suggests is that the 'masks' women assumed to project their appropriate gender identities (cf. chapter 1) were all there was, that there were no human beings behind them. Since the masks in question included the tangible ones constituted by the faranja and chachvan this amounts to saying that there was no human body inside, that Central-Asian women had been so repressed as no longer to be human beings (cf. chapter 3).

For the rest, the Bolsheviks collected horror stories, such as that of Nazrullo, whose story is recounted below, from those women who joined them in the early days, and projected these on to all Central-Asian women. It was clearly useful for the Soviet regime to portray pre-
revolutionary life as negatively as possible, to make it appear to be solely thanks to the Soviet state that any improvements in living conditions had taken place.

While the stories told by the Russian settlers and travellers to the region show many details of pre-revolutionary life through somewhat eurocentric eyes they are at least convincing. A reader feels that they are about real life. The Soviet political writing, on the other hand, just does not ring true. It quickly begins to sound monotonous and unconvincing, if not ludicrous. Moreover, the imbalance between the lack of attention paid in Soviet discourse to Russian peasant women and the fixation on the lowly position of Central-Asian women demonstrates the strongly political nature of the whole enterprise. After all, aside from the specifics of local customs, such as polygyny, brideprice, and veiling,

the position of Sart women was in many respects better than that of the Russian peasant woman, who until quite modern times was a creature almost without rights; divorce was quite out of her reach; her husband could treat her as cruelly as he like; he could flog her to death, and still she was quite unable to leave him (Nazaroff 1993: 83).

Even after the Revolution many Russian peasant women often led indescribably horrible lives (Goldman 1993). But Russian peasant life was both more easily penetrable by the Soviet regime, as well as being less politically critical. Therefore, it merited considerably less attention, as witnessed by the appalling conditions prevailing in Central Russia even today. The outrage that the Soviet sources express at Central-Asian women’s inability to obtain a divorce sounds ridiculous when contrasted with the situation in Russia before the Revolution, where divorce was unattainable for everyone. At least divorce was permissible under Islamic law, which is more than it was in the Russian Orthodox Church. Moreover it was not true that a Muslim woman could never initiate divorce proceedings.

It was certainly much easier for Muslim men, who need merely to repudiate their wives in front of witnesses. When Nazaroff’s (1980) host decided he was tired of his second wife of three years - explaining that ‘She is no use to me. She won’t help with housekeeping, is lazy and now to have an extra wife is very expensive’ - he merely sent for a mullah to witness the repudiation:

Next day at noon a mullah arrived. All the family was gathered round in a circle and the mullah read a prayer. They then sat down, ate pilau, drank tea and the divorce proceedings were over. An hour later the son took his father’s divorced wife with her child and belongings back to her home in Tashkent. It was just as simple as the leave-taking of a domestic servant. (Nazaroff 1980: 43).

However, although it was more complicated for women to initiate divorce, since this had to be done through a judge, they were able to do it in certain circumstances. Shishov (1904, 1910), who lived in Turkestan around the turn of the twentieth century, states that:

A wife has the right to divorce in the following cases: if her husband has beat her without reason and she still carries the marks on her body; if without her permission or agreement her husband takes a second wife; if her husband takes her further than

3Personal communication from Natalya Kosmarskaya, a Russian social scientist studying lifestyles of Russians returning to Central Russia from Central Asia.
three days journey from her place of permanent residence without her permission; if he goes mad; if he becomes a leper.

A wife who is unsatisfied with her husband can go to the qazi and explain that her husband doesn’t feed or provide for her in other ways, and that she therefore does not want to live with him. The qazi sends an inspector to her home to check out the situation. If he finds no flour or other provision he will inform the qazi. Then the latter asks the husband whether he intends to feed his wife. If he refuses he is told to divorce her. If he will not do that he is forced to or the qazi does it for him (Shishov 1904: 365, 418).

Nazaroff (1980, 1993) and the Nalivkins (1886: 101) suggest that women often demanded divorces for more frivolous reasons than those mentioned above, for instance, if their husbands did not bring them new clothes at major feasts. (I wonder what the qazi’s reply to this would have been, or would he have been given a different reason?) The sources suggest that it was not so very difficult for women to obtain a divorce, especially if they were from a wealthy background and had their families’ support. It was harder for women from poor families and for a poor man it might be a tragedy to lose a wife, as it might be very difficult for him to afford another (Schwarz 1900: 193).

Nazaroff (1993), writing after the Revolution, insists the Bolsheviks have the wrong idea entirely about women’s place in Turkestan, that it is not nearly as disadvantaged as they portray it. His accounts of life among the Sarts suggest that their women did have considerable power within the family (1993: 79-82). Although he may be exaggerating somewhat, his account is clearly based on his own observations and on his experiences during many years of living closely with the local population, which is more than the Bolsheviks’ were. Most of them had little, if any, first-hand experience of life in the region. Their acquaintance with the local women was confined to those in desperate straits who had come to seek help from the Bolsheviks. Indeed, few Russians at any time mixed socially with the locals to any great extent. During my own time in Tajikistan I met many Russians who had never been inside a Tajik household, despite having lived all their lives in the Republic.

I am not trying to suggest that the women who fled to the Bolsheviks in the early days had not been severely maltreated but merely wish to point out that it was convenient for all concerned to paint their stories as black as possible. No one will ever know how widespread abuse of women may have been in pre-revolutionary Central Asia. Certainly any system that puts power largely into the hands of one social group will lend itself to the abuse of the remaining ones, so it would be hardly surprising if Central-Asian men took advantage of their position. Abuse may well have increased as poverty levels grew during the years of Tsarist rule (cf. introduction), putting more young girls into the hands of older men as polygynous wives, and forcing increasing numbers of poor women into servitude. The tales of the women and adolescent girls who fled to the Bolsheviks in the early post-revolutionary years suggest that they were indeed exposed to considerable maltreatment, including sexual exploitation of servant girls by their employers, ferocious beatings of both servants and wives, and abandonment.

Nasrulla had been married at age 11 to a man as his ninth wife. After four days of marriage her husband hit her in the face so hard he knocked her down because their
neighbour said she had met her in the street wearing a chachvan that was not thick enough. After that her husband beat her every day and his eldest wife tried to kill her. After the Revolution her husband joined the Party and forced this wife to join also. But he still made her wear the faranja, and continued to maltreat her. She tried to commit suicide but was saved and then left her husband. Later she studied in Moscow and subsequently became a member of the Uzbek government and editor of the largest Uzbek women's journal (paraphrased from Halle 1938: 312).

This still does not mean these women were incapable of any sort of resistance. The mere fact they were able to run away shows that they had not been completely browbeaten. However, not all abuse came from men. There were also powerful women in Central Asia, who used their positions to abuse other women. In great contrast to the situation today younger women might even abuse older ones:

In those wealthy families where the wife originally came from a poor family it is not at all rare for this wife's mother or some of her other relatives, to be employed as servants. Such servants have the same low position as any other servant. The daughter orders her servant mother about as if the only relation between them were that of mistress and servant. We often heard the conversation of mothers giving their daughters in marriage to rich men. The mother would beg the bride to forget she ever beat or scolded her, always trying to avoid the danger that her newly rich daughter might send her away from her home. We knew of a woman married to a wealthy man who took her own mother for a servant and not only ordered her about mercilessly but constantly nagged her about her bad service, and even sometimes beat her (Nalivkin & Nalivkina 1886: 111-12).

