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**Women and religious practices in**

**Uzbekistan:**

**Transformation and changes in the capital of**

**Uzbekistan**

**in the light of the post-Soviet period**

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Anthropology

The School of Global Studies

University of Sussex

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**DECLARATION**

I, Matluba Anvar, hereby declare that:

This thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another university for the award of any other degree.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is an anthropological study of Uzbek women's everyday life and religious rituals, focusing on the experience and transformation of women's religious and ritual lives in the capital Tashkent, after Soviet rule lasting seventy-three years ended in 1991. The research was conducted over four years, covering English, Russian, and Uzbek language literature, periodical press, archive materials, and oral histories of women who experienced the challenges of the Soviet system and the social changes of the period since independence in 1991. A large body of literature has been written about women's ritual life in Islam, but relatively little about Uzbek women's ritual life within Islam since independence. This thesis introduces an ethnographic contribution to the literature by investigating Uzbek women's everyday life since independence.

This thesis will lay out the historical background to the changes in the government of Uzbekistan between 1991 and 2011, in particular the transition from Soviet to independent rule. It will then examine the particular impact this change in government had on women's religious and ritual life, by comparing data gathered before and after the transition. The existing body of literature on women's ritual life will be critically assessed in relation to the particular findings of women's experience in Tashkent, and differences and similarities will be discussed.

The thesis argues that religious rituals and the everyday life of Uzbek women change continuously because of the influence of social forces and institutions. The ritual and everyday life of women has adapted to historical circumstance and political systems. Women's rituals are controlled and partly constructed by the state and religious institu-

tions for the purpose of national identity-building, ideological legitimation, and controlling women's everyday lives.

In the following study, I argue that women have incorporated change and transformation into their everyday (ritual and religious) lives, thus revealing their agency and self-expression as they navigate the social and gender realities of twenty-first century Uzbekistan.

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents.

## NOTES ON TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

I conducted my research in Uzbek and English. In the following study I used different Arabic, Russian and Uzbek terms. I identify Arabic terms by ‘Ar’, Russian terms by ‘Ru’, and Uzbek terms by ‘Uz’. However, some Arabic words are pronounced very similarly in Uzbek and in such cases, I use the Uzbek version with the Arabic version in brackets.

Since Uzbekistan adopted the Latin alphabet in 1993 it has been taught in schools and used as the official language of the country. Therefore, I have decided to render all Uzbek and Russian titles and publication names in the new Uzbek-Latin alphabet.

Place names are used in their most familiar English language form, and based on a transliteration from Russian. For example, some widely-known words I use in the form in which they are pronounced, for example, Tashkent not Toshkent, *hijab* not *hijob*, and Uzbekistan not O’zbekiston.

Quotes from Russian and Uzbek literature are translated by the author.

## PREFACE

I grew up during the Soviet period and witnessed the process of independence in Uzbekistan. During my life under these two different systems, I have seen many changes, and have also heard many interesting stories about the pre-Soviet period from my grandmother, whom I remember as a very kind and shy woman. She was my treasure box: every time I asked her, she would recall a new story from her life. I recall her as a woman who almost never missed her prayers and fasted all her life. Once she told us how she performed her morning prayer in a hospital in 1975. When a nurse entered the room of my grandmother she was shocked to see her praying. The nurse asked her “What are you doing?” My grandmother answered her with a question: “do you do exercise every morning?” “Yes!” the nurse replied. “Then this is my exercise and that’s how I do it!” my grandmother said. Although the nurse knew my grandmother was praying, she requested her not to exercise so early, because she might be told off by the doctors. My grandmother’s humorous reply to the nurse was her way to get out of a difficult situation.

My mother also lived under these two different systems and was a woman who loved to socialise and conduct different local practices (especially the worship of ‘Lady *Mushkulkishod*’ and ‘Lady *Buvi Sheshanba*) with women of her *mahalla*, and knew lots of stories from the past. She always wanted to read the Qur’an, which never happened; however I saw her persistence throughout the Soviet period and after independence in trying to learn the Qur’an, correct her prayers and read about Islam. After independence she started questioning some practices which she used to perform during the Soviet period. I learnt a lot from my mother and grandmother about different practices and

women's life in the past. When I was younger I did not understand the meaning and purpose of these practices and beliefs and why Uzbek women follow them, and during the process of my research I became grateful to my mother and grandmother for passing me all this knowledge, and these stories and memories.

I continually learnt new things from my mother. During her last few months of life, when she was suffering from cancer, my mother could not move much and it was very difficult to comb her hair. I kept insisting and finally cut her hair, but one day she looked in the mirror and was upset that I had done so. So I asked her why she worried about her hair so much, which was anyway covered by her scarf and nobody could see it. She said “this hair covers my breast when people will wash me for my last journey.”

We have a *paranji* (a robe women wear to cover the head and body) in our family which belonged to my late mother and grandmother. I know from my mother's stories that my grandmother covered herself with this *paranji* when she married. My grandmother gave the *paranji* to my mother on her wedding to cover herself as she was leaving for her husband's home, but when my grandmother passed away my mother covered her coffin with the same *paranji* (for more information see Part Two, 6.2.2.). At my mother's funeral we used the same *paranji* to cover her coffin. I asked my brother to bring this *paranji* back to me after the funeral prayer (*janoza*), and although I did not use it on my wedding day, I keep it as it has a very important story for me.

When I was a young girl, I also remember how my mother used to take me to the graveyard to visit her mother. She used to tell me “the dead can hear us, whenever you enter a

graveyard you should say '*Assalomu alaikum*' to the dead." She said she used to visit the graveyard with her mother, and that one day I would bring my children to visit her grave. At that time this story horrified me, but when I brought my son for the first time to my mother's grave, I understood what lesson she had taught me. Many practices and rituals are passed from parents to children and thus continue to be practised for generations.



## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1. Aim of the research**

This thesis is an account of women's experiences in practising religion, religious rituals and life-cycle ceremonies in Uzbekistan. The overall aim of this thesis is to show that a study of women's ritual lives can be deeply relevant for understanding women's religiosity, and the processes of social change and transformation.

Religious rituals and life-cycle rituals are strongly connected to the local form of Islam, are central to women's lives and are an important means through which women socialise with each other, discuss problems and share concerns. Women practise these rituals mainly within the sphere of the family and the community: these rituals start with the birth of a child and continue beyond his/her death. Life-cycle rituals are 'key' to an understanding of Uzbek women's religious and social lives. The importance of these ritual practices makes them a privileged arena for examining changes in the lives of women in the post-Soviet period in Uzbekistan.

During the Soviet period (1917-1991) religious rituals were prohibited by the Soviet state and life-cycle rituals were controlled and constructed. This thesis compares religious rituals in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods and investigates the social, political and economic factors which influenced the changes in those rituals. It also examines the reasons for different women's choices whether or not to adopt the new rituals, incorporate elements of them into existing ones, or reject them altogether. An investigation of

these questions will illuminate the role played by the state in controlling these rituals and the social and religious lives of women.

This thesis therefore uses women's narratives regarding their choices and self-determination as a means to reveal their agency in renegotiating the norms established for them by the state and society. These narratives will be analysed with reference to the debates and statements of feminist activist women, and the views of different religious leaders, government officials and representatives of different religious groups.

During my research I considered the following broad research questions:

- (1) What are the areas of continuity and change in the ritual life of Uzbek people from the Soviet to post-Soviet period?
- (2) In what ways has the Uzbek state used local practices and rituals in its attempt to transform post-Soviet society?
- (3) How have Uzbek women coped with and adapted to the changes in their religious and social life?
- (4) Have women instituted any changes in rituals and customs themselves?
- (5) What are the consequences of these changes for women's lives?

This research is ethnographic and suggests that women can choose to conduct their lives in different ways. Some women can work in the public sphere and at the same time participate in religious rituals and practices. Some women activists, or women working in decision-making posts, can control men. Other women take the veil, pray regularly at

home and try to live piously. Engaging with women's everyday experiences in *mahallas* (neighbourhoods) of different social compositions and histories through participant observation and discussion with informants allowed me to compare and analyse their ritual lives, social position and choices. I discuss different aspects of their lives and the factors that influence their religious and social life, and argue that women have an important socio-cultural role within the framework of social change and transformation. They show an attempt to use their agency to cope with and adapt to social change. Indeed, the scholarship on Central Asia concerning social change and transformation in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries reveals its complexity.

My focus is on Tashkent, but given that the scholarship on Central Asia concerning social change and transformation in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries reveals enormous complexity, this thesis will place the particular location under analysis within the larger picture.

## **1.2. Setting and rationale**

This thesis is based on anthropological field research conducted over the course of four years in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. It is a modern city, partly rebuilt after independence and made up of twelve districts (*tuman*) differentiated by their location and social structure. Each district is divided into a number of smaller units known as *mahallas*, which can consist of from a few dozen households to a few hundred or even thousands of households, each managed by the *mahalla* committee.

I chose this field site because Tashkent is a multi-ethnic city, and rich in ritual. I lived and worked in Tashkent for eighteen years, so am familiar with the city, its civic institutions and the variety of backgrounds of its citizens. I commenced my fieldwork in Tashkent in 2007 because my husband was offered a job here, and with two children it was best for our family to stay there.

For field work I chose two *mahallas* in two different districts. The situation in these two *mahallas* is quite different. The names of both *mahallas* (*Eski Bog* and *Yangi Bozor*) and all respondents are pseudonyms. The first, *mahalla Eski Bog* (Old Garden), is situated in the old part of the city and its inhabitants are all native Uzbeks. In this *mahalla* locals know each other's families very well as they have lived there for many generations. They have their own practices and rituals that are passed down through the generations. The second case study is *Yangi Bozor* (New Market), which is under reconstruction and becoming an area with many expensive new houses. At the same time, most people in this *mahalla* came from different areas of Tashkent or from different regions of Uzbekistan, and from different ethnic backgrounds. My work rotated between these two *mahallas*.

### **1.3. Methods**

During my fieldwork I employed five methods of investigation: participant observation, in-depth interviewing, collecting life-histories, running focus groups and archival research. I found these methods very useful in conducting my fieldwork and research. My primary method of research was participant observation. After arriving in Tashkent, we

bought a house in the *Yangi Bozor mahalla*. The women of the *mahalla* accepted me into their community and invited me to their gatherings; consequently, starting my work at the site was straightforward and I started participating in the social life of the *mahalla* straight away. In my research into the community, I focused on observing the religious life of women. Wherever possible, I accompanied informants to learn about the networks in which they were involved and the practices they performed, and observed their daily lives. I attended a Qur'anic course for women in *Eski Bog mahalla* which helped me to learn about Islam, met women attending the course, and discussed and observed their religiosity to understand what drives those women towards Islam and an Islamic way of life. I participated in many life-cycle rituals and religious practices, and attended a number of meetings and courses organised by the *mahalla* committee for women of the *mahalla*. I also participated in a few field trips to sacred sites at Bukhara, Tashkent, and Samarkand organised by women of *Eski Bog*. Participating in all these events and observing women's daily lives as a woman, mother and researcher familiar with Tashkent, helped me to understand their lived religious lives. Observing and participating in their everyday rituals and practices gave me access to an in-depth understanding of their social lives and relations<sup>1</sup>.

At the same time as using the participant observation method, I conducted in-depth interviews with people of different ages and both genders, and from different social backgrounds. These interviews revealed a broader picture, with different specific accounts of women's everyday ritual life in the *mahallas*. I also collected the life histories of women and several men whom I met during my fieldwork, and participated with them in differ-

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<sup>1</sup> For list of principle respondents see appendix 20

ent practices and generally observed their daily lives. They shared their stories, and our conversations helped me to understand their life, the choices they made, and their lived experience.

The women of the *Yangi Bozor mahalla* accepted me into their local circle and I became the seventh member of their social group, known as the ‘Gap’ (literally ‘talk’ or ‘chat’, meaning a gathering of people). This group, like many other women’s groups in Tashkent, met once a month in a restaurant where they shared news of their everyday lives over dinner and put money into a communal pot. This money is shared, and every month one of the members receives the whole amount. It works for the women like a ‘private bank’. At the beginning of the year, each woman says in which month of the coming year she will need the money. They usually use the money to celebrate family practices, such as weddings, birth or anniversaries. These women were my core respondents and I collected the life story of each one. I also organised some practices such as *sumalak*, *halim* (traditional meals cooked in big community pots, usually during spring time), *iftor* (meal to break the fast), *mavlud* (the commemoration of the prophet Muhammad’s birthday) in my house. Occasionally I used these meetings as a focus group. During these practices I interacted with the women, asking them questions and discussing issues relating to their social and religious lives. Some of the interviews were recorded and the rest were written in the form of the field notes.

In order to get a complete picture of the transformation of women’s religious life and life cycle-rituals I also conducted extensive archival research in the Tashkent state archives. This thesis draws on archival materials, a variety of documentary material,

state decrees, reviews and codes, policy papers, media texts, television programme analyses and policy statements to gain a better understanding of the social history of the sites I was studying. The fieldwork was carried out in Uzbek. My knowledge of Russian, which was the official language of Uzbekistan during the Soviet period, provided me with good access to archive documents from that era; at the same time it was helpful in researching different papers and books published in this language. All Russian sources used in my thesis were translated by me. Although I participated and observed numerous life cycle-practices and religious rituals, recording and writing during these events was almost impossible. Therefore, I also watched 83 recorded wedding and birth practices on DVD. These videos helped me to understand the diversity of these rituals and how they are conducted in different households.

#### **1.4. Positionality**

It is important to introduce the positionality of the researcher during research: to establish what Talal Asad (1986, 17) called his or her ‘narrative relation’ to the material under consideration. I am from an Uzbek Muslim family, originally from Fergana Valley. My great-grandfather was exiled from the Fergana Valley during the Soviet period because he was from a rich and religious family. Growing up during the Soviet period in the Tashkent region, I watched religious practices organised and performed by my mother and grandmother. I used to see how my mother enjoyed inviting women to visit her, conducting rituals, and reading stories from religious books. I always wanted to understand why it was so important for women to conduct these rituals. Despite having an atheistic education at school, I had a different life at home and my great curiosity about

the religious rituals I saw performed there principally led me to choose this research topic.

As a result of my interest in religious rituals, my previous research at the Institute of History in Tashkent and fieldwork during 2000-2001 in Fergana Valley, gave me the opportunity to investigate this subject from a broader perspective. When I started my PhD degree in the United Kingdom my interest in Islam and Islamic practices grew stronger. I started studying Islamic literature, and while conducting my fieldwork I attended a course on reading and understanding the Qur'an. I tried to understand how important it is for Uzbek women to be Muslim, what their religious rituals mean and what they gain socially, emotionally and psychologically from participating in these rituals.

Being an anthropologist among your own people gives both privileges and difficulties. As a local Uzbek woman, I was accepted by members of the *mahalla* very easily. They invited me to all their practices and I participated in the life of the *mahalla*. However, being an anthropologist, studying in the West, and researching a sensitive subject (sometimes writing, asking questions, and recording on a mechanical device) made my work difficult on occasion. Although they knew I am an Uzbek woman, my English surname sometimes brought concerned looks from people. Sometimes, especially when people did not know me very well, they were very reluctant to talk to or to share information with me. Occasionally, some of my questions surprised respondents. Although I grew up in Uzbek culture, I never questioned some practices until I started my research. When I raised questions such as 'why does the groom tear the curtain (*goshanga*) dur-



ing the practice of *kiyov navkar*<sup>2</sup> people could not answer; some said ‘because our parents did it’. It was an interesting experience to look at my culture from a different angle and through an anthropological lens.

## **1.5. Contribution to knowledge**

The originality of this thesis also derives from the fact that women’s religious life in Uzbekistan remains under-researched. Recent publications on women’s issues have failed to provide a detailed analysis of Uzbek women’s religious life, particularly the transformation of religious and life-cycle practices in Tashkent. The majority of the research works on Islam and Islamic practices were carried out during the Soviet period by Soviet ethnographers. In contrast, my thesis examines women’s religiosity during both the Soviet and independence periods.

My background as an Uzbek woman, previous fieldwork experience of Islam in the Fergana Valley, prior residency in Tashkent, social network and knowledge of Uzbek and Russian all give me an advantage in dealing with some of the difficult issues which non-local anthropologists might face in the field.

My research contributes, on the one hand, to the growing literature on women’s religious and rituals in Uzbekistan and, on the other, to ethnographic studies of everyday Islam.

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<sup>2</sup> This traditional practice consists of the groom’s tearing a curtain (*goshanga or chimildiq*) which is set in the corner of the room. A more detailed discussion is found in Chapter 4; 4.3.4.

## 1.6. Structure of the thesis

Chapter one describes the aim of the thesis, its settings and methodological framework, providing social and demographical information about the site which helps the reader to understand the subsequent chapters.

Chapter two introduces the theoretical framework of the thesis which is dedicated to a discussion of Islam, women's religious ritual life and their choices. It starts with a general account of Islam and the history of scholarship on Islam, and the perspectives offered by different authors. This is followed by a discussion of feminist scholarship on Islam, women's place in these studies, and how I used these approaches in my thesis.

