Control and subversion: gender, Islam, and socialism in Tajikistan

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Citation for published version (APA):
CHAPTER 8
CONTROL AND SUBVERSION

A Summary of the Findings

This book starts out from the premise that gender identities are central to social formation. It is through analysing the way that gender norms have been applied that I have been enabled to understand how the gender and age-based systems of control discussed in this book function. At the centre of these is the family, with on the one hand its internal relations and on the other the pressures on it from the community at large.

The introductory chapters present the theories of Foucault, Butler, and my own theory of gender masks and variant gender performances, and analyse their relevance to the Tajik situation. Chapters 2 and 3 describe the Soviet state's attempts to control Tajik society by re-engineering gender identities, and how the Tajik people subverted this at several levels. They explain how the government's use of language and the institutions of civil power in this engineering project had a greater effect than the use of violence, thus proving Butler's contention that power is best exerted through strategies other than overt coercion (1997b: 21). Finally they discuss how the Soviet regime succeeded in producing only a tiny fraction of the social transformation that had been aimed at and how it was precisely by preserving their (traditional) gender norms that the Tajik people were able to resist cultural encroachment on a long-term basis.

Chapters 3 through 7 furnish an analysis of Tajik resistance to Soviet oppression, its effect on social norms and what this has meant for individuals. Three major themes are introduced here. The first is the way the honour-and-shame system shapes gender identities, how image and appearance, rather than lived experience, are what count, and the implications of all this for social organisation. The second is how control is exerted within families. The important point that comes out of this is that the subjugation parents impose on children from birth is the strongest of all controlling mechanisms within Tajik society, far stronger on the whole than male control over females. My third point is that while there is in principle no reason that arranged marriages should not be happy, when parents force their offspring to marry against their will, and furthermore when they refuse to acknowledge the personal aspects of the couple relationship, the result can be tremendous unhappiness, the break-up of families\(^1\), and, in extreme cases, suicide. Moreover, the constraints on sexuality, especially female sexuality, can also be the cause of much marital unhappiness.

Family power relations do not simply operate unidirectionally from the father on to the other family members, but rather function in circular fashion (cf. Foucault 1980a: 98). The gender identities of the most powerful members, conceptualised as male heads of family, are heavily dependent on the conduct of the conceptually least powerful, the junior women (cf. Gilmore 1987: 4) and, by extension, so is the network of families that forms the Tajik community. Thus, minimising potential weak points is an essential part of strategies for

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\(^1\)For instance, statistics show that in Dushanbe a high incidence of divorces occurred between couples forced to marry against their wills (cf. Monogarova 1982: II, 61).
community preservation, which makes control over (young) women vital to community identity. In the face of Soviet pressures, a mass acceptance by young Tajik women of the Russo-Soviet way of life could have destroyed the entire community and for this reason had to be prevented at all costs. It was in order to do so that the Tajik community kept such a tight rein on their young people.

In one sense, the chief objective of the structure of gendered social control I have described in this book could be regarded as ensuring young people’s acceptance of Tajik culture and their subsequent co-operation in raising their own children according to communal norms. This is done by subjugating them to Tajik gender norms and making it clear that any deviance would be regarded extremely negatively. By making transgression of the norms a high social risk the community at large pressures its members into conformity and thus into the perpetuation of the status quo. Nevertheless, despite all their attempts to prevent this, over the decades of Soviet rule some variations still managed to sneak in, albeit most of them so gradually they largely went unperceived. This has allowed Tajiks to believe in the essentially unchanging nature of their traditions, supported by the fact that those changes that did take place were so superficial as to make only small dents in the pre-revolutionary value system.

The connection I posited at the start of this book between state politics and the marriage bed has been shown to be constituted of gender norms. For the Bolsheviks the removal of the veil was to have opened up the way for the transformation of the Central-Asian marriage relation to reflect a whole new way of life, based on modern rationality and equality, not just between the sexes but also the generations. That the government managed to enforce the outward change while very largely failing to inculcate the corresponding inward one, both shows the strength of the micro-mechanisms of power to withstand pressures emanating from macro-power structures, and the enormous importance to the Tajik community at large of maintaining their own gender norms. It also shows that where substance and image are so loosely coupled it is possible to effect large changes in the latter without necessarily producing correspondingly large alterations in the former.

In Tajikistan and related cultures there is no clearly defined male rite of passage to adulthood at puberty as there is in many other cultures (cf. Gilmore 1987: 15). Circumcision takes place a little too young, in Tajikistan usually between the ages of six and eight. However, as I suggested in chapter 7, deflowering a virgin on the wedding night is implicitly accepted as a substitute. This makes it especially important to ‘guarantee’ each bridegroom access to a virgin bride. Subsequently, wives’ faithfulness has also to be ‘guaranteed’. Both of these are essential to masculine identity and in both cases the perception of female chastity is vital. To this end females have to be under constant supervision and their mobility constrained, so that they can be seen to have no possibility of transgressing. Sons, on the other hand, can be relatively free in their daily lives, as long as they appear to perform their gender appropriately and publicly acknowledge their fathers’ right to dominate them. In their turn male heads of family are expected, tacitly at least, to acknowledge the right of the community at large to exert control over the individual families that comprise it. At the same time this does not go unopposed. Women and young people do not meekly submit to control but subvert and resist it.

They do this in two different ways. The first consists of reshaping gender performances for the purposes of resistance, the second in bending them to people’s own ends
through variant performances and the use of 'masks'. The first way is less frequently resorted to since it presents an outright challenge to authority and is thus risky. For women the behaviour associated with this can include wearing inappropriate clothes or travelling by themselves, as well as refusing to act submissively to their husbands in public. For men such behaviour may include refusing to exert proper control over their families. For both sexes any defiance of their parents' wishes, for instance, choosing their own educational path and careers, is subversive, but contracting a marriage against their parents' wishes is one of the most subversive acts they can perform.