Some women were able to stand up for themselves to their menfolk also, as Donish (1960 - cf. chapter 3) and Meakin (1903) suggest - 'even in Bokhara it is not a rare thing for a woman to give her husband a good drubbing if she suspects him of inconstancy' (Meakin 1903: 284). No doubt where the wife and husband came from families in similar social positions and the difference in age was small a married couple would be more equal in power. It is clear that wealth was a very major component of power relations in pre-revolutionary times. It would be inconceivable for a woman today to maltreat her mother in this way whatever the differential in wealth and/or education. I have seen the most highly educated women, living in elegant surroundings, meekly obeying their poor, illiterate mothers.

Nazaroff's (1980) accounts of the relationships between his hosts reveal anything but a submissive attitude on the part of the women. They are always fighting with their husbands and threatening to leave them, while secretly doing all they can to hoard money and other valuables, which he considers tantamount to robbing their husbands. The son of Nazaroff's host is very much in love with his second wife and she takes full advantage of this. At one point Nazaroff saw her in fury throw a cat at her husband who caught the poor animal and slapped his wife in the face with it. Later this woman told her father-in-law that if he did not buy her material for a new chemise, robe and overdress, as well as new boots and galoshes she would leave her husband. The family finally got a mullah to come to plead with her and
she agreed to stay with her husband if he would buy her new boots and galoshes (Nazaroff 1980: 22: 44-5).

It is difficult to know how much this behaviour was dictated by the presence of Nazaroff, who was hiding in their house from the Bolsheviks, thus providing an ideal opportunity for blackmail. It was he who provided the money to buy this woman her finery and in the end her threats to betray him to the Bolsheviks if he did not give her more and more presents drove him to look for shelter elsewhere. However, it is clear that this woman was not afraid of her husband, or even of her father-in-law, and is able to act in her own interests. When her mother-in-law suggests the best way of dealing with her is to beat her soundly the men disagree (Nazaroff 1980: 44ff). This wife has power over her husband because he loves her and so cannot bear to lose her. The relationships in this family, further complicated by the friction between the father's and the son's polygynous wives show how very much more complex family situations were than the Bolsheviks ever gave credit for. Here Foucault's points of pressure and resistance can be clearly seen at work (1990: 94-6).

The Revolution comes to Central Asia

On 15th November 1917 Lenin declared all the peoples of Russia to be equal and to have a right to sovereignty, free self-determination, and secession from the Union. Furthermore, he explicitly promised not to interfere with the culture of the Muslims:

_Muhammadans of Russia, Tatars of the Volga and the Crimea, Kirghiz and Sarts of Turkistan, Turks and Tatars of Transcaucasia, all those whose mosques and prayer-houses were destroyed and whose religion and customs were trampled upon by the Russian Tsars and tyrants! Henceforth your faith and customs, your national and cultural institutions, are proclaimed free and inviolable. Build up your national life freely and unhindered. This is your right._ (Caroe 1967: 105).

Considering how very soon afterwards the Bolsheviks were doing their best to suppress Islam far more harshly than the Tsars had ever done, it is hard to believe in the sincerity of the sentiments expressed here. Indeed it is difficult not to see this as little more than a very opportunistic attempt to persuade the Central Asians not to secede, at a time when the Bolsheviks would have been too weak and too much taken up with battles elsewhere to resist them. It is, of course, impossible to say how much freedom Lenin might eventually have allowed the Central Asians had he lived to supervise Turkestan's reconstruction of the region himself. However, he was well aware how desperately the fledgling Soviet state needed the region, both for strategic and economic purposes. Lenin was behind the declaration of the Fourth Regional Congress of Soviets that the principle of self-determination of peoples was to be subordinated to socialism and which defined the self-determination of peoples solely as the self-determination of the 'toiling classes' (Park 1957: 19).

Lenin saw Central Asia as barbaric, savage, and completely alien. He was baffled by the question of how to tackle such a backward region so as to bring it into socialism. This was not dealt with in any tracts he was acquainted with. Lenin was also troubled by the chauvinistic tendencies of many of the Russian revolutionary leaders, who openly talked

---

4 Except where otherwise stated the material in this section and those on *hujum* is based on Gregory Massell's brilliant study (1974).
The Bolsheviks Attack

about Turkestan as only fit to be a source of cotton and other raw materials, rather than as an integral component of the new socialist state (Lenin 1960: 504). He was particularly concerned about this, since he saw Central Asia as the place that other Asian and African peoples would look to when deciding whether or not to fight for socialism in their own countries and therefore believed that the future of world socialism might hinge on developments there (Massell: 41-55).

Soviet relations with Central Asia were very tricky. On the one hand, as long as most of their arable land was given over to cotton production the region would remain dependent on the government’s grain imports. On the other hand, local elites were very resistant to the encroachment of a new style of government that threatened their very existence. They managed to combat the worst effects of this by ensuring that they held the top posts in the new government themselves while simultaneously maintaining the old power structures. They saw to it that poor men who failed to support them suffered at the hands of the rest of the community, especially since they were dependent on local power networks to provide all services, including supervising rites of passage, healing, schooling for their children, courts, and help for the destitute. As long as the local peoples banded together the government found itself quite unable to make any real impression on Central Asian society.

Hujum

In 1926, several years after Lenin’s death, and after the basmachi revolt had been almost completely crushed, the government in Moscow decided that the time had come to go more actively to work to incorporate Central Asia psycho-socially into the Revolution. To do this they decided they had to penetrate and destroy the local family structures that had proved so resistant to change. Immanent plans for collectivisation made Central Asian co-operation all the more urgent.

The fact that Central Asia was largely rural with no more than cottage industry, meant that there was no local proletariat to carry out a class struggle. The Bolsheviks had already refused to accept the possibility that Russian peasants could be instruments of revolution (Lenin 1942). Central Asian peasants were proving even more recalcitrant. It was decided that the solution was to seek out members of the most disadvantaged social group and provide them with sufficient incentives to switch sides. The problem was to identify this group. It was suggested that one possibility might be the younger generation of males, who might be willing to go over to the Bolsheviks out of resentment of their fathers’ power over them. However, this turned out not to be workable. Their position was not nearly disadvantaged enough.

The Bolsheviks then decided that by far the most seriously disadvantaged social group in the region had to be the women. An imaginative reconstruction of these women in the guise of a nominal proletariat seemed to solve the theoretical problem of how to promote a functional class struggle that would break open Central-Asian society and bring all parties into the Soviet system. In June 1921 a group of Central-Asian women had attended the Second International Conference of Communist Women in Moscow, many turning up veiled. The image these veiled women presented made an overwhelming impression on the Russian delegates who had never before been confronted with anything like it. It brought the slavery
of these Asian women home to them in a way that does not seem to have occurred with respect to the equally badly treated Russian peasant women.

After this conference many women went from Russia and other European regions of the USSR to Central Asia for the purpose of working on the campaign to win over local women. They appear to have been genuinely inspired by a desire to help their 'downtrodden sisters'. Once it had been decided to 'free' Central Asian women detailed plans were worked out. Civil marriage laws permitting women to initiate divorce and forbidding marriage of girls under 16 and boys under 18 were already in force, although they had never been enforceable in Central Asia. Throughout the 1920's special laws were promulgated for the Central-Asian republics. They outlawed polygyny and the payment of kalym and included stipulations that marriage was only legitimate if it had the consent of both parties. Infringements of these laws were punishable under a statute called 'crimes based on custom'. In 1928 a legal codex was drawn up for the whole Central-Asian region to help combat 'Crimes Constituting the Relics of the Tribal Order'. Among the laws it contained were those the Bolsheviks considered necessary to do away with all formal inequalities between men and women (Massell op. cit: 202-7).