Chapter three explains key moments in the history of Islam and describes key Islamic rituals, *fatwas* and decrees in order to illustrate some of the differences in the Uzbek Muslim experience during and after the Soviet period. This chapter also explores how the different state systems deployed understandings of 'Muslimness' and how these differed from the understandings of individual believers.

The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters explore life-cycle rituals in Uzbekistan. Chapter four is about weddings, the practices organised during the wedding ceremony and how these changed during the Soviet and independent periods. I describe how marriage practices continuously changed and how state regulations, decrees and *fatwas* have had a significant influence in bringing about those changes.

The fifth chapter looks at practices relating to childbirth and the upbringing of children. I discuss Soviet policy toward religious rituals, bringing up children during the Soviet period and how women kept and performed certain practices by adapting to the political situation.

Chapter six discusses death and funeral practices. I analyse practices connected to the preparation for death, prevention of death and interpretation of death, and those performed after death. I describe funeral practices during the Soviet period and analyse how these practices were performed, interpreted and changed since independence. I analyse the role of women in organising these practices, state regulations and changes in these practices.

The seventh chapter is the conclusion of the thesis. I summarise the main points made in my argumentation, clarify the findings of my research and their contribution to academic knowledge. Furthermore I write about the limitations of the thesis, and suggest potential areas and topics for future research.

## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Preface

In recent years, Western anthropologists investigating Muslim societies have turned their attention towards Islamisation and the diversity of local Islamic practices. They have discussed, debated and interpreted sacred texts, and Islamic knowledge and practices (Asad 1986, Abu-Lughod 1993, Bowen 1993, Gellner 1981). My thesis contributes to the array of academic understanding of women's religiosity. I will discuss how women in Tashkent, capital of Uzbekistan fashion themselves as Muslim and practise their everyday life in an Islamic manner, while at the same time the state attempts to construct and control the religious lives of citizens. I will show that these women continuously engage in the social and material world through life-cycle rituals and religious practices as they experience change in their everyday lives.

To establish the theoretical framework of my thesis, I will examine three broad orientations: general anthropological scholarship on Islam; gender in Islam; and Central Asian women's religiosity within Islam. I will draw upon the literature addressing these themes, and on scholarly interpretations of Islam. Within this study I also analyse literature on the life of Uzbek women within Islam, and their place in society.

This chapter is structured in three parts: firstly, in 'Towards an anthropology of Islam' I will explore anthropological debates on 'what is and what is not Islam'. Secondly, in 'The historical background to women's religiosity in Islam' I will explore the debate on women and Islam in Muslim societies, examining three different feminist approaches to

the status of women. Thirdly, in 'Islam in Central Asia' I will discuss Soviet-era ethnography on Islam, the revival of Islam in post-Soviet Uzbekistan and the academic literature relating to this period.

## **2.1. Towards an anthropology of Islam**

In order to understand anthropological debate on Islam I will commence my discussion with a brief history of scholarship on Islam. One of the first researchers was Evans-Pritchard, who described the traditional lives of the Arabs of Libya in *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (1949) and dealt 'with three main sets of structural relations: the political system of Europe, the tribal system of Cyrenaica, and the religious organisation of the Sanusiya' (18) As his research concentrated more on religious movements and tribal groups and their resistance to Italian occupation, Islam was not its main subject.

Following this study came the work of Clifford Geertz (1968) and Ernest Gellner (1981). They differed from Evans-Pritchard in their research by focusing particularly on Islam. Gellner (1981) in *Muslim Society* examined the impact of Islam on the transformation of social culture and argued 'Islam is the blueprint of social order.' He was one of the first to discuss the theory of the 'Great and Little' traditions and compared the religious lives of Muslims in urban and rural settings. Gellner discussed 'folk and scholarly variants' of Islam, and how the latter criticised the former (1981). Undertaking comparative research on Islamic culture, in *Islam Observed* Clifford Geertz (1968) contrasted Moroccan Islam with Indonesian Islam, discussing the social, political and cultural differences between the two countries. For Geertz, unlike Gellner, 'meaning' and

‘culture’ offered an important approach, which varied according to the social context of each Muslim society. Geertz argued that sainthood, Islamic ‘consciousness’ and ‘meaning’ were constructed through a cultural context.

Gellner and Geertz are an important starting point in exploring Muslim societies. At the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s the anthropological debate on Islam expanded and more scholars wrote on Islamic traditions with different cultural understandings. Michael Gilson in his work *Recognising Islam* (1982) discussed the basic principles of studying Islam. Like Gellner and Geertz, Gilson did his research on Islam in the Middle East; however, in contrast to those authors, he did extended fieldwork and avoided essentialism, which was noted by Gabriele Marranci (see below): ‘Geertz’s and Gellner’s works founded the anthropology of Islam ... Gilson’s study represented a valid start’ for an anthropology of Islam. Gilson (1982, 5) said the researcher needs first to examine the practices and everyday lives of individuals who self-identify as ‘Muslim’ and the discourses of authority that are either taken for granted or contested. Second, Gilson said researchers need to reflect critically on the ways in which Westerners in general tend to approach other societies and religious practices; the teaching of other societies; and the interpretation of other forms of knowledge and culture. Furthermore, he suggested Islamic society was heterogeneous, and should be regarded as not:

... single, rigidly bounded set of structures but rather as a word that identifies varying relations of practices, representation, symbol, concept and worldview within the same society and between different societies (Gilson 1982, 19).

My fieldwork and research echoes Gilson’s words, and will add to the existing literature not only by exploring his ideas of how Muslim women interpret their lives and

practices, but also by offering data from a country and culture which have attracted less recent scholarly attention than North Africa or the Middle East.

Abdul Hamid El-Zein (1977) also tried to define an 'Anthropology of Islam.' In his work he compared five anthropological works by different authors (including Geertz and Gilsenan) and argued that 'both theology and anthropology claim a higher degree of reflection than folk expressions of Islam'; indeed, both regard the latter:

... as less ordered, less objective, and somehow less complete versions of the religious experience. Each, however, looks upon this diversity of experience in different ways (El-Zein 1977, 243).

El-Zein (1977, 249) argued that there is no 'true Islam' or 'false Islam'. He maintains that both theologians and anthropologists share a similar 'understanding of Islam':

Their interpretations of the meaning of Islam depend themselves upon already presupposed and fixed meanings which determine the universality of Islam and limit properly "religious" and "Islamic" phenomena, and distinguish a folk from an elite, and a real from a false Islam (El-Zein 1977, 249).

In his article El-Zein posed the question 'is there a single, real Islam?' and concluded that there are in fact multiple 'Islams' (1977).

The debate was further developed by social anthropologists, who posed the fundamental question 'what is Islam?' Talal Asad, (1986) who has concentrated on the anthropology of religion and secularism, developed the debate by comparing Islam and Christianity as 'two historical configurations of power and belief.' Asad said such an approach was central to investigating Orientalism, but was also to be found implicitly in the writings of many contemporary anthropologists. He added to the debate the concept of 'a discu-

sive tradition': looking at Islam through the lens of Muslim descriptions of their textual sources (Qur'an and *Hadith*<sup>3</sup>):

[...] an Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, which reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present (Asad 1986, 14).

On a discussion of Asad's concept of 'discursive tradition', I would suggest the practice existed in pre-Soviet period in Uzbekistan were kept alive by women during the Soviet period and they are still practicing such as transmitting traditional knowledge of Islam by *otins* - religious female practitioners. These practitioners existed 73 years under the Soviet repression and taught children Islamic way of live and performed religious practices in Uzbek women's everyday life.

Asad (1986, 17) stated that anthropologists should rethink 'their object of study' and proposed that the concept of 'tradition' and the author's relation to it, and understanding of it, would help in this task:

... to write about a tradition is to be in a certain narrative relation to it, a relation that will vary according to whether one supports or opposes the tradition, or regards it as morally neutral (Asad 1986, 17).

However, Ronald A. Lukens-Bull (1999, 3) disagreed with Asad and reclaimed the right of non-Muslims to comment on Muslim society, saying 'culture-bound assumptions' influence 'cultural analyses', with Muslims and non-Muslims potentially holding different ideas of society, human nature, and religion. Claims of Orientalism might be directed at non-Muslim researchers who are critical of Islam or Islamic society, according to

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<sup>3</sup> *Hadith* - the authoritative record of the Islamic prophet Muhammad's teachings, actions, deeds and sayings



Lukens-Bull, who maintained that both insiders and outsiders have something to offer, and both have their different strengths and weaknesses.

Later anthropologists have extended the debate, among them Bowen 1993, Hirschkind 2006, Osella and Osella 2008, Mahmood 2005, 2006, and Marranci 2008. Gabriele Marranci, who is founding editor of the first anthropological journal of Islamic Studies (2008) criticised Gellner and Geertz as essentialist, though he acknowledged Gilsenan's contribution. In response to Asad, he said the notion of Islam as a tradition is interesting, while disagreeing 'with (Asad's) limited and proto-theological paradigm on the anthropology of Islam' (2008, 42) In addition, Marranci criticised Lukens-Bull's argument: '(a) comparative study of the different conceptions of how to submit to God (that is, how to be a Muslim) should be the central task of an anthropology of Islam' (1999, 10) Marranci argued that the central problem with Lukens-Bull's view was that it reduces the anthropology of Islam to the focus upon 'different styles of Muslim submission.' Furthermore, Marranci stated the importance of how Muslims 'through discourses, practices, beliefs and actions, make Islam' (15) He argued that 'the starting point should be Muslims not Islam' (15) and concluded by saying that 'Islam exists as a 'cognitive map in the minds' of those who 'feel' Muslim' (2008, 139).

The anthropological debate on 'what is Islam' has, therefore, been underway since the mid-twentieth century, and has broadly moved forward with a great number of works carried out on people living under Islam, and several different approaches and discourses. However, debate continues and every/new research contributes to the notion of the anthropology of Islam as it adds a piece to the puzzle. Having outlined the anthropolog-

ical debate on Islam, I will narrow my study to the historical background of women's religiosity within Islam.

## **2.2. The historical background to women's religiosity within Islam**

Although anthropological research into Islam began much earlier, it was not until the 1980s that considerable debate began among feminist scholars as to women's place in Islamist movements. Scholars began to try to understand how women participated and supported these movements; how they resisted the dominant male order; and how they expressed their agency and desires. The same decade witnessed growing mosque attendance in many countries, along with a renewed interest in Islamic education, a proliferation of religious literature and the growing popularity of piety groups (see, for example, Torab 1996, 2007, Deep 2006 2009, Gole 2002, Haniffa 2008, Huq 2009, Mahmood 2001, 2005). Much recent scholarship has focused upon the resurgence of Islamic practices and values in Muslim women's lives, and has demonstrated that women's lives are complex. Women often reveal their agency, for instance, in renegotiating the norms established for them by society: instead of Muslim women being merely passive and conforming to social expectations, they have a voice.

In this section, I discuss three approaches to the debate as to women's everyday life in Islam. Western secular feminist scholars broadly argue that Islam is a patriarchal system and blame it for women's oppression (for example, Moghadam 1993, Winter 2001, Mernissi 1987, 1989, 1993, Al-Ali 2000). Islamic feminist scholars (A), on the other hand, agree that misinterpretations of the Qur'an result in patriarchy (for example,

Ahmed 1992, Badran 1990, 1995, Engineer 1992, 2005). A third group of feminist scholars (B), however, argue that women can express their agency through Islam and Islamic practices (for instance, Mahmood 2005, Torab 2007, Deep 2006).

### **2.2.1. *The Western secular feminist view***

Scholars expressing the Western secular feminist view include Fatima Mernissi, Valentine Moghadam, Haleh Afshar, and Nadjie Al-Ali. Their research has mainly focused on women living under Islamic law in Muslim countries (the Middle East and Iran). These feminist women argue that Islam is an inherently patriarchal system in which women are subordinated by Islamic law, and that Islam is an instrument of women's oppression.

In my work I have used Heidi Hartmann (1976, 138) definition of patriarchy:

‘a set of social relations which has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men, and solidarity among them, which enable them to control women. Patriarchy is thus the system of male oppression of women’.

Secular feminist studies generally describe women as objects of subjugation and subordination who experience social and gender segregation and oppression under patriarchy. The veil is one of the most criticised objects of female segregation and oppression. Secular feminists have argued that only by rejecting Islam can women express their agency because Islam is equal to patriarchy.

In her book *Beyond the Veil* (1975) Fatima Mernissi was one of the first to discuss male-female dynamics in Muslim society and Muslim women's sexuality in Islam. She argued that laws and customs ensure the subjugation of women, while ‘Muslim ideology’

separates men and women and ‘empowers men’s institutionalised means to oppress women’ (20). Mernissi even claimed that Muslim men’s rights over Muslim women include the ‘right to kill their women’ (170). However, comparing women in the West and Muslim women, she argued that both Muslim and Western societies, in different ways, exploit and oppress women; and that Muslim women in Muslim societies ‘engage in a silent but explosive dialogue with a fragile ruling class whose major task is to secure economic growth’ (177).

Valentine M. Moghadam (1993) discussed gender dynamics in the Middle East, North Africa and Afghanistan. She stated that women in Muslim countries do not generally fare well compared to those in the West, and that Islamic theology and law have a negative impact on the status of Muslim women, due especially to gender segregation. Moghadam also argued that although ‘women are at the centre of change’, ‘patriarchy has been reinforced by economic and political factors’, warning that ‘in the modern context, a new form of patriarchal family could get stronger’ (109).

Discussing Muslim women’s life in Iran, Haleh Afshar (1987, 83) asserted that ‘Islamic ideology’ perceives women in fearful and paternalistic terms, regarding women as ‘evil’ and ‘vulnerable’, and in need of ‘surveillance and protection’. She further claimed that in Iran men benefit from Islamic laws to the detriment of women and that women need to be covered in public to ensure a fragile national honour. Afshar also proposed that marriage has become an institution to ‘satisfy male sexual urges’ (1987, 79) which explains women’s unequal life condition within it, supporting her argument with reference

to the legal acceptance of polygamy, and support for young marriages, which have resulted in numerous short-lived polygamous marriages.

Taking the debate to women's movements in Egypt, Nadjé Al-Ali (2000), provided an in-depth ethnographic account of secular women's activism. Al-Ali argued that Islam is inevitably patriarchal and is not conducive to gender equality. She suggested that Egyptian women's activism is moulded by the fear of 'transgressing' values and norms connected with the national fabric. Identity politics is as much a part of their activism as rights. Al-Ali pointed out that 'despite [the] Islamists' call to return to 'the glorious past', many writers have pointed to the 'modern' and 'modernising' character of Islamist trends and noted that:

...(d)ebates about identity and authenticity are certainly promoted by Islamists these days and influence the ways in which other political actors, such as secular women activists, address these issues (2000, 216).

### **2.2.2. *Islamic feminist view A: Qur'anic misinterpretation***

I now examine two schools of Islamic feminist discourse (A and B) which present a different type of argument to those of Western secular feminists. In this section, I will look at a feminist perspective based upon the interpretation of holy texts. Although still embedded within the idea of Western liberal agency, this group of Islamic feminists rejects the idea that Islam is inherently patriarchal. Within Islamic feminist scholarship (Abu-Lughod 1986, 1998, Ahmed 1992, Badran 1990, Bodran and Tohidi 1998, Mir-Hosseini 1996, Tohidi 1997, Najmabadi 1995, Engineer 1992, 2005, Metcalf 1998) there is an ongoing debate that says the Qur'an is not patriarchal but has been interpreted as being such: this is the reality criticised by Islamic feminists. For them, the antidote is to high-

light the dilemma, critically read and interpret the Qur'an, and thereby use agency against masculine power structures.

One of the first modern proponents of this view was Leila Ahmed (1992), who offered a different discussion to Western secular feminists. She argued that Western colonial observers and others were wrong in blaming Islam per se as the problem and, by presenting historical and social analyses of Islam, strongly rejected Western feminist ideas of gender in Islam. Instead, she suggested that women should (re-)interpret Islam to claim their rights and gain a stronger voice.

The themes of patriarchal control by the state and women's place in Egyptian society were also explored by Margot Badran (1990), who concluded that native customs and traditions were responsible for degrading women's rights in Islam. Badran asserted that for Muslim women to access basic rights within an Islamic context they need to understand Islam better, which would also benefit their families and wider society. Badran (1995) reported that religion (Islam) and its interpretation is under the control of competing interests: 'Islam had been used to shore up family-based patriarchal controls and prerogatives. Badran criticised state power which increasingly regulates public life through the appointment of the *mufti*,<sup>4</sup> and by issuing *fatwas*<sup>5</sup> (religious rulings). She (1995, 11) highlighted Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh's notion of Islamic modernism and the need for a return to *ijtihad* (independent inquiry), an approach which would enable men and women to interpret religion and apply it in ways beneficial for all. Badran dis-

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<sup>4</sup> *Mufti* - muslim spiritual advisor, a person who gives an opinion on a point of law (*fatwa*), or is engaged in the legal profession

<sup>5</sup> *Fatwa* - a decision by the jurist; an ordinance by the formal religious authority, a decree made by a religious authority on the basis of Islamic law

cussed the ‘emergence of men’s feminist discourse’ using the example of the late nineteenth-century male lawyer and scholar Murqus Fahmi (1995, 18). Fahmi, who employed Islamic modernist argumentation to justify his call for gender reform, and argued that if the country was ‘backward’ so would be the social position of women. Fahmi called for the education of women, the ending of female seclusion and the elimination of the misuse of divorce practices, which he demonstrated had nothing to do with Islam.