The second type of subversion consists of pretending to conform, by projecting a conformist image, while simultaneously hiding an underlying unconformity behind various thicknesses of gender masks. When strong women act submissively in front of their husbands, or declare that Tajiks always obey their spouses, when in fact they personally often do not, when perhaps their husbands do not even require this, they are essentially subverting gender performance behind a mask that proclaims their conformity to it. But men can also use gender masks to screen inappropriate behaviour from sight, as in the case of the man who secretly helps his wife with the housework but when someone comes to the door is found watching television. The dominant also assume masks, in this case to conceal their weaknesses, like the man who hits his wife in order to compensate for his feelings of inadequacy. Thus, the second type of subversion provides a way for the subordinated to elude controls without actually challenging them, as well as for the dominant to preserve their authoritarian image. It can also be used by a head of family to evade the controlling eye of other community members, again without challenging their right to exert control over individual families.

Since appearance is so vital to Tajik social order, those who outwardly conform may be able to get away with a certain degree of aberrant behaviour, just as long as this is discreet. However, when aberrations are paraded publicly, condemnation is essential to keep others from copying them. This is why the negative consequences of such behaviour must be made clear to all.

The ultimate power struggle between the sexes takes place in the marital bed and it is here that Tajik men find themselves in the quandary of giving their wives, and thus themselves, greater pleasure, or of prioritising masculine control. Even if they would like to choose the former, for the majority their dearth of knowledge of female sexuality, often combined with a lack of sensitivity to their wives' feelings, tends to preclude the practice of all but the most elemental male masturbation in the female body.

Some Reflections on Theory

Honour and Shame

A good deal of the social norms discussed above can be attributed to the influence of the honour-and-shame system. This has been the subject of scholarly exploration ever since cultural anthropologists studying Mediterranean societies found themselves continually being confronted with the words honour and shame, and posited the notion that these must form the basis of social organisation in that region (cf. Peristiany 1966). This idea has subsequently been challenged by other scholars, either because they consider that this system is not
necessarily the primary organising principle of all these cultures or because they are not convinced that these words have such unitary meanings (cf. Herzfeld 1980).

The problem to some extent lies in the fact that several local words with different meanings have been translated into the one English word, honour (cf. Delaney 1987: 36). Herzfeld, for instance, proposes dropping the word honour altogether and substituting hospitality, as a chief moral principle of the Mediterranean region, based on his translations of the Greek words filotimo and filoksenia (Gilmore 1987: 6; Herzfeld 1980). However, to do this rather misses the point of what the people of these societies themselves say about honour and shame. This may be partly because of a semantic misunderstanding - there is no English equivalent for the type of honour that Mediterranean societies associate with the honour-and-shame system, in Italian called onore, in Tajik, Persian and the Turkic languages namus\(^2\), and in Arabic 'ird. However, it may also be because of the aspects of cultural organisation Herzfeld is exploring. To those scholars studying gender relations in Mediterranean and culturally related societies, it is clear that the type of 'honour' represented by the Tajik word nomus has a very particular connotation, one vital to the organisation of the majority of social groups in this vast area\(^3\), which is why it forms an essential part of their dominant discourse. In this discourse male, and by extension family 'honour' is dependent on the conduct of their womenfolk (cf. Al-Khayyat 1990; Apkiner 1998; Brouwer 1998; Giovannini 1987; Macleod 1991; Wikan 1980, 1984).

Although the honour-and-shame system is not specific to Islam this religion has elaborated ideology that lends itself to its support, particularly female seclusion and veiling (cf. Keddie 1992). However, the development of highly sex-segregated societies has been a feature of Mediterranean Christian and Jewish\(^4\) societies as well. It has been suggested that the very structure of these monotheistic religions privileges the male, since here 'divinity itself is creativity and potency and is defined as masculine', while women are conceptualised as 'the vehicle through which divinity was made manifest'. The male is like God, while the female is like a field. The result is that the two are considered almost as two different types of being, based on the notion that each has a completely different role to play in procreation, the woman being the field to be sown by her husband's male seed. The preservation of her purity is essential so as not to sully his seed (Delaney 1987: 45). This sex-based differentiation has served as the foundation of masculine and feminine gender norms under the honour-and-shame system.

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\(^2\) Namus is the Turkish spelling as also the standardised Arabic transliteration, as opposed to the Tajik nomus, the spelling I have used in line with my Cyrillic transliteration throughout this book.

\(^3\) Which not only stretches from North Africa right to the North Western border of China (Xinjiang), including most of the intervening Muslim societies on the way, but also includes Cuba and to a lesser extent other Hispanic societies of the Americas.

\(^4\) Although orthodox Jews do not exactly seclude their women in the same way as Muslims, segregation by sex is virtually as strict. For this reason most marriages are also arranged. Orthodox Jewish women do not veil but after marriage must keep their hair covered from the sight of all men except their husbands. Until recently the practice has been for women to shave their heads and wear a wig, although today most women prefer to wear headscarves instead. Men and women who are not closely related are not supposed to mix socially, and may even be discouraged from being present in the same room.
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I do not wish to imply that the values represented by this system and the aspects of gender identities that I have associated with it, represent the totality of those available within each culture. Nor do I wish to posit a unity in the culture as a whole, among the societies that claim this system as a main governing principle. Rather, I want to suggest that these particular values have come to dominate all others in regard to male/female relationships in these cultures. While the actual nature of acceptable conduct varies with the community and is in any case everywhere in a continual state of renegotiation, the importance of maintaining correct female conduct, and the vital role of reputation remain largely constant throughout the area (cf. Brouwer 1998: 150). Although it is ignored in discourse, in practice the honour-and-shame system is not simply a system of male control over women but almost more important of the older generation over the younger, including not just paternal control over young men (cf. Weyland 1994: 63ff), but also maternal control over them (cf. chapter 4).

