Control and subversion: gender, islam, and socialism in Tajikistan
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CHAPTER 4
COMMUNITY CONTROL

Auto-Surveillance, Auto-Repression

The prison the Tajiks created for themselves was bounded by the rigid walls of the community, and its members were kept in their cells by means of the micro-mechanisms of power discussed by Foucault (1980a: 96-102). These are tools of repression innate to and at the potential disposal of all societies, that of auto-surveillance - that is surveillance of its members, by its members - together with its twin, auto-repression. This is the most effective, neat, efficient and powerful method of control ever devised and has been run largely, although certainly not entirely, by women, who are at once the most repressed and the most repressing members of the community. For it is the women who have the most to conform to, as their gender identities are the most stringent. It is, therefore, the women who have to be the most strongly pressured, and who could do this better than other women? After all they have more opportunities to police each other than men do since they inhabit a separate world men are not privy to.

Women’s role in preserving communal norms is not just policing their neighbours. As they are the ones who spend most time with their children when young, they are also the ones who carry out their first subjugation to social norms, who start off their inculcation in the appropriate gender norms (Butler 1997b: 8)

Feminists have considered the way women pressure each other to conform to gender identities that appear essentially to benefit men, as a sort of false consciousness, where women have been persuaded to be complicit with the ‘enemy’ against what are seen as their best interests (cf. Firestone 1971: 249ff; Gardner 1970; Peslikis 1970). However, I do not believe that this is necessarily so. Given the situations most women live in they may well be right not to consider conformity to social norms to be against their best interests. On the contrary, compliance may bring them real benefit, for older women in the form of status and power from their position as arbiters of social mores, and for younger women through being publicly labelled as ‘good’. This is no doubt a major reason why so few Tajik women cooperated with the Bolsheviks and why it took so long for women to abandon their veils.

The Tajik Community

Once unveiling had become general the Tajik community was left in a state of vulnerability to external penetration, a little like a tortoise without a shell. The intense reaction to the unveiling on the part of the men shows just how important that carapace had been to masculine identity. Previously, when the community as a whole had unquestioningly lived by their own customary laws, any infringement of feminine gender norms had been a matter for individual families, but external threat had changed this. Once infringement took on a mass form, this touched on everyone’s identity. It was no longer a case of individual misguided behaviour but a threat to the masculinity of the entire nation. Such a threat made each woman’s correct behaviour the business of all men. This is why rape is so widely practised as an instrument of war precisely in those countries where men’s personal honour is
dependent on the purity of their womenfolk. This was also why Tajik men reacted *en masse* to the Bolsheviks’ attempts to force unveiling. It was a national dishonour.

Whenever there is a threat to a group it is inevitable that its members close ranks against it. In this case, the threat being to male honour via the females any circumstances where males and females find themselves together in a group can lead men to react in this way. This may account for the way young Tajik men react in group situations, such as school or college. It is as if the class had come to resemble a sort of extended family, where all the males are responsible for policing the behaviour of each female. In this way the men come to regard themselves as honorary brothers, responsible for their 'sisters'. It is not that these 'sisters' are under direct threat from non-Tajik men, it is rather that the threat comes from the Russo-Soviet education system that has set up structures that would permit girls to violate their gender norms.

Jahongul was 16 years old, in her last year at high school, and living with her widowed mother, younger brother and sister in Dushanbe. One afternoon after school Jahongul went to her aunt’s office to get in some practice on her typewriter. By the time she arrived home it was almost 5 o'clock. One of the boys from her class who also lives in her building was standing by the entrance to the stairway to Jahongul's flat. He looked surprised to see Jahongul and immediately asked whom she had been out with that she came home that late still in her school clothes. Jahongul said she had been practising her typing. The boy said 'I hope you have not been out with a boy. You are our neighbour and you should not do things like that.'

Jahongul said that all the boys in her class seemed to feel responsible for her, as if they had appointed themselves her keepers, and that they always kept a look out for her. For instance, when once a boy from another class started to bother her, her classmates immediately rushed to throw him out of the room. Those boys who live in the same block of flats as Jahongul feel doubly connected to her, and thus doubly possessive of her good name.

Jacobson reports much the same behaviour on the part of Pakistanis in Britain. At college, a time when girls might expect to have a little more freedom from parental control than before, Pakistani men carefully watch over the behaviour of any woman from their community, whether or not they are acquainted. In fact, brothers are often stricter than parents in looking after their sisters, presumably because they are more vulnerable to accusations of failure to live up to their masculinity than older men and because they are worried about being able to maintain their appropriate masculine performances in England, where girls do not so easily concede their brothers’ rights to control them. According to one of the girls Jacobson interviewed, these boys have just got one big chip on their shoulder, one big attitude problem when it comes to girls. They believe Pakistani girls should stay at home...' Girls say that the boys have it both ways in England. They can easily find (English) girlfriends for themselves but are extremely strict about the behaviour of Pakistani girls, much stricter than their cousins back home in Karachi (Jacobson 1998: 63). Similarly Turkish families in the Netherlands are much stricter in watching over their daughters than their relations in Turkey. At the same time most of their sons have some sort of relationship with Dutch girls (De Vries 1988: 19, 155, 166-7, 179). Moroccan and Turkish boys in the Netherlands say that they have sexual liaisons with girlfriends both Dutch and even (secretly) girls from their own communities. However, they all still want to marry virgins (Brouwer 1998: 158).

1 See chapter 6 for more details of Jahongul’s background.
The Tajik community today is not under the same degree of social pressure as are the Pakistani communities in Britain and the Turkish communities in the Netherlands. Although in some towns, most notably Dushanbe, Tajiks did form a numerical minority in Soviet times, they still form out and away the largest ethnic group in Tajikistan; it is virtually unheard of for a local girl to have any sort of relationship with a man outside the local ethnicities.

Nevertheless, in a similar way to the Pakistani males in Britain, Tajik males feel that the responsibility rests jointly on them to preserve the honour of the Tajik nation from besmirching by outsiders who might compromise their womenfolk and thence, as Beg suggested (cf. chapter 3) reduce them all to the status of prostitutes. So they have to be very vigilant. In other words, the concept of shame is used by Tajiks, as by other Muslims, to differentiate themselves from the non-Muslim Russians/Westerners, and thus becomes a major component of their gender identities.

Honour and Shame

Tillo was born in Dushanbe in 1961, the only daughter in a family of four children. When she was a child, they lived with her paternal grandparents. Her grandmother did most of the housework and her mother went out to work. Tillo’s grandparents did not support the Soviet regime. They told her that to be a communist - that is a Party member - was a sin. It was also wicked to join the Komsomol. All Russians are kofirs. Kofirs are non-Muslims and basically not nice people.

In school they learned very different things from what they were taught at home. They learned that Islam was bad and communism good.

Tillo remembers her childhood as very boring. Although, as the only daughter, Tillo was rather spoiled and not forced to help in the house if she did not want to, she was rarely allowed to go anywhere outside it. She was not allowed to go to the cinema more than once or twice a year. She does not remember what television programmes she liked to watch as a girl, or even if she watched at all. She has little memory of those days, other than of persistent boredom.

As a young girl Tillo only ever wanted one thing - to be a singer - and she wanted that with all her might. However, although most of the men in her family are musicians, they consider it a disgrace for any of their womenfolk to have anything to do with professional music making and were all against her being allowed to study it. It is a sin for a woman to be a musician. In fact, according to Tillo’s men folk a woman should not study at all. Her future could lie only in marriage.

Tillo was never close to her mother and they never discussed anything important or interesting. They never had any sort of heart-to-heart conversation, never discussed her mother’s life, marriage or anything. Tillo’s only confidantes were her girl friends at school. But one thing they never talked about was what they might do after they left. Although they all knew that they would have to get married they never ever discussed it. It simply didn’t occur to Tillo to think what her future life might be like. She was too young and knew nothing. She never thought at all about what her future husband might be like or indeed much about anything at all beyond her desire to sing.

Soon after Tillo left school at the age of seventeen her parents told her that they had arranged a marriage for her and she simply accepted this unquestioningly. She didn’t see the boy until her wedding day and then she didn’t like him. But she had no choice. Everything was arranged and it would not have occurred to her, or indeed to anyone else, that she might refuse to marry him.
Tillo knew nothing at all about marriage nor about housework. She and her husband lived with her parents-in-law. Her mother-in-law had to teach her how to do everything. She just obeyed her and did what she was told.

Tillo's first husband was revolting. She not only did not love him, she could not stand him. He was unpleasant to her and sometimes beat her. After a while she realised he was a drug addict and eventually he was caught and put in prison. In all he was in prison three times during their marriage. Then he went mad. At this point he became intolerable and so when she was twenty-three she left him and moved back in with her parents.

But they did not want her and her three children living at home with them. They insisted she remarry. At least this time they allowed her some say in the choice of partner. They came to a compromise between her parent's wishes and her own. Her second husband's mother was Russian, his father Tajik. He himself was a sculptor and had some sort of high-up political function as head of some committee or other, which she did not really understand. However, it brought them in enough money so that they were able to buy the large house she now lives in.

Tillo did not love either of her husbands, but she claims that neither was she especially submissive towards them. She obeyed her first mother-in-law in whose house she lived but did not take that much notice of her husband. She fought a lot with her second husband who used to drink a lot and beat her. But in general their relationship was not too bad. Although she could not love him, she respected him because he was good looking. Although Tillo already had three children when she married him he had never been married before and so he insisted on her having more children with him, especially as he had been brought up in an orphanage and had no close relatives\(^2\). Tillo had two more children by him so that by the time she was 29 she had five.

However, when things got really bad in Tajikistan he decided to make use of his dual nationality and move to Russia. He offered to take Tillo with him but she did not want to leave her homeland. He decided to go anyway, so he just abandoned her and their two children, although he did say talq three times before he left so that she is free of him as far as religion is concerned. In Russia he has married again. However, she is not sure on what terms, since his marriage to Tillo was registered at ZAGS and they don't yet have their divorce. Russian women don't do nikoh, so she figures they are just living together on an informal basis.