Asghar Ali Engineer (2005) has also investigated patriarchal interpretations of the Qur’an and their implications for women. He argued that patriarchal Muslim societies use their interpretation of the Qur’an to deny women their rights, as the holy book outlines, which suggests that the rights of Muslim women of 1,400 years ago (when the Qur’an was written) cannot be changed. Engineer also discussed the ‘rights of Muslims to reinterpret *Sharia* law according to their needs’ (2005, 3) and suggested that ‘many verses which were used for centuries to subjugate’ women should be re-read and re-interpreted. He claimed that subjugation stems from culture and patriarchy, rather than from Islam or the Qur’an per se.

Barbara D. Metcalf (1998, 109-112) has discussed women’s participation in the Islamist revival movement *Tabligh jama’at* (Society for Spreading Faith). She wrote that in *Tabligh* thought, Muslims would teach each other the key values and practices of Islam, and that social hierarchies, supposedly, should be removed between worshippers. Metcalf talked about women’s participation in the movement by accessing education, engaging in *da’wa* (proselytizing or preaching of Islam), and teaching other women and family members about Islam. One striking aspect of women’s participation in *Tabligh* is the

possibility for women to meet outside for communal female prayer, since South Asian Muslim women are discouraged from going to the mosque or to saintly shrines and are restricted to gatherings on the occasions of marriage or death. Metcalf argued that it is not always husbands or fathers who introduce *Tabligh* into the family, but that in some cases women have done so.

The idea of Islamist feminists group echoed with Muslim modernist reformers movement, *Jadids*, in Uzbekistan. They were early exponents of theories later taken up by Islamic feminists, claiming that misinterpretation of the Qu'ran had been responsible for women's oppression, and that women were in fact being treated 'un Islamically'. *Jadids* wanted to change Uzbek women's life, they said 'if they want Muslim people to develop and prosper they have to give rights to their women as Europeans. ...if women are educated their children will also be educated' (from *Turkestanskye Vedomosti*, in Shodmonova 2011, 143).

### **2.2.3. *Islamic feminist view B: Agency and Islam***

There is substantial scholarly writing on women's religious life in Middle Eastern and South Asian countries (Mahmood 2005, Raheja and Gold 1994, Torab 2007, Deeb 2006, Raheja and Gold 1994, Werbner 2002, Boddy 2002, Navaro-Yashin 2002, Holy 1991, Metcalf 1998). These authors focussed upon women's participation in and support of religious movements, and argued that 'women express their agency though submitting themselves to God', and adjusting to and coping with social and cultural change. Moreover, they claimed that women resist patriarchy and power structures though poetry and stories.



Lara Deeb (2006) examined a community of Shi'a women and their religious movement in Lebanon, and discussed how the notion of 'public piety' is connected with 'authentic Islam', and how Lebanese women devote themselves to learning 'correct Islam' and practising this in their everyday life. She concluded that these women consider themselves modern, cosmopolitan and pious while at the same time opposing themselves to the images of 'the West'. Deeb also debated individual and collective ways of expressing piety by Shi'a women.

In her book *Politics of Piety* (2005) Saba Mahmood discussed challenging questions of politics, religion, piety and agency. She analysed conceptions of 'self, moral, agency and politics' (5) and discussed a women's mosque movement in Cairo which emerged in opposition to secularisation and Westernisation. Mahmood mentioned that previous scholarship had 'focussed on the operations of human agency within structures of subordination' and portrayed women's agency as passive, submissive and oppressed; indeed, a principal preoccupation had been a discussion of how women had contributed to reproducing their own domination, and how they had resisted or subverted it. Contrary to the Western liberal feminist approach, Mahmood claimed we need to rethink the notion of agency, thereby correcting a flawed analysis of women in the Middle East. In her view, women's agency is not expressed through rejecting certain ideas, but is about submission to the will of God. She discussed why a large number of women in the Muslim world actively support this notion, especially at a historical moment when they have more emancipatory possibilities available to them.

Mahmood devoted much of her study to a discussion of the veil, offering different explanations and citing a variety of reasons why women voluntarily take on religious headwear. She drew on the subject of ‘piety’— a subject which is problematic in feminist scholarship - and argued that ‘authors have paid so little attention to Islamic virtues of female modesty of piety, especially given that many of the women who have taken up the veil frame their decision precisely in these terms’ (16). Mahmood justified her stance by stating that ‘women’s subordination to feminine virtues, such as shyness, modesty, and humility, appears to be the necessary condition for their enhanced public role in religious and political life.’

Mahmood considered *ibadat* (acts of worship), which ‘acquired the status of customs or conventions, a kind of “Muslim folklore” or “religio-cultural identity” (48) and demonstrated how women participated in *da’wa* through piety and submission to God. One woman interviewed said:

the state and society want to reduce Islam to folklore, as if Islam is just a collection of ceremonies and customs, such as hanging lanterns from doorways or baking cookies during Ramadan, or eating meat on *al-id al-kabir* (feast that celebrates the end of Ramadan) (Mahmood 2005, 49).

Mahmood draws on the debate<sup>6</sup> between the *da’iya* (preacher/religious teacher) *Hajja*<sup>7</sup> Iman and Maryam, who is one of the participants attending lessons in the mosque. This debate shows that ‘despite the difference in age, and in experience in the use of canonical sources, between the *daiyat* and their audience, the conversation between these women precedes along remarkably equitable lines’ (102-103). These discussions

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<sup>6</sup> The debate was about avoiding eye contact when taking private lessons from a male tutor/teacher.

<sup>7</sup> *Hajja* - Literally means a women who has performed the pilgrimage to Mecca (*the hajj*), but it is also used in Egyptian colloquial Arabic to respectfully address an older woman.

demonstrate how young members of the *da'wa* movement understand scholarly arguments.

In her work on prayer gatherings of middle-class *Shia* women, Azam Torab (2007) detailed diverse ritual activity and gender constructions in Iran and demonstrated the importance of gender analysis in understanding society and ritual. The assumption of her study is 'that gender is a product of specific activities within particular cultural and historical contexts rather than their cause' (242) Torab. focused on rituals, which are 'powerful forums where ideas develop, or where rules, symbols and discourses are contested,' with the aim of understanding how 'gender views, ideas and beliefs were being formed or projected through ritual activities' (ix). In addition, she claimed that women perceive rituals as a source of 'joy' and 'support' away from the family unit, which promotes spirituality (246). She argued that religious rituals do more than satisfy 'personal piety', being also an 'effective means for constructing and renegotiating the relations between the self, society and the transcendent' (249). Contrary to Mahmood, who discussed the concept of piety, Torab emphasised the construction of gender in religion.

In comparison, Gloria G. Raheja and Ann G. Gold (1994) discussed the lives of women from rural Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, northern India, through stories, ritual-songs and personal narratives. They reflected on how 'these speech genres may be implicated in women's self-perceptions and self-fashioning,' and help form a moral discourse about gender identity and kinship that is 'constructed, represented, negotiated, and contested in everyday life' (1-2). Raheja and Gold (re)examined songs and stories of the women

of rural North India as possible sources of empowerment. They hoped examination of rural women's 'poetic resistance' to power structures might help a feminist understanding of gender and power. Raheja argued that songs can question social conventions of kinship; that these songs are 'so emotionally compelling' and women 'were not unquestioning bearers of 'tradition'' but 'challenged tradition at every turn' (xxvi). Raheja observed that some young women, apparently modest, will 'hurl obscene insult songs', seek out a particular male lover and strategically manipulate kinship ties.

While a number of scholars have been concerned 'with recovering the voices of those whose subjectivity and agency are generally obscured by most historical writing,' Raheja and Gold shared an interest in what J. Scott (1990) called the 'everyday form of resistance' to systems of ideological or material dominance. They argued that their interest lies in exploring the "hidden transcripts" (Scott 1985) implicit in women's speech and song, often veiled, but sometimes overt and public, words and actions through which women communicate their resistance to dominant north Indian characterisations of "women's nature" (*triya charitra*) and of kinship relationships. (1-2).

Raheja and Gold reported that women 'reimagine' their lived reality through songs and stories; that they 'find that the boundaries between words and lives are fluid and permeable, and they are sites of contestation and of struggle' (182). They concluded that it was untrue that women do not have agency, even in extreme patriarchal situations, but that they express it in a very complex way, by singing songs, telling stories, finding spaces and coping.

In her work on cultic *zar* (a type of spirit possession) practice Janice Boddy (1989) discussed how women use their agency through the practice ‘as the space of subordinate discourse’ and as ‘a medium for cultivation of women’s consciousness’ (345). Her 2002 work described a case in Northern Sudan of numerous women and a very few men diagnosed as suffering from an illness attributed to *zar*. *Zairan* is known as *jinn*, whose existence is mentioned in several verses of the Qur’an. She described how external agents, which demanded the preservation of a woman’s ideal self, took control of her body, transforming it into a vessel of otherness. Although Islam is officially controlled and dominated by men, women find space to adjust to this domination by using their agency through performing such cultic practices. Boddy suggested that ‘a major issue addressed by *zar* is a problem of socialisation: the cultural determination of women’s selves.’ Though women are more restricted than men in many social ways, they are less constrained by religion, which means that women are relatively free to embrace what men consider folk beliefs. Men publicly scorn the *zar*; however, privately they are not so intractable. Despite appearances of opposition, therefore, men tolerate women’s involvement in the cult and are generally willing to provide for the spirits’ demands.

Some scholars have argued that women’s piety is a social element of their life and that certain social rituals are important means through which women socialise with each other (Werbner 2002, Fathi 2006, 2007, Mernissi 1989, Mahmood 2005, Deep 2006). Mernissi (1989, 112) described how women visit shrines, where ‘they find a haven of peace and quiet; where they cry without speaking, each in her own world.’ In each of the following cases, the ‘women’s mosque movement’ in Egypt (Mahmood, 2005), women’s popular ritual meetings (*Jalaseh*) in Iran (Torab, 1996), and the Shi’a women’s

movement in Lebanon (Deeb, 2006) the place of women is significant. They try to engage with religious resurgence and social change taking place in society by using their agency: ‘submitting themselves to God’, ‘adjusting and/or coping’, and ‘expressing their agency through poetry, stories and songs.’

The above studies, then, have provided me with information on the position of women in Muslim societies. The readings of Mahmood (2005), Torab (1996, 2007), Deeb (2006) and others, have helped me to interpret and clarify details of my research. Torab’s exploration of women’s ritual gatherings informed my own investigation of how women question the rituals in their own lives, and the work of Mahmood and Deeb was particularly helpful in illuminating women’s everyday religiosity. The religious movement I discovered during fieldwork in Tashkent is not as large as those Mahmood and Deeb studied in Egypt and the Lebanon respectively, but the women I interviewed and observed nonetheless showed significant interest in introducing Islam into their everyday lives, transforming their life-cycle rituals accordingly.

In my investigation into women and Islam I will next draw upon the writings of Western and Uzbek authors pertaining to Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia. I will examine and analyse the life of Uzbek women within Islam through religious practices and life-cycle rituals with particular reference to social change and transformation. My thesis analyses women’s everyday life, their way of communication with ‘the systems of ideological or material dominance’ (Raheja, 1994), and the hidden meanings and interpretations of their life-cycle practices.

## **2.3. Islam in Central Asia**

### **2.3.1. *Soviet and Western scholarship on Islam in Central Asia***

In recent years, anthropologists working in Muslim societies have turned their attention towards the diversity of local Islamic practices, interpreting these practices and understanding them. In some cases, this examination of practices has extended to a global context. Questions pertaining to the nature of Islam have been studied through spirit possession, piety movements, and veiling. The work of anthropologists like Delaney (1991) on Turkey, Marsden (2005) on northern Pakistan, Torab (2007) on Iran, Mahmood (2005) on Egypt, and Deep (2006) on Lebanon, all discussed in this thesis as comparative material, have helped me to understand social change and transformation in Uzbekistan. However, the Central Asian experience is unique and does not match that of other Muslim countries. When we look back over the past 150 years, we can see that Uzbekistan has been ruled by different political systems: in 1867 it was occupied by Tsarist Russia; in 1924 the Soviet state was established; in September 1991 the country gained its independence. Different rules, policies and ideologies were propagated during these periods and the social, spiritual and economic life of the Uzbek people underwent radical changes during each. In the following section I will focus upon key changes in Islamic practice: I will draw on scholarship written on Islam in the pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-independence periods.

### 2.3.2. *Islam in pre-Soviet Uzbekistan*

In the pre-Soviet era Russian researchers such as Likoshin, Bartold, Ostroumov, Mayev, Kislyakov and Nalivkin researched Islam and the everyday life of Central Asians, publishing many articles about the life of the indigenous people in the local newspaper *Turkestanskiye vedomosti* (News from Turkistan). The wife and husband team, the Nalivkins (1886), for example, did valuable research among the people of the Fergana Valley. Although I found many historical documents describing the lives of local people in the Tashkent State archive, the pre-Soviet history of Uzbekistan has not been researched in detail. Most of the research carried out during this period was undertaken by the Tsarist Russian administration and served the political interests of the Russian Empire. Although the studies of these Russian scholars were biased, they nonetheless provide important insights into the social, cultural and economic life of people in that period. Alexei Elfimov (2010) has described the political nature of research conducted during this period by Tsarist Russia:

‘...police officers and informers, who could be local administrators, schoolteachers, doctors and often priests, ordinarily kept notebooks in which for years they painstakingly recorded various aspects of everyday life of communities, of which they were part. Ethnic details, among others, were always the focus of their attention’ (Elfimov 2010, 99).

### 2.3.3. *Soviet scholarship on Central Asia*

During the Soviet period an alien ideology and state structure were imposed on Central Asian countries. Soviet ethnographers were forced to work within a Marxist-Leninist theoretical framework, the Soviet state ideology claimed religion, hence Islam, was an oppressive, patriarchal and backward practice, and all religions were banned. Research carried out by Soviet ethnographers on Islam and the everyday lives of Uzbek people is



used in the main body of my thesis. One of the first studies on Islam was written by the Vasilii Vladimirovich Bartold who worked on the history of Islam and the Turkic people. He undertook extended trips to Muslim countries, and wrote three monographs, *Islam* (1918), *Muslim Culture* (1918) and *The Muslim World* (1922), and contributed to the development of the study of Islam and Central Asian people.

Soviet Russian ethnographers N. A. Kislyakov (1954, 1959), G. P. Snesev (1957, 1971), M. S. Andreev (1927), O. Suhareva (1958, 1975), N. P. Lobacheva (1979) and V. N. Basilov (1991) researched life-cycle rituals and the daily life of Central Asians. Snesev (1957), Kislyakov (1959) and Suhareva (1975) conducted extended research into Islamic practices and the everyday life of Uzbek people. In their work they criticised these practices and described them as vestiges of the past (*perejitki proshlogo*). Snesev (1979) and Basilov (1992), who carried out fieldwork in Uzbekistan, explained that many people used to look for cures and help for their daily problems by visiting holy tombs and spirit healers (practitioners who used 'spirits' during the healing processes), using these as examples of their thesis that some so-called religious practices had pre-Islamic roots.

In 1943 the Muslim Spiritual Directorate for Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) was established. The Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (CARC) was founded in 1944, and served as a link between state and religious communities. Bakhtiyar Babadjanov (2001) discussed *fatwas* and letters written by CARC clerics to imams, government institutions and other official bodies. He argued that CARC clerics were flexible in their interpretations of *fatwas* and adjusted them to the requirements of the Communist

Party. Trained religious clerics and imams criticised practices such as visiting holy places and praying at the tombs of saints but despite their criticism and the Soviet state's other attempts to build a secular state, Central Asian societies remained 'traditional', as many religious practices and life-cycle rituals remained in the family.

Like western secular feminists, Soviet ethnographers criticised Islam as a patriarchal system which oppressed women. Again echoing the claims of some feminists, the Soviet state claimed to be aiming to liberate women by unveiling and educating them, and transforming them into citizens and workers. However, by attempting to institute the new rituals and practices which would help bring about this transformation, the Soviet state in fact changed one type of patriarchy into another, controlling women by means of state, rather than religious, controls and ideologies.

#### **2.3.4. *Western scholarship on Soviet Islam***

During the Soviet period, Muslim Soviet countries were closed to Western scholars and information on Central Asian countries was very limited. Mark Saroyan, interpreted Soviet Islam by engaging in critical analyses of the available Western and Soviet scholarly literature. He concluded that Western scholars had used two interpretive strategies in using Soviet texts for empirical data, 'direct and indirect extrapolation.' In 'direct extrapolation', Western scholars reproduced whatever information was available. Saroyan argued that despite doubts expressed about the reliability of Soviet data and interpretation, this strategy was used widely. On the other hand, in 'indirect extrapolation', Western scholars used information from Soviet sources and transformed it into new ideas or information (11-12).