The government justified its onslaught on traditional lifestyles by propaganda demonstrating just how negative these were. This was designed to entice women to abandon these lifestyles and go over en masse to the Bolsheviks. Since the early 1920's when the zhenotdel set up branches in Central Asia, women and girls had started to make their way to them for help. They had virtually all been severely maltreated, had no natal families or had been abandoned by them, and were desperate to leave an unbearable situation. However, very few other women made contact with the Bolsheviks. Particularly in those areas of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan where the women lived secluded, there was almost no way of communicating with them, shut up as they were behind the walls of their houses. The only way to reach them was to smoke them out, to force them out of seclusion.

Bringing them out of seclusion, the Bolsheviks reasoned, would liberate their eyes and voices, allowing them to show their hitherto suppressed personalities. This would at one stroke set women on the road to 'emancipation' and bring them out into the open, where Bolshevik propaganda could reach them. Thereafter it would surely not be so difficult to convince them to abandon their other 'harmful' practices - including religious worship. This would be all the easier to achieve because the women would naturally be grateful to their rescuers and wish to side with them. So, although the hujum campaign also included freeing women from other aspects of traditional life it was decided to concentrate mainly on persuading them to abandon those symbols of female degradation, the faranja and chachvan.

Indeed, the use of symbolism was marked on both sides of the fence. For the Bolsheviks the veil had become the symbol of local resistance to new ideas. It was a symbol very conveniently to hand and one that they could exploit with all apparent justification and legitimacy. If they succeeded, not only would the women be won over but the men would have been defeated in the centre of their beings, since, for Central Asian men their womenfolk's wearing of the veil symbolised the bastion of their own gender identities and a bulwark against Sovietisation. In other words, this struggle had little to do with the women themselves, who were basically pawns in the fight between two groups of men, each of them

---

5 It was only later that the government co-opted their sincere efforts to free women from what they saw as slavery, into a policy for subduing the entire region (Massell 1974: 135-141), a policy outlined in detail in the numerous official documents that Massell consulted for the writing of his book.
trying to manipulate the women to their own advantage. However, this was also very much a struggle over gender performances. Those of both Central-Asian men and women were heavily dependent on female veiling.

Groups of Soviet officials were organised to go round encouraging women to unveil. Poor women who were already unveiled accompanied them and with great gusto tore the veils off richer women. Other groups travelled from village to village trying to get women there to abandon their veils. Mass unveiling campaigns were organised to coincide with International Women's Day. On March 8, 1927 an unveiling campaign was organised in the cities of Tashkent, Samarkand, Fergana, Narmangan, and others. Local Soviet officials were specifically ordered to attend, together with as many other local men as could be reached. All were warned in advance to bring their wives and other female members of their families with them, on pain of severe penalties.

_Thousands of Muslim women went out into the squares of the old cities of Central Asia. There they cast off their faranjas and chachvans... and they burned them on bonfires, whose huge flames, ascending towards the sky, announced the hujum. This started an attack on the centuries-old backwards, patriarchal-clannish way of life, seclusion. With this ceremony began a new era - that of the free Muslim women_ (Pal'vanova 1982).

In fact the effect was short lived. Most of these women, including the majority of the wives of local Party members and government officials, resumed their garments soon afterwards, many on the following day, declaring they had understood the occasion to be merely symbolic - just for women's day (Halle 1938: 174), as a satirical verse of the time suggested:

_On the seventh of March I tore off my veil,
But before I reached home
I bought three new paranjas
To veil myself more darkly_ (Strong 1930: 273).

Central-Asian men experienced the unveiling campaign as an outrage, an attack against their masculinity. While they could not take direct action against the government, they could, and did, retaliate against those involved in the campaign, killing and injuring many of them, both Soviet officials and unveiled women. Many men killed their own wives and sisters.

It must have been a highly confusing time for women. Should they unveil or not? What would their fate be if they did so? How would they live if they did not, since they would be excluded from the advantages of literacy classes and jobs? Weighing up the pros and cons, must have been tremendously difficult. For some, especially younger women, the idea of unveiling may long have been extremely attractive, as Schuyler suggests (1876: I-124). Bourdon (1880) too said that she had heard that the young women of Tashkent, at any rate, wished to abandon the veil:

_The Sart women in Tashkent are unhappy. They maintain that the Russian authorities did wrong in not passing a law allowing them to uncover their faces. This criticism was levelled at the government by the youth of both sexes but it was far from finding an echo among the older men who are quite untractable on this point_ (1880: 151).
Other women no doubt experienced unveiling as a horrendous psychological attack. Moreover, during the time of the *hujum* campaigns, in order to encourage women to feel that there was little potential benefit to be derived from unveiling and for them to experience it as negatively as possible many were physically attacked. Crowds of men followed unveiled women in the streets, jeering and shouting at them, knocking against them and even pouring foul water on them. There were even incidences of gang rape and disembowelments. It is estimated that several thousands of men and women were killed or seriously injured during the course of the campaign, which lasted from around 1926 to 1930.\(^6\) (1974: 281-2).

**Karomat's Mother abandons her *Faranja***

Karomat's mother was one of those women forced by the Soviet authorities to abandon their *faranjas*. This coincided with the start of collectivisation in her village and so with the need for women to work on the newly organised kolkhoz. Previously the women had worked on their own homesteads, looking after their vegetable gardens and fruit trees, tending the livestock that lived near the house and carrying out domestic tasks, but not working in the fields. That was men's work. Under collectivisation all adults and many children were put to work on the farm.

One day in early 1930 the whole village was informed that the following day there would be a great feast at which all the village women and those from several neighbouring ones would be expected to gather. Karomat and her sister went with their mother and her friends. A great fire was lit and all the women told to remove their *faranjas* and chachvans and burn them. Karomat's father had already decided to support the Bolsheviks, regarding this as the only way to advancement under the new system, and his wife had her husband's agreement to abandon seclusion. Therefore, however traumatised she may have been at the idea of appearing 'unclothed' before men, at least she did not have to worry about what her menfolk would do. She was also young, without as many years invested in seclusion as the older women. So she complied with the instructions to throw her *faranja* on the flames with at least a show of acceptance.

Not all of the women, however, were so lucky. Those whose menfolk had threatened them with dire consequences if they were to expose themselves and thus bring down dishonour on their families were particularly frightened. These women had to have their *faranjas* taken from them by force. Indeed, some of them clutched on to them so desperately they measured their lengths on the ground when the Bolsheviks wrenched them out of their hands.\(^7\)

These women crept away, trying to hide their faces, in a, perhaps vain, attempt to appease their menfolk. Karomat did not know what happened to them later, or how many, if any, from her village were actually killed on account of their unveiling. However, she distinctly remembered what it was like there immediately after the burning. The women did not resume their *faranjas* and they looked so uncomfortable

---

\(^6\) This is somewhat reminiscent of the dichotomy faced by Algerian women a few years ago, when veiled women were being targeted by 'democrats' while unveiled women were being attacked by Islamists. Whichever course they chose many of them ended up dead.