For Peristiany (1966) honour was an attribute of men, as shame was of women. Delaney (1987) claims this to be true to a certain extent for the Turkish community she studied, where 'shame is an inevitable part of being female', although women retain their honour as long as they are careful in their behaviour (Delaney 1987: 40). Wikán (1984) contests this. She argues that the usage of the two terms cannot be directly compared. Honour, she says, is an attribute of a person while shame (ayb in Tajik and Arabic) refers to specific acts. Nobody can completely avoid all shameful acts throughout their lifetime. The important thing is to situate them within the context of daily life, some being more significant than others for their perpetrators' long-term reputations. Ayb is commonly used to designate not only the shame of inappropriate gender behaviour but other sorts of shameful actions as well (Wikán 1984: 636-8). This word is used in Tajikistan with much the same frequency, and in much the same contexts, as Wikán claims for Cairo (1980), that is to say that the word is in constant use and arouses the same almost palpable fear of gossip (cf. Wikán 1984: 647).

In Tajikistan, as in Egypt and, I believe, most other societies where the honour-and-shame system reigns, the emphasis is on appearance rather than on the internalisation of moral principles. As a result 'morality is in large part recognized by social behaviour rather than individual, internalised beliefs, a point that leads to the corollary that public manifestations of ideals often do not coincide with actual behaviour' and that morality is focused not on ideas of individual behaviour but 'on the woman's body as the locus of morality for the entire family' (Macleod 1991: 100). It is because the status of each family is dependent on the external perception of the inviolate state of the bodies of its female members that such bodies have to be ringed round with visible prohibitions. These are applied through gender norms, which is why the essence of the honour-and-shame system is the role it plays in the determination of such norms. This is the reason that my own exploration of the way the honour-and-shame system influences social relations takes the standpoint of elucidating not who has honour and who shame, when, and how (cf. Delaney 1987; Peristiany 1966; Wikán 1984) but what the concepts of honour and shame have meant for the development of gender norms and thus, how they shape all aspects of life (cf. Abu-Lughod 1986, 1993).

Perhaps because of its situation as a minority within the Soviet state, within the Tajik community there is only one basic discourse, largely for the political reasons discussed in chapters 2 and 3. This may be somewhat modified, depending on educational levels, urban or rural settings, and locality but in general it sticks to the same narrow principles of female submission/virginity/chastity and male control/virility. Moreover, because popular Islam
supports this particular set of norms it is always available to legitimise it over and above any other sets. This makes it difficult to do other than acquiesce in adopting subject positions appropriate to these norms, whatever individuals' actual wishes, and however they may experience their own gender identities.

At the same time the awareness of the existence of a contrasting and, to a certain extent, conflicting, set of norms in those of the Russo-Soviet majority, infuses Tajik norms both with conservatism and a sense of ambiguity. Soviet influence has further softened the impact of the honour-and-shame system, aided by the fact that in Tajikistan the state's usurpation of economic and political space, severely curtailing access to the public sphere usually dominated by men, has allowed women to assume significantly stronger subject positions than would probably otherwise have been possible.

Foucault and Butler

Foucault and Butler formulated their theories in the context of Western societies, where image and substance coincide to a much greater extent than in those influenced by the honour-and-shame system. Nevertheless, the basic structures of power relations in the two regions are similar enough to make their work relevant to the Tajik situation, albeit with certain reservations and adaptations. Foucault has been criticised at length by feminist scholars, for instance, for his failure to ground his work in concrete settings, his lack of interest in gender, and his refusal to examine personal power relations (cf. Bell 1991, 1993b; Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994b: 23-4; Diamond & Quimbry 1988; McNay 1992, 1993; Ramazanoglu 1993; Sawicka 1991). He has further been criticised for minimising or ignoring human agency and embodied experiences (cf. Turner 1984: 245-8).

In my own work I have tried to ground Foucault's abstract concept of the micro-mechanisms of power (1980a) by placing them in a gendered social reality. In fact, in one sense this whole book could be read as an attempt to study power according to the techniques recommended by him in a lecture he gave in January 1976 (Foucault 1980a: 92-108). In my study, Foucault's 'net-like organisation', through which 'power is employed and exercised' is translated as the wider community, which I conceptualise as essentially a web of families. The 'individuals [who] circulate through its threads' are the members of these families, who are 'always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power'. The 'techniques and tactics' of the 'infinitesimal mechanisms of power' have become the strategies used by these family members, both in their relations with the community at large, that is with other families, and with the members of their own families. His 'molecular elements of society', which are the starting place for his 'ascending analysis of power,' have become gender identities (Foucault 1980a: 98-99). In this way I have situated Foucault's dehumanised abstractions in human society, albeit one rather different from the European societies he had in mind.

Butler has made considerable use of Foucault in her own philosophical project, in the course of which she has resituated and gendered many of his concepts5. But Butler herself is criticised for some of the same shortcomings, particularly for failing adequately to refuse a eurocentric gaze6 (cf. Cornwall & Lindisfarne 1994: 40; Moore 1994b: 18). I have taken

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5 For example, see Butler on desire (1999), cited in chapter 7 of this book.
6 See the work of Stoler, especially her book on Foucault, sex, and colonialism (1995) for a
Butler's conceptual world and translated it to fit the Tajik context, one far from the American one within which she conceived it. In order to do this I have had to make certain adjustments.