Furthermore, Saroyan argued that not only facts from the Soviet texts were used in Western discourse, but also ‘Soviet interpretive schemes’, and compared this flawed usage with the concept of ‘two Islams’ earlier developed by the scholar Beningsen. This notion had distinguished between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ Islam, the former referring to the Soviet Muslim clerical administration, and the latter to popular Muslim practices. Around 1980 these concepts became identified as ‘parallel Islam’ which became ‘a fundamental organisational concept of the work of Beningsen and his associates since 1970’ (1977,14) However, Saroyan argued that the concept of ‘parallel Islam’ did not in fact originate with Beningsen in the West, but rather with the Dean of Soviet Islamic studies, Lusitsian Klimovich, in the Soviet Union. Saroyan claimed that it had first been published by Klimovich in 1966 (1977). Indeed, the concept of ‘parallel Islam’ echoes Gellner’s theory of ‘Great and Little’ traditions.

After independence foreign scholars gained access to Central Asian countries and conducted research in the field, thereby presenting different analyses. Adib Khalid, (1998) undertook extensive archive research to study religious education in schools and *madrasas*, and examined the *Jadid* (Muslim modernist reformers) movement in pre-Soviet Uzbekistan. He reported that students received their textual education at school, and learnt behavioural norms (through discipline). Khalid’s work is very important because the *Jadid* movement which was his focus was an important movement in Uzbekistan: the *Jadids* fought against illiteracy, superstition and old practices, and to improve women’s lives. In the early Soviet period *Jadids* tried to shape modern Islamic Uzbek women.

Various regimes in Uzbekistan have attempted to use women as a part of a nation-building, identity-forming process. This process was mentioned in a number of scholarly works written on Central Asia during the Soviet post-Soviet periods. My ethnographic material also demonstrates that this process is continuing in Tashkent. One of the first detailed studies of the Muslim women of Central Asia was written by Gregory Massell (1974). Massell argued that the Communist Party planned to transform Uzbek women's lives, and looked at the strategies and methods deployed. Douglas Northrop (2004) supported Massell, claiming that the Bolsheviks tried to change gender ideals and cultural practices against the wishes of most Uzbek women. Furthermore, he argued that the Party's plan to transform women had a goal: to turn them into loyal members of the proletariat willing to help transform society as a whole. Unlike Massell and Northrop, Marianne Kamp (2006), in her discussion of *Hujum* (the Soviet state project to unveil women in Uzbekistan), argues that Uzbek women engaged in resistance against their subordination to men, while the state acted in opposition to patriarchy. Moreover, she argues that although the Soviet state did not succeed in transforming Uzbek gender ideals, nor did the state even try; but it did make huge changes to the way Uzbek women lived their lives economically and socially.

Johan Rasanayagam (2011) supported the argument of a number of scholars who said that Islam in Uzbekistan is cultural not religious, as most of the self-fashioning Muslims have not had Islamic instruction and do not even follow the basic requirements of Islam (Khalid 2003, Shahrani 1994, Rasanayagam 2011). Nazif Shahrani (1994), for example, had stated that Islam in Uzbekistan was part of the national identity and was more cul-

tural then religious. *Everyday Islam* by Sergey P. Poliakov (1992) was written just before the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the perestroika period. Poliakov studied the continued existence of traditionalism in Central Asia, and extended the discussion of 'parallel Islam', comparing the 'official' government-registered institutions with 'unofficial' unregistered mullahs who are the keepers of traditional Islam.

Although I believe these authors to be partly correct in identifying Uzbeks as 'cultural Muslims', my fieldwork strongly suggests that there has recently been a significant shift in Uzbek religious life, with people questioning their traditional beliefs and rituals and informing themselves about Islam. Prayers have been relearned and corrected; there is greater attendance at the mosque; more people fast and, in general, people are asking more questions as to how they should be correctly practising their faith. This recent shift in religiosity must be taken into account in any discussion of whether Uzbeks are now 'cultural' or 'religious' Muslims.

### **2.3.5. *Islam after independence (1991 onwards)***

Independence resulted in another round of social transformation as historians rewrote the history of Uzbekistan, scholars started writing about the great people of the past, and Islamic literature was published in the country. Uzbek nationalism imagined the country as 'awakening from sleep' (Anderson 2003, 195). Uzbek scholars wrote about independent Uzbekistan and the Russian influence on the social and political life of the people (Boriev 1995, Nuritdinov 1996, Nasrutdinov 1996, Aminov 1987). This was followed by foreign scholars specialising in the area and actually undertaking fieldwork, as men-

tioned above (Kamp 2006, Khalid 1998, 2006, Rasanayagam 2011, Fathi 2006, Privatsky, Louw, Abramson and Karimov). However, one particular event, the Tashkent bombing of 1999 (which was blamed on Islamic rebels) brought an end to the relative freedom of religious activity, and the flowering of scholarship around Uzbek variations of Islam. This led to changes in the social life of people, including dress code, the conducting of life-cycle rituals and other religious practices. The government started using Islam as a part of a Central Asian cultural and spiritual heritage, opposing what it presented as 'traditional' Islam to what it portrayed as 'radical', 'political', 'alien' or 'extremist' Islam.

In detailed analyses of the nature of terrorism in Uzbekistan, Russel Zanka (2005) attempted to understand terrorism from both sides: from the perspective of the state leaders, and from that of the 'militants' and 'terrorists'. He argued that talking to people labelled 'terrorists' or those willing to use 'terrorist methods' could provide a better understanding of the problem. Rasanayagam (2011) unlike Zanka, he does not believe in the wide existence of Muslim extremism in the region. Instead of talking 'bad-extremist' and 'good-local Muslim', Rasanayagam analysed a wide range of beliefs and practices within Islam and came to a different conclusion.

My own fieldwork has led me to agree with Rasanayagam: I met no 'radicalised' women, and did not encounter any debate between *otin* (religious female practitioners) and women (participants of the practices) on Islamic knowledge such as described by Mahmood above the case, of whether or not women should avoid eye-contact with a

male tutor. Uzbek women principally follow *otins* in Islamic teachings, and their relationship is that of students and teacher.

Rich in ethnographic material, Bruce Privatsky's (2001) work presented different analyses to Zanka's; he concentrated on the Sufi tradition and the transmission of knowledge from Sufi master to follower. He talked about pilgrimage to sacred places, spiritual experiences and the process whereby these traditions were transmitted. Maria Louw (2007), who did similar work to Privatsky, provided a detailed case study of people's everyday practice and understanding of Islam in Bukhara. She reported that, contrary to fundamentalist radical Islamic ideas, people used Islam as a symbol of identity, and that it helped them to solve their everyday problems in a socially and economically difficult period.

Following the discussions of Privatsky and Louw, Rasanayagam supported the idea that Uzbeks are not radical Muslims. In his book (2001) *Islam in post-Soviet Uzbekistan* Rasanayagam examined the moral quality of experience. He discussed how individuals fashion themselves as Muslim, through particular experiences of healing, visiting mosques, participation in life-cycle rituals, interacting with their Muslim friends and developing an understanding what it means to be a Muslim. For Rasanayagam, 'moral reasoning is not only a cognitive process of the mind' but also an 'individual's embodied experience.' Indeed, Rasanayagam's work on the Muslim people of the Fergana region frequently echoes my own, for the life-cycle practices of Fergana and Tashkent are very similar.

Magnus Marsden's (2005) discussions of Muslim religious experience in Chitral, Pakistan, illuminate the parallel experience of Muslims in Uzbekistan. He argued that Muslims do not necessarily follow strict 'everyday' cultural practice and, by exploring their everyday experiences, described 'intellectually vibrant and emotionally significant' lives. He argued that people in Chitral use their intellect and emotions as Muslims to enrich their life with music, poetry and dance, just as I have found Uzbek women in Tashkent fashion themselves as Muslims through the performance of their life-cycle and religious practices. Julie McBrein (2009) spoke of gender and Islam and applied an anthropological approach to the study of modernity in post-Soviet Tajikistan. She argued that an individual's expression of religious piety and the adoption of the veil can go hand in hand with notions of modernity: 'Modernity can be simultaneously past, present, and future' (142).

Life-cycle rituals in the region have been researched by Guillian 1996, and McBrein 2000 and Kandiyoti and Azimova 2004. In her research on marriage practices conducted in rural Tajikistan, Tett Guillian (1995) discussed how a village kept its Muslim identity in a secular-atheist Communist state and argued that a study of marriage can be relevant in understanding the process of cultural change and cultural resistance. Kandiyoti and Uzbek ethnographer Azimova (2004) discussed about state policy on Soviet ceremony and battle over local customs and life cycle rituals in Uzbekistan. They argued that transformation which happened after independence has had an impact on gender relations. Talking about 'politicisation' of customs, Kandiyoti and Azimova say that Islam is no longer treated as a cultural identity but as 'a statement of political affiliation' (344).



Habiba Fathi (2006) who conducted extensive research in Central Asia, discussed female religious practitioners - *otins* - their role, and the transformation of their position after independence. Fathi maintained that women contributed to the revival of Islamic practice among Central Asians in general, and that Soviet secularisation helped female religious practitioners to turn social restrictions to their advantage. Furthermore, she noted that Central Asians define themselves as Muslim; religion is inseparable from their identity. She argued that there is no single definition of Islam, but that 'Islam is experienced on multiple levels.' After independence people redefined how they relate to religion, and new roles and responsibilities opened for women within communal religious life.

David M. Abramson, and Elyor E. Karimov (2007) researched the religious pilgrimage of Uzbek people to sacred sites. They concluded that 'shrine usage offers competing versions of true, authentic Islam' (334), and argued that 'people turn to the spiritual world for moral guidance,' and 'local Islam has become a foundation for establishing new kinds of social relationships' (335).

In the following section I will narrow my focus to Islam in Central Asia, and an examination of ritual.

### **2.3.6. *Uzbek scholarship on religious rituals in Central Asia***

Over the centuries Uzbek life-cycle rituals have been analysed and criticised by both Uzbek and Russian scholars. One of the earliest areas of criticism of the amount of money spent on certain ceremonies was made by *Jadids* - Muslim reformist movement

representatives. One of the active members of the *Jadid* movement, Behdudiy, (1909) disagreed with spending money on *toys* (Uz. literally translated as feast, big celebration) and celebrations, and called on people to spend their wealth on education for their children instead, building new schools and sending children to foreign countries to study. Sergei Abashin (2003), a far more recent addition to this body of criticism, discussed life-cycle practices in Uzbekistan and wrote about the continued cost and pomposity of celebratory practices. He talked about the rationality and irrationality of local practices and why people conduct them. Another group of Uzbek scholars and researchers have worked on life-cycle rituals in post-Soviet Uzbekistan (Arifkhanova, Ashurov, Rasulova, Hamraqulova and Nasrutdinov); their studies are interesting, but no detailed research has yet been published on religious rituals and women's everyday life in Tashkent.

A major contribution to Uzbek Islamic knowledge has come from Uzbek Sheikh Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf<sup>8</sup> the distinguished former Chief *mufti* of Uzbekistan, international advisor and well-known Islamic scholar of *Hanafi madhab* (legal school). When seeking advice on *fatwas* or religious matters, Uzbek people will refer first to his many books and sermons, which incidentally furnish a great deal of data. Sheikh Muhammad Yusuf was a prominent local Muslim scholar not only in Central Asia but in the Muslim world. In his book *Arguments, Reasons, Solutions (Ihtiloflar, Sabablar, Yechimlar)* (2011), he presented detailed information about debates on Islamic rituals and practices and gave advice as to how to deal with these questions.

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<sup>8</sup> Sheikh Mohammad Sodiq Mohammad Yusuf (1952-2015, born in Andijan, Uzbekistan) is a well-known Islamic scholar in Uzbekistan and has published many Islamic books including translation and interpretation of Qur'an and *hadith*.

Another contribution has been made by Marfua Tokhtakhodjaeva<sup>9</sup> who researched Uzbek women's lives by interviewing women and combining their life stories. She acknowledged that Soviet society transformed the life of Central Asian women, but concluded that it did not change 'the most fundamental aspects of the daily lives.' For Marfua Tokhtakhodjaeva, these changes had both negative and positive impacts on the lives of Soviet women. Discussing the position and future of women in the changing society of Uzbekistan, she commented upon the revival of Islam and women's role within it. Expressing a feminist view on women's lives in society, she argued that Uzbekistan cannot remain in its shell and ignore a changing world (2002).

#### **2.4. Conclusion**

From an analysis of anthropological debates on Islam and Islamisation we can trace how scholars have written about Islam as a 'big and little tradition', as one or many 'Islams', as 'parallel Islam' and/or as authentic Islam. Drawing on both the debates outlined above and my own fieldwork, I argue that Muslims, whether practising or non-practising, perceive themselves as Muslim and follow, or try to follow, Islam.

If the question were posed as to whether it is possible to make a clear distinction between what is and what is not Islamic, I would answer that it is, and that the distinction can be made not only about Islam but about associated Islamic practices: it is about how and why they are formed, constructed and revived. I suggest there is one Islam but that

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<sup>9</sup> An architect, Tokhtakhodjaeva is feminist activist. She has also published a few books on women's lives in Uzbekistan and founded one of the first non-governmental organisations in the country, the 'Women's Resource Centre' in Tashkent.

it is embedded in the cultural, regional context of each Muslim society and that the study of Islam requires the study of Muslims: how they interpret their sacred texts, perform their religious practices and incorporate their faith into their everyday lives.

My thesis explores the transformation of the religious and social life of Uzbek women in the post-Soviet period. My case study draws together ethnographic material gathered in neighbourhoods of Tashkent city. I discuss how women fashion themselves as Muslim and practise their everyday life in an Islamic way while different forces and institutions continuously change and construct their religiosity. I also argue that Uzbek women use their ritual network to communicate with each other, negotiate distinctions in status, strengthen their positions, find brides or grooms for their children, and share their joy and solve their problems together.

I do not suggest that after independence there was a big Islamic women's movement in Tashkent or that all life-cycle practices became religious. But I argue that there is a big shift in people's religious life, there is an interest among women on learning Islam, people developed Islamic understanding/knowledge and individuals choose to negotiate their new social reality. I discuss women's choices and negotiations around Islamic rituals, for example their debates about being a real Muslim or a moderate Muslim; European-style weddings or Islamic weddings; putting on *hijab* or not. Furthermore, I discuss Uzbek piety, Islamic weddings and fashion trends and talk about different interpretations of ritual: Islamic, traditional, modern, authentic and Uzbek. Women continuously engage in the social and material world by experiencing change in their everyday

lives. I argue that women are agents of their lives, and at the same time they 'cope' with broad societal transformations.

## **CHAPTER 3: ISLAM**

### **Introduction**

This chapter investigates the transformation of Uzbek women's religious life under three different political and cultural systems (pre-Soviet/traditional, Soviet and post-Soviet) and explains the structure and meaning of women's practices in each period. As we know from the existing literature (Chatterjee 1995, Ong 1995, N. Yuval-Davis 1997, Navaro-Yashin 2002) building new images of women, creating new female identities, and controlling women and their sexuality are central to the process of nation-building. Therefore, in this chapter I discuss how these three political systems used the image of women in the nation-building process, and the implications for Uzbek women's everyday lives in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods.

Although the Soviet state (1917-1991) claimed to have 'emancipated' Central Asian women by providing them with education, work, social and medical care and a place in public life, that Soviet influence did not extend to Uzbek women's private lives, where practising Islamic/traditional life-cycle ritual, in particular as related to dress-codes and gender segregation, continued to be the norm. These changes brought about during the Soviet period were reversed after independence in 1991.

This chapter investigates women's religious lives by using the example of Islamic practices and women's life stories, and demonstrates the continuity of women's role as keepers of religious practices under Soviet and post-Soviet rule. The chapter contains three parts. Part One provides a historical outline of Islam in Uzbekistan in the Tsarist and Soviet periods (1868-1991). Part Two addresses Islamic practices and society in Uzbe-

kistan after independence in 1991, and Part Three explores the anthropology of ‘Islamic’ and ‘un-Islamic’ practices in Uzbekistan.

### 3.1. PART ONE - Historical Background

When the Soviet State created Uzbekistan<sup>10</sup> as a Central Asian<sup>11</sup> republic in 1924, its territory had been a centre of Islam in the region for a thousand years, peaking between the tenth and fourteenth centuries and having declined somewhat in importance since then.

Islam was introduced to Central Asia during the 7th century (Shoniyazov 2001) and Uzbek people are predominantly Sunni Muslims of the *Hanafi madhab* (juridical school). In medieval times there were many *madrasa* (colleges), Bukara and Samarkand being the most famous, with numerous students coming to study from different parts of the Muslim world. Religious scholars known throughout the Islamic world such as Imam Bukhari, At-Termithi and As-Samarqandi lived in this land. Sufi *tariqats* (schools of Sufism) developed locally, such as the *Naqshbandi* and the *Yassaviy*. It was home to the scientists Abu Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna), Beruniy and Ulugbek, world-famous for their works on medicine, astronomy, maths, etc. From 800 to 1200 the sciences, mathematics, medicine, law, art and Islamic learning<sup>12</sup> studied in Central Asia were the most advanced of the ‘civilised’ world. In brief, the region was a cradle of Islamic knowled-

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<sup>10</sup> For national delimitation of Uzbekistan see Akiner, 1983, 273-274

<sup>11</sup> Central Asia consists of five former Soviet Union countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

<sup>12</sup> Frederick Starr’s (2013) *Lost Enlightenment* discusses the period further.

ge, and Islam took root in the region and in the lives of its people. Every stage of life was regulated by Islam: from the *azan* (the call of the imam into a newborn's ears), to the *nikoh*<sup>13</sup> (marriage) to the *janoza* prayer performed over the dead body, the Uzbek life-cycle was saturated in Islamic practice and belief.