Tillo scarcely ever hears from this husband, although in 1995 he informed her he wanted to divorce her officially in order to marry his new wife, with whom he now has children. He doesn't send Tillo even one kopeck to pay any of the expenses of his children in Tajikistan nor does he bother about them at all. He never even asks after them. After all his insistence on having children he has now just abandoned them. 'So much for them being important to him', she says.

Tillo was furious when he left her and she threw out all his things, including his books, of which he had a lot. After he left she stayed on in their house and determined to work out a way to keep herself and her children without any financial help from anyone.

After Tillo had divorced her first husband she went to work in a factory. She loved it there. At work there were always lots of people to chat to and she was never bored.

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\(^2\) Not only was this man an orphan but also his mother had been Russian. This probably accounts for his being able to marry a divorcee as his first wife, when for a full-blooded Tajik this would have been considered shaming (cf. chapter 5).
Although she worked in a sewing factory she was not involved with this aspect but dealt with the administrative side. For this reason most of her immediate colleagues were men. Women did the sewing, men the administration. Tillo preferred working with men because she said they were less spiteful. Women's conversation is mostly spiteful gossip, although it can be nice talking to them too, she said. Tillo was able to support herself and her three children by her work, and she continued with this all during her second marriage. However, by the time this ended things were very different. The Soviet Union had collapsed. Financially it became impossible to make ends meet, as the factory management first found it could no longer pay a living wage and later was forced to lay off most of the workers. Also, by the time her second husband left her, Tillo had two more children to support and a large house to take care of.

So she decided to start her own trading business, buying in bulk abroad and selling at home. She had a couple of girlfriends who were also in the business and they always travelled together. Tillo concentrated her business largely on cloth, something she knew well both from her time in the factory and from her own interest in clothes. She ran her business for two years, during which time she travelled to Iran, Moscow, and Tashkent. In this way she was able to see something of the world while she did her business and she thought this was great.

When Tillo brought her goods back to Tajikistan she had to deal with Kulobis, since they were the ones who owned most of the stores and dominated business. She hated this, as they gave her so many problems. Several of them tried to pressure her to become their lover and when she refused they threatened to kill her. She was very frightened. At the same time she needed to deal with them in order to keep on with her business. So she tried her best to work out a way of doing this while not sleeping with any of them.

Meanwhile her two younger brothers decided that her actions in running her own business, and especially in dealing with Kulobis were disgracing the family. They particularly hated the fact that she would dress up when she went into the centre of town and would even wear Russian clothes at times, including long boots, which they considered showed off her legs. When she wouldn't do as they told her they would beat her up and do all they could to make her life unpleasant. For two years Tillo was on her own. She had not intended ever to marry again. Two husbands whom she did not love were more than enough. However, two things happened that made her change her mind. The first was her brothers' harassment. Tillo said part of the reason they beat her up was because they thought she was dishonouring the family and this was always the reason they gave when they talked about it, but Tillo believed that the real reason was that they wanted her house. They had not been as financially successful as Tillo and they have rather small and not very nice homes. So, they had decided that their sister and her children did not need such a large house to themselves and that she should give it to one of them. They offered to buy her a three-room flat in an apartment block, which is not nearly as nice as where she is living now, nor worth nearly as much. Tillo did not know how long she could resist them and she was tired of the beatings. She felt she needed protection from her brothers.

The other reason she changed her mind was that she had a suitor. This man, whose name was Chahonbek, wanted to marry her so much that he would follow her around all over the place - to the bazaar and to work; he would even jump over her fence at night and ring her bell. She didn't want him at first but eventually she gave in and in February 1995 she agreed to marry him.
Her brothers objected even more strenuously to this than to anything she had done before. After all, once she had a husband they would hardly be able to expropriate her house. But there were other reasons. By custom Tajik women do not marry three times. They may have two husbands, but only shameless women have three. And then Chahonbek is not even a Tajik but an Arab. How is it possible that the two husbands Tillo chose for herself were not proper Tajiks? One was half Russian and the other an Arab. Why does she not marry Tajik men?

But the final straw was that Chahonbek was already married. Tillo would be his polygynous second wife, not only that, but his first wife lived on the same street, just a few houses away. This was disgrace indeed. This deserved a real beating. When Tillo insisted she was going to go through with the marriage her brothers beat her even more severely than before, so badly she almost died. Nevertheless, or perhaps just because of this, somehow or other she went through with the marriage, defying the traditions to do so. But her natal family has never forgiven her. Since her marriage they have refused to speak to her; even when her mother lay dying and begging to see her daughter, her father would not allow her to visit.

Before I even met Tillo I had heard of her. Her fame was all over the neighbourhood. She was the one who had her own business, who travelled all over, who had doings with Kulobis, who dressed so shamelessly in Russian clothes, and who finally and most scandalously, had married polygynously. She was also the one whose brothers had beat her up so severely that for a while it seemed as if she might not survive. The story of the beating was told at all gatherings of the neighbourhood women, accompanied by many sighs and shakes of the head. Tillo's brothers, it seems, always ministered their beatings virtually in public, at the gate of her house, never inside where no-one could see. The last time she was left lying on the ground in full view.

As soon as it became known in the neighbourhood that Tillo had accepted to become Chahonbek's polygynous second wife tongues started wagging in earnest. All up and down her street Tillo formed the main subject of conversation for both men and women. To defend herself Tillo insisted that she had accepted the marriage in order to improve her financial position, as her new husband was a wealthy man. The women of the neighbourhood decided to test this out. They did not believe she was as wealthy as she was pretending and wanted to catch her out and shame her for suggesting she was superior to them. They all got together and went over to Tillo's place en masse, and just sat there, so that she would be bound by the laws of hospitality to feed them. They wanted to see what she would do. Would she really put before them all the expensive meat dishes and other delicacies that wealthy persons as a matter of course would give their guests? They did not believe that Tillo could do this. They were sure she was too poor to have anything of the sort in the house, and they hoped that this would shame her into admitting she was no better than the rest of them. When they told me about it afterwards they were really laughing. They said they had gone along and sat there for several hours waiting to be served. Tillo had done her best with the little she had but it had been very inadequate, so they felt they had made their point and that she would never put on airs with them again and pretend she was rich.

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1 This does not mean he is from the Middle East but from a group of indigenous Arabs who have lived in southern Tajikistan for generations. The Shaartuz region, where he comes from, has a large community of such Arabs.
The neighbours also amused themselves telling many stories of Tillo's husband's supposed infidelity to her. I was never able to figure out whether these had any basis in fact or whether they were just fabricated for her further mortification. While the women went for Tillo the men attacked the males of her family. For months five-year-old Aziz, Tillo's younger son, could hardly bear to go outside the house since as soon as the neighbourhood men caught sight of him they started to mock him. They would always find something nasty to say about his new 'father' that would send him running home in tears.

Soon after Tillo had more or less recovered from her last beating I was taken to her house to meet her. Despite her bruises it was clear that she was a very good-looking woman. At thirty-five, after five children, and despite the beatings she had recently undergone, she had a bloom on her that made all the other women in the room look drab and worn out. In fact, Tillo looked just like the famous Tajik singers one sees on the stage or on television. She was beautifully made up and exquisitely dressed in traditional Tajik clothes made out of expensive-looking material. Her house made a background that further enhanced her looks. It was spotlessly clean, with curtains that went well with her dress material.

Tillo has a large traditional-style house, with kitchen, dining room, and bathroom in a separate building, and a medium sized plot of earth, on which there are vegetables and fruit trees. In the main section there are six interconnected rooms. There was also a car left over from her second marriage in the garage.

The main room had no television set but when we went in Tillo was listening to her radio cassette player. Tillo spends all her free time listening to traditional Tajik music. That day she was dancing and singing to the music on her tapes and very nicely too. She puts on a sort of falsetto voice to sing - very much like the voices used by Chinese singers - and does the elegant hand movements of Tajik dancers, reminiscent of Indian or Indonesian dancers, most beautifully. In short, it is a crying shame she was not allowed to become a professional singer. I am sure she would have been a great hit.

Tillo and I got on well together and she agreed to allow me to interview her. At our first private meeting she immediately set out to ensure that I didn't believe all the bad things about her she was sure I would have heard from her neighbours, for instance, that she slept round during the two years she lived without a husband, and that she stole Chahonbek from his wife and married him purely for money, because with five children and no husband she could not make ends meet.

'None of this is true,' she assured me. 'I had no lover at all, no sex life whatever, during the time I was on my own. And it is also not true that I stole Chahonbek from his first wife. It was he who chased me. He was so determined and declared his love for me so passionately that I couldn't help myself. In the end I had to accept him but I know everyone hates me for it. It is not just the neighbours, but my whole family has abandoned me now. You see Tajik women are not supposed to marry three times. That looks like excess, as if we could not live without a man. It is considered very bad. I should just have been resigned to my fate and lived on my own. But it is very hard today to do that. The men will not leave a woman alone.'

What Tillo did not say, and what I only found out later from the neighbours, was that Chahonbek's first wife lived so near her home. They said that no-one would make much fuss if she were to live on the other side of Dushanbe but that to live a few houses away from her new husband's first wife was to bring the latter into ridicule and make her life hell.
The neighbourhood women have not ostracised Tillo but they mock her, sometimes mercilessly, especially because when she first married she boasted so much of her new husband's riches. However, when things became really tough after Chahonbek lost his job, and Tillo had no choice but to admit to poverty as she needed to borrow food in order to survive, they did help her out. Nevertheless, most of them have never completely forgiven her, not only for transgressing the norms but also for what they see as the airs she put on when she first was married.

The vigilance of Tajik men, as they attempt to prevent their womenfolk besmirching the nation, is mediated through the honour-and-shame system (nomus and ayb in Tajik), which is the chief regulatory principle of Mediterranean and many Muslim societies. In fact, it is to a large degree this system that has been responsible for the differences between popular Islam and that of the jurists and the scriptures, owing to its strong influence on customary law in many Muslim countries. This is one major reason why popular Islam is so very constraining for women.