\(^7\) For a more detailed account of this scene in Karomat's own words see Harris (1998a).
without them - like plucked chickens. At first they wore some garment or other draped over their heads, usually one of their husband's shirts, ready at any moment to pull the edges down to hide their faces from strange men. The older women never did get used to being uncovered and many kept some form of covering for life. The younger women gradually became accustomed to the new ways and adopted the wearing of a kerchief, which has been maintained to this day.

Leaving off the veil after a lifetime of wearing it must have been extremely difficult and traumatic. An unveiled Tajik woman Egon Erwin Kisch met when he travelled to Central Asia around 1930 told him that the first time she went out in the street unveiled her feelings were indescribable. She walked closely behind her husband with her face pressed to his back so that it could hardly be seen (Kisch 1932: 193).

The end of hujum

Karomat's mother must have been among the last groups of women forced to remove their faranjas. Already by mid 1929 the campaign was winding down. In December 1928 Lenin's widow, Krupskaya, had made an important speech advocating what she called 'systematic work'. She suggested that in future the Soviet government should concentrate on eradicating the root causes of traditional behaviour and on providing acceptable substitutes for the local social networks, rather than on attacking their way of life. Krupskaya was worried about the social upheavals the campaign had produced. Furthermore, it had not been a success. Aside from the many dead and wounded there were other problems associated with unveiling and the whole campaign on 'crimes based on custom' that had not been clearly foreseen by the campaign's authors (Massell 1974: 359-389).

Most of the women who had originally unveiled had resumed their veils and returned to traditional lifestyles. This was largely because the Soviet government had not put in place the support systems that would have been necessary to allow these women to make significant changes. Former qazis were even appointed to positions as Soviet judges. The result was that local officials were more likely to follow tradition than Soviet law in their attitudes to, and treatment of, local women. For some time after the end of hujum unveiled women continued to be attacked in the streets and sometimes systematically raped by village communist leaders. The following testimony of one woman before an investigative committee illustrates local attitudes:

Everybody acts as though he is busily engaged in agitating for female emancipation, [shouting] down with the veil! But go ahead and try to unveil: immediately everyone, including village communists, regards you as a fallen woman. This is exactly what happened to me: at one time I discarded the veil, and everyone persecuted me for this. The communists not only failed to defend me; quite the contrary, they let it be known that I was a prostitute. That's why I donned the veil again, and now people treat me with greater respect (Massell op. cit: 332).

In short, women were shown by their own menfolk that in order to be respected they had to be veiled and to accept their traditional place within the family hierarchy. Non-veiled
women could be treated as the prostitutes they were supposedly behaving as. In other words, women were shown that to be respected they had to keep to their traditional gender performances, including all the outward trappings of these. Moreover, large numbers of women who had left their homes and husbands either through choice or because they had been thrown out after unveiled had in fact been forced to resort to prostitution as the only way to survive. (Massell 294-99, 303, 329-30, 332).

After the end of hujum Soviet officials made it difficult for women to initiate divorce proceedings and stopped applying the laws on ‘crimes based on custom’ with any rigour. Local officials refused to apply these laws, on the contrary forcing women who tried to escape their families to return home, apparently exhibiting a zeal unusual in the rest of their work, in their eagerness to compel them to conform to tradition. Essentially, the government was permitting the clock to be turned back by refusing to support women’s immediate emancipation. It had been decided that this should take place gradually through reorganisation, not immediately through compulsion (Massell 1974: 336).

The ‘New’ Central-Asian Women

Gradually, the new material conditions did produce some differences in lifestyle. With the end of the compulsion to unveil the rate of abandonment slowed down tremendously, depending on family pressures and how these balanced with the exigencies of life under the Soviet regime, where access to public institutions, such as schools and factories, was often barred to veiled women. By the 1960’s factory work had given some women access to income of their own, while schools had brought girls into contact with new ideas and taught them new skills. By then also all but the oldest and/or most religious women had abandoned their veils.

From the start the Bolsheviks exaggerated the numbers of those going over to them and the strength of their commitment. They made much of each case, ignoring the fact that most of the women concerned were widows or orphans with little or nothing to lose by leaving their native communities. As increasing numbers of women came out of seclusion and joined the workforce, or at least went to work on the collective farms, there was still more reason for the Bolsheviks to proclaim a breakthrough in their achievements for Central Asian women (Pal’vanova 1982; Raskreproshchenie 1971).

The Bolsheviks made the most of the slightest material for propaganda purposes. From the 1930’s on they celebrated the development of the ‘new’ Central Asian woman, acclaiming the enormous gap between her way of life and that of her traditional sisters. This new type of woman was a Stakhanovite (cf. Buckley 1996), a tractor driver, a star cotton picker, even a parachutist.* She was healthy, energetic, and always willing and eager to work hard, especially in the years after World War II when the provision of ‘modern’ flats allowed urban women at least to spend less time in domestic labour. They now had indoor plumbing with hot and cold running water, a gas stove, central heating, and later on even a refrigerator (Gafarova 1969: 166).

*The first Tajik woman to parachute from a plane was Ulmaskhon. Previously Tajik girls had had no right even to learn to read (Luknitsky 1954: 37). Note the almost mechanical stress on pre-revolutionary backwardness. Being published in English this book was presumably intended as a propaganda exercise.
Tajik women appeared in Soviet films picking cotton, with rosy cheeks, kerchiefs on their heads, and large smiles on their faces. Outside the world of the cinema, women and even young girls were winning awards as heroine labourers, fêted widely, and held up as examples to the rest of their communities.

Hamra Bibi Abilova was a 'Stakhanovite of the cotton fields'. According to the report of the secretary of the Central Committee of the Lenin Communist Youth League at the first republican committee meeting of the young women of Tajikistan on November 10, 1935, Abilova was the best cotton picker in the whole republic. Her story, as told in the report, is that

_Hamra Bibi came from a poor family. She understood that the best way to emancipation, to a prosperous and cultured life was to work in the cotton fields. She realised that only by working in the fields could she achieve independence, prosperity and culture. Hamra Bibi, Stakhanovite of the cotton fields, acts as a role model in the struggle for cotton, showing by her honest labour and perfected methods, she could pick not 10-15 kilos as many do, but that anyone who with a will and works honestly may overfulfil the norm five times. (Hamra Bibi picks 100-145 kilos a day). (Raskreproshchenie 1971: 310-12)._

The reader will notice all those positive outcomes that are supposed to accrue to women agricultural workers. I should like to point out that anyone who is inclined to believe that such benefits were general for female cotton workers should take a good look at the women who work on the cottonfields today. They certainly show little sign of having gained any independence, prosperity, or 'culture', through their work, either now or during Soviet times (cf. Rumer 1989: 121).

Another story taken from a letter written to the newspaper Kommunist Tajikistana in January 1936 by Gaukar Sharipova, a kolkhoz brigadier from Kulob, shows how the Soviet regime transformed the lives of Tajik women:

_How can I fully express my joy that I got to see Moscow - its squares, cars, lights, shops.... I was so very happy. I had lived a heavy and dark life in my village for many years. My parents had died there in great poverty and I began life as an orphan... I was the poorest and most downtrodden of the entire village. The Soviet regime has changed me into a human being. Today there are not many who can boast of such good fortune as mine... The order of Lenin I hold is dearer to me than all the riches in the world. I am supremely proud and happy. ... In the future I shall strive to assist all the girls and women in our village and the neighbouring ones to become worthy of a journey to Moscow_ (ibid: 313-4).