For instance, Butler (1997b: 1-12) discusses the struggle of young people to attain agency in the face of parental subjugation to norms, as if the only pressures on them at that point were of conformity to social ideals. However, in Tajikistan the strong influence of parental attempts to prevent their offspring developing independence cannot be ignored in studying psychological development. Butler also posits the concept that it is specifically for children that dependency and attachment to those who subordinate them are a condition for (social) existence. Children, she says, cannot but love those who subjugate them, since this is a prerequisite for them to emerge as subjects, whereas adults, although still bound subconsciously to their primary love objects, are consciously able to look back upon these and wonder in 'indignation' that they were ever able to love such people as their parents and siblings (Butler 1997b: 8). In Tajikistan attachment particularly to parents does not seem to weaken throughout most people's lifetimes and I have never heard anyone suggest that they might cease to love them as adults. In other words, much more than Butler appears ready to admit (cf. Moore 1994b: 18) human psychological development is culture dependent, as has indeed been suggested by anthropologists working in cultures far more distant from European ones than that of Tajikistan (cf. Moore 1994b: 24, 38, 48-9).

Butler's theories on performativity are as eurocentric as those on the development of the subject and I believe also very much focused on the middle classes. When she (1990) states that 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; ... identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (Butler 1990: 25), she is talking about a very specific, almost abstract type of performance. Here there is no space for the deliberate enactment of non-internalised characteristics to simulate adherence to the norms.

It seems to me that the problem here is that Butler overlooks the fact that what is internalised and what is performed cannot be completely the same. That is to say that performance inevitably carries within it an element of the conscious, and that this element may even be dominant at times. Also, variations are not necessarily produced with the project of political change in a way that entails risk as Butler suggests (1997b: 29), but on the contrary may be enacted in order to give the appearance of conformity to norms that have not been fully internalised. It is not only in Tajikistan that people vary gender performances according to setting and audience. This happens also in Western communities, particularly but not only in the working classes, albeit in a less ritualised fashion. I am not disagreeing here with Butler's insistence that there is no such thing as an unmarked, ungendered subject able to choose freely the gender norms to be performed (1990: 25ff), but rather stating that performance cannot simply be a linguistic conceit based on some essence of gender that has been internalised, or even that is continually being re-internalised. It is inevitably related to the theatrical because it exists only in front of an audience. Moreover, variations on it are inevitable, indeed demanded, by the varied situations of lived experience.

discussion of Foucault's eurocentricism.
The notion that people have more than one gender position open to them, and that in practice they do not present themselves exactly according to accepted discourse is, of course, not new. It has long been a point of discussion in feminist theory. Riley (1988) has pointed out that even in the West there is a gap between the narrow gender definitions established through discourse and the way men and women position and experience themselves, and others, in their daily interactions. Harvey and Gow further suggest that how people perform their gender is more to do with how they constitute relationships than how they construct their identities (Harvey & Gow 1994: 8), a comment that addresses the way people perform differently in different social settings.

Moore (1994a) posits the idea that although subjects construct themselves as such in part through the categories, discourses and practices of gender, this is not a unitary construction, rather individuals take up multiple and often contradictory subject positions within the range of discourses and practices of the society they live in, present positions being to a large extent determined by past ones. Different subject positions will be demanded of a person at different times (Moore 1994a: 139-142). That is to say, there is a range of subject positions open to people of each sex, who will adopt that position they find appropriate for each particular occasion (Weedon 1987: 86 in Moore 1994a: 142). Moore goes on to develop the notion of the 'internally differentiated subject, constituted in and through discourse'. She suggests that there tend to be multiple discourses on gender within each society but that the dominant discourse is almost invariably one in which male and female are sharply and hierarchically distinguished (Moore 1994a: 145).

In order to conceptualise the way Tajiks manage their enactments of gender in the different circumstances they are placed in, I have posited a theory of variant gender performances, enacted with the aid of notional masks behind which aberrations can be concealed, thus avoiding the penalties inherent in visible non-conformity (cf. chapter 1). Such variants are not only important for maintaining appropriate images within the Tajik community but during Soviet times could also serve to aid in the project of fictitious adherence to state norms that clashed with their own. Thus, Tajiks of both sexes, like the Azeri women (Tohid 1996, 1997) discussed in chapter 1, became adept at using masks and producing variant performances, in line with Soviet expectations.

My theory of variant performances speaks to the necessity that subjects have to position themselves in respect of different audiences, in this case both Soviet and Tajik. The variations in performance are enabled by the fact that subordinates are not forced into complete submission but permitted to subvert their gender performances, as long as this remains concealed and thus poses no overt threat to the dominant discourse. The result is that those in power rarely attempt to look behind the masks of the subordinated, although it is unclear whether this stems from their belief that the surface presentation is all that there is, or whether the very effort of subordinates' assuming the gender mask, an assumption that implies acknowledgement of the power of the dominant, generally suffices to satisfy them. Moreover, perhaps they are only too aware of the risks involved in attempting to look further.

The fact that appropriate performance is considered more important than the internalisation of correct values is in line with the honour-and-shame system's emphasis on image and enables Tajiks to assume diverse gender masks with relative ease. This made it
possible for them to keep their Soviet personas to the level of the superficial, which goes a long way to explain how people were able to manage to preserve their own ideology intact, despite an outward show of conformity to Soviet ideals. Within the Tajik community the use of masks tends to produce highly ritualised performances, as gender characteristics assume specific, well-delineated and very concrete forms, with female and male characteristics being sharply polarised - viz., submission versus control, seclusion versus mobility, pregnancy versus impregnation. Defining people according to such clearly demarcated aspects of gender identity becomes almost like a caricature, as if everyone were participating in a very stylised theatrical performance, perhaps something on the lines of Japanese noh theatre. Within this stylisation everyone has their stock character to play. This character is supposed to be ritualised and impersonal, not individualised at all, and can even be portrayed almost better from behind a mask than by a living being.