It is the honour-and-shame system that bears the chief responsibility for the similarity of social norms, and thus for many similarities in lifestyles, across these countries. It has been an important factor in the way gender norms are defined throughout the region, at least as regards their most elemental characteristics, that is, those aspects directly related to female virginity and chastity, and male control over women. What is crucial here is that men and, by extension the family, can be shamed by even the hint that their womenfolk may not be correctly performing their gender. Masculine gender identities and with them men's honour are highly dependent on the visible demonstration of their ability to keep their womenfolk under control. This makes men extraordinarily vulnerable, since their honour can be destroyed by a single deed or even word (cf. Gilmore 1987: 4) and this is what allows gossip to play such a vital role in social control.

The discourse simply depicts men as having control over women. However, the reality is somewhat different. The men whose honour depends on this system are basically conceptualised as heads of family, whose right of control extends to all family members, including sons. The result is that the position of younger men is ambivalent. They have control over women of their own and younger generations but are themselves subject to the control of their elders of both sexes. Unlike women they are not restricted in their mobility and are even applauded for having multiple sexual relations, which can only improve their masculine image. At the same time, they must visibly comply with their fathers' orders. A rebellious son can be almost as harmful for a father's and a family's honour as a recalcitrant woman. However, control over sons usually becomes a problem only at crucial moments, such as if they make difficulties over their parents' choice of spouse, while women's purity is a matter of daily consideration. But this is most critical in the case of younger women. Older women's purity is no longer considered very likely to be at risk, while they are supposed to support their husbands in the control of the younger generation (cf. Hegland 1992: 205). In other words, as far as control is concerned, the masculine and feminine norms legitimised by discourse are at opposite ends of a continuum, which situates older men at one extreme, young women at the other, and everyone else in between.

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4 See chapter 6 for the sequel to Tillo's story.

5 See, for example, Al-Khayyat (1990); Apkina (1998); Brouwer (1998); Delaney (1987); Gilmore (1987); Herzfeld (1980); Kandiyoti (1987); Makhlouf (1979); Singerman (1995); Tapper (1980); Warmock (1990); Wikan (1982, 1984) for discussions on the meaning of this system and the extent of its influence in these geo-cultural regions, which stretch from the countries of the Northern Mediterranean and the Maghreb to the Indian subcontinent, including Afghanistan and Soviet Central Asia.
For young women almost more important than being pure is being seen to be so. The slightest scandal can destroy their reputations and by extension that of their families. As Warnock puts it:

'Since honour was a matter of external appearance, it had to be constantly open to inspection and to be proved by contact with the external environment. Honour consisted precisely of what other people said... The slightest deviation would arouse comment which would be, in itself, dishonour.' (Warnock 1990: 25).

What is at stake, therefore, is not so much a woman's sexual behaviour as the perception of her behaviour, the image she projects. This is something all societies dominated by the honour-and-shame system have in common. The Pakistani girls in England interviewed by Jacobson (1998) claimed that their parents' chief concern was not so much that their daughters preserve their hymen intact until marriage, but almost more that they should never be seen in any even remotely potentially compromising situation, such as for instance, getting out of a man's car (Jacobson 1998: 61, 64). Parents of Moroccan and Turkish girls in the Netherlands took exactly the same attitude (Brouwer 1998: 150).

According to Ginat (1982), girls in Palestine who were determined to marry their boyfriends would on occasion go as far as deliberately to have sex with their friends in order to manipulate their families. After this, parents would have little choice but to allow their daughters to marry their friends, as marriage to anyone else would have caused a scandal. As long as the boys went along with this, the girls could still appear to have been virgins on their wedding night thus keeping up appearances (Ginat 1982: 177-8). These girls were taking a tremendous risk. They would really have to trust their boyfriends' willingness to marry them. Such a ploy would probably not work in Tajikistan, Iraq, or other more conservative Muslim communities, where men more usually abandon girls with whom they have had relations (Al-Khayyat 1990; De Vries 1987: 151). In Tajikistan at least this often happens because of their parents' insistence on choosing their sons' brides themselves.

Since above all it is image that is important, punishment will follow not so much the actual violation of the norms as this violation's being made public. In fact, since the very infliction of punishment would be a sign that something was wrong it can only take place once a violation has been made public. However, if this happens castigation must follow, for honour to be vindicated, even when, among Palestinians, this may take the form of a girl's execution. Ginat mentions a case where a girl who had had a secret abortion was put to death by her family many months later because a woman feuding with the family insisted on making the matter public, thus forcing them to act (1982: 180). Ginat further points out that community pressures do not act on all families equally. The extent to which a family is vulnerable to community pressure depends on its social standing. The lower a family's place in the community, especially if the family is a relative newcomer or has some blot on it already, the more important it is for them to demonstrate that they are capable of exerting the necessary control (Ginat 1982: 180).

In Tajikistan the honour-and-shame system is as important as anywhere else in the Muslim world, although I have never heard it even hinted at that nowadays killing would ever be a punishment for causing aby, as in this Palestinian case, or as is quite common over the Tajik border in Afghanistan, even among its large ethnic Tajik minority. Since Karomat's story (cf. chapter 2) suggests that before the Revolution women were punished in this way it may well be the Soviet legal code, which did not consider the preservation of family honour sufficient justification for murder, that is responsible for the change.

The conflict between Tillo and her brothers must be read in the light of the honour-and-shame system. It is a struggle between Tillo's wish to lead her own life in her own way and the demands of family and the community. Tillo's brothers were placed by the community at
large, in this case their neighbours, in a situation where the preservation of their own and their family's honour depended on their being seen to be attempting to control their sister's actions and keep her in line. If Tillo is perceived as being able to get away unscathed with such terrible deviations another woman might copy her, and then another, and who knows where this might end.

The neighbours used spying, gossiping, and tale-bearing, in other words, some of Foucault's micro-instruments of power (1980a: 101), to ensure that Tillo's brothers knew exactly what was going on with their sister. It was clear from what they told me that as soon as Tillo's second husband had left her alone, she immediately became a target of communal scrutiny. This had only increased when she started her business and her travels. The clothes she wore, the places she went to, and the people she met there were all relayed back to her brothers. The informants thus ensured that not only were Tillo's brothers kept fully informed of everything their sister did, but that they knew she had become a subject of general gossip in the neighbourhood. Moreover, the brothers were made aware that everyone realised they knew. This forced them to act or else to lose nomus in a big way. Tillo's brothers made sure that everyone understood they were taking control of the situation by always beating their sister in public, so that everyone could see that if she continued with her defiance of the norms it was not for want of effort on her brothers' part to stop her.

When Tillo was young she had unthinkingly complied with her parents' wishes. It did not occur to her that she could have any say herself. After her first husband went mad she started to take control to the point where she had been able to leave him. By the time her second husband abandoned her she was ready to take full charge. And she did this openly. Here was a woman who seriously challenged gender norms. She was a beautiful woman, who knew how to present herself most attractively and took great pride and pleasure in doing so. She travelled abroad, even though she took care always to go in the company of her women friends. She openly consorted with men in her business, and with Kulobis at that, a regional group that is at present heartily disliked by practically everyone in Tajikistan because of their crude and unpleasant behaviour since they took over the government. Since then men from Kulob seem to consider themselves superior to those from other regions, and certainly above the law. Anything they want they take. And here was Tillo spending time with them. Although she never brought a man home, nor was ever seen doing anything specifically wrong, no-one could tell for sure what was going on when she was elsewhere.

Tillo was thus a challenge to the norms. Her beauty was a threat to her neighbours whose husbands saw her every day in the street and knew she was a woman on her own. She dared to do what other women did not - to live on her own with her children, to travel, to earn money through her own initiative, in short to behave like a man. The more Tillo defied the conventions, the more the neighbours tried to pressure her into conforming, by means of the only weapon they had, threat to her family's nomus, and her brothers took this very much to heart. The fact that all those concerned lived within a few streets of one another heightened the neighbours' potential for control, since Tillo's neighbours were also her brothers' and her father's neighbours. Had they not all lived so near each other, things might have been different. As it was, the family had no escape from their neighbours who could constantly be seen and heard gossiping about Tillo. The men would congregate in the middle of the street and talk for hours, from time to time giving loaded glances towards Tillo's house as they did so. I could never get close enough to hear what they were saying, but it was clear even from a distance that it was about her, and that it was not complimentary. Even the women sometimes gathered outside their houses to gossip about her. It would thus be hard for anyone not to notice something untoward was going on.

Tillo's brothers may also have felt shamed by the fact that she, a woman on her own with five children, was visibly living more prosperously than they were. Moreover, perhaps one
reason they beat her as hard as they did on that last occasion was out of frustration that by marrying again she would be ensuring that they would not be able to get their hands on her house, as well as passing out of their control into that of a husband who owed them nothing and probably would not even show them outward respect. This meant they would still suffer the shame of their sister's behaviour without being able to exert the slightest control over her. Once she was married they would be unable even to chastise her.

Tillo's father was too old to be able to punish her physically so his public reproof consisted of refusing her permission to see her mother in the last days of her life, something the family took care that the whole neighbourhood should be aware of. The fact that this was extremely distressing to his dying wife who desperately wanted to see her daughter, appeared not to be as important as the shame this would have caused the family in front of the neighbours.

Tillo's story illustrates the power of gossip and shows what a significant effect it can have on people's lives. Along with its companions, spying and tale-bearing, gossip, is used not just in communities based on the honour-and-shame system but in all communities where the preservation of social norms, most particularly of course the appropriate performance of gender, is a paramount consideration. Melanie Tebbutt (1995), who studied gossip in working-class English neighbourhoods from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries shows that it was used there in the same way and to the same ends, as in Tajikistan. It was especially older women who gossiped about younger ones in order to compel conformity to the community's norms, thus preventing deviation. Gossip was particularly aimed at the preservation of female chastity (Tebbutt 1995: 9, 49ff). Al-Khayyat (1990), who studied her own Iraqi community claims that there 'Gossip operates as one of the strongest forms of social control, particularly in policing women. [Girls] are very conscious of gossip' (Al-Khayyat 1990: 23).