### **3.1.1. *Tsarist Turkestan, 1867-1918***

The Russian Tsarist Empire occupied Turkestan<sup>14</sup> in 1867, and 'Central Asia became a raw-material producing periphery to an empire' (Kamp 2006, 25). Pre-Soviet Russian researchers such as Likoshin, Bartold, Ostroumov, Mayev, Nalivkin and Ivanov researched Islam and the everyday life of Central Asians and published many articles about the life of indigenous people in local newspapers. The wife and husband team, the Nalivkins (1886), did valuable research among the people of the Fergana Valley and while working in the Tashkent State archive I observed many historical documents describing local people's lives. However the pre-Soviet history of Uzbekistan has not been researched in detail. Most of the research carried out during this period was undertaken by the Tsarist Russian administration and it served the political interests of the Russian Empire. Although these studies were biased they nonetheless provide important insight into people's social, cultural and economic life in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

During this period, Uzbek families were mainly extended, and based on gender segregation, kinship relations and age hierarchy, and these extended family networks and community networks were powerful social forces. Local society was traditional and conser-

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<sup>13</sup> *Nikoh* (Uz.) - *nikah* (Ar.) - Islamic marriage contract

<sup>14</sup> For more information on occupation of Turkestan see Akiner, 1983, 271-272



vatively Islamic. In accordance with sharia law women held a subordinate position in the family and society. Outside the home a woman covered her body with a *paranji* (a heavy cotton veil traditionally worn by women in Central Asia) and a *chachvon* (a veil made from horse-hair to cover the face, placed under the *paranji*). Girls covered their head from around the age of nine, at which time their marriage was usually arranged (Nalivkin, 1886). It was possible for a man to marry up to four wives, and although early marriage was prohibited by the Russian Empire,<sup>15</sup> local newspapers reported that girls could be married at as early as ten to twelve years old, that their marriage was arranged against their will, that most of the time they were given to much older men and that some committed suicide (Pesin, 1971). However, the Tsarist period also saw the birth of the *Jadid* (new, modern) movement of educated Uzbek Islamic modernists and *Jadids* (members/leaders of the movement) started calling for reform in family life to improve education, people's lives and politics (for more discussion of *Jadids* see Alimova 1989, Khalid 1998, 2007, Kamp 2006, Agzamhodjaev 2006). This movement continued into the early Soviet period.

### **3.1.2. *Islam in Soviet Central Asia (1918-1991)***

Tsarist Russia regarded Islam as an alien body but did not interfere in local practices, but the Soviet state was determined to uproot it entirely, and replace it with Bolshevism.

The Soviet occupation of Turkestan started in 1917 and by 1924 the territory which is now the Republic of Uzbekistan was under Bolshevik control, becoming the Uzbekistan

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<sup>15</sup> The citizen's law, book 10, part 1, chapter 3 says that that boys are not allowed to marry before the age of eighteen and girls are not allowed to marry before the age of sixteen. Chapter 91 of the same law states that these provisions related to all Muslims and Jews living in the Russian Empire.

Soviet Republic. By 1917, the *Jadids* had developed into a strong movement and were attempting to shape the Uzbeks as citizens of a progressive nation. They debated social problems including education, women's status, early marriages and necessary changes to life-cycle practices and celebrations. They suggested turning women into 'agents of morality' by educating them in a religious and modernist way so that women could then educate and instruct children, and organise everyday life. As Khalid (1998) argued, the ideas of *Jadid* were connected to those of the larger Islamic world. National movements in Turkey (1908) and Iran (1905-1911) empowered and gave *Jadids* hope. Their idea was to create an autonomous nation (*millat*) free from Tsarist colonisation (Agzamhodjaev 2006).

Unwilling to exterminate the entire Uzbek intelligencia until they had penetrated society and weaned the 'proletariat' from its feudal ways, the Soviets enlisted the *Jadids* as allies during the first years of their rule. After they had sufficiently strengthened their position, however, the *Jadid* dream of an autonomous Turkestan became too much of a threat and the Communists prosecuted most *Jadids*, either imprisoning them or sending them to Siberia.

Although Soviet rule conferred some benefits on Uzbeks, their religious freedom and Islamic consciousness were under constant ferocious attack. There are different opinions among scholars about Uzbeks' life under the Soviet regime. Some have argued that Soviet rule was an occupation while others argue it was liberation.

Shahrani (1994, 143) argued that although ‘the Soviet conquest of the region was justified on Marxist-Leninist revolutionary grounds’, the Russian Bolsheviks used the power of the Soviet state for ‘revolutionary but colonial objectives’, which included the systematic destruction of Islam and the replacement of ideology by scientific atheism to Islam. There has been a heated debate about the Soviet occupation of Uzbekistan, with some scholars arguing that it was an occupation and others claiming it was liberation.

Shirin Akiner has distinguished within this debate.

two mutually contradictory, mythologizing projects: that of the Soviet activists, who used it to promote a negative image of traditional society: and that of anti- and post-Soviet nationalists, who created from it an idealised image of a ‘golden age’, uncorrupted by Europeanising/Russifying influences, and hence an inspiration, if not a model, for the future development of the region (1997, 265).

During the first part of the Soviet period, thousands of Muslim clerics and Sheikhs were killed, Islamic institutions and mosques closed and religious practices were banned. An anti-Islamic campaign saw the replacement of the Arabic alphabet by the Latin alphabet in 1929, which was itself replaced with the Cyrillic alphabet in 1939. Religious and other books written in Arabic were destroyed. Tokhtakhodjaeva (1995, 48) has argued that the Soviet anti-Islamic campaign was the ‘erosion of traditional’ knowledge and was carried out deliberately to cut off future Uzbek generations from their national heritage, local culture and religious literature. During an interview in 1991, President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan argued that the crisis facing Uzbekistan ‘is not economic but moral,’ and ‘the destruction of age-old moral principles for ideological reasons will be far more difficult to overcome than the chaos in the economy’ (quoted in Shahrani, 1994, 143). Soviet identity-building required the changing of a nation’s religious beliefs in order to transform its political beliefs and people’s everyday life. Within the Soviet experience of social and political change, and identity-building process, women’s reli-

gious lives in particular informed national identity, hence the particular attention to the female experience of Islam.

### 3.1.3. *The de-veiling campaign (Hujum)*

The female dress code as a marker of a woman's belief and identity was targeted by the state, and been subject to change, during both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. The most powerful example of the Soviet campaign to extirpate Islam from Uzbekistan was the *hujum* (de-veiling campaign) which started in 1926 and continued into the 1930s. Its aim was to 'free' Central Asian women from their *paranji* (veil) and thus transform their way of life. The Soviets viewed the veil as an expression of an 'illiterate', 'regressive', 'backward' and 'traditional' way of life.

There is an ongoing argument among scholars about the impact of the *hujum* (Alimova 1991, Marsell 1974, Northrop 2004, Akiner 1997, Kamp 2006). Akiner (1997, 271) argues that 'for Russians, the success of the *hujum* was an ideological victory, yet for the Central Asians, it was a defeat and brutal rape: the honour and dignity of the community was suddenly and monstrously violated.' Tokhtakhodjaeva (1995, 48) argues that in reality *hujum* was an offence against Islam and a strategy to transform women into 'hard-working, patient and skilful workers'. Habiba Fathi (2007) also sees the campaign primarily as a Soviet attack on Islam and the 'archaisms' of the past.

Gregory Massell (1974) and Douglas Northrop (2004) have both discussed women's agency within the *hujum*, separately reaching the conclusion that the Communist Party emancipated Central Asian women in order to turn them into supporters of the state, and

the whole campaign was organised against the wishes of women. However Kamp (2006), quoting Shoshana Keller (2001), argued that women were ‘trapped between the state and society’ (12) and saw Uzbeks not as objects of Russian colonialism, but as primary actors in the multisided struggle in which ‘women became symbols for both modernist transformation and for tradition’. I argue that *hujum* was indeed a part of the Soviet fight against Islam, of which *paranji* was an important symbol and identity marker, and agree with Kamp that Central Asian women had to cope with pressure from both state and society.

On February 14, 1937, the Constitution of Uzbek SSR (Soviet Socialist Republic) was adopted. Point 212 of the Constitution noted that men and women had the same rights, stating that any obstacles to the emancipation of women, such as the marriage of young girls or *qalyn* - (bride price), and any hindrance to women’s education, participation in work or attendance at state activities would be prosecuted (Lobacheva, 1975). The *zhenotdel* (the Communist Party's Women's Department) and *mahallas* were mobilised to participate in the process of women’s emancipation. This was a triumph of the Soviet identity-building process.

#### **3.1.4. State-created ceremonies**

In classical Marxist theory, religion was the ‘opium of the masses.’ One way for the Communist Party to wean people from their addiction to Islam was to replace ‘old’ and ‘backward’ religious holidays with ‘new’ and ‘progressive’ Soviet ones (Tashbaeva 1989, Suhareva 1950, 1955, Lobacheva 1975, Snesev 1975, 1978). During the Soviet period, therefore, two religions ran side by side: while the first, Communism, regulated

official relations, the second, Islam, continued to regulate informal relations amongst people.

In Uzbekistan, the Institute of Cultural Studies (*Davlat Madaniyat Instituti*), five special cultural colleges (*Madaniy Oqartuv*) and many cultural-entertainment institutions such as clubs, museums, theatres, and cinemas (Qoraboev, 1986) were built as focal points for the new State-sponsored social activities. Special state institutions created plans for each year, with new Soviet practices and celebrations, to be conducted in different clubs and parks across the country. People celebrated

- 31 December - New Year's Eve
- 23 February – the Day of the Soviet Army
- 8 March – International Women's Day
- 1 May – Day of Workers and Peasants
- 9 May – Day of Victory
- and more than twenty-five other newly-created holidays (Qoraboev, 1986; Lobacheva 1975).

Honouring mothers, receiving a first passport, graduation from school and university, jubilees, conscription into the Soviet military and becoming a state worker or cotton picker were also occasions for the new celebrations. All these practices were created to celebrate the Soviet state and induce people to adopt a new Soviet way of life. Suhareva (1955) said that celebrating a birthday was a new practice, and was adopted by the Central Asians. If these campaigns are a mark of the absolute Soviet determination to replace 'traditional' with 'progressive' rituals, they also demonstrate what an enormous

task this was: all life-cycle practices were connected with Islam and women were the keepers of these practices, with their whole life constructed around them. Soviet rule would never succeed completely in detaching women from practices and rituals central to their lives and those of their families and communities.

### **3.1.5. *Islamic practice and policy change***

Religious observance was one of the principal targets of the new Soviet ceremonies, and the wider Soviet campaign to change national identity. The Soviet state banned Islamic practices and life-cycle rituals such as fasting, polygamy, bride wealth (*kalym*), circumcision, religious marriage (*nikoh*) and funeral prayers (*janoza*). Party members could not attend their parent's funeral under pain of expulsion and participating in any religious practice could cost a Communist Party member his or her Party membership (Arifkhanova, 2006; Nasrutdinov, 1996; Poliakov 1992) and thus ban him or her from practising a profession or accessing university education. Nonetheless, means were found within the family and the community to continue some of these traditions. Circumcision, also banned by the Soviets, was carried out under different names; usually the occasion was called a 'birthday party'. Religious marriage (*nikoh*) and funeral prayer (*janoza*) were also practiced discreetly. During my visit to the archive<sup>16</sup> (reading documents dated 1959, 1963, 1965, 1969, 1974, 1976, 1977, and 1984) I learnt that every year people continued to celebrate the holidays of the sacrificial festival - *Kurbon Hait* (Uz.) (*Eid-al-Adha*, Ar.) and the holy month of fasting - *Ramazon Hait* (Uz.) (*Eid-ul-*

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<sup>16</sup> ЦГА УзССР, фонд 2456, ОП 1, Д 691, Л 74; ЦГА УзССР, фонд 2456, ОП 1, Д 589, Л 134; ЦГА УзССР, фонд 2456, ОП 1, Д 572, Л. 94; ЦГА УзССР, фонд 2456, ОП 1, Д 549, Л 50; ЦГА УзССР, фонд 2456, ОП 1, Д 549, Л 42; ЦГА УзССР, фонд 2456, ОП 1, Д 290, Д 493, Л 11, Л 86;

*Fitr*, Ar.), visited local mosques and performed *Eid* prayers. Archive documents also illustrate that ‘people continuously asked permission from state officials to build mosques and the state officials kept refusing, but that ‘they built a mosque without permission’ and ‘the state kept closing the mosques or demolishing them.’<sup>17</sup> During the Soviet period state officials gathered information about the number of people attending mosques and fasting (against which they put out educational propaganda), the number of sheep sacrificed and the various forms of ceremony, holiday and practices performed.

Despite the anti-religious campaign of the Soviet state, therefore, a significant number of people continued performing religious practices and life-cycle rituals at home and in their *mahallas* (Abashin 2006, Snesev 1957 and Lobacheva 1975). Although the Soviet state could control the traditional and cultural practices of Uzbeks in public life, in private life people continued living in the traditional Islamic way. In some parts of Uzbekistan, especially in rural areas, gender segregation continued. Suhareva (1955) confirmed that although men and women mixed at work and in public places, they were segregated in private life, in the *mahalla* and at gatherings such as parties. My fieldwork revealed that during all life-cycle practices connected with Islam, women follow an Islamically (and nationally) appropriate dress code: at funerals I found it was almost obligatory for guests to cover their heads, and for household members to be fully covered; I found that brides, too, were fully covered (especially during the *nikoh* (religious marriage), and on the way to the groom’s house). My own observations, therefore, support Suhareva’s argument that the Soviets never succeeded in fully changing practices

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<sup>17</sup> ЦГА УзССР, фонд 2456, ОП 1, Д 220, Л 121; ЦГА УзССР, фонд 2456, ОП 1, Д 290, Л 8; ЦГА УзССР, фонд 2456, ОП 1, Д 174, Л 3; ЦГА УзССР, фонд 2456, ОП 1, Д 142, Л 5; ЦГА УзССР, фонд 2456, ОП 1, Д 220, Л 169; ЦГА УзССР, фонд 2456, ОП 1, Д 498, Л 164; ЦГА УзССР, фонд 2456, ОП 1, Д 220, Л 130;



requiring segregation and dress code. Women, especially, retained their Uzbek and Muslim identity throughout the Soviet period, as demonstrated by the organisation and practice of the life-cycle rituals described later in this thesis.

The religious rituals and dress code of women was under attack from the Soviet state, which banned religious practices and forced women to abandon the veil on the pretext of emancipation (Alimova 1991, Kamp 2006). The Soviet aim was that Communism would replace all other religions and beliefs, and the practices, rituals, dress codes, holidays, foods and everything else connected with those beliefs had to be eliminated. The main reason for forcing women to abandon the veil was, therefore, to weaken their attachment to Islam, and the reasons officially adduced - emancipation, encouraging women to enter public life, creating more workers, etc. - were secondary.

Lobachova (1975) and Snesev (1975, 1978) argued that although religious rituals were practised during the Soviet period, they gradually lost their religious meaning under constant Soviet criticism and a relentless pressure to turn from a belief in Islam to one in Communism. Approaching the data from a different point of view, however, Yemelianova (2010) has argued the Soviet state 'pushed Islam underground, undermined its intellectual component and exacerbated its 'folk' ritualistic characteristics' (214), thus not so much weakening it, as simply changing certain aspects of it.

Although the Soviet campaign against Islam never ceased entirely, the latter half of the twentieth century saw a decrease in the repression of religious observance. The outbreak

of the Second World War was particularly important: the state needed support from all its citizens. Therefore, the Central Asian Muslim Religious Board, SADUM (*Sredne-Aziatskoe Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musulman*) was established in Tashkent in 1943. There was no reversion to heavy religious repression after the war, and in 1971 the Tashkent Islamic Institute (named after Imam Al-Bukhari) was allowed to open. During Gorbachev's leadership (1980-1986), at the height of perestroika,<sup>18</sup> Muslims of Uzbekistan started practising Islam openly, by performing pilgrimage (*hajj*), life-cycle rituals (*azan, nikoh, janaza, etc.*) and celebrating religious (Eid) holidays. These changes had a big impact on women's lives, as women gained more freedom to organise their life-cycle rituals and other religious practices.

### **3.2. PART TWO - Islam in Uzbekistan after independence in 1991**

When the Soviet empire fell apart, each of the newly independent countries had to re-discover their identity, whilst simultaneously finding their places in a world which had changed around them, not least in matters of religion. On 8 December 1992 the Uzbek state adopted a new constitution which guaranteed 'freedom of conscience' and 'the right to profess or not to profess any religion.'<sup>19</sup> This section investigates the transformation in religious practice since independence with a focus upon Islamic themes: *hi-jab, otins*, state decrees and religious *fatwas*.

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<sup>18</sup> *Perestroika* - political movement for reformation in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union starting in 1986.

<sup>19</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 1992, mode 31.