The audience is aware that behind their masks the actors are quite different from their public personas but as long as this difference is kept from view it does not interfere with what is happening on the stage. Essentially, this is a ritual in which the characters act out parts where the differences that distinguish individuals have been deliberately submerged. Of course, everyone knows that human beings are not really like this, but that is not the point. As long as everyone goes round pretending they are, this gives the appearance of everything being in order.

In other words, while the masks hide aberrations they also hide the humanity of those who wear them. It is as if the variant gender performances allow the dominant figures in Tajik society and family life to manipulate the lives of the subordinate, whether young people or women, without truly coming to terms with the fact that the masks are just the surface image, that the people behind them are not actors, who can go home after the play is over. The masks conceal the fact that real emotions get involved and real people get hurt and even dead. Real life is not nearly as neat and tidy as the Tajik scenario would have it. Young people are not simply puppets whom their parents can manipulate at will. Neither are women their husbands' Marionettes or their houris. There is flesh and blood beneath the masks. But it is because the masks serve to conceal this that the system can continue to function, and everyone can go on pretending that all is well, that there is no pain, and nobody is committing suicide.

As long as young people were kept from exposure to the outside world it was not so difficult for them to accept the state of affairs in their own community, especially for the great majority, who had little direct contact with Russians. With the collapse of the Soviet Union young Tajiks have been exposed to many new influences their parents could not have dreamed of. In this situation tension around family relations is increasing, as witnessed by the growth in teenage abortion rates, and also in the numbers of young men choosing their own wives in Russia, the two ultimate subversions of parental power and of the masculine identity of the father. Moreover, these are trends that are likely to be highly destructive of families. This raises the question of whether young people will continue to support the current social system and what will take its place if they do not. Whatever changes they might prefer, as long as the current set of gender norms remains dominant significant transformation of the status quo will be impossible.
The structure of Tajik society is such that there is a very wide gulf between the power position of different groups of women. It is this that suggested to me the idea that the concept of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities (cf. Carrigan et al 1987) could usefully be extended into the sphere of femininities. What interests me here is not so much that category of women dominant in what is thought of as male terrain, such as women directors of enterprises, heads of government offices and university departments, and ministers of state. It is rather the very much larger category of women who have attained hegemonic positions within the family.

This type of feminine hegemony operates in a very different sphere from the outside world, where masculine hegemonies dominate. However, its significance extends far beyond the individual family. It also goes beyond the question of women ruling in tandem with men in their own separate but parallel sphere (cf. Makhlouf 1979: 25). I refer here to the fact that in Tajikistan women may take on roles within the family that have traditionally been reserved for male dominants. Mature women, especially those who have both produced sons and successfully established their ability to control the younger generation, thereby earn themselves a secure place within their marital families (cf. Hegland 1992: 205). This can be used as a power base, even in some cases to the point of enabling them to usurp their husband’s place as effective head of family. While this does not lead to the overt conceptualisation of the wife as head of family there may be a tacit or even privately articulated acceptance of her place as such. This is something especially commented on by daughters-in-law, along with complaints about the inability of both spouse and father-in-law to stand up to their mother/wife. In other words, the hegemonic woman may boss not only her daughters(-in-law), her sons and grandchildren but even her own husband, always provided she is careful how, and in front of whom she does this, and above all does not do it overtly and in public.

These women’s usurpation of the role of the family head is perhaps facilitated by the fact that they have more responsibility in the home at an earlier age than men. In addition, after leaving their parents’ home on marriage, they are placed in an alien environment, very often with little or no emotional support either from in-laws or husband, and are thus forced to develop inner resources, both for their own sakes and later for the sake of their children. Men, on the other hand, remain with their own parents and thus psychologically as well as materially dependent on them. The result is women are likely to develop agency more strongly and earlier than their husbands.

The Soviet state also has a part to play here. The passivity of the Slavic man and the dominance of the Slavic woman so often fretted over by the Soviet authorities (cf. Attwood 1990), appear, at least in part, to be connected to usurpation of traditional masculine public space. It is very possible that this has had some impact on Tajik gender performances as well and this might go some way to explain why it is frequently the more educated men, those in other words, who should have been the ones to occupy these public spaces, who are the least dominant and thus whose wives tend to be the most hegemonic.

The existence of some dominant women does not mean, however, that there is gender parity, nor that Tajik women do not experience oppression. The often severe limitation on their mobility is in itself testimony to this. As long as the strict (sexual) control of females
remains at the centre of masculine gender norms equality between the sexes will remain impossible. Men may find themselves caught in many of the same social traps as women but this does not make them either empathic and sensitive to the needs of the latter or likely to relinquish any of their privileges without considerable pressure. Thus, the hegemonic woman does not occupy a straightforward position of power. She has constantly to manipulate the situation rather than being able to confront it head on. This is largely because she has to be careful to keep her power invisible to outsiders and very often to her husband as well.

At the same time the discourse that gives men control over women does not merely produce a simple situation of male dominance. Rather it places power in the hands of the older generation, encouraging young men to support both parents against the females of their own generation and pitting older women against the younger generation of both sexes. Thus, a prerequisite for young women to transform themselves from a subordinate to a hegemonic position is to separate from their parents-in-law and transfer to their own home. It is for this reason that the biggest thorn of contention between them and their parents-in-law is usually over their attempts to liberate themselves and their husbands from the parental home (cf. Patel 1994: 77).

In some ways it would seem that it is psychologically easier for Tajik women to assume hegemonic positions than for Western ones. If young Tajik women were really as repressed and submissive in their youth as they appear in public, it would seem to be difficult for them to effect such a great change in later life. In fact, it would seem to be precisely the gap between appearance and reality that enables feminine hegemony, since it permits performance to be to a large extent delinked from internalised identity. In other words, feminine hegemony is in great part the result of variant performances concealed behind gender masks, rather than of the internalisation of traits of subordination.