Roger Abrahams (1970) claims that gossip is a necessary tool for the maintenance of any community's social system, that in general it is gender norms that are the main focus of gossip, and that gossip is important in providing an active way to guarantee a certain level of homogeneity of ideals and social practices. He suggests that there is an ongoing tension between the interests of the community, which are served by gossip, and those of the individual families within that community, who are always under threat of becoming focuses of gossip (Abrahams 1970: 297ff).

Moreover, gossip provides a way of channelling group discussions into paths chosen by community leaders, who tend to be older men and women. This is another way to control youth. Regulating the range of acceptable subjects and the attitude to be taken to them, is a means the elders use to groom young people to tread the same well-worn paths in their own discussions. This is a way of actively working against the possibility of young people developing the sort of group discussions that take place within the framework of the health project's educational sessions (cf. introduction), where the aim is to stimulate the development of independent points of view in the hope that this will help people to start to question the generally accepted ideas.

Gossip also provides a way of uniting a community, of letting people feel they are part of a group with common interests. Anyone who does not identify with those interests and is not willing to participate is showing a lack of identity with the community. For many people everywhere the opinions of their neighbours and fitting into their community are vitally important. In Tajikistan there is little that is more important, at least that is the impression I got when I heard repeated over and over again - 'I can't do that. What would the neighbours say?' Once, when I was really tired of hearing this I asked Jahongul, 'Does it really matter what they say?' She replied, 'It matters to us. We are simply not in a position to ignore it.' The
neighbours are clearly only too ready to 'condemn and distort', something not limited to Tajikistan. As Wikan points out, the same is true for Cairo (Wikan 1984: 636).

Gossip is reinforced by the concept of shame, ayb. This tiny word carries a gigantic force. Everything and anything can be ayb, from loss of virginity before marriage to the length of one's sleeves. The important thing is that it usually has to do with some aspect of gender performance. For this reason, although ayb tends to be aimed at women it can also be directed towards younger men, towards anyone, in fact, whose gender performance can come under pressure from a controlling individual, whether this is the older generation subjugating the younger or males dominating females. Tillo's activities were full of ayb. Her wearing long boots, Russian clothes, talking to men, and especially to Kulobis, daring to go abroad at all (Tillo is one of the few non-elite women I met in Tajikistan who has ever been outside the borders of the former Soviet Union), and especially without an accompanying male with jurisdiction over her, her presumption in marrying for a third time and particularly someone whose wife lived nearby. In short, it was hard to find any aspect of her behaviour that did not appear to be shameful. Nevertheless, Tillo did not appear to allow either this, or her neighbours' opinions of her, to deflect her from her path.

How is it that Tillo was able to continue on her way without taking much notice of her neighbours and without allowing their labelling of her actions as ayb to deter her, while other people, for instance Jahongul, are petrified of putting a foot wrong, of doing anything the neighbours might comment adversely on? Tillo is in her thirties. She is no longer dependent financially on anyone and has her own home. Although she cares about her eldest brother and her mother, she cares more about her own life. She has learned that if she does not take control of it she will be forced to live in a way she finds unpleasant and she feels she has been doing this for long enough. She only wishes she had had the strength to make her own decisions when she was younger. Now she has decided to live as she wants. In other words, Tillo has decided to be assertive and selfish, neither of which are acceptable traits in Tajik women. In fact, Tillo is practically a closet feminist, although she probably has never heard of this term. It may well be that she has developed in this way from living without a husband or other constraining figure. Having spent several years as her own boss, and what is more travelling widely, as well as becoming a very successful businesswoman, Tillo has developed strong ideas, which she is able to articulate, about what she wants out of life. What appears to be happening is that after the end of her second marriage Tillo was gradually able to abandon her gender masks, since at that point she had nobody directly demanding submission of her. This does not mean she has abandoned Tajik customs, merely that she can now articulate things she was previously never able to. Nevertheless, in her general lifestyle Tillo lives very much the same way as other Tajik women and most of the time is as controlling of and watchful over her daughters as any of her neighbours. Moreover, after her marriage to Chahonbek she found herself forced to reassert her gender masks, at least to a certain extent, and to allow herself to be subjected to his will, unable to bring herself to defy him outright, as her story later shows (cf. chapter 7).

Jahongul was in a very different situation. She was sixteen years old, unmarried, living at home with her mother and subject to her control and that of her brothers. Any stain on her reputation might have made it impossible for her to marry a man of her own age. Jahongul's reputation was the only resource she had and it was important to her to take good care to preserve it (cf. chapter 6). It is so easy for a girl to bring shame on her family that she has to be careful of almost everything she does that can be seen by outsiders. However, a girl may bring shame on her family completely involuntarily and through no fault of her own. Parents today have to be especially on their guard because, since the war, young men have become much more casually violent. Rapes have become a daily occurrence:
Nohira was from one of the more conservative southern villages. She was fourteen years old and very closely guarded by her parents. She had never been allowed out of the house without another family member accompanying her. One day her parents entrusted her to the care of a somewhat older male cousin. He took her some distance away, raped her and took off. When the men of the village heard about it they pressured Nohira's father to send her away and suggested he should arrange to marry her off quickly to some older man who might agree to take her, 'spoiled' as she was. So he sent her to Dushanbe to stay with some distant relatives until a marriage could be arranged.

A Tajik woman from the nearby OSCE office heard of the case and went to see the parents. They told her what had happened and said how bad they felt that they had been forced to send their daughter away. The woman from OSCE asked who had forced them to do this and why they were punishing her for a crime she had not committed, and for which the cousin, and not Nohira, should have been punished. She pointed out that Nohira had been doubly traumatized by immediately being sent away to virtual strangers as well as having suffered the horrors of the rape itself. She had been left without any moral support or help. After a long discussion Nohira's father agreed that he had been too influenced by the neighbours and that he should have had the strength to stand up for what he himself thought best for his family and daughter. So he went to Dushanbe and brought Nohira home.

Nohira was lucky that she had the OSCE representative to stick up for her and even more lucky that her father loved her enough for her happiness to mean more to him than his honour. Their neighbours gained power over the family through Nohira's rape. Her father was considered not to have done his duty in keeping his family on the right track and this laid him open to community pressure to ensure that the seriousness of what had happened would not be ignored. When the code of nomus was broken, both Nohira and her father had transgressed the norms and so made themselves vulnerable to public retribution. They paid very dear for his having made the mistake of believing that a cousin would consider their family's honour as his own. Once again it can be seen how very easily a family can become vulnerable to outside pressures and just how difficult it is to withstand them.

At the same time it shows something very important indeed. That it needed only one person to say firmly that nobody had a right to interfere in the internal affairs of another family to get Nohira's father to rethink his position. Once he had done so he realised that he could take back the power he appeared to have relinquished not so much with the rape itself, as through his apparent failure to perform his gender appropriately. It was this failure that gave others in the community the power to dictate to Nohira's father, holding over him the possibility of rehabilitating himself, of re-establishing his gender performance by obeying his neighbours' behests. Once Nohira's father believed himself to be justified in putting his family welfare before his masculine gender performance this broke the community's hold over him. At the same time it points up just how fragile and illusory this hold really is.

Nevertheless, the fact that Nohira is no longer a virgin, that this is publicly known, will make it impossible for her to become a young man's first wife. The likelihood is that in the end she will end up married to someone older. This is a very negative situation for her. It is not simply that young men may be more attractive. It is also that the power relations will be considerably more equal with a husband near her own age. Moreover, if her husband feels that she has gained a poor reputation through the rape he may be liable to treat her badly (cf. chapter 7).
Male Honour - Sharaf and Nomus

A man who rapes is not totally disgraced by such behaviour, any more than Tillo’s first husband faced serious disgrace because of his drug taking and his prison record. This is because these affect only a man’s sharaf, not his nomus. Nomus is that type of honour related to a man’s gender identity. It does not hurt a man’s gender identity to be a rapist. On the contrary, if anything it enhances it, since each new sexual conquest only increases a man’s reputation (cf. chapter 7).

Sharaf is that sort of honour that men can gain through their own behaviour. It is associated with such qualities as honesty, integrity, and hard work. For a man to possess sharaf he needs to behave in a decent upright manner. In theory, women can also possess sharaf but because their lives are supposed to be centred round their families and because for women the elements of their gender performance are so strongly controlling of all facets of their lives, it is rare that sharaf is mentioned in regard to them. Sharaf bears no direct relation to gender identity. Perhaps this is why, although there are many Tajik families where sharaf is considered important and most older men seem to prize their reputation for sharaf, in Tajikistan today many younger men seem not to take it very seriously. They do not overly concern themselves with matters of stealing, fraud, lies, etc. However, it is not clear to me whether this is a result of the post-war situation or due to the generation gap. After all there is much the same discrepancy in values between young people in the West and their parents.

But nomus has lost nothing of its force for men, if only because it is constantly reinforced by the threat of mockery or worse. In general the worst thing a man can be accused of is being like a woman. Thus, men believe in the desirability of living up to the dominant gender norms more strongly than women do because to do otherwise is to risk ‘becoming’ the inferior (cf. Moore 1994a: 145). For this reason men are likely to try to conform to the dominant idea of masculinity much more than women do. Nevertheless, not all men fully internalise the norms either, so that they may prefer to assume gender masks in order to try to avoid bringing down upon themselves accusations of ayb through inappropriate gender performances, ranging, for instance, from doing housework to failing to enforce control over unmarried daughters. If they do not cover this up other men are always quick to react to pressure them into conforming. One of the male staff of the health project recounted how he was mocked for helping his wife with a domestic task:

One Sunday morning my wife and I carried our rugs down into the communal courtyard for cleaning. We had just started on this when I noticed several of my (male) neighbours standing round staring. When they saw what I was doing they started jeering - ‘Are you a woman to do such work?’ I stood it for about fifteen minutes but then I couldn’t bear it any more. Throwing a quick excuse at my wife I rushed off, leaving the rest to her. After this I decided to restrict my help to inside the flat, where no one could see me and, if a visitor came, I would always pretend to have been doing something else.