The new Central-Asians were as much creations of discourse as the old 'feudal' ones had been. Soviet political tracts, such as Gafarova (1969), continued to glorify the 'great gains' made by the regime with respect to Central-Asian lifestyles. Near the beginning of her book Gafarova states that 'from the first day of its existence Soviet power destroyed all old laws enslaving women' (1969: 15), making it sound as if this in itself had made a great difference

---

9 It is noteworthy that, although these pieces are included in a book specifically on the concerns of women, neither of these women claims to have been persecuted as women.
in the lives of Central-Asians. Furthermore, although she does admit that traces of the old ways of life still persist, including kalym, child marriage and polygyny, Gafarov a insists that the majority of the population of Central Asia is no longer religious and that women's acceptance of modern medical care, universal use of maternity clinics to give birth, and employment on farms and in industrial enterprises have largely weaned them away from their traditions (1969: 105). Karomat, who herself had lived through most of the Soviet period, and who read Gafarova's book along with me, said firmly that it was less real than most novels and a good deal less interesting. She maintained that it had little relationship to life in Tajikistan as she had known it. It certainly appeared to bear little relationship to the life I was observing.

Karomat - a 'new' Tajik Woman?

Karomat was generally very scornful of Soviet propaganda celebrating new Tajik women and extolling their new lifestyles. She considered the famous Stakhanovites just a publicity stunt. When she was a teenager she once witnessed a huge reception given for a girl of about her own age who was supposed to have picked an inordinate amount of cotton - 100-140 kgs a day. Karomat pointed out that she herself had often picked 100-120 kgs a day as a teenager during World War II (Harris 1998a) but that nobody made any special fuss over her achievements and her photograph was never in the newspapers. Karomat believed that this particular girl's achievements were entirely a construction of her uncle, a brigade leader. He had had a number of people register part of their cotton under his niece's name and had then encouraged a journalist to come to the collective farm to see this great phenomenon. In this way he had made his niece into a heroine worker.

Karomat's family was among those 'real' Central Asians who supported the Revolution:

Karomat was brought up in a hybrid Russo-Tajik manner. On the one hand they spoke Russian at home, did not pray, and dressed more like Russians than Tajiks. The children even attended Russian schools when they lived near enough. On the other hand, Karomat was taught all the Tajik customs, just as her mother had learned them as a child. She was also taught complete submission to her parents; she had to do her mother's bidding immediately and unquestioningly and to see to her father's needs and wishes before everything else, no matter what. Each morning her mother would inform her father where she intended to go that day and for what purpose, in order to get his approval. Her father never relinquished one jot of his right to dominate his womenfolk right up to the day he died. However, despite expecting to be waited on hand and foot, he was never cruel or unkind to his family. He was a good provider, a firm but not unreasonable husband and father, and a man of high moral principles. Karomat attended school until the outbreak of World War II when she was 15. At that point most schools in Tajikistan were closed down, as their teachers were sent to the front and all the older students drafted into the war effort. Karomat among them. She worked in several different factories, and even spent some time as a street labourer, helping to build post-war Dushanbe. Subsequently she spent twenty-five years at the Dushanbe textile factory, where she became one of the most highly skilled weavers, with apprentices under her, one of the very few local women to attain such a
position. Although she thought life was better when women did not have to carry the burden of responsibility for home and children as well as working. Karomat also thought that the only way to get to know anything was to go out to work. 'Those women who stay at home all the time are completely ignorant', she said. Karomat half accepted and half resented the Russians. Some of her best friends were Russians. She read constantly, largely in Russian because there are relatively few interesting books available in Tajik. She spoke fluent and reasonably grammatical Russian, much to the surprise of most Russians she came across who did not expect this in a Tajik woman of her age and low educational level. Despite this she believed that each society had its own culture and should stick to it. Russian culture was for Russians, not for Tajiks, she maintained. Soon after she married, her mother-in-law had persuaded her to stop dressing in the Russian manner (cf. chapter 4) and she never returned to this. In the last years of her life Karomat turned increasingly to the old traditions. She prayed faithfully twice a day except when she was ill, and tried to stop her family from speaking Russian, at least at home. She would get furious if any of them spoke it in her hearing. Karomat kept all the old customs she had been taught by her mother and mother-in-law, feeling totally assured of their absolute rightness. In so doing she was rejecting not so much Soviet ideology, which she had never really grasped, but Russians and their way of life. At the same time she would not hear a word against that good man Stalin, had been very proud of being a citizen of the Soviet Union and deeply mourned its passing, blaming Gorbachev chiefly for its collapse and for Tajikistan's enforced Independence. On this last, and not on so much on the ending of the socialist system as such, Karomat blamed all the many ills of the post-Soviet period.

For all Karomat's parents' acceptance of Sovietisation in many aspects of their lives, it is notable that they made no significant changes in gender performance, nor allowed their children to do this. The result is that even today the family still maintains the old way of life.

Government Institutions of Control

The failure of the *hujum* campaign and the subsequent retrenchment did not mean that the government had abandoned its efforts to Sovietise Central Asia. As the smoke from the

---

10 The great majority of skilled factory workers were Russian speakers, although this fact is rarely mentioned in Soviet accounts or in statistics on the female workforce in Tajikistan.

According to Karomat one of the reasons there were so few Tajik women in such jobs before the last couple of decades was that they simply had no concept of going to work on time and spending the whole day there. A lifestyle based on punching time clocks was completely alien to them. Some of them did piecework at home where they could combine this with watching over their families and they would often get their daughters to help them with it. Many of these daughters subsequently became factory workers themselves. By the end of the Soviet period there were much larger numbers of local workers in the factories, especially in the less skilled jobs. However, the most skilled work continued to be carried out by Russian speakers.

11 Where not otherwise attributed the material in this section has been taken from Rakowska-Harmstone (1970).
Control and Subversion

'hujum' and collectivisation campaigns was clearing the Soviet state was already beginning to impose its bureaucratic structures on Central Asia, with the Communist Party as one of its main tools. Local Party branches were formed in every region, such as those established and headed by Karomat's father (cf. chapter 1).

In Tajikistan the heads of government were locals but in the mid 1930's it was found preferable to use Russians, confining Tajiks to the lower levels. It was only after World War II that Tajiks were allowed once more to occupy the most senior posts but the second in command, and the man with the real power, was always a Russian, who would keep a close watch on his Tajik 'superior'.

Supervision by Russian communists in the post-war period was the more vital from the viewpoint of the regime since anti-Soviet feelings manifested themselves in the country in various ways, by the revival of the 'religious prejudices' among the common people, by the existence of pan-Iranian tendencies among a section of the intellectuals and by peasant resistance against the Soviet cotton policy (Kolarz 1952: 290).

The individual republics never were allowed to make their own policy decisions.

Periodically when something went wrong and scapegoats were needed or when it looked as if local elites were becoming too strong Moscow carried out purges. One of the most serious of these took place in 1933 when the President and Prime Minister of Tajikistan were removed from office, accused of following nationalist leanings rather than socialist ones. The former had wanted to expel all Russians from the republic while the latter had wanted to claim the age-old Tajik cities of Bukhara and Samarkand from Uzbekistan. After this, the entire leadership of the Tajik Communist Party was replaced because they were considered not to have monitored the situation with sufficient vigilance (Kolarz 1952: 288-9).