### 3.2.1. *Identity formation*

The process of identity formation under the newly independent regime involved not only changing the names of the streets and talking about great people from the pre-Soviet past, but trying to give new value to local traditions, giving power to *mahallas*, and celebrating *Navruz* (the Central Asian spring holiday) and *Eid* (a religious holiday), which the Uzbek Government declared official holidays. Many mosques and religious schools opened during the first few years of independence. People began openly fasting during Ramadan, praying, learning the Qur'an, and practicing sharia. More people visited Friday (*Jumah*) prayer, women covered their heads and dressed modestly, and more people conducted the pilgrimage (*hajj* and *umra*). More videos, audio cassettes, and CDs with sermons from *imams*, stories from *hadith* and *adab* (behaviour, good manners) became available and religious literature with information from different schools and from different theological schools (*madhabs*) flowed into Uzbekistan. Mass media, including newspapers, radio and television programmes, made a significant contribution to the revival of traditional Uzbek practices and Islamic rituals. As a majority of people returned to their previous cultural and religious values, life-cycle ceremonies underwent significant changes.

Building a new image of women became a central element of the nation-building process and Uzbek 'values' and nationalist discourse played a role here. For instance, the Uzbek government attempted through the mass media, in particular television, to develop a picture of the ideal Uzbek woman. Programs like '*Kelin-kiyov*'<sup>20</sup> ('Bride and

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<sup>20</sup> *Kelin-kiyov* – a bride and groom TV show where couples compete to be the 'best' couple (answering questions about how to take care of family members, cooking, sewing, etc).

Groom Show’) portray this ideal as a submissive daughter, shy bride, subordinate daughter-in-law, loving mother and hard worker.

With religious consciousness being promoted as part of the new national identity, the government had to provide means for people to learn about Islam. In 1992 the Uzbek state opened the educational department under the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan. The Tashkent Islamic Institute named after Imam Al-Bukhari, (opened in 1971) was already preparing Islamic specialists and ran a women’s group. Ten special Islamic educational institutions started operating, two of which were for women and girls. By the decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 1999 Tashkent Islamic University was established. The aim of the University was to prepare highly qualified specialists on religious knowledge. By 1992 Islamic secondary schools functioned in almost every region of the country. The school uniform for the girls was the long *hijab*, indicating the traditional nature of the version of Islam approved by the independent state. At these schools religious subjects such as the Qur’an, *hadith* (sayings of the prophet), *Tajvid* (pronunciation), *Fiqh* (the theory of Islamic law) and Arabic languages were taught alongside secular subjects.

All the changes discussed above, and in particular the awakening of religious consciousness, were suddenly changed, eight years after independence. After the Tashkent bombing of February 1999, Uzbek authorities took a harder line towards Islamic groups (as they had towards extreme Islamic dress), propagandising ‘Uzbek’ Islam and discouraging the ‘foreign’ Islam which they blamed for the introduction of terrorism.

### 3.2.2. *Hijab*

The Soviet system's policy on de-veiling Uzbek women was mirrored by an emerging movement encouraging women to take the veil after independence. The Islamic identity of Uzbek women had survived Soviet domination despite all the restrictions. After 1991, *hijab* became an important signifier of woman's faith, and her religious and national identity.

Independent Uzbekistan has been influenced by international Islam and the religious knowledge movement known as *da'wa* (call, invite non-Muslims to Islam) had already started growing. People travelling to Mecca for pilgrimage and other foreign countries had begun bringing home different ideas and different outfits for their family members. A changing women's dress code, under the influence of 'foreign', 'alien' Islam, was shaping women's religious identity although Islamic dresses were also made by local dressmakers in Uzbekistan. In some parts of the Fergana Valley, especially among elderly women, the pre-revolutionary *paranji* was revived. However these women were in the minority (Fathi 2004, Kamp 2006, Tokhtakhodjaeva 1995). The most significant change after independence was the widespread use by women of Islamic clothing adopted as a proactive way of signalling their identity as Muslims.

Among the Islamic forms of dress available to women, there are different degrees of covering the body, all of which are intended to convey a particular degree or expression of faith and national identity: people in Tashkent have begun to use different terms (*orangan* - covered, *hijoblik* - woman in *hijab*, *romollik* - woman covered in scarf or

*islomiy* - Islamic) for women dressed in an Islamic way. Explaining those terms, Shoirra Opa<sup>21</sup> (*otin*) said:

*hijablik* (women wearing *hijab*) indicates a woman covered with a long, modest, wide dress (a light coat of a plain dark colour) which does not show the body. The hands are covered with long sleeves and the head with a scarf which should be long enough to cover the woman's breast. The term *orangan* (covered) indicates women who cover their head with a scarf, which might be shorter and does not cover her breast; in addition, she might wear a long dress but this could be any dress with long sleeves. In some parts of the city covered women are also known as *romollik* or *islomiy*.

The other version of Islamic dress – the *niqab* (facial veil) - is an indicator of religious observance which was adopted under the influence of international Islam by very few women and very soon disappeared. In 2008, I was invited to the annual Qur'an competition. It was in the mosque and the participants were students from the religious schools of different regions of Uzbekistan. Among the guests I noticed a woman wearing *niqab*, which was very rare in Tashkent at that time. I asked one of the teachers why the woman was wearing *niqab*. The teacher answered, 'this woman wants to say her *taqwa* (piety) is stronger than ours!' It was a sarcastic answer but it shows that this phenomenon was not accepted even by a teacher (practicing Muslim) in an Islamic college.

Although during the first years of independence many women wore *hijab*, the number has since decreased. Women's dress again became the focus of scrutiny after the Tashkent bombings in 1999 induced the state to toughen security, and women's garments again became an indicator of their religious identity. Rohat Opa (59) was even stopped in the street by a police officer and told that she should not wear her prayer

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<sup>21</sup> Opa (sister Uz.) is an honorary suffix and is attached to a person's name. It is translated as 'older sister' and very often people add Opa on other women's names as a mark of respect.

dress (*hijab*) in a public place. These tensions were still obvious when I carried out my fieldwork in 2007 - 2011. During my interview with Muqaddas Opa (55 years old), who is in women's advisor in the *Yangi Bozor mahalla*, I asked if there were women wearing *hijab* in the *mahalla*. She answered that there had been one, but that she had sold her house and moved outside the town. Furthermore, Muqaddas Opa said,

Our *mahalla* is very active and progressive and it is one of the best *mahallas* in the city. Every day we have all types of activities for people living in this *mahalla*. I am very busy and I cannot pray five times a day. But I do my morning prayer and I don't show it to everybody. It is difficult for us to learn the Qur'an as I am not young but I have already started reading a translation of the book.

Muqaddas Opa's attitude to dress, and to the need to relegate religious observance to the private sphere, was typical of the women of her *mahalla* whom I interviewed. This *mahalla*, as I mentioned, is situated in the centre of the town, and inhabited by people from different nationalities who live their life close to a European, or modern, style. The women of this *mahalla* are not as traditional as the women of the *Eski Bog mahalla*. Muqaddas Opa wears a scarf (*romol*) and dresses in the Uzbek way as a 'uniform' when she goes to a funeral (*janoza*), but dresses in a 'modern' way when she goes to celebrations. During her work on the *mahalla* committee, Muqaddas Opa tries to follow the rules and regulations of the state and when she is among women or participating in religious practices she makes sure to wear appropriate clothes. During my fieldwork observation I noticed there were more veiled women in the *Eski Bog mahalla* than in the *Yangi Bozor mahalla*. People of the *Eski Bog mahalla* have lived in their community for a long time and their parents and grandparents knew each other. Islam is stronger in this *mahalla* as there is a base for spreading, developing and keeping its ideas, hence women of this *mahalla* were more religiously conscious.

### 3.2.3. *Female religious practitioners (Otins)*

Since independence the emergence of Islam into the public sphere has become obvious and people have started conducting religious rituals and practices openly. *Otins* (religious female practitioners) were among those who kept Islam alive under the Soviets, but they have moved centre stage in the public profession of faith by most Uzbek women. *Otins* perform religious rituals and practices; teach girls Qur'an and *hadith*, and act as consultants in their *mahallas*.

During my fieldwork I met a number of *otins* and observed their work. As with the debate on 'what is Islamic and what is not', a contentious divergence between 'traditional' and 'modern' *otins* and their followers has emerged since independence, which was reflected in my fieldwork. I met 'traditional' *otins* from the older generation who spread Islamic knowledge even when it was prohibited; and also a few 'new' group of 'Islamic reformist' *otins* who were younger, claimed to be more educated, modern and knowledgeable, and who could recite Islamic texts with perfect pronunciation. The latter *otins* took the role of preachers (*da'watchi*) to propagandise radical Islam and wanted to play a central role in the re-islamisation of the female population (Fathi 2006, 15, 2007; Tokhtakhodjaeva 1995). Most of these women had studied abroad in Turkey, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and some of them had become fanatical propagandists of radical Islam (for more discussion on radical Islam see Naumkin 2005, Yemelianova 2010, Zanka 2004). These groups of *otins* criticise the 'traditional' groups, saying that they are ignorant and practice un-Islamic practices. By the end of my fieldwork, the number of radical *otins* had decreased, and those left in the profession were no longer allowed to con-



duct religious practices. This change was brought about by state regulations which controlled *otins* by requiring them to gain official accreditation.

Among the *otins* interviewed for this thesis is Rahima Opa (72 years old), who falls into the category of traditional *otins*, is from the *Eski Bog mahalla*, worked as a doctor for thirty-five years and still does a consulting job once a week. Her development as an *otin* is revealing of Uzbek women's changing attitudes towards a public profession of their faith. Her interview reveals the significance of the debate between the two groups of *otins* in creating a new religious identity.

She said that she had always wanted to read Qur'an but only did so in her sixties (post-independence) when she became very sick (the main reason for her search for Islamic knowledge was freedom of religion and her illness). She found a teacher who advised her to start reading the Qur'an and later became an *otin*. She started going to small gatherings, and now women of the *mahalla* invite her to all their gatherings. People invite her when someone dies, to help organise a wedding, for *mavlud* (to honour the birth of the Prophet Muhammad) and for other gatherings. Rahima Opa told me a story about an *otin* who came to a funeral (*jamoza*) in her *mahalla* and asked the women to stop crying and eating at the funeral ceremony. The *otin* said eating in the house of deceased is not from Islam (*Islomdanmas*): 'if you are crying it means you are going against the will of God (for more details see Chapter 6; 6.3.2).' Rahima Opa did not agree with the *otin* and said,

The neighbours bring food to the house of the deceased; people come to help and support the family and some of them stay for long hours and they need to eat. It is not a feast but people need to eat there. Stopping people serving food for visitors is not right. Our parents and their parents had these customs and why should we abandon them. These new

trained young *otins* have new ideas, they are *Wahhabi* (the group of people promoting *Wahhabi* ideas) and most people do not agree with what they say.

Rahima Opa's story about the debate over 'eating or not eating during the funeral practices' shows competition between 'traditional' and 'reformist' *otins*. I asked Rahima Opa if she conducts the rituals of *mavlud* (to honour the birth of the Prophet Muhammad), *Buviseshanba* and *Mushkulkushod* (cult of female saints), acts criticised by a group of 'Islamic reformist' *otins*. She said her great-grandmothers conducted all these practices and they are not harmful. Nowadays women perform these rituals less and she performs them only when someone asks her. She consulted the books of Sheikh Mohammad Sodiq and Mohammad Yusuf about *mavlud*, which say that the celebration is permissible.

#### **3.2.4. *Changes in Muslim self-identification during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods***

In the process of my fieldwork I observed Uzbek Muslim women and discussed Islamic self-identification: what it has meant for an Uzbek women to be Muslim during both Soviet and post-Soviet periods, and what impact state control and outside influences have had. Women who recalled the Soviet period remembered finding private places and spaces to perform Islamic prayers, rituals and practices openly or discreetly. My grandmother, for example (see the preface), was performing morning prayer in the hospital one day in 1975 when a nurse entered the room. Shocked to see my grandmother praying, the nurse and asked her not to pray, because she might be told off by doctors. My grandmother's humorous reply to the nurse was her way to get out of the situation.

Rahima Opa's experience demonstrates the Soviet state's policy of forcing religion underground; the fact that clandestine religion was and is largely in the hands of women; and the fact that there was always a search for religious knowledge among people. Rahima Opa remembered her father-in-law, a member of the Communist Party, used to come home from work about midday, wash himself and go to the attic (*bolahona*) for a rest. He always asked her not to disturb him for a while even if somebody phoned. After a few years she realised that he used to pray there. He would keep his room locked and only sometimes open it for her to clean. She remembered seeing a prayer carpet (*jaynamoz*) there, but she never asked any questions.

Some social scientists and historians have concluded that Islam in Uzbekistan should be understood in cultural rather than religious terms and as an element of secular national identity. They have come to this conclusion because most of the Muslim population of Uzbekistan do not have knowledge of Islam and do not follow even the most basic rituals (Khalid 2003, Ro'i 1995, Shahrani 1994). Abashin (2000, 114) shared his experience of traditional Islam in Uzbekistan. He told the story of Turdiniso-kampir, an old, kind woman, who taught him testimony of faith (*shahada*). Abashin said that, for Turdiniso-kampir, it was not so important to convert one more man into Islam but to help him by teaching *shahada* to get rid of his bad deeds, to heal him, and to do good deed (*savob*). Abashin noted 'I felt that Turdiniso-kampir and whole Islam saw me not as a *kafir* (disbeliever) but as an ordinary human being who has weaknesses. Further he said this form of Islam did not reject me, contrary it wanted to help me.'

Although some groups of scholars have claimed Islam in Uzbekistan is more traditional and cultural, I argue that there is a movement of people searching for Islamic knowledge and piety. Especially after independence some people have changed their lives according to Islamic requirements, incorporating Islam rituals such as Islamic weddings, observing gender segregation at gatherings and parties; diet and dress code; visiting mosques and keeping fasts. In my fieldwork I observed that some women have changed their entire life style: attending Qur'an lessons; studying Arabic language; participating/contributing in community life by doing *ehsan* (charity) and helping neighbours. At the same time there are still Muslim women keeping to the traditional ways. Due to the sensitivity of the research/fieldwork (connected with Islam) and the lack of data (people's faith, number of practices conducted, number of *otins* or *imams* accredited, attendance at mosque, etc.) available on Islam in the press/literatura/media etc, it is difficult to say how many people are becoming more knowledgeable or pious, and how many remain wedded to traditional ritual. However, my fieldwork reveals a significant interest in Islam, although sometimes hidden, which has encouraged a movement towards the search for Islamic knowledge among women.

### **3.2.5.            *Decrees, fatwas and sermons***

The Central Asian Muslim Religious Board (SADUM, *Sredne-Aziatskoe Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musul'man*, Ru.) was established in 1943 during the Second World War. Its purpose was to allow the Soviet state to control Soviet Muslims lives, and all SADUM *fatwas* were issued under Soviet slogans. Babadjanov (2002) has argued that SADUM's *fatwas* were parallel to the decrees of the Soviet state and were issued at the Soviet state's request.

During the Soviet period SADUM issued a number of *fatwas* criticising un-Islamic (or pre-Islamic) practices, most of which referred to life-cycle rituals such as weddings, circumcision (*sunnat*) and the ‘feast of the cradle’ (*beshik to’y*). A number of trips were organised by SADUM to research the sacred sites in different regions of Uzbekistan, after observation of which *fatwas* were issued criticising people visiting them as un-Islamic, and calling them ‘idolatry’ and ‘polytheism’ (*shirk*) (Babadjanov, 2001).

Since independence in 1991, Uzbekistan’s branch of SADUM was renamed the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan. Religion is still controlled by the state and the government-supported institution the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, which issues *fatwas*, publishes newspapers, journals and books on Islam, and enables communication between the state and the Uzbek people. Babadjanov (2001) has argued that although Soviet and post-Soviet governments have officially declared religion to be separate from the state, in practice they were (and are) state institutions, regulated first by SADUM and now by the Muslim Board.

After independence, the state issued a number of decrees to regulate the religious and ceremonial life of Uzbek people. This process was followed by a number of *fatwas* issued by the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan in order to control the everyday life of Muslims. These *fatwas* were issued to justify some practices determined to be Islamic and, equally, to eliminate others which are not mentioned in sharia, which were described as un-Islamic. The *fatwa* on ‘how to express condolences to families holding funerals and how to conduct some other ceremonies’ states that in sharia mourning is permissible for

three days; that people should not cook in the household of the deceased; and they should not lay the table (*dasturhon*) and feed visitors. Furthermore the *fatwa* condemned people for conducting too many funeral practices, and called these practices un-Islamic. The practices mentioned were: 1) people wasting food and conducting practices with pomposity (to show off or gain respect, or in a spirit of competition, etc); 2) if someone arranges this practice as a sign of reciprocity - just because they have been invited and eaten in other people's houses; 3) incurring debt for conducting these practices. This *fatwa* is an example of how funeral practices are regulated by the state and the Muslim Board.