Mockery appears very effective in controlling men, in preventing them from inappropriate actions such as helping to clean rugs. It is even more important for getting them to control their womenfolk, especially when applied to boys who are not yet sure of their masculinity. Jahongul’s younger brother, Farukh, for instance, was very sensitive to any gossip about his

6 Although in Egypt the bloodied sheet from the first night of the marriage is known as the bride’s sharaf (Wikan 1984: 637).
sister and would immediately confront her with any he heard, letting her know she had to amend her ways and stop disgracing him.

When Ibrohim was twelve years old his mother Basgul, a widow in Dushanbe, decided to remarry. However, her new husband turned out to be a heroin addict, and violent when under the influence. He would come home night after night stoned and desperate for sex, to the point that if Basgul did not immediately acquiesce he would beat her, or threaten her at knife point. To escape his violence Basgul spent many a night huddled in fear on the staircase outside her flat and it was clear to everyone that things were not going well. Ibrohim was scared his mother would get a divorce and then later would wish to marry again. Women who have taken more than two husbands are considered immodest. Ibrohim had heard his school friends jeering at other boys whose mothers had done this, indeed he had joined in. He was scared that he might now end up as the butt of their ridicule. So he told his mother that she must just endure her situation. He would not accept her divorcing this man; somehow she had to learn to live with him. Basgul eventually did find a way to get her husband to abandon heroin and their marriage has since become more bearable. She admits that Ibrohim's fears definitely influenced her decision to try to make the most of her marriage.

Men can be extremely harsh to and unforgiving of one another when they consider that serious infringements of nomus have taken place, as when they pressured Nohira's father into sending her away. The men in Tillo's street were quite hard on Chahonbek for marrying a second wife living so near to the first. They made it very clear what a disgraceful action that was and at the same time that they would not have said a word had his second wife lived far enough away that no-one would have seen them.

Hamid lives in a village in Kofernihon. Shortly before the civil war his unmarried daughter became pregnant. Immediately they learned of this the men of his village got together and decided they had to take action. They felt that if they were not careful their village might become a laughing stock in the region. They decided the most effective punishment was ostracism. They hoped this would show Hamid that everyone considered him to be responsible for his daughter's behaviour and to have dishonoured the whole village. Hamid should have taken better care of his daughter and prevented this.

The ostracism continued for some months. Hamid was very upset by his fellow villagers' behaviour but he did not know what to do to make amends. One day he decided to see if he could force the men to accept him again. There was a tui at a neighbour's house and Hamid decided to attend. He sat down at the dastarkhon with the other men. Immediately they all moved away from him, leaving him at one end all by himself. Hamid had still not been able to get the men to change their attitude towards him when the war broke out and the villagers scattered in exile.

The ostracism of men who are felt to have violated gender norms or nomus serves not just as punishment and pressure to rectify this if possible but also as a warning to other men to

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7 At the stage before heroin depresses the male libido it appears to have the opposite effect but at the same time to make it difficult for men to reach the point of ejaculation - cf. Chahonbek's story in chapter 7 and Lola's husband in chapter 6.
8 This story was told me by Ayesha Homed.
live up to their responsibilities in looking after the honour of their family members. It is notable that violation of *sharaf* does not seem to carry such heavy communal penalties. Robbery with violence, rape, and even murder seem not to be nearly as shameful as an unmarried pregnant daughter.  

**Ayb and Religion**  

*I went to Khojamaston together with a few colleagues to interview potential new staff for the health project. One of the things we needed to find out before hiring someone was his or her attitude to Tajik traditions, as we needed staff open to the possibility of change. We asked fifty-year-old Yusuf what he would do if a man came to him and said, 'My wife has taken a lover, what should I do?' What advice would Yusuf give him? Yusuf was horrified at the question and said firmly that he believed in all the Islamic teachings and that marital fidelity was obligated to women under Islamic law. A wife who had taken a lover would be polluted and her husband should immediately divorce her. Meanwhile, the man himself would be dirty and no other men could have anything to do with him. 'A man has the right to have more than one wife, so it is no problem if he takes another one. But a woman can't have more than one husband at a time. Her husband first has to say *taloq* and only then can she remarry, so it's always a sin for a woman to have sex with another man while she is still married. There is nothing that can change this law. It is so written.' Needless to say, we did not hire Yusuf. Instead we found other men who, while believing it to be undesirable for women to have extra-marital sex, do not completely condemn either wife or husband for this.  

Khojamaston is a very religious region and Yusuf was not the only man there to hold such views nor to make use of religion in this way, both as a potent weapon for control over women and as a very handy justification for men's rights to a more hedonistic lifestyle, while at the same time legitimising his right to exert control over other men by insisting they enforce the norms within their own families. However, in fact, there is nothing in the *qur'an* to suggest a man can just go off and marry a second wife as and when he pleases, and without even informing his first wife, whatever men in Tajikistan and other Muslim countries may (conveniently) believe. In other words, religion lends itself to being used as one of Foucault's micro-mechanisms of power. It is very easy for people to (re)interpret the scriptures to their own ends.  

The following story, which took place in summer 1998, is narrated by one of the health-project staff members, who had been teaching the teenage boys in Sayot. It illustrates how religion can be used as a pretext for blatant self-interest. Every week after lessons were over the boys would play football, which for many was their very favourite part, and something they would spend the entire week anticipating, especially as none of them had the wherewithal to buy footballs for themselves.  

*Last Tuesday after we had finished our lessons I got out my football as usual, but the boys all absolutely refused to play. I was completely astounded, since usually they can hardly bear to wait until the end of the lesson, they are so eager. When I asked  

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9 As I pointed out in the introduction, it is not so long ago that the same attitude existed in England.  
10 See the section on the Family and Women's Role in Islam in chapter 1.  
11 This story was told me by Bahodur Toshmatov, the teacher in question.
them what was going on, they said that football was haram. I could not understand this. I thought perhaps they were upset about my football, or about the fact that I am not religious, that I do not cover my head. So I asked them whether it was just my football that was unacceptable, or was it all footballs. The boys said that because the very first football ever had supposedly been made out of the head of a dead Muslim it was, therefore, anti-Islamic to play at all.

I didn't understand one bit what was going on. I had been teaching there for months and no-one had ever mentioned such a thing. In my nearly two decades teaching sports to Muslim boys I have never heard of this, nor has any boy ever refused to play on religious grounds before. Moreover, other Muslim countries don't appear to have a problem with this. So I said to the boys, 'but Pakistan, Iran, and lots of other Muslim countries have football teams. Didn't any of you see in the television listings that Iran is playing this week in the World Cup?' They started to think about this and eventually agreed that maybe it was alright to play after all. Once they got going they seemed as happy as ever. But I still didn't understand why the question had arisen in the first place and it worried me. I thought perhaps someone was trying to sabotage our project.

On Friday I was working in another section of the village. The boys there seemed quite happy to play football after lessons, so I asked them about Tuesday's group. Did they know why they had been so reluctant to play? 'Don't pay any attention to them', was the reply. 'They were told that by Mullah Abdul'hamid. He was very upset that the boys always attend your classes on Tuesday afternoons instead of going to his religion lessons. He was losing a lot of money and so he thought this up as a way of getting them back. He figured if they couldn't play football any more the boys wouldn't bother to go to your lessons. They were silly to take any notice of him. We never do.'

Today was Tuesday again and I waited to see what would happen after lessons. But the boys seemed to have totally forgotten their objections and grabbed the ball as fast as ever.

In Sayot there are many mullahs and each one has different ideas about how strict it is necessary to be. While mullah number one tries to get the boys to abandon football in order to keep his earnings up, a second mullah actually looks after his children himself so that his wife can be free to attend our project's education sessions on anatomy, physiology, contraception, and women's rights. At the same time, yet a third mullah has not allowed his wife to be seen by anyone outside their immediate families for all the 40 years of their marriage. When the villagers had to flee during the civil war this mullah's wife, bundled up so she could not be seen, climbed into their car and was driven away. She was later brought back in the same way.

These differences are to some extent the result of the fact that anyone can declare himself a mullah. A man needs no special knowledge, no qualifications, no licensing. In Sunni Islam there is no institutional control that regulates mullahs. In Tajikistan a mullah may not actually know the qur'an, which he may not have read even in Tajik. He may have a copy of it in Arabic without understanding this language, although he may know the letters well enough to be able to read the sounds and he may teach this. Many mullahs are wise and good but unfortunately there are all too many who are narrow-minded and self-serving. Tajikistan is full of mullahs whose knowledge of the scriptures is minimal, but who simply by calling themselves mullahs set themselves up as arbiters of communal mores.

The use of religion as a mechanism for social control is not limited to men. For instance, when Karommat was in agreement with a plan she would be happy discussing it. However,
Control and Subversion

when she was not in favour or was in a bad mood she would say 'you should not plan for the future. This is in the hands of God alone'. While at times she would say that one should put all one's trust in God, at others she would go haring off for advice to the nearest doctor. When she became infertile in the mid 1940's at first she had resorted to mullahs for advice but when she saw this was achieving nothing she turned to the health service, which, however, also failed her. She told me rather sadly that she now very much regretted not having gone to the Russian doctors in the first place because perhaps it was the mullahs' treatments that had made her infertility incurable.

The name of God is often invoked in Tajikistan in the sort of situation where in the West the word 'natural' might be applied. For instance, a Westerner might say that it is not natural to fly and that had human beings been meant to do this we would have been born with wings. That same person may not have anything against trains, although we were not born with wheels. More commonly the word 'unnatural' is applied to things people find morally wrong, especially in regard to sex. For instance, homosexuality is often said to be unnatural, despite the fact that male dogs hump each other, female chimpanzees have sex together, and the same applies to many other mammals. On the face of it then, sexual relations with members of one's own sex would appear to be more natural than many other practices that human beings indulge in and which appear to be perfectly acceptable. None of this prevents homosexuals being labelled 'unnatural'. It is clear then that this term has no basis in logic but serves rather as a useful way imposing social control, since the word 'natural' somehow has a special force that means it is rarely queried by the Western public. In Tajikistan evoking the name of God is even more effective as it is that much more difficult to question it.