It is clear that on both sides the Soviet state was regarded as essentially a Russian one, to which the Slavs were likely to be loyal while the Central Asians were not. This impression was not without foundation. The Soviet Union was always run from Moscow and essentially by Russians. At the same time, in Tajikistan Russians were regarded with both suspicion and dislike. Their behaviour towards the locals was supercilious and condescending and perhaps because of this on many occasions over the decades of Soviet rule, individual Russians were quietly told by Tajiks that one day they would all be expelled from the country. It was no doubt partly in remembrance of this that after the riots of February 1990 many Russians felt that Tajikistan was becoming dangerous for them and started to emigrate. By 1999 the former ratio of one Tajik to every 10-20 Russians in Dushanbe had been reversed, and more.

The Soviet police force continued Tsarist techniques of undercover operations and the use of individual informants. In Soviet society there was no legal or social concept of privacy. State intervention in daily life was expected and the police had the right to monitor and spy on the lives of citizens as they saw fit (Shelley 1996: 118). In Tajikistan this was less easy to carry out, since the lower ranks of the police were from local nationalities and so unlikely to report on their compatriots to the Soviet authorities. This was especially the case with regard to the practice of those national customs outlawed by the Soviet state.

---

12 In 1924 when the state lines were drawn the Uzbeks were numerically and politically strong enough to persuade Stalin to allow them to include these cities in their republic, despite the fact that culturally, historically, and linguistically they were Tajik.

13 According to the subjects of Natalya Kosmarskaya's research - cf. note 3.
At the lower levels Tajik bureaucracy served as a tool for national resistance and even for the subornation of the state. After all, it was impossible to use Russians to run all the smaller committees, which had perforce to be staffed by Tajiks who were, therefore, in a position to block the carrying out of many official policies or at least to nullify their effects. Despite collectivisation and the Sovietisation of farm land many villages managed to organise themselves in such a way that the former elites remained in charge, merely exchanging their traditional titles for new Bolshevik ones. They managed to see to it that as few changes as possible were made that would affect traditional lifestyles (Polyakov 1993: 137).

Besides the bureaucratic structures of the government administration and the Party, the state made use of all other possible institutions as tools for control. In a much more open and straightforward manner than in ‘democratic’ countries the educational and medical services, and the media (Mickiewicz 1980, 1988) were all used to these ends. These institutions all came under the control of the Party’s Central Committee in Moscow. In practice this meant that the systems were devised in Moscow to function under Russian conditions, and then applied throughout the entire Soviet state. The result was school textbooks portraying Russian landscapes, and recounting Russian folk-legends, doctor-patient ratios based on Russian conditions, and so on. All Soviet publications were controlled by Glavlit, the organ of censorship. This functioned not by vetting works submitted to it for approval but by itself laying down the guidelines to be followed each year by those who wished to publish (Pipes 1994: 296).

The government deprived the population at large of the right to use language publicly by keeping control of the media, publishing, the arts, and scholarship. Public meetings and all official gatherings were stage-managed from beginning to end. Decisions would be made in advance and everyone would be expected to vote in favour without demurring. Small wonder that at the first annual general meeting of a woman’s NGO I attended in Tajikistan, the members sat round waiting for guidance. When I suggested they might start by assessing the successes and failures of their previous year’s work they asked me to do this for them. When I told them they should do this collectively themselves, they said they did not know how. They had never before been at a meeting where they were free to speak their minds.

This deliberate deprival of the population at large of a voice, of the right to use language on their own behalf was taken further by the elevation of specialists to a place of political power. Only teachers had a right to make judgements on education, only doctors on medicine, and so on. When a Syrian friend and I started a(n amicable) discussion on Israeli politics at the dinner table of an elite family belonging to the Tajik intelligentsia, the husband, a professor at Dushanbe University, was horrified and tried to shut us up, saying that we had no right to discuss such matters, since we were not political scientists.

In other words, people were dissuaded from considering questions unrelated to their professional field of expertise. This effectively prevented them from being equipped to take informed decisions relating to their own lives and left them in the hands of the government. This was especially true for the rural population, who until the mid 1980’s could not even leave their home farms without special permission (Heller 1988: 30).

While the government managed to exercise this type of control their carefully planned campaigns of ideological indoctrination largely failed in Tajikistan. Even the schools of

---

14 See the work of Foucault (1961, 1976, 1980a, 1991) and Chomsky (1994, 1996), for discussions of how this is done in a more opaque fashion in the West.
political education barely functioned and, in any case, few teachers were particularly interested in socialist principles, so that imparting them appeared of little importance. The local mass media was highly unsatisfactory in political content, distribution networks for printed matter worked poorly, many villages were without electricity so that radio\textsuperscript{15} and eventually television, could not penetrate there. Where there were television sets the women, at any rate, preferred to watch Central-Asian singing and dancing rather than more serious programmes. Besides, their knowledge of Russian was too poor for them to understand political broadcasts.

Most Tajiks I talked to never did understand the principles of socialism. Karomat's father was almost the only person I interviewed who was able to give me the textbook definitions of socialism and communism, or who had any concept of the place of Marx and Engels in the ideological hierarchy. However, he gave his answers exactly as he must have learned them in the Party school and it was clear that he had not made the ideology his own but was merely repeating it parrot fashion. The contrast with his much deeper understanding of, and far wider interest in, Islam was very marked.

The medical system that Gafarov made so much of similarly failed in its aims to teach the tenets of healthy socialism. Pregnant women who wished to be able to take maternity leave were obliged to attend pre-natal courses ostensibly aimed at teaching them how to look after their babies, but in fact aimed at inculcating a uniform Soviet lifestyle. However, the great majority of Tajik women did not hold formal jobs and there was no maternity leave for labourers on the collective farms, so they saw no reason to attend such courses, which, in any case, were rarely available in rural areas. Even when urban women did attend they did this without interest and paid little attention. Those I spoke to could not remember anything they learned there. They said they had already known what to do from helping their mothers and older sisters with their babies. They had just viewed the course as a necessary prerequisite for taking maternity leave.

Although in urban areas and the more modernised rural areas women were now giving birth in hospitals, in the villages where the health project worked many men would not allow their wives near Soviet medical practitioners and traditional birth attendants were used far more than midwives. In this way those institutions set up to provide Soviet socialist indoctrination signally failed in their mission in Tajikistan, partly due to the inertia of the officials who ran them, partly to incompetence, and partly to local resistance.

It is hardly surprising that few people in Tajikistan today feel able to voice their concerns about, or demand information on, subjects relating to their health or their children's education. After decades of being prevented from making decisions other than in the most limited way it is difficult for them suddenly to reverse this. Most people are still in the process of learning that they have a right to take charge of their own lives and that if they do not do this they will be in bad shape because no-one else is going to do it for them.

The situation is made more complicated by the fact that it is very uncertain how much freedom the present government is going to allow its citizens. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan's governments are already employing very much the same autocratic methods of control as those the Soviet government used to use. The press in these republics is particularly strongly controlled. Students have no more freedom to publish their own opinions than during Soviet

\textsuperscript{15} Battery-operated radios were unknown in Tajikistan at that time.
times and there are even indications that the Uzbek government may be thinking of bringing in a new and perhaps very strict censorship law.