Another *fatwa* issued by the Muslim Board on 'visiting graveyards' continued the work of SADUM, which tried to eliminate 'un-Islamic' practices during the Soviet period. The *fatwa* declared that visiting graves is *sunnat*; it instructed people how to behave while visiting graveyards; states that when visiting graves of saints (*avliyo*) people should not ask help from the saint, but from Allah; and that they should 'not light candles, kiss stones, walk on top of the graves, or pray (*namoz*) in front of the graves.'<sup>22</sup>

The *fatwas* of the Muslim Board are issued to regulate different practices and people's everyday life. The Muslim Board states *imams* should give sermons on how to organise weddings, *aqiqa*, funerals and other ceremonies; the activists and *oqsoqols* (elders) of all *mahallas* should help to organise these events without wasting money and food, and take into consideration the financial situation of every family. Further, it said *imams* should explain how charity for the elderly, orphans and schools works. Money wasters

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<sup>22</sup> Source: The Chairman of the Uzbekistan Muslim Board, *mufti* Abdurashid Qori Bahromov, Tashkent, 4 July, 2000 year.

were criticised as ‘arrogant, showing off’ (*riyokorlik*), and ‘not respecting national traditions and not following religious instructions.’ In order to make a working day efficient another *fatwa* was issued by the authorities that changed the timing of the *nahor osh* (morning *osh* - national dish cooked from rice) ceremony from 5 or 6 am to 7 to 8 am (or even lunch time). The *fatwa* also suggested changes in women’s ceremonies (for details see the Chapter 4). Furthermore, the Uzbekistan Muslim Board ordered that religious ceremonies should be conducted only by the local official *imam*.<sup>23</sup> The above *fatwas* illustrate that the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan is the controlling body of people’s ritual lives; that all actions and functions are regulated in detail; and that religious ceremonies must be conducted only by officially appointed *imams*, just as *otins* have to obtain their accreditation certificate from the state.

### **3.3. PART THREE - The Anthropology of ‘Islamic’ and ‘un-Islamic’ practices**

Part three discusses Islam and the ‘folk’ religion which survived the Soviet and post-Soviet periods in spite of attempts by the state and religious bodies to eliminate it. It describes the continuity of these practices, women’s role as their keepers in both periods, and the importance of these practices in women’s lives. I will also discuss the interpretation of these practices by the state and religious institutions, and among women.

The anthropological debate on Islam illuminates how Islamic practices and diverse interpretations of them have been presented (Chapter 2). Scholars have tried to categorise

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<sup>23</sup> Source: Uzbekistan Muslim Board, Chairman (*oliy haiat raisi*) *mufti* Abdurashid Qori Bahromov, 28, December, Tashkent

Islam into a 'big and little tradition', 'parallel Islam' 'official' and 'un-official' Islam, 'formal' and 'informal' and 'authentic' or 'folk' Islam. Anthropologists have debated what constitutes 'correct' Islam and how to study Islam; and how to define Muslims, people living under Islam, and those practising Islamic rituals.

### **3.3.1. *Defining/researching Islam during the Soviet period***

The practices associated with witchcraft, fortune-telling, animism, fetishism and shrine devotion have a long history in Central Asia. Some Soviet ethnographers claimed these practices survived from pre-Islamic religions and existed parallel to Islam (Suhareva 1975, Snesev 1957). Mirsalihov (1972) mentioned that in the pre-Soviet period almost every village had a *bahshi* (shaman) and people believed in bad and good spirits. During the Soviet period, although Islam was banned, folk religion existed, practised and kept by women, who continue practising it today. Basilov, Snesev, Suhareva, Karmisheva, Lobacheva and Andreev carried out extended research on Islam, Islamic practices and beliefs including animism, magic, the cult of ancestors and nature and the shrine devotion and shamans which are connected with the everyday life of women. This research provided a vast amount of information on the everyday life of Uzbek women.

The practices connected with spirits and healing are very similar to shamanism, and Suhareva (1955) provided detailed fieldwork observation of the séance of a *bahshi*. Early research into shamanism (*saman*, *shaman* is a Tungus word meaning excited, frenzied man) was carried out by Tokarev (1986). He explained that shamanism existed in Siberia prior to Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam and the aim of the shamanic séance is



to treat an ill person, to help people to find their lost livestock or to bring good luck when starting a job. This is similar to the work of the Uzbek *bahshi* and *tabib* (healers).

In his extended research in the region of Khoresm, Uzbekistan, Snesev (1957) discussed practices conducted by women similar to shamanism. Women called shamans when someone was ill or they had family troubles. During the practices, shamans might sacrifice an animal for spirits, or use the drum (*dombra*), fire or knives (on which they might jump barefoot). Shamans could strongly influence women. Snesev (1957, 72) called these practices vestiges of the past: 'these practices lost their meaning but they are still alive.' Snesev (1957) also argued that since over recent years Soviet scholars had kept repeating that such religious vestiges (*perejitki*) were disappearing, the research on the subject had almost stopped, which had the result of weakening the fight against them. In Snesev's view, although Islam had almost disappeared at the time he wrote, and Islamic practices (visits to mosques and religious rituals - fasting, sacrifice, etc) were decreasing, the practices originating in the pre-Islamic period still existed.

This point was supported by Suhareva (1975) who conducted similar research among the Tajik people in the neighbouring country, Tajikistan, and came out with the same findings as Snesev: that pre-Islamic practices were being incorporated into Islam. Suhareva argued that Islam and old cults (*drevniyi kulti*) influenced each other and that sufism had developed out of shamanism. She believed that Islam had attempted to eradicate shamanism but could not, and had therefore incorporated and developed shamanic ideas within Islamic belief and practice (1975).

Snesarev (1957) argued that women are keepers of the vestiges (*perejitki*) of the past and we can call these practices ‘women’s religion’. Further he stated that the reason these practices survived is because they were kept deep in the family. Although these practices were criticised throughout the Soviet period, they were not highlighted as the principal enemy of the Soviet state, which remained Islam; rather, they were regarded as ‘witchcraft’ or vestiges of ‘folk’ religion (Snesarev, 1957). Snesarev (1957) discussed his fieldwork experience, where informants (women) gave not only a detailed description of the practices but also explained their meaning and purpose. Further he stated that these observations from the field totally opposed the idea that religious vestiges (*perejitki*) had lost their meanings.

Snesarev, Suhareva, Lobaceva and Karmisheva continued their extended research into finding ‘alien’ practices which opposed Soviet ideology and worked towards eliminating them. They suggested that the reasons for women’s keeping these practices were that women were under-educated; that there was not enough cultural-education work done in the area, that historically women’s everyday life was isolated; that women were segregated, and that patriarchal-feudal family relations still existed in the areas being researched. Snesarev (1957) suggested ways to change people’s attitudes towards the patriarchal-feudal relation towards women; to support women and help them to come out of the household; and to educate young people with an atheistic education program. He also suggested that in order to isolate young people from the influence of religious practices it was important to fill their time with cultural education (fun) programmes: for them, the lack of such opportunities to have fun meant young people found it in these *toys* and *ziyafats* (feasts) instead.

### 3.3.2. *Debate among Uzbeks about ‘Islamic’ and ‘un-Islamic’ practices*

The revival of Islam in independent Uzbekistan has seen a growth in people’s interest in religious practices and practices connected with ‘folk’ Islam. First few years after independence many shrines have been revived, the séances held by fortune tellers and *tabibs* (healers) have become crowded, people burn *isiriq* (appendix 14) in the streets and ask for money, and markets have filled with colourful amulets protecting their wearers from the ‘evil eye’ (appendix 11). State officials and religious leaders continue the policy concerning the regulation of these practices which started in the Soviet period. Certain practices have been condemned and decrees and *fatwas* issued to try to regulate them.

The debate as to the categorisation of these practices as ‘Islamic’ and ‘un-Islamic’ has continued since independence. These terms are contentious and problematical: while some practices are generally agreed to be Islamic, the categorisation of others is a matter of fierce debate. I term the latter group ‘un-Islamic’ and draw on debate about their definition. The following section presents a discussion on ‘Islamic’ and ‘un-Islamic’ practices.

#### 3.3.2.1. **‘Islamic’ practices**

Religious practices were subject to debate and criticism throughout the Soviet period, and labelled as Islamic, pre-Islamic or un-Islamic. However some practices were accepted as Islamic, and after independence most hidden Islamic practices started to be con-

ducted openly. The following practices are generally accepted by Uzbeks as Islamic: *aqiqa* (practice for a newborn baby), *nikoh* (religious marriage), circumcision, *janaza* (funeral prayer), *hodayi* (sacrifice), *ehson* (charity, gift), *amri ma'ruf* (*da'wa* (call, invitation for Islam) gathering), *mavlud* (to honour the birth of the Prophet Muhammad) and *iftor* (the first meal eaten after sunset to break the fast during Ramadan). Since independence people started conducting some practices as charity in the form of cooking and inviting people, or sacrificing an animal and distributing its meat to people. These practices were gender segregated: for gatherings of men an *imam*, and for gatherings of women an *otin*, gave sermons. I will discuss religious life-cycle practices (*azan*, circumcision, *aqiqa*, *nikoh*, *janaza*) in my ethnographic chapters four, five and six (for more details on Islamic practices see appendix 2).

### **3.3.2.2. 'Un-Islamic' practices**

During my field research I observed practices such as belief in spirits (for more information on feeding spirits see appendix 13), fortune telling, healing, warding off the evil eye and the shrine devotion, which were criticised by religious institutions throughout the Soviet period and are still called un-Islamic. The practices such as fortune telling, witchcraft and *bahshi* are similar to shamanism. In Uzbekistan people performing these practices can be either gender and are called *domla* (religious cleric) or *folbin* (fortune teller) in Tashkent, and *bahshi* (shaman) or *folbin* in the Fergana Valley. These people, who seem to possess a supernatural ability, use the power of spirits and perform their work with the help of shamanic accessories such as beads (*tasbeh*), or whip (*aqamchi*), knife (*pichoq*) or drum (*dombra*). Their practices (see appendix 10 on Visiting Domla)

are very similar to shamanic practice. The fortune teller, *domla* or *bahshi* treats a person who is seeking help to, for example, cure a disease, find a good job or find a spouse.

### 3.3.2.2.1. Fortune tellers and witchcraft

During my field experience, most of the women I met still believed in witchcraft, although there are different interpretations of witches and their practices. I had a discussion with Shoirā Opa (59 years old) who is a pious woman with Islamic knowledge (from a religious family background), whose father and grandfather were famous religious clergy and who holds Qur'an lessons for girls. She presented her interpretation, which is that of the majority of religious women, as follows:

Fortune tellers are connected to *jinns* (supernatural creatures from Islamic texts). *Jinns* help fortune tellers to learn about people and what is happening around these people. Fortune tellers can influence people's health, wellbeing, success, behaviour, attitude, and relationships with other people. *Jinns* are mentioned a number of times in the Qur'an and there is also separate *sura* called *jinns*. *Jinns* can be Muslim or *kafir* (disbeliever). Muslim *jinns* will not harm people, but *kafir jinns* could. In Islam it is prohibited to contact *jinns*. It is *shirk* (polytheism) to believe fortune tellers, because they tell you about your destiny. Muslims believe that destiny (*taqdir*) is written by Allah and nobody knows it but him. It is a sin to go to fortune tellers, but I am sorry to say that some of our Muslims still visit these people because they don't know what they are doing.

Dilbar *otin* (from the *Eski Bog mahalla*) supported this view, saying, 'if you have a fortune teller in your street, and if someone asks you about her/his house and you show them the house, all your prayers for forty days will not be accepted by Allah.' However there is debate on this subject among women and some disagree with Shoirā Opa's and Dilbar *otin*'s explanations.

These women visit fortune-tellers and use their services. Rohila Opa said ‘our grandmothers used to go to fortune-tellers, what harm is there in doing *isitish* (literal translation: to warm two people to each other) to your son if he has a problem with his wife? ... start visiting a fortune teller to fix the problem between the couple!’ She continued, ‘Hadicha Opa also had a problem with her daughter’s marriage and I took her to my *domla*. After the *domla*’s seance, Hadicha Opa’s daughter is very happy with her husband.’<sup>24</sup> Some people say ‘don’t believe what the fortune teller said but don’t live (your life) without it (*folga ishonma, folsiz yurma*)’ which is a telling proverb!

The above examples from the field illustrate that women are closely involved with these practices and find support, comfort, protection and solutions for their problems. Although women do not talk openly, they share information about fortune-tellers and shamans in the family, in a small circle of friends or relatives. Once Sanobar Opa, (48 years old shop assistant, from the *Eski Bog mahalla*) who was annoyed with her neighbour, said ‘I just found a *domla* who has a very strong magic, now if she (her neighbour) messes with me again, I will show her...’ (*Men dami otkir domlani topib oldim, endi men bilan oynashib korsinchi*). It reminded me of a note I have seen on the T-shirt of a tourist in New York: ‘you don’t want to know who my lawyer is.’ Sanobar Opa said many women use these practices and, in particular, they go to a *domla*, who has strong magic (*dami otkir* - degree or quality of the practitioner).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Hadicha Opa’s daughter was almost on the edge of divorce. She came back with her child to her parent’s apartment; there she gave birth to her second child; only after the practice of *isitish* did her problems seem solved and she moved to her husband’s house.

<sup>25</sup> *Dami otkir* – during the séance the *domla* reads the *duo* (invocation, an act of supplication) and does *kuf-suf* which by literally pronouncing the word *kuf-suf* blows air on the face of patient to cure her; people believe that the breath of *domla* has magic strength

Field observations showed that women still communicate closely with healers (*tabibs*) (for more information on *tabibs* and their methods see fieldwork material appendix 9). *Tabibs* are spiritual healers and can prescribe changes in diet, herbs, oil, steam, leeches, massage, or forty days of diet and quarantine (*chilla*). Usually they combine treatment with reading chapters (*suras*) from the Qur'an. Some *tabib* claim that they have supernatural ability and their spirits (*odami*) help them to cure their patients. Similar practices were discussed by Rasanayagam (2011, 228) who observed 'the healers and their clients' changing ideas of Muslim selfhood' in Fergana Valley. During my fieldwork I met a few *tabib*. They have different methods of treatment and there is no particular system according to which we could classify them. Some women visit particular *tabibs* on the basis of recommendations from their friends or relatives. When a woman gets pregnant after treatment, the rating of the healer is naturally increased, because these newly-pregnant women will recommend them to others. By attending different *tabibs* women share their concerns and sometimes find solutions for their problems (appendix 9).

#### **3.3.2.2.2. Shrine devotion**

Shrine devotion is widespread throughout the Islamic world and in Uzbekistan it has a long history. There are many sacred sites (*ziyaratgoh*) in different parts of Uzbekistan, visited by people performing pilgrimage (*ziyarat*) to a sacred shrine/tomb (*mazar*) of a saint (*awliya*). People believe that the saints possess extraordinary power and ability, that a saint could be a mediator with God, and that through pilgrimage they can obtain blessing (*baraka*). The major sites such as Bahovuddin Naqshbandi's tomb in Bukhara,

Shahi Zinda in Samarkand, Zangi Ota in Tashkent, Hoja Yassaviy's tomb in Turkestan and others attract people from different regions of Uzbekistan.

Mirhosilov (1972) described people's visits to Zangi Ota in pre-Soviet Uzbekistan. These visits continued for one month and people sacrificed animals, cooked *halim* (a special traditional dish) and made *zikr* (chanting) during them. This process continued throughout the Soviet period despite the number of *fatwas* and state regulations which attempted to ban pre-Islamic practices (Snesarev 1957, Suhareva 1955, Tashbaeva 1989, Abramson and Karimov 2007, Mirhosilov 1972). Snesarev, supporting the state policy, argued that 'graves have very little in common with Islam and all rituals and actions in graveyards have deep roots in ancient beliefs; they have animistic ideas and elements of magic (*magicheskiye*), and are connected with the cult of nature' (1957, 70-72). Mirhosilov (1972, 22) argued that these places were maintained by Islamic authorities as shrines to increase their own influence and bring in money. As a consequence, he said, 'in spite of the fact that Islamic ideology believes in destiny (*taqdir*) and opposes shrine devotion and visiting tombs (*mazar*), sacred sites (*ziyaratgoh*) became deeply rooted in Islam.'

After independence, the state continued the regulation of the practices connected with shrine devotion. Many historical complexes such as Al - Bukhari, Go'r Emir, Shahi Zinda, Zangi Ota and other sites were renovated by state initiative as part of the national heritage. In different parts of Uzbekistan people's interest has grown in shrine devotion; they have restored and renovated some old shrines and built some new tombs, and more people have started visiting sacred sites. In most of these sites cooking and other facili-



ties have been organised for families and groups. Many women from different *mahallas* organise trips to these sites. When women visit sacred sites, they make intention (*niyat*) and sacrifice an animal (chicken, goat, sheep or cow) asking the spirit of the saint to help them, and cook food (*is chiqardi* - feeding spirits by the smell of food) (Ashurov 2007, Abramson and Karimov 2007, Snesarev 1957). This is another example of how a practice and belief maintained by women can continue even while accommodating changing external pressures.

Alongside the revival of interest in the shrine devotion, many other practices, such as lighting candles in the cemetery or kissing grave stones, also reappeared. Again, the Uzbek state and Muslim Board continued the policy started in the Soviet period. The Muslim Board issued a *fatwa* in 2000 to regulate people's visits to graveyards and tombs or shrines of saints. The *fatwa* criticised the waste and pomposity of organising expensive marble grave stones, and stated that it is forbidden in Islam to ask for help from the dead; to dedicate a prayer to a saint; and to cut up sheep in the name of the dead. The *fatwa* also stated that in Islam, worshipping a dead saint is polytheism (*shirk*). (*mufti*, Abdurashid Qori Bahromov, Tashkent, 4, 2000).