Muna is a 35-year-old Gharmi woman living in the village of Sayot in Bokhtar. After her marriage she found herself unable to bear children. She went to a gynaecologist for consultation, who had her admitted to hospital for treatment. Her family were horrified. No woman in their family had ever done such a thing before. This had to be against the will of God. At first they kept away from the hospital, showing their disapprobation by a refusal to visit. But eventually Muna's father could stand it no more, so he went to the hospital and forced her to come home. However, by this time the treatment had already been completed and not long afterwards, Muna became pregnant with her first child. When he was two years old the boy drowned in one of the village drainage ditches. Her following child also died. Although Muna eventually did manage to rear several children to adulthood she has never got over these two deaths. Both Muna's family and her neighbours say that the deaths of her children were a punishment from God for having transgressed by allowing herself to be treated by kofir doctors. She should have accepted her childless fate or at least limited her quest for fertility to traditional Muslim remedies, such as asking mullahs for help or visiting certain shrines well known for their efficacy in such matters.

Lutfia is from the same village as Muna. She had an IUD inserted some time ago, when she felt she had completed her family. However, one of her children has recently died and Lutfia is now trying to have another one. So far she has been unable to conceive, since her IUD has left her with some gynaecological problems. A group of women was sitting round discussing this. The younger women were commiserating with her but several older women condemned her for having used contraceptives, insisting that the death of her child and her current infertility were God's punishment for this.
Ailsa is a widow also from Sayot. She is extremely poor and has started trading in the market in order to feed herself and her children. Few men from her section of Sayot were killed in the war so that Ailsa is one of only a handful of widows there and most of the others have some sort of support. Although many women from other sections, where the number of widows is higher have been trading for some time, in the section where Ailsa lives the number of women in dire straits is not sufficient to have forced a consensus that this is permissible. Thus, her neighbours are extremely upset with her behaviour.

Feeling ill one day, Ailsa went to see the village doctor. While she was waiting in the queue several older neighbours started muttering. Finally they turned to her and asked why she was there. She said she was not feeling well and had come for treatment. 'Of course, you are not well', they said. 'God is punishing you. Your illness is a direct result of your immorality. All you have to do to become well is to stop trading. God cannot be for you when you behave like that.' Ailsa became very upset and started shouting that she had no other way of feeding her children and did they expect her to starve. The reply was - 'That does not matter; you must not contravene God's laws'.

In all these examples God's name is being invoked to enforce community values that may actually be the opposite of what is permitted by the qur'an. There is no justification in the scriptures for not using contraceptives. These are permitted by the medieval jurists; the Central-Asian Ibn Sino mentions 20 different forms (Musallam 1983: 67) and the Prophet Himself mentions coitus interruptus (withdrawal) as perfectly acceptable. There is also nothing in the scriptures to suggest that there is anything inherently bad in going to doctors nor that women are forbidden to trade or do other work (cf. chapter 1).

Community Relations

Safarmo, a war widow in her mid thirties, is from the same section of Sayot as Ailsa. After her husband was killed Safarmo was left with seven mouths to support on her own. Except for her older son who has left home and now lives in Kazakhstan and occasionally sends her money, the boys are all too young to help. Safarmo has no special skills, so she decided to trade the produce from her plot of land in the town market. However, the neighbours took the same attitude with her as with Ailsa. After she had been trading for a short time a delegation of older women from the village came to her and asked her to stop, saying it was not appropriate and that she was shaming both herself and the village. Safarmo weighed up the consequences and decided she could not afford to get herself a bad name, so she agreed to give up trading, although she was now so poor she and her family could barely afford to eat. She was also very preoccupied by the fact that she had no money to buy school exercise books and pencils for the children. Nevertheless, Safarmo did not feel strong enough to defy village tradition.

A year later Safarmo had to rethink her situation. Her son in Kazakhstan had stopped sending her money and without it she was below the survival line. She absolutely had to earn money. She started baking non and selling it in the market in Kurgan, telling the neighbours that if they wanted her to stop they would have to feed her and her children. Because she has neither a mother-in-law nor any adult men in her household, Safarmo has become an object of suspicion in the village. Old women will turn up to sit with her to check that all is in order and the village boys spy on her constantly.
Things became so bad, Safarmo confided, that she could no longer meet her women friends openly; the boys simply would not leave them alone. They would even crouch down outside the windows to listen to what was going on inside, so the women could never talk freely. For this reason they have taken to meeting at night. Around midnight, when they hope everyone else in the village is asleep, Safarmo’s friends, shoes in hand, tiptoe down the paths of their homes and out into the night, trying to be quiet so as not to waken the dogs. They gather at her house, have their conversations in peace, and around 3 a.m. return home in the same way. So far they have not been caught.

Each section of a village is so small that everyone can easily manage to get to know everyone else’s business and they all do their best to discover each other’s secrets. On a number of occasions when a woman set out for our clinic the boys were already telling everyone where she was going and why, long before she had even left her own neighbourhood. This spying and the ensuing gossip acts as a strong deterrent on any woman looking to keep her visit, or at least the reason for it, private.

Safarmo and her friends go to quite extraordinary lengths to evade community vigilance in order to be able to meet in peace. However, they clearly find the opportunity to get together important enough to make the effort. All these women were extremely enthusiastic attendees at the health project’s classes and this may have been a contributory factor in their desire to have private discussions. It may be that they are learning to be subversive in ways that alarm the community and that this is also why there are all the pressures on them.

However, it is not any emancipatory effect of the health project but sheer necessity that drives both Ailsa and Safarmo into defying convention and going to trade in the market. Their options are to do this or starve to death, along with their children. They are in a far more drastic situation than Tillo, who could probably have found at least minimal ways of survival without starting her own business. She defied convention because she wanted to live above the mere survival line. Ailsa and Safarmo have not managed to raise themselves more than a tiny fraction above this even with their trading, which is on a very much smaller scale and thus very much less lucrative than that of Tillo.

It is difficult to know whether their critics would really have preferred these families to starve to death rather than contravene the norms or whether the pressure is just a way of reminding everyone that people should not imagine they can transgress with impunity, while not necessarily being intended to have the effect of preventing the women from trading. In other words, the community at large is suggesting that a woman who is really desperate might trade, if this is what it takes to stay alive but other women should not think that this gives them the right to trade just because they want to live better.

There is obvious and visible tension between communities at large and the families of which they are composed. In Tajikistan, just as in other societies based on the honour-and-shame system, it is almost impossible to avoid considering what people will say in virtually everything one does (cf. Wikan 1984: 636). If people publicly transgress social norms, especially if they dare to challenge approved gender performances, there will be a concerted effort on the part of other community members to squash this, to ferret out wrongdoing, to reveal it where the disclosure can have most disciplinary force. Through their spying the village boys act to support the senior community members in retaining their power base, and thus from quite early on they play a significant role in the preservation of community norms.

The tension between families and the communities they live in is occasioned largely by the former trying to preserve their secrets, while everyone else is constantly on the alert to discover anything discreditable they can. The winning family is the one that is able to preserve its own secrets, while taking a high moral stance over the aberrations of others.
Thus, family dramas are played out against the background of community observation, with
the constant terror of being exposed and suffering the consequences hanging over everybody's
heads.

Although in Tajikistan these consequences may not be as negative as for Ginat's (1982)
Palestinian girls they may still be very bad. This accounts for the sometimes quite
extraordinary lengths that people may resort to in order to preserve their secrets intact from
public gaze, enveloping them in a maze of intricate lies and deceits. Such cover-ups are
clearly especially important when a girl's reputation is at stake. Mothers who find out their
unmarried daughters are pregnant will rush them off to a distant region in order to get them
abortions somewhere they hope no-one knows them.

In fact, in Tajikistan female neighbours often do have some idea of what is going on.
Whether they will reveal their knowledge depends partly on the esteem the family is held in
but most especially on whether its members are seen as trying to remedy the situation. Where
it is clear that they are doing their best to maintain gender norms and that they acknowledge
the shame of their wrongdoing the community may leave them in peace. It is as if a supreme
effort at covering up suffices to demonstrate that the family respects the norms and that its
women will be controlled without the necessity for public exposure.

In other words a community's older women, who are very often the arbiters of its morals
and actions, may not always be malicious. It seems that at times they may be content to leave
a family unexposed in order not to cause irreparable damage, as long as it is clear all round
that the norms are not going to be violated and that it is unlikely that that particular person
will soon transgress again. But their knowledge of the transgression is something they will if
necessary be able to use in the future and a family may be very aware of this, without
anything overtly having been said.

The women of the community may be aware that those of a certain family have conspired
to cover up some transgression on the part of one of the girls without their men folk finding
out. It is not infrequent in the case of girls' infringement of nomus, resulting for instance in
clandestine abortions, that the women try to keep this secret from the men. The community
women may tacitly agree that the men need never find out. In this way they may gain great
power over the women of an offending family because there is always the unspoken threat
hanging over them that they might make the transgression public, as happened in the case of
the Palestinian girl recounted by Ginat (1982: 180).

Thus, although nomus may be far from beneficial to women they are certainly not just
passive victims of it. On the contrary they play a very active role, as guardians of nomus or as
its (deliberate) transgressors, as concealers of violations within their own families or as
revealers of the infringements of others. Older women derive power from their position as
controllers of young women's honour as well as being able to manipulate family honour to
their own advantage, which gives them a particular incentive to initiate cover-ups rather than
have their own inadequacies exposed to the public gaze.

But when senior community members see that families are permitting 'shameful' behaviour to continue, they apply what pressure they can until they feel the situation has been rectified.

* Zora, whom I introduced in chapter 1, was very aware that she and her family were
the focus of considerable gossip, because her daughter Dila was still unmarried at
the age of twenty-three. Zora had decided to allow Dila to wait to get married until
she finished her physics degree at Dushanbe University as she had great hopes of an
academic career for her and wanted her to have every chance at this. However,
keeping to this resolution was getting very hard. Dila was now by far the oldest
unmarried girl in her circle. Dila's situation, together with much speculation as to the
reason for it, was becoming a major topic of conversation among all her friends and acquaintances.