Relations of Subordination

Exploring the strategies of resistance and subversion used by subordinated women, and the schism between them and the dominant categories and discourse, has become very much a trend in postmodern feminist writing. There is a further trend towards rejecting dealing with 'conditions of subordination', in reaction to the former universalistic ideas of women as victims. Today the tendency is towards narratives of difference, where resistance and empowerment rather than the pain of subordination are the order of the day, in an attempt to eschew the essentialist and universalistic concepts of earlier writing (Nencel 1997: 253-5). However, the concept of relations of subordination in itself is not necessarily either essentialist or universal. There is no reason why it should not form part of narratives of difference.

As the previous section shows relationships of subordination clearly exist in Tajikistan but they are neither as straightforward nor as clear-cut as the earlier feminist writing on patriarchy and the male oppression of women would suggest. Moreover, narratives of difference can simultaneously be sites of discussion of the conditions of subordination, as Nencel (1997) has shown in her work on prostitution in Lima. There she uses the concept of 'gendered enclosures' to denote not only the specifically demarcated spaces within which the Peruvian prostitutes function, but also the 'already existing directives' (Butler 1990: 277) that restrict them in the gender performances open to them (Nencel 1997: 255-6). Using this
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notion Nencel is enabled to tackle the matter of the conditions of subordination prostitutes exist under, in a non-essentialising, particularistic manner. She can show how the constraints of their social situation and especially of the poverty they live in, affect not only their material lives but also their concepts of themselves, and their enactments of gender.

Similarly, I have analysed the conditions that Tajiks live under, in order to demonstrate that certain groups are subordinated in specific ways but that this subordination is neither monolithic, nor unresisted, although it may not openly challenge the dominant, just as the subaltern population described by Scott does not (1990: 3). Scott suggests that the fact that subordinates assume masks in public to hide their real identities, provides convincing evidence for the hegemony of the dominant values. It signals that there is no realistic choice but compliance. Here, he argues, is where the effects of power relations are most clearly visible (Scott 1990: 4, 66). In a sense that is what Moore suggests also (1994a: 142-5), but she applies this specifically to gender discourse, something Scott is reluctant to do (1990: 22).

The ability of discourse to bring about what it names by invoking the conventions of authority (cf. Butler 1993: 13) gives the public domain of the wider community a real importance in family life, as the locus of that authority that legitimises the dominance of men over women, parents over children. It is in this public domain that men are able to unite to develop and enforce the norms. In Tajikistan while men can congregate in public places, such as mosques, women must remain in their separate homes. This public dimension is what makes it so difficult for individuals to move beyond the discourse, the authority that binds them, and that thus produces the necessity for the dissimulation represented by the gender mask. It is also this that makes the group discussions held under the auspices of the health project so effective, since they allow the subaltern to join together to discuss the implications of the norms for their own lives, even if not on the same scale or with the same authority as the adult men. Nevertheless, their retention of their gender masks means that they continue to perpetuate the system. It is clear that secret subversion of the norms can do little to procure immediate transformation in power relationships.

For the Tajik youth of both sexes, accepting present misery may be bearable precisely because of an implied future promise that they will one day themselves attain positions of power, as indeed is the case in other societies where the extended patrilocal family is the norm (cf. Kandiyoti 1991; Patel 1994). This gives them a stake in maintaining the status quo and helps motivate them to subjugate their own children as they themselves were subjugated (cf. Hegland 1992), although in all fairness, they often have little choice but to do this, if the families are not to become outcasts.

The social relations I have described in Tajikistan are neither fixed and essential, nor totally fluid and permitting of manipulation at will. They occupy a middle ground, where subjects are forced to negotiate between family and social acceptance on the one hand, and their own desires, in other words to situate themselves according to what Holloway has termed 'investment in specific subject positions', in the hope of being rewarded with future benefits (Holloway 1984: 234 in Moore 1994a: 149). However, in Tajikistan the inducements for assuming such positions tend more frequently to be avoidance of censure and punishment than any pleasure or satisfaction they might hold. The subject positions taken up by the

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7 This can perhaps be compared to the potential for organising of factory workers, able to combine forces to resist their bosses, as opposed to piece workers, working out of their individual homes (cf. Bobroff 1974).
subordinated may well be subversive of social control but they rarely offer overt resistance or much chance of happiness.

Reflecting Back on the Title

Control and Subversion

Just as Foucault discusses for resistance (1990: 94ff) subversion can also take place on multiple levels and from multiple points, and can be inserted into even the smallest spaces left by the dominant discourse. The title of this book suggests with Foucault that power is always opposed and resisted. I have used the word subversion, however, rather than resistance, especially to suggest that in Tajikistan the strategies used by the subordinated may not always produce significant or fast transformation of the conditions of oppression but more often tend rather slowly and secretly to undermine them.

To give an example, the harmless seeming daydreams of adolescents, with their fantasies of the sort of person they would like to become and to be regarded as, might be seen as secret rehearsals of ways to take up positions of agency and power in regard to their own lives (cf. Moore 1994a: 148, 151). This is in itself subversive, since young people are not granted such power without a struggle, and not always even with one. However, as long as they put the need to maintain a good reputation above their fantasies of one day in the future being able to perform their gender in a far more subversive and risky manner than has so far been possible, their dreaming will not change the material situation. At the same time, although hiding subversion beneath masks does not create the same sort of immediate transformation in the social situation as overt resistance, it is perhaps a more enduring strategy, linked as it may be to tiny variations in gender identity that with reiteration can eventually resediment to form new norms (cf. Butler 1990: 140). The result will then be that in the long run gender performances that would earlier have been considered too risky become generally accepted, thus subverting control without anyone being fully aware of it.