The present government of Tajikistan is giving every indication of wanting to be as controlling as its neighbours. This has so far been prevented by the political situation, which has kept the government from being able to exert control over the country as a whole. However, if it gains greater power in the elections of 1999-2000 there is a very good chance that it will start trying to enforce the same sort of controlling mechanisms used in Uzbekistan. Throughout all the chaos of the war and its aftermath the government has been careful to maintain the bureaucracy from Soviet times firmly in place so the enforcement of restrictive laws would not be difficult.

The Failure to 'Modernise' Tajikistan

Russians today still deplore Tajikistan's 'backwardness' and adherence to tradition, blaming entirely and only the Tajik people themselves for this. They prefer to ignore the responsibility of the Soviet regime for Tajikistan's failure to modernise. In the first place, they categorically refuse to admit that Tajikistan was administered as a colony, insisting that the Tajiks were from the start treated on exactly the same level as all the other peoples of the Union. This is palpably untrue. As has been noted above, Central Asians were never given any say in government policy, and there was a very serious attempt at indoctrinating them with the ideology of their colonising masters. Furthermore, economic policies were aimed at benefitting the centre, not the periphery (Gleason 1991).

Central Asia was preserved largely as a source of raw materials. Tajikistan was considered primarily a cotton-producing state. For this reason, and to keep it from competing with Russia, little industry was ever developed there, the majority of it situated in the politically strongest North. As a result of such policies Tajikistan sent most of its raw cotton to Russia to be processed so that the Tajiks were forced to buy back material and clothes at prices far above those they received for the raw cotton\textsuperscript{16}. More than 90\% of the cotton fibre from the largest cotton-producing state, Uzbekistan, was shipped out to other republics, and even abroad, for processing. The Russian Federation produced no cotton but carried out more than 70\% of the Union's cotton fabric production. The whole system of production, coupled with that of turnover taxes, meant that Central Asia, one of the poorest regions of the FSU, in effect subsidised the richer manufacturing areas, and in particular the Russian Republic (Islamov 1994: 208):

\begin{quote}
For many years the mechanism of turnover taxes provided a hidden instrument for pumping out big sums of value added from the less developed to the more developed republics and increased the gap between them, creating huge economic, social and ecological problems in Central Asia because of the monoculture of cotton and forced specialization in raw-material production (Islamov 1994: 209-10).
\end{quote}

Small wonder that Tajikistan had the lowest per-capita income of any Union republic (Liebowitz 1992: 163). A UN survey of the 1950's showed living standards in Central Asia to

\textsuperscript{16}According to figures from Uzbekistan Central Asians were forced to sell their cotton for around a fifth of its real worth (Islamov 1994: 214).
be 20-25% lower than the Soviet average and investment around 67% (Rakowska-Harmstone 1970: 62).

In their approach to collectivisation and female emancipation the Soviet government had not simply been forcing compliance with laws removing private resources from individual control and enforcing formal equality of all Soviet citizens. By being compelled to give up their private farms the men were made to abandon their control over economic resources. When their wives were induced to leave seclusion and abandon the veil men had lost the major symbol of masculine control over women. In this way they were deprived of the two most crucial elements of masculine gender identity, control over financial resources and women. Meanwhile women had been forced into abandoning their symbol of virginity and chastity, an essential part of feminine identity, tantamount to surrendering their virtue.

Essentially one goal of Soviet policies was the inscription of new concepts of femininity and masculinity on the bodies of these Tajik women and men, concepts that the Bolsheviks felt to be more in keeping with the new state they were attempting to build. From the Tajik point of view the Bolsheviks had defeminized their women and emasculated their men by enforcing the abandonment of their traditional gender performances.

The largest difference between the Central Asian republics and Western colonies was that the former were part of the same land mass and the same administrative system as the colonisers and they were treated by Russian settlers as an extension of home, what has been called internal colonialism (Hechter 1975 in Gleason 1991). However, there is another major difference. In studies of Western colonial policies much is made of the fact that colonial power was in the hands of men who used the sexuality of colonialised women, as mistresses, for coerced sex (Stoler 1995: 45). Here reference is made to the relations between white men and 'native' women. It is practically unthinkable to consider the opposite relationship, in other words, between white women and 'native' men. But this is just what exists in Tajikistan.

The sexual availability of local women was extremely limited even for their own men, let alone for kofirs. Freeing them from seclusion did not make them available to their colonial masters. On the contrary, the need for workers for the textile factories brought in large numbers of single Russian women, many of whom became sexual partners of Tajik men, although very few actually married them. When Karomat was working in the Dushanbe textile factory in the late 1960's and 1970's she often found herself the recipient of tearful admissions by these women that they had been abandoned by their Tajik lovers. Karomat would warn them that these men were rarely honourable in their intentions. Only the very few who fell genuinely in love with the women would want to marry them and even so they would still have the obstacle of their parents to overcome. Most of these men despised the Russian women who made themselves so easily available outside marriage, while having no compunction at using them to their own ends. These may have been primarily personal but there was also an element of cultural superiority at being able as it were to 'cuckold' the Russians en masse.

Unlike the European colonial discourse on the dangers of exposure to the diseased sexuality of the colonies (Stoler 1995: 46) Soviet colonial discourse in regard to Central Asia was purely political in content, stressing 'feudal bai' vestiges. In other words, where European discourse served to hide political power relations behind personal ones the Soviets

\[17\] See the quotation from Beg's Proclamation (cf. chapter 3).
did the opposite and hid personal relations behind political ones. The Soviet refusal to consider that the Tajiks thought of themselves, and reacted as a colonised people prevented their analysts from being able to use theories on colonisation in their studies of Central Asia (Polyakov 1992). Because of this and the generally very limited analytical tools at their disposal, due to the government's strict controls on scholarship and insistence on social scientists limiting themselves to 'Marxist-Leninist methodology', it was difficult for them to provide meaningful analyses that might have enabled the Soviet government the better to understand the results of its policies. Perhaps because of this the Soviet regime failed to grasp that to 'modernise' Tajikistan it would have been necessary to make significant changes in the material way of life of its people. Instead it tried to set a cultural transformation in train without providing the material circumstances to facilitate it.

Indeed, it could be said that the state subverted its own attempts at modernisation by actually providing the material circumstances to prevent modernity despite simultaneously preaching the importance of attaining it. The great majority of Tajiks were kept in their birthplaces, perhaps by their own wish, but certainly by government policies that did not permit them to leave (Heller 1988: 30), and forced to work on the cotton fields. They still lived in traditional houses in circumstances that differed little from those of a century before. The main changes consisted of the addition of electric light and cookers, refrigerators, and water taps in the back yard. Although these made housework somewhat less time-consuming the amount of work women were forced to do in the fields more than compensated for any time saved. Moreover, many of the more isolated villages did not even have access to electricity or piped in water. Even in Dushanbe traditional houses rarely have indoor plumbing.

Tajik social scientists have pointed out to me how much the level of modernisation varied at the local level depending on the level of industrialisation. Even one factory, particularly if it employed a significant number of local women, was enough to produce a notable difference in modernisation. But in Tajikistan these were few and far between, and more often employed Russian speakers than locals.

Essentially, the change promulgated by the Soviet regime amounted to some slight tampering with the social structure, most of this to do with increasing the mobility of women and driving the practice of Islam under ground. This hardly amounted to a significant break with the former way of life. The regime ignored Marx's contention from the experience of Europe, most particularly from that of England, that in order to bring a society into modernity there has to be a very major rupture indeed 18.