Even Jahongul, herself only too aware of how difficult it can be to tread the minefield of gossip, could not refrain from adding her mite. 'How extraordinary that Dila is not yet married. They must move in very different circles from ours. We could never get away with being unmarried at such a late age. Someone would be bound to start insinuating that there was something wrong with us', she concluded. Zora did her best to take no notice but she got really fed up with the fact that greetings increasingly consisted mainly of the question 'have you married your daughter yet?' Things got so bad that she would go out of her way to duck meeting acquaintances she had not seen for a while.

Dila's brother, Ali was most upset when his friends jeered at him about it, insinuating that his sister was perhaps no longer a virgin, otherwise she would already be married. Almost every day Ali would come home and beg his parents to marry off his sister, as he couldn't stand the pressure any more.

Finally, Dila finished her degree and registered for post-graduate studies. A fellow student had had his eye on her for some time and his family offered for her shortly before she was due to graduate. Thus, she was able to marry immediately after graduation. A year later she had a baby, thus demonstrating that after all there was nothing wrong and she was well able to conform to social norms.

The friends and acquaintances of each family member all exerted tremendous pressure to force this family to conform to the norms they were too visibly defying. In a society where practically all girls are married by the age of twenty a girl of twenty-three is virtually on the shelf. As Jahongul said:

*Here in Tajikistan a girl who has reached the age of eighteen without her hand being asked in marriage is considered an old maid. I want to marry as late as possible, perhaps between twenty and twenty-two. Only brides over twenty look so old and awful!*

So a girl unmarried as late as twenty-three must have something wrong with her. If nothing is obviously amiss people's first thought, like that of Ali's friends, is that she is frightened to get married because she is no longer a virgin. It is inconceivable to most people in Tajikistan that a girl might postpone marriage in order to be able to concentrate better on her studies. I have even known Tajik women studying in Moscow come home to give birth, leave their new baby with their mothers, and return to Moscow to finish their studies, perhaps not seeing the child again for several years. Most girls in Tajikistan today get married on leaving high school and study afterwards, as Jahongul did. Luckily, for Dila it all came right in the end and she is now working on her master's degree.

*On her first day at work after her marriage, Karomat dressed in her Russian clothes. All the women in the street stared at her and began to talk loudly, so loudly it reached Karomat's ears. They were asking, 'how can she go around without exot, she must be a shameless hussy. Karomat wanted to lift her skirt and show that she was wearing Russian-style knickers underneath and was not naked. But she decided this might not be a good idea.*

*Day after day she would go to the factory dressed in European clothes, and day after day the women would gather on the street and stare at her, muttering their disapprobation. Karomat hated running this gauntlet every day but she carried on*
with it. Meanwhile the local women went to her mother-in-law and said to her 'how can you let your daughter-in-law dress like that? It is absolutely disgraceful. Who are her father and mother? Why does she wear such clothes?' Karomat's mother-in-law replied that her son had promised his bride before they were married that he would allow her to wear Russian clothes and so nothing could be done at present. However, she agreed to talk to her daughter-in-law after she had had time to settle in. One Sunday morning after breakfast, when she had been married a couple of months, Karomat's mother-in-law said to her, 'come and sit down with me, I want to talk to you'. Karomat protested that there was too much housework to do but her mother-in-law said she would help her do it later. Then she said, 'sweetie, lovey, pet, I am an old woman - I am now forty-five and have born twelve children and buried ten - in a few years I'll be dead. When I am in my grave you can do as you please, but right now I beg of you to do as I ask.' Karomat said 'what, what do you want me to do?' Her mother-in-law said, 'no-one will invite me to their homes, everyone says we are shamed because we have a daughter-in-law in the family who dresses like a Russian and doesn't wear ezo. They ask, 'where are her parents from?' Karomat replied heatedly, 'my parents are from the North and they are Tajiks, just as I am. Her mother-in-law said 'Please, just for my sake and just for the few years I have left to live, please wear Tajik clothes.' Karomat told me she was 'somewhat stupid in those days' and really believed that probably her mother-in-law was so old that she would soon die and leave her free to be her own boss. So she agreed. The following day she went to work wearing ezo and a rumol, in other words Tajik traditional dress. All the Tajik women looked approvingly on as she walked down the road. When she got to the factory the Russian women all crowded round her and said 'Clara (Russians cannot handle Tajik names so they give everyone Russian names and Karomat was always called Clara) what is it, what happened? Why are you dressed like that?' Karomat explained, adding 'my mother-in-law is like a mother to me and her word is law. What can I do?' Then the Russian women said, 'you see, you were promised that you could wear Russian clothes, but now he has got you under his thumb you see what has happened, you are doing what he says and he is not sticking to his promise.' They went on like this for a long time. Karomat continued to turn up to work in Tajik clothes and every day her co-workers would discuss them. Finally Karomat got fed up and told them that she worked with them for eight hours a day but then went home and lived her life outside the factory. She was Tajik, her family was Tajik, and her mother-in-law and husband were part of it and they were more important to her than her co-workers, who should shut up and leave her alone. So they did and never bothered her again on the subject. Karomat's own mother was happier also when she started to wear ezo although it was she who had first dressed Karomat in Russian clothes when she had started her at the Soviet kindergarten, while she herself had been studying to become a teacher. From then on until after her marriage Karomat had dressed only in Russian clothes outside the house. Once she resumed Tajik clothes, however, she never returned to dressing in Russian style, even after her mother-in-law died and after her divorce. In her later years she could no longer conceive of dressing any other way.

In Sayot there lives Tojiddin, an older man who delights in manipulating his fellow villagers. He spends much of his time on the look out for things to criticise. The young people, and especially the teenage girls, go in terror of his noticing anything at all about them and do their best to avoid being anywhere near him. One day Tojiddin
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decided the sleeves on many of the girls' dresses were too short. In the mosque that evening he told their fathers that their daughters were shaming them by wearing their sleeves so short. Their fathers returned home and punished the girls, who then had even more reason for fear. This is a fear that constantly hangs over them. I have heard them discuss whether or not to do something and decide against it because they were frightened that Tojiddin might see them.

In both these cases the community's self-appointed representatives were able to force individuals to change their behaviour, even though in neither case had a major transgression occurred. To make so much fuss over mere clothes might seem trivial, but it is far from insignificant in the context of an opportunity for the self-proclaimed leaders of society to demonstrate their power. Moreover, the issue of whether to wear Russian or Tajik clothes directly impinges on gender norms, as was discussed in relation to Dila in chapter 1.

The terror that the Sayot girls feel in front of Tojiddin is very real. In fact, even their fathers go in fear of this man because they never know what shortcomings he will expose next. But, because gossip and spying give power, because men feel themselves helpless in a situation that could lead to a public exposure of themselves as unmanly, they are powerless to do much about Tojiddin. Men are weaker where such things are concerned than older women. While Tillo and especially the 70-year-old Karomat of today can say to hell with what the neighbours think, men very rarely appear to feel able to shrug off their peers' public derision. In fact, especially since they are the group most impervious to gossip older women can use this as a weapon in power struggles both against women from their own and other families and against men, even thereby forcing men into taking action against others against their will.

But when she was seventeen and newly wed Karomat was not in a position to be able to ignore the neighbours. The threat to her relations with her mother-in-law, and perhaps also her husband, was very real. It is also possible that her mother-in-law may have actually objected to Karomat's wearing Russian clothes as much as the neighbours did and might have been using the excuse of their disapprobation to impose her own wishes on her daughter-in-law in a less conflictive manner than by directly saying that it was her own opinion.

Men and Ayb

Men have a rather different relationship with community morals than women, since they are at once the provokers of ayb and those with most to lose from it, since it is their nomus, their manhood, that is under threat. In Tajikistan it is very rare for a Tajik woman's honour to be threatened by a man from a different community. Russian men do not seduce or rape Tajik women, they have relations only within their own community. No doubt they are aware of the undercurrents of hostility towards them and know how dangerous it would be should they dare in any way to approach a local woman.

Whatever the reason, ayb is brought into Tajik communities almost entirely by Tajik men. Paradoxically the men who spend so much time and energy to ensure that their own sisters and daughters are never touched by a strange man even in gossip, are the very same ones, who get other men's womenfolk into compromising situations. This is because masculine gender performance depends on proving virility and one way of doing this is to have large numbers of sexual partners, as I discuss in greater detail in chapter 7. In fact many men feel that any other man's womenfolk are fair game, as Nohira's cousin appears to have done. Clearly for him the relationship was not close enough for him to consider her part of his family, although her parents presumably thought of him in this way when they entrusted her to him. Unlike Nohira's cousin men are usually careful to keep their illicit relations away
from the eyes of family and neighbours. For this reason it appears to be rare that they take place near their own place of residence or that of their close family members.

Such an attitude towards sexuality is not restricted to Tajikistan or to Muslim countries but is common to all countries whose moral system is based on the honour-and-shame system, such as Cuba and Spain, which is why female seclusion was practised in all of these. That is to say, seclusion is not peculiar to Muslim societies, it is rather that Islam is a juridical religion, which adjudicates on all how people lead their lives. Thus, it has the authority not only to interpret the scriptures in line with the prevalent moral systems but to use these to enforce compliance with them. It is this that allows female seclusion and veiling to be incorporated into daily religious practices, legitimising them in a way unavailable to Christianity today. However, it is not so long ago that the older generation of men in Spain still expected to keep control of their wives' movements. I remember that when I was living there in the mid 1980's the husbands of some of my older women friends expected to control all their movements and for their permission to be sought before their wives might participate in any activities outside the home.

Before the Revolution large numbers of Cuban men secluded their wives. One of the chief reasons men who emigrated to Cuba in the 1960's gave for leaving was that they had felt themselves dishonoured by the new laws that brought women out of their homes and into the workforce. These men felt the necessity of secluding their wives most strongly because they believed that it was impossible that a 'real man' could be contented with only one woman. Their status among their men friends was dependent on their success in seducing other men's womenfolk, while simultaneously their honour was dependent on their wives' being kept from contact with other men (Fox 1973: 275-8).