Gender, Islam, and Socialism

This subtitle suggests a direct link between control and subversion in Tajikistan and gender, Islam, and socialism. While the present study has shown how vital gender norms are to control, such norms are always inevitably informed by their social context, and in the Tajik context both socialism and Islam played key roles throughout the years of Soviet rule.

In the first place it is interesting to note that long before Western feminist scholars came up with the concept of the importance of gender identities, both the Soviet government and the Tajik people were clearly already strongly aware of the involvement of these in the (re)production of culture (cf. chapters 2 and 3). In other words, practical considerations appear to have provided the sort of insights that took years to formulate theoretically.

To fact, throughout the Soviet era gender norms and relations, the practices of Islam, and the forms of Soviet socialism were in a state of flux. Changes in any one of these inevitably impinged on the others. Thus, at moments of strength the Soviet regime tried hard to suppress religion and to encourage changes to the local gender norms, while at moments of weakness it allowed Islam to make gains, which again affected gender ideals. These changes,
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however, took place first of all at the top political levels and it is far from clear what their real
effect was at the grass-roots level, particularly in the rural areas where the vast majority of
Tajiks lived. My impression is that in these areas change was fairly gradual and was at least
as much the result of material processes, such as the establishment of village schools and
health centres, as ideological ones. Moreover, it progressed at different rates in different
places, the strength of religious observation in each location being a significant factor in the
speed of transformation.

However, the main significance of the intersection of Islam and socialism with Tajik
gender norms is that this formed the central battleground between the Soviet regime and the
local population, as described in chapters 2 and 3. It was a battle that neither side could win,
and despite the demise of the Soviet Union it is still continuing today, albeit on slightly
different ground. It is now being fought between the secular state represented by the post-
communist government of Rakhmonov\(^8\) on the one hand, with on the other the more radical
factions of the Islamic opposition\(^9\). The latter would like to turn Tajikistan into an Islamic
state, or at least to make significant changes in the direction of enforcing Islamic practices,
particularly as regards the conduct of women and girls. At the same time Rakhmonov's
government is making some effort to continue the Soviet trend of modernisation of gender
norms.

**Tajikistan and the West**

In the introduction to this book I mentioned a number of points of resemblance
between Tajikistan and the West and asked how there could be so many correspondences
between these two societies. Here I should like to try to provide an answer to this. It seems to
me that the similarities between these two societies are the result of two different categories
of influences, the first Russo-Soviet, the second and more fundamental, based on
resemblances between the dominant sets of gender identities.

The first category is the result of the continual Soviet pressure towards modernisation.
This was specially applied through schools, which were supposed to encourage students to
free themselves from parental influence, laying stress on such things as young people's right
to choose their own path in life, and marriage for love. Besides this, other 'modern' values,
such as 'rationality' and atheism, were promulgated. Outside school the Russian mass media
disseminated the same messages (cf. Mickiewicz 1980, 1988). Although these may have had
little obvious effect on action, exposure to such ideas, so radically different from those taught
at home, did make some impact especially in urban areas, and I believe this to be the chief
cause of the anachronistic flavour of some of the reactions described in this book.

Considering that throughout this book I have stressed the contrast between Tajik and
Russian gender ideals, the latter after all very similar to Western ones, it may seem strange
suddenly to raise the question of their resemblance. To Tajiks, as to most Muslims, there are
irreconcilable differences between these two sets of gender norms, most particularly as
regards the necessity for the strict regulation and control of female sexual conduct.
Westerners equally believe their norms to be qualitatively different from those of Muslims.

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\(^8\) Together with the Russian Federation and Uzbekistan, both of them deeply concerned to prevent any
chance of Islamist forces gaining a foothold in the region.

\(^9\) Supported by Pakistan, Iran, and no doubt factions from Afghanistan and other Muslim states.
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After all, do they not believe in male/female equality, something far from the submission and ritualised inferiority they associate with the veil?

To my mind this apparent dichotomy is the result of two different conceptualisations of the workings of social order. Muslim cultures delight in overtly proclaiming the different position of men and women in society. They make it very clear that women’s duty is to be submissive to their men folk and demand that they acknowledge this publicly. But in private the two sexes may have considerably more equality than outsiders realise, as I have described for Tajikistan. In the West, on the other hand, there have been attempts to remove the material manifestations of female inferiority. Having eliminated a large number of these it appears to be relatively easy for many people, women included, to assume there is now virtual parity in male/female relations. In reality what has happened is that the inequalities have been buried deeper and as a result become less visible. They may at the same time have been diminished but they certainly have not disappeared. It is rather that they have become more insidious, being so much harder to distinguish.

For instance, while it may seem on the surface that at work are given the same treatment and opportunities as men they often still find themselves missing out, without being able to pinpoint exactly what is going on. One way the more powerful men clandestinely manage to keep access to the most lucrative or influential contacts for themselves is by the use of networks such as clubs or the system of ‘godfathers’, by which a man low down in an organisation teams up with someone higher up, for guidance and (mutual) support. There are very few women in a position to become ‘godmothers’ (cf. Roper 1994). Similarly, although women are now admitted to many clubs in London even Mrs. Thatcher found herself unable to use these for networking during her time as Prime Minister, although she was put into power by a group of right-wing men, who almost certainly used the clubs in their organising strategies10. As a result she was forced to use the tactics of direct coercion that earned her the sobriquet of the ‘Iron lady’ (Rogers 1988: 193).

Below their dissimilar surfaces can be found numerous correspondences between Western and Tajik gender norms. For instance, it is not unknown for there to be pressure on Western women to assume public gender masks of submission, and allow their husbands to assume masks of dominance. Komarovsky (1964) researching working-class American marriage in the late 1950’s, found strong pressures towards the subordination of wives. Even where women had achieved de facto dominance within the marriage bond, it was not acceptable for them to deny their husbands’ authority in public (Komarovsky 1964 in Carrigan et al 1987: 149-50). The concept of superior male power is still around today. According to Kaufman, in America ‘prevailing versions of masculinity are based … on a conception of control and dominance’ (1993: 47). Moreover, the fact that Western societies have made neither a really serious effort to combat violence against women, nor to transform the ideology that enables this phenomenon, shows that on the whole these versions of masculinity are not being strongly contested.