---

18 In the history of primitive accumulation, all revolutions are epoch-making that act as levers for the capitalist class in the course of its formation; but this is true above all for those moments when great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence, and hurled onto the labour-market as free, unprotected and rightless proletarians. The expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil is the basis of the whole process. The history of this expropriation assumes different aspects in different countries, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different historical epochs' (Marx 1867: 876). That is to say, when people were torn away from their former rural lives, the communities in which they had lived were destroyed and with them the traditional customs that had ruled their lives. When they no longer formed part of a small inter-dependent group, people were forced to develop new lifestyles.
Control and Subversion

Whilst agreeing with Appadurai that such a rupture may well not lead to a post-enlightenment rationality of the sort that both Western capitalism and the Soviet state wished to develop (1996: 9) I do believe that major cultural transformations will only come about through correspondingly significant change in the structures of material existence. People on the whole prefer to maintain the status quo, unless this is completely intolerable, and will only make major changes if they have no other options. This is specially true for gender ideals, which are among the most deep-rooted of all cultural phenomena, inculcated as they are from birth.

Despite the relatively slight changes in lifestyles, the vast majority of Tajiks did experience a small but significant improvement in living standards, including educational and medical services. This produced corresponding improvements in nutritional levels, as also in infant and child mortality rates, and an adult literacy rate higher than in some Western countries, notably the UK and the US. However poor and overcrowded housing conditions in Tajikistan might be everyone had some sort of a roof over their heads and even today there are no shanty towns or squatters. While the standard of living was much below even that of Eastern Europe it was much higher than that of Tajikistan's Southern neighbours Afghanistan and Pakistan.

While appreciating the material improvements the Soviet state brought them the Tajik people deeply resented Russian interference in their way of life. This resentment dates back at least to the beginning of the Soviet era when the Red Army brutally mistreated the local population (Rakowska-Harmstone 1970: 24, 30-32). However, keeping it alive today is the Russian's open contempt for most things Tajik, added to the systematic daily abuse that went on during the Soviet period.

Karomat was bitter about how Russians would make room for each other in the inevitable queues in shops, pushing the Tajiks to the back. She was also angry at the ways they tried to prove their culture was superior, making fun of the way Tajiks ate with their fingers and slept on mattresses on the ground. A Russian acquaintance of hers who became impoverished after the civil war, told her that now she appreciated the Tajik way of life more, since she had been forced to sell her bedstead and many of her kitchen items in order to buy food. Karomat told me with great satisfaction that she felt it served this woman right for her previous sneering.

During her twenty-five years in the Dushanbe textile factory Karomat made friends with some of her Russian colleagues but at the same time built up a vast pool of resentment at most of the rest for the arrogant and insensitive way they treated her and the other local workers. For instance, they would deliberately refrain from informing the Tajiks of their rights within the social system, with the result that they frequently lost out on benefits. Russian bookkeepers would even cheat Tajiks out of part of their wages by means of fictitious taxes. Far from thanking the Russians for coming to Tajikistan Karomat felt that the shoe was on the other foot - the Russians had benefitted only themselves and had lived far better there than they would have at home.

It made her furious to see how the Russians who returned home in the 1990's would fill up containers with fifty-kilo bags of flour and sugar, as well as with Central-Asian carpets and other luxury items. She said that they had arrived with nothing and now they were taking all these goods from Central Asia back with them.
In addition to their dislike of the treatment the Russians meted out to them Tajiks also dislike what they see of their way of life - their failure to contain their women's sexuality within marriage, their tendency to alcoholism, and their lack of attachment to their place of origin, to their parents, and other family members. It quite shocked my Tajik acquaintances to see how easily Russians could abandon their places of birth to migrate to Central Asia, and even more how those returning home very often left their elderly parents behind in Tajikistan to die of hypothermia or starvation. They said Tajiks would never abandon their parents in such a way.

Many Russians appear bewildered by the Central-Asian hostility towards them. Even today they cannot see why the people there did not appreciate what the Russians did for them. After all, they went all the way there just to assist these people and improve their standard of living, and look what thanks they get for it. 'These ignoramuses are too stupid to want to accept our higher cultural levels. When we first arrived in the region they had no culture at all; we gave them everything', said one elderly Russian woman in Dushanbe. Almost all the respondents in Natalya Kosmarskaya's survey (cf. note 3), agreed with this statement. Only one of them said that perhaps the Russians had had no right to go to Central Asia and hold up their culture as superior.

**Conclusion**

Karomat's story shows how basic was the failure of the Soviet government to impose its ideology in Tajikistan. However, both Karomat and most other people I talked to were very appreciative of the material advantages given them by the Soviet system, especially when they looked back from the vantage point of the post-civil war situation at their former way of life.

As I examine the situation in Tajikistan today and watch the unravelling of the material structures created by the Soviet government I find it difficult to assess who won what in the power struggle. Perhaps it might be more useful to look at it the other way round and assess the losses. The Soviet state made the most significant losses of all when it proved unable to convince the Tajik people to adopt socialism. Had it taken a different approach and encouraged them to develop their own brand of Islamic socialism, treating them as equal partners with Russia rather than as inferior colonials, had they made more of an effort to industrialise the region and provide its inhabitants with high-class education, things might have been very different. Perhaps the Soviet Union might still be in existence today.

As it was, the Tajik people lost the chance for a higher level of material development and of educational attainment, for an opportunity to train their people in the sorts of skills useful for industry and technology that might have enabled them to run the few enterprises they have, as well as to resurrect the crumbling infrastructure. Their experiences under the Soviet regime have left them ill-prepared for government. They are more used to subversion from below than to ruling from above.

The women of Tajikistan have also lost in many ways. The small gains made through being granted a legal right to mobility and education have been insufficient to make any fundamental changes in gender norms. The preservation of the old traditions, coupled with isolation and denial of the chance of individual development, have prevented even the most
Control and Subversion

educated women, with only a handful of exceptions, from evolving ideas beyond the limits of the Soviet-Tajik, Marxist-Leninist framework, which leaves the women intellectuals of Tajikistan light years behind those of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Iran in the development of concepts useful for women’s liberation. It is difficult to see much gain for young people either, in that most of them have little more right to decide their own futures than they had century ago.

The ferociousness of male resistance to *hujum* demonstrates just how important correct gender performance was to Central-Asian men. The veil had a very real significance in local culture, and a very real meaning for local gender identities. When women discarded their veils this was tantamount to emasculating their men folk, whose gender performances were dependent on demonstrating control over their womenfolk, a demonstration in great part contingent upon seclusion and veiling. This appears to have been so threatening to the men as to make it worth killing in order to prevent it. In effect, stoning pregnant unmarried girls in Karomat’s village to death and killing unveiled women were all part of the same phenomena that puts a higher premium on the maintenance of social norms, and in particular on preserving masculinity, than on human life, whether it is the lives of women who put their men folk’s masculinity in jeopardy or the lives of men sacrificed in warfare.

Those women who dared remove their veils in the early days were taking all the risks Butler associates with deliberate suborning of gender performance, and more. She suggests that changing the conditions of gender performance amounts to risking social death, ‘the prevailing conditions of existence’ are threatened (Butler 1997b: 27-30). What we have here in Tajikistan is women courting not just social but physical death.