Men in the Arab countries have the same basic approach, which is the major reason why both men and women in Cairo feel more relaxed when the latter wear the hijab to work. This makes them symbolically untoouchable (MacLeod 1991), something that of course does not exist in the less structured conditions of Christian societies. This is the main difference between Egypt and pre-revolutionary Cuba in this respect, so that use of the hijab actually gives Egyptian women more freedom as it allows them to leave the home while remaining protected. In both societies men aim to have (sexual) contact with as many women as they can, whilst simultaneously endeavouring to keep their own women from even looking at other men. According to Abu-Odeh (1996), in Egypt this struggle between men for each other's womenfolk is so strong that some even make (silent) pacts with their best friends that they will not touch each other's womenfolk but will help each other have relations with other men's women. However, most Egyptian families do manage to protect their womenfolk and as a result most Arab men are still virgins at marriage (Abu-Odeh 1996: 152-3, 179). The same could probably have been said of Tajik men before they started labour migration to Russia.

In Tajikistan the same tensions between families apply. On the one hand the community exerts pressure on its families to ensure its females preserve their chastity while on the other hand men do their best to get them to violate it. This even happened during the period of hujum when Central-Asian men felt their collective manhood to be at stake. It was not merely that men attacked women who unveiled in order to force them to resume their veils (cf. chapter 2) but also Central-Asian communist officials would use their position to expropriate the unveiled wives of the poorest men (Massell 1974: 305).

This accounts for a great deal of men's unease at the thought of their womenfolk being exposed to strange men and explains why they try so hard to keep track of all their movements outside the home. Once, when the husband of a friend of mine expressed doubts

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12 The Spaniards exported their honour-and-shame system to their colonies.
about her chastity and one of his relatives came to check up on her, I even inadvertently became involved myself. It was one of the few times I actually found myself on the inside of a Tajik family situation.

Mahsuda was forty years old and had recently split up with her husband, although they were not yet divorced. They lived in a traditional house on the outskirts of Dushanbe, with a plot of land on which they grew vegetables and fruit. Mahsuda's husband had left the house to her and returned to live in his native village with his second wife. Usually I would find her in the evenings working in her garden.

One evening I went over to her place. As I knew her children were visiting their grandparents I expected to find her alone. However, when I got there I saw an unknown man working alongside her in the garden. Mahsuda called to me and told me to go on into the house and sit down.

A little later she and the man came into the house. Without introducing us she offered us both refreshments. Mahsuda was clearly ill-at-ease. She kept making small talk. The man kept quiet. I responded as best I could, understanding nothing of what was going on. As it got later and darker I wondered whether he was intending to stay the night. Although there is no formal curfew in Dushanbe, since the war few people go out late at night.

Several hours passed. Eventually, around 10 p.m. the man got up and left. Mahsuda bolted the gate after him. We went back into the house. 'Who on earth was that and what was he doing here?' I asked. 'A cousin of my husband', she replied, 'He came here to see if I were receiving men tonight. I told him a woman friend was coming to spend the night and that was all, but he didn't believe me.' 'Why did he stay so long after I got here?' 'He thought we were in it together, that we were both planning on having men over. My husband had told him I was a whore and he wanted to see for himself if it was true. He found out that my children were away tonight so he thought this was the obvious time to come and check on me.'

Around 11 p.m. we decided to go to bed. Mahsuda went into the front room without turning on the light. Looking through the curtains she could see her husband's cousin standing in the street watching the house. Just in case his presence inside had been influencing our behaviour he had transferred to the outside and was waiting to see what would happen next. For all I know he may have spent the entire night there. When we got up the next morning he was gone.

This story had a happy ending. When the cousin saw nothing to bear out Mahsuda's husband's accusations he decided the latter had been deliberately malicious. In the end he took Mahsuda's side against her husband and became very helpful to her in organising her divorce.

Conclusion

Foucault's micro-mechanisms of power are made the more potent in Tajikistan by the way the honour-and-shame system works, especially through its influence on the formation of both masculine and feminine gender identities. It provides the heavily related concepts of nomus and ayb, which are powerful tools for social control, and which allows the community to exert pressure on a family through the way masculine gender identity is defined, in particular through the characteristic of control. Men are vulnerable to community pressure precisely because of this characteristic, which forces male heads of family to repress the rest of the members in order not to be seen as emasculated. It is also beneficial to younger women
in the community that other young women conform, because this keeps the pressure off them. Once one young woman is seen to be rebelling against the norms their peers find their behaviour under closer scrutiny. This encourages young women also to co-operate in policing each other and to keep any aberrations well hidden behind their gender masks.

Such interference of the wider community in the lives of individuals and their families may seem exceptionally intrusive, but, as the Tebbutt (1995) study referred to above suggests, it is only quantitatively different from community control in the West. In fact a certain amount of community control is vital everywhere since communities cannot exist as cohesive groups without a sense of underlying norms and shared understanding of how people should live and societies be structured (Singerman 1995: 50). So, the survival of the community and society is actually dependent on the types of controls discussed here.

If everyone took as little notice as Tillo, if everyone were to defy the community secretly as Safarmo does, if young people were allowed to go their own way, taking no notice of their elders, this would threaten the glue that holds society together and chaos would doubtless ensue, a chaos that would be beneficial to no-one. This was the sort of chaos that occurred in actual fact during the civil war. People in Tajikistan perhaps rebel less against social controls today than they might otherwise do, given the relative weakness of the national government and the stresses of the transition period, precisely because they have all seen the horrors that lack of control caused in 1992-93, and still do cause on a daily basis, and they would prefer to minimise these.

The problem is, however, that it is difficult to draw the line between community pressures that simply serve to keep a community together by giving them a common outlook, and the suppression of the individual members of that community. Perhaps the two are virtually synonymous, at least in most societies. Thus, community pressure serves both to ensure that family hierarchies are supported in their repression of their subordinate members and that dominant members are held strictly to their function as intermediaries of community control.

In Tajikistan the threat posed by the constant attempts of the Soviet state to penetrate and influence the local culture, attempts which only ended with perestroika, have made the vigilance, strictness, and repression of difference far more important than they might otherwise have been. This also legitimises parental repression of youth. When the community members as a whole felt themselves under attack, such as happened during the hujum, their reaction made it very clear that in Tajikistan national honour was dependent on exactly the same attributes as masculine honour. Both men and the nation are disgraced if their womenfolk’s gender identities are infringed upon.

However, no-one is apparently disgraced when men batter their wives or refuse to take responsibility for their wives and families. Hairy’s husband went to Russia five years ago from Sayot and has not been heard of since. He has not bothered to send her one penny in cash or one kilo of flour. Nevertheless, she considers herself honour bound to him and says it would be shameful for her to divorce him. It does not appear to be shameful for him to go off to Russia, leaving his wife behind to fend for herself. This attitude is not common to all Muslim countries. In Egypt, for instance, men who do not provide for their families lose their right to their wives’ services (Wikan 1980: 46). In Tajikistan this problem may have been largely caused by the Soviet system, which provided allowances to mothers and children. This may have suggested to some men that it was the government’s responsibility to look after their families, not theirs.

Before the Revolution if a Tajik man did not provide for his wife she could go to the qazi to ask for a divorce (cf. chapter 2). But today there are no longer any qazis in Tajikistan, which gives women nowhere to turn to for protection or freedom from their husbands. Even if they can get a civil divorce this does not free them from their marital bonds if their husband refuses them taloq. In other words, by removing the formal structures that had regulated
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traditional society, without transforming social norms the Soviet regime put Tajik women in a more vulnerable situation than before. The state legal code compensated only very partially since in the main it was evaded in matters of family relations.

The stories in this chapter make it clear that for both sexes the characteristics that comprise their gender ideals are essentially those which men find important. The characteristics women prize in men - responsibility, kindness, caring, and tenderness - are totally missing in the definition of masculine gender identity. At the same time, for men the important feminine gender characteristics are not so much those associated with relationships between the sexes, but rather those connected with men's relationships with other men. In other words, the dominant sets of gender norms are essentially part of male struggles to attain, or at least preserve, their status vis-à-vis other males (cf. Gilmore 1987: 4).

In the course of these struggles anything that might conceivably be labelled ayb, and there are an extraordinary number of things that can be, may appear on the prohibited list and be used against a potential transgressor. The system is the more frightening in that, since the law is not written down and since the officials who regulate it are not formally appointed, the boundaries can be moved in accordance with the whim of whoever wishes to appoint him/herself as judges. The result is that no one is ever exactly sure where the limits lie. However, this can also be used to the benefit of the less powerful. The lack of the rigidity of written codes of law means that when the norms change the law automatically changes with them rather than lagging behind as happens when it is necessary to update formal codes of law through getting them passed through parliament, something that may mean subjecting them to the scrutiny of persons who are against the new trends.

A society bounded only by customary law may maintain relatively rigid social norms but this does not mean that individuals determined enough to transgress cannot manage this, nor that the norms are static. The trick is to figure out how bend the system to their own ends and above all how to do this unperceived. Similarly, anyone determined to pressure another person may be able to use the system to do this. Those who appear to conform to the system acquire a good name, which provides a certain amount of protection lacking for those who are perceived as continually teetering on the brink of losing respectability. Someone from a prestigious background or who lives within visibly strict family controls will thus be less spied upon than someone in the situation of a Tillo.

While the stories in the following chapters stress family and inter-personal relationships they also contain many further instances of the influence that gossip can have on people's lives. There are even more instances of people being held back from acting merely by the fear of provoking gossip and the imagined consequences. These often loom far larger than reality. Hearing others being gossiped about strikes fear into the hearts of the listeners, fear that next time they or their families might be on the receiving end. It should further be kept in mind that those who manipulate the micro-mechanisms of power within the community are always also members of families themselves and as such are also in danger of being gossiped about and spied on. As Foucault suggests (1980a: 98) society is, in effect, a net, its threads connecting all its members. In Tajikistan these connections run, not from person to person, but from family to family, with the individual family members forming an internal circle of power at each node.