In addition, there is a great deal about the sexual practices of Tajiks, especially in relation to male/female power plays, that closely resembles the situation in the West, particularly in the working classes, even now so long after the sexual revolution of the late

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10 Incidentally, there are at present (December 1999) plans to pass a law to force all-male clubs in the UK to admit women as full members. It will be interesting to see if this will make any significant difference to the networking.
1960's, which in any case was very far from affecting all Westerners equally (Holland et al 1990). It is not so very long ago that Western women were expected to have no sexual experience prior to marriage. Even today, although virginity at marriage is rare, a double standard still prevails, so that women who are perceived as having multiple sexual partners are referred to pejoratively, while in men this is viewed favourably and they are considered to be successfully proving their manhood. Equally, despite all the literature now available, there is evidence to show that many Western men are still ignorant of and/or indifferent to their partners' sexual needs and what is more demand sexual relations as their right, irrespective of their partners' wishes (Holland et al 1992; Thompson 1990).

I could give many more such examples but I think these are sufficient to prove my point. However, this does not explain how gender norms from such apparently disparate cultures came to be so similar. The answer may lie in a suggestion on the part of some historians that the basic social norms of all the Indo-European agrarian civilisations may stem from an earlier common moral system (Wyatt-Brown 1982: xiii in Gilmore 1987: 5). This would go a long way to explain the correspondences in gender norms over so much of the North-African-Middle-Eastern-Eurasian area and, through Spanish/Portuguese influence, also much of the Americas. However, I believe that it is more likely that various different aspects of these norms originated in disjunct places and were spread from there along with trade and other contacts. It is my opinion that in-depth historical research would show that some of the most constraining facets of gender norms either originated in Europe and were passed on from there in ways in which colonialism almost certainly played a major role, or were a direct reaction to Western penetration (cf. Keddie 1992).

Future Directions for Research

In this final section I should like to discuss possible future directions for research, arising out of the questions raised by the present book. First, I should like to plead, with Moore (1994b: 29), for an approach to ethnography that includes the work of postmodern, poststructuralist feminist theoreticians such as Butler, with their emphasis on multiple subject positions and fragmented views of the self. In this respect I should like especially to suggest new directions for researchers in the field of psychology. Theories are desperately needed that take into account the significance for human psychological development of the many variations in lifestyles and culture world over. For instance, in Alor, Indonesia it is the father who takes care of most of the needs of the infant child and who becomes the primary parenting figure from whom the child has to separate (Oakley 1976: 169). This raises a whole new set of questions for the development of gender identities in children. So far such distinct cultural phenomena have been little reflected in the work of the elaborators of most psychoanalytical theory, whose gaze remains largely focused on Western cultures.

Gilmore (1987) posits the idea that in strictly sex-segregated societies, where men are very largely absent from the home, boys find identifying with the male figure difficult and therefore grow up with extreme anxieties about their capacity to become 'real men'. This, he suggests, accounts for the extreme emphasis on sex differentiation and the continual struggle to preserve manhood from feminisation. In such societies masculinity becomes a problematic construction, which leaves men feeling compelled to compensate for their insecurities in such acute ways as the seclusion and veiling of women (Gilmore 1987: 12ff). Gilmore's hypothesis
raises the need to add to psychological research in-depth explorations of how the formation of gender identities within different cultural settings relates to social organisation.

I should like further to propose that it is time to do away with the concept that white communities are qualitatively different from others and instead to take a multi-cultural approach in which ethnographical studies would no longer be limited to 'exotic' non-western societies. In this respect I should like to encourage non-western students pursuing post-graduate studies in anthropology at Western institutions, to do their fieldwork not back in their own home communities, but right there among the (white, middle-class) communities of their place of study.

A large body of such studies should make it impossible for theorists in the United States and Europe to continue to produce work that assumes a universalistic human being. Moreover, the insights gained in applying theories such as those of Foucault and Butler to non-western societies, can then be reflected back on the societies they were originally drawn from, so as to provide new understanding of processes hitherto taken for granted there.

Next, I should like encourage more scholars to explore the cultures of the former Soviet Union, especially as regards the formation of gender identities and their intersection with socialism, Islam and/or other relevant modalities. For instance, as I pointed out above, the Soviet government was extremely concerned with what they perceived as the inappropriate development of passive traits on the part of Soviet, particularly Russian, men. They blamed this on the fact that women were too active and dominant (Attwood 1990: 125-32). They did not, however, consider the effect on masculine gender identities of being disenfranchised from participation in public life, not only as regards politics but also in respect of all institutions of civil society and indeed all power positions outside the home, as happened in the Soviet Union. In-depth studies should reveal much more about the dynamics of this and its effect on gender development and relations. Aside from such considerations there is a great deal to be learned from the former Soviet Union about the processes of cultural transition, as well as of the coping strategies of ethnic groupings whose identities are under threat and the significance of all this for the ability of such groups to exist in peaceful co-existence.

My final two points are first to suggest that since in real life nothing is gender neutral, it is more than time that all social science reflected this. Secondly, I should like to plead for scholars to provide active encouragement to the most vulnerable, if only through the way they carry out their field work and write up their results, in other words for what Schrijvers (1993: 37) calls a 'transformative approach', one that supports struggles against the dominant, whether this is a matter of combatting racism, class struggle, or, as in the case of Tajikistan, conflict between the sexes and the generations.