During my fieldwork I accompanied women from the *Eski Bog mahalla* to a trip to the Naqshbani tomb in Bukhara (appendix 7) and the tomb of Zangi Ota (appendix 8). Most of the women visiting these places are experiencing some difficulty, which they try to solve by worshipping the saint. My interviews and observations showed that they are attracted to these places through their hope the saints will help them, and because of the

support they get from other women in their group, the chance to share the problem with others, and the opportunity of sightseeing.

Fathi (2006, 2007) argued:

the reason why Central Asian women's religious life developed in the private sphere or around tombs was because these places provide ideal conditions for an act of faith, expressed in an emotional manner.' "Traditional Islam" is based on the world of saintliness, ancestor worship and glorifying divine love.

During my fieldwork I also learnt about the practices connected with female spirits of old ladies such as *Buvi Mushkulkishod* and *Buvi Sheshanba*. Women believed that these spirits help them to fulfil their wishes, and ease their difficulties. These practices are organised by women and performed by *otin*. Suhareva (1975,) also mentioned Uzbek women's belief in the cult of *momolar* (old ladies) and, in particular, their worshipping of the 'islamised saints' Anbar Ana and Bibi Fotima. During my fieldwork I also observed debate among *otins* about performing these practices. Some *otins* and women argue that as they date back many generations it is important to continue them. However, other *imams* and *otins* call them un-Islamic. These practices almost disappeared after independence, as have practices connected with the evil eye.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

From my field experience I argue that most of the women I met still believe in spirits, saints and witchcraft. These women visit fortune tellers and use their services. Field research shows that during the *séance*, most *domlas* mention the name of Allah, read chapters from the Qur'an; prepare amulets and recommend their patients to read certain

chapters from the Qur'an. Although some *domlas* claim that they are not fortune-tellers, they conduct practices banned in Islam. There seems to be a paradox here: although in Uzbekistan (as in other parts of the world) these practices are criticised by Islamic clergy, fortune-tellers and people performing witchcraft combine their practice with Islamic practices. This is a very extensive subject that has been discussed in previous scholarly works on Islam (Rasanayagam 2011, Louw 2007, Privatsky 2001, Snesev 1957, Suhareva 1975) and needs further investigation.

Some practices connected with spirits (*Buvi Seshanba*, *Mushkulkushod*) and the evil eye are disappearing in Tashkent. However, practices connected with witchcraft, fortune-tellers and healers are still alive. I would argue that these changes are due to the increase of people's religious consciousness. In the process of the search for religious identity, Uzbeks shape their Muslimness and choose how to be Muslim. This leads them to choose certain practices and not others.

The practices connected with witchcraft, fortune-telling and healing are usually performed by *domla*, *tabib* and *bahshi* who use during the seance Islamic attributes such as beads and the Qur'an. These elements might explain why people believe these practices are Islamic, whereas others (*Buvi Seshanba*, *Mushkulkushod*, evil eye) are disappearing because they are connected with spirits.

Hence, there is a question/paradox: these practices were criticised and kept under the strict control of the Soviet state and the Religious Board during the Soviet period, and are still under the control of the state and the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan. What is the

reason for some practices being alive and others dying out? I argue that Uzbek women have always chosen whether or not to follow decrees, *fatwas*, fashion, their faith and ways of dealing with economic hardship. I suggest that the reason for changes to these practices is the rise of people's Islamic consciousness, and the knowledge spread since the revival of Islam through sermons, media and literature. However, more extended research is needed to analyse these practices.

I would suggest there are a number of reasons that women continue practices connected with the spirits and shrine devotion. These are:

- Psychological and emotional help: these practices offer comfort and support;
- Community support: by organising these practices women get together, share meals, listen to each other, consult, learn, advise etc;
- Hope - women perform these practices in the hope of help from someone - God, spirits, *jinns* etc. Rituals are performed to please them, bribe them, feed them, etc., and they always ask for something in return.
- Continuation of tradition: these practices are being passed from mothers to daughters and sons; for girls, in particular, who repeat their mothers's practices, they are connected with memories.

## CHAPTER 4: MARRIAGE AND WEDDING PRACTICES

### Introduction

This chapter will examine practices and rituals particularly related to marriage in order to explore how the women who organise and participate in them have identified, contested or coped with the changing discourses of authority in Uzbekistan over the past seventy years, and are constructing relations between themselves, their religion and the changing society in which they live.

‘Marranci stated the importance of how Muslims ‘through discourses, practices, beliefs and actions, make Islam’ (15). He argued that ‘the starting point should be Muslims not Islam’ (15) and concluded by saying that ‘Islam exists as a ‘cognitive map in the minds’ of those who ‘feel’ Muslim’ (139). This is why I have chosen to concentrate my ethnographic research so closely on those who self-identify as Muslim, and who see that identification as lying largely in their respect for certain life-cycle rituals.

Discussing religious rituals and practices in Iran, Torab (2005) argued ...’religious rituals do more than satisfy ‘personal piety’, being also an ‘effective means for constructing and renegotiating the relations between the self, society and the transcendent.’ In her work she argued that ritual performances are very important and dynamic area of women’s live, where ‘ideas develop and where rules, symbols and discourses are contested’. In the line with her research, this chapter discusses women’s ritual life in Tashkent and the impact of these practices on women’s everyday live. Further, I discuss practices relating to weddings and the arrangement of marriages, the continuity and

change in practice and ceremony during and after Soviet rule; agents and institutions of change; and the role of women in the organisation and management of the rituals described.

Chapter 4 is structured thematically. In Part One, 'Marriage and wedding practices', I discuss different types of marriage, wedding rituals and practices, the changing significance of consumerism in marriage practices, and government regulations and attempts to control these both before and after independence. In Part Two, 'Institutions connected with wedding practices', and Part Three, 'Wedding practices', I develop these themes further, examining the physical contexts of wedding ceremonies, and investigating marriage rituals.

In this chapter I argue that women's everyday life and wedding practices kept changing in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, and that women as organisers and keepers of these practices consciously positioned themselves in relation to the changing discourses of authority.

#### **4.1. PART ONE - Marriage and wedding practices**

##### **4.1.1. *Types of Marriage***

Marriage is a complex institution and a very important part of Uzbek life. Indeed, people dream (*orzu-havas*), talk, plan, arrange and conduct not a single ceremony but a

whole range of marriage practices, and marriage is a long process. By Uzbek law, marriages must be monogamous, although in some parts of society polygamy is accepted.<sup>26</sup>

Life-cycle ceremonies have changed greatly in Uzbekistan over the ninety years under consideration in this thesis, and weddings are no exception. After all the changes which I will talk further about in this chapter, nowadays the following two types of marriages conducted in Uzbekistan:

- a) *Nikoh* (Uz.) (*nikah* Ar.)- Islamic marriage. This is practised by inviting an *imam* (religious leader) to the home. During the Soviet period it was practiced discreetly, and began to be practiced openly after independence, although it is still not an official marriage; and
- b) *ZAGS*<sup>27</sup> - (the civil registration office), conducted in the state registry office: the officially accepted marriage which was introduced by the Soviet state and continues to be practiced as an official marriage today in Uzbekistan.

Below I discuss these two types of marriages and how they changed during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. And what they reveal about how women self-identify as Muslims, and what position they take in relation to the dominant authority.

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<sup>26</sup> Polygamy is a sensitive subject and it is not easy to gather data about it in Uzbekistan. Indeed, there is scarcely any data available. However from talking to a few respondents and according to the work of Soviet ethnographers I argue that polygamy existed during the Soviet period and still exists in Uzbekistan. Although I had a few interviews with women who lived as second wives, I do not have sufficient material to talk about this subject. Further extensive research is needed on this subject.

<sup>27</sup> *ZAGS* - Ru. (*akty grazhdanskovo sostoianiye*) - Acts of civil status; civil registration was instituted after the Russian Revolution (1919).

#### 4.1.1.1. Islamic Marriage: (*Nikoh*)

It is important to realise that although every Uzbek considers him- or herself to be Muslim, some practise their faith to a greater degree than others. The word *Islomiy* - Islamic - is used to describe the community of people who are religious, modest and covered (women), and who fast and pray five times daily. Some of them have conducted *Haj* or *Umra* (pilgrimage to Mecca). I therefore use 'Islamic' to differentiate those people whose whole life is organised according to their faith from non-observant (or less observant) Muslims.

*Nikoh* is a religious ceremony and a very important part of the wedding: almost every Uzbek marriage is sealed by *nikoh*. *Nikoh* literally means 'to join', to bring couples together (Sheik Mohammad Yusuf, 2008, 317). In Tashkent it is performed by the *imam* of the neighbourhood mosque in the bride's home (for the process of *nikoh* see appendix 3).

*Nikoh* was banned by the Soviet state. As part of its campaign to stop religious practices, people identifying as Muslim and persuade them to self-identify as Soviet. However, Soviet scholarship (Suhareva 1955, 1940, Lobacheva 1975, Abramzon 1967, Snegarev 1969, Kislyakov 1959) and my own fieldwork reveals that in fact *nikoh* continued to be widely practised 'in defiance of the new authority' (echoed with Gilson's theory). As Mastura Opa (60 years old) said, 'although during the Soviet period *nikoh* was prohibited, no parents would marry their son or daughter without *nikoh*, because mar-



riage without *nikoh* would be as bad as adultery.’ The continued use of *nikoh* was confirmed by Movluda Opa (50 years old), who said:

I checked my stepdaughter’s family roots before I adopted her. You never know. Some children are born out of *nikoh* and I wouldn’t like to have a daughter born out of *nikoh*, because I would have problems finding a husband for her in the future.

In addition to the official registration required by Soviet law, therefore, people secretly conducted *nikoh*, mainly at the initiative of family elders, on the same day as the wedding celebration, and usually in the house of bride (Suhareva 1955) so the religious requirements of marriage were met. From the above data I argue that the practice of *nikoh* was always very important in Uzbek people’s lives: although the Soviet state fought against this practice it could not eradicate it. From the public arena *nikoh* moved to the private, and most of the time women made sure their daughters had *nikoh* before starting their married life. Women coped with the Soviet regulations by preparing all arrangements for the official Soviet marriage and conducting publicly-approved practices such as the *ZAGS* ceremony and main wedding party/ceremony, while practising *nikoh* discreetly.

#### **4.1.1.2. Soviet Marriage (the *ZAGS* ceremony)**

In the Soviet period, the *ZAGS* (the civil registration office) ceremony was the official registration of marriage and was celebrated one day before or on the same day as the main wedding celebration. It contained a number of Soviet innovations. The bride, for example, was usually dressed in a white wedding gown (rather than the traditional Uzbek dress) and the groom in a black suit and tie. The guests at the celebrations, mainly family members, relatives, neighbours, friends and colleagues also mostly wore Eu-

ropean dress. The bride and groom entered the hall to the Soviet style wedding march by Felix Mendelssohn. The official worker of the *ZAGS* asked if the bride and groom agreed to marry each other. After answering ‘I agree’, they would sign the marriage certificate, followed by the witnesses, usually the groom’s and bride’s best friends. The bride and the groom exchanged wedding rings – another Soviet innovation - and the official *ZAGS* worker pronounced the couple to be ‘husband and wife’ and everybody congratulated them. After the *ZAGS* registration, the bride, groom and guests went to picturesque places to take photographs, then had a party at a relative’s home or a restaurant, with music and food.

The introduction of *ZAGs* was a major part of the de-islamisation of Uzbek society. Suhareva (1955) stated that in traditional *nikoh*, the imam could ignore the bride’s and groom’s answers, whereas *ZAGs* discouraged forced marriages because officials had to check whether both individuals had actually agreed to marry. However, Arifkhanova (2002) noted that arranged marriages continued from the 1930s until as late as the 1960s, sometimes even without the couple meeting. It is possible that Suhareva and some other Soviet scholars believed an ‘ideal socialist situation’ existed because, (as I described in Chapter 3), people hid certain practices from officials.

Although there was a profound change in the discourse of authority after independence in 1991, the complex ceremonies surrounding family life were still recognised as an important way for people to re-affirm their religious and national identity. The 1992 Constitution stated that ‘the family is the primary unit of the society and shall have the right to state and societal protection’ and that ‘marriage shall be based on the willing consent

and equality of both parties<sup>28</sup>.’ Although the Family Code (1998, 10), stated that ‘a marriage arranged according to religious practices has no legal status’, both types of marriages are practiced nonetheless. In Tashkent, most marriages are still officially registered in *ZAGS*, but people have also started openly practising *nikoh* as they have other religious practices. Although it is not accepted as an *official* marriage, it has not been banned. As Abdurahim Aka, a 74-year-old male pensioner who works for the *mahalla* community, told me, ‘within Islam, marriage is obligatory to all believers. It is thus the parents’ obligation make sure their children marry.’

#### **4.1.2. *Types of wedding practices***

Wedding is a complex institution and it has been changed over the last century many times, in structure, detail and name. In order to differentiate these weddings and changes, I have divided these wedding practices into two groups:

- Islamic wedding - the old (pre-Soviet) type of wedding, which revived after independence; people also call it an ‘old’, ‘traditional’ or ‘Uzbek’ wedding; and
- European-style wedding, which was introduced by the Soviet state, and in the first years of its existence was also called a ‘new’ (*yangicha*), ‘red’ (*qizil*) or ‘Komsomol’<sup>29</sup> wedding, and later a ‘Russian’ (*Russcha*) or ‘European’ (*Evropeiskiy*) wedding.
- Below ‘European-style’ and ‘Islamic’ weddings will be discussed in details

##### **4.1.2.1. European-style Wedding**

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<sup>28</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Chapter 14, p18, 1992, “Uzbekistan”, Tashkent

<sup>29</sup> *Komsomol* – the youth organisation which used to prepare young people for the Communist Party.

The history of European-style weddings starts during the first years after the Soviet state was established in Uzbekistan. (Arifkhanova 2002, Suhareva 1955). The new types of wedding were celebrated mainly by young people who were studying, or working for the new government, and thus were more easily reached by Soviet education and propaganda. Young adult Uzbeks often had no money and some had just moved into the city from villages, so they did not have access to family-based networks which might have anchored their weddings in more 'traditional' ways, and given them the opportunity to celebrate their weddings in the old style. Their weddings were instead organised by friends and colleagues. In these new weddings, men and women celebrated on the same day in a big hall with the bride and groom sitting in the middle of the hall.

Pre-Soviet wedding rituals were criticised by the Soviet ethnographers: Suhareva (1955) argued that although '*qizil toy*' increased in numbers, these weddings only involved 'progressive' people. In her discussion of Uzbek wedding practices, Suhareva (1955) argued that some of these practices had changed their forms, some were not conducted fully, and others were merely performed as a joke, for fun. Furthermore, she described an example of an 'old, negative wedding ritual' by referring to an article from a local newspaper. This described how Komsomol member Haidarali Mirmahmudov had married according to the old wedding rituals, even wearing a turban on his head. In response, the Komsomol Committee of Kolkhoz had revoked his membership, demonstrating its disdain for these 'primitive' rituals. 'This helped to explain,' Suhareva explained (1955, 216), 'why many refused to conduct the old type of wedding celebration, and why wedding rituals connected with old forms of ideology such as magic and animism are disappearing.'

Another custom which Suhareva criticised as backward is throwing soil on the head of the bride to make her as productive as the earth. Another, taking the bride around the fire to ‘cleanse’ her with fire had not disappeared even in the 1950s. Suhareva (1955) claimed that rituals such as these might have survived, but were not taken seriously, calling them ‘ridiculous’ and ‘funny’ (*nelepiy, smeshnoy*), and arguing that young people performed them not as magic but more for fun (Suhareva and Bikjanova 1955).

The examples described above demonstrate that the Soviet state used Soviet ideology to control Uzbek wedding practices as it did other rituals; that local practices were criticised by Soviet writers and Soviet officials, and that conducting these practices could cause people to lose their job, status or freedom. Soviet TV, mass media and academia were all set to work on the process of changing these practices into ‘new’, Soviet, ‘progressive’ practices. Under this barrage of criticism and innovation, there was therefore a big shift in wedding practices, with changes to elements such as music, catering and dress.

#### **4.1.2.2. Islamic Wedding**

The second group of weddings - Islamic (*islomiy*) weddings - are also called ‘Old type’ (*Eskicha*), ‘Uzbek’ (*Uzbekcha*), and ‘Traditional’ (*Urfodat boyicha*) weddings.

Although throughout the Soviet period people gradually westernised wedding ceremonies, a different pattern evolved after independence: When self-identification as a

Muslim was allowed to leave the private sphere and, indeed, became a proud badge of national identity to be worn in public; people started practising Islam in all aspects of their life, and what came to be known as the ‘Islamic wedding’ was naturally included in this revival of religious practice. At first these weddings were only conducted by a few very religious families (Arifkhanova 2002). However, when I started my fieldwork (2007) the number of these weddings had increased, and had created a major change in some people’s lives, including the organising of celebrations, dress code, food and relations with other people. Families practising Islam became more respected and more trusted, and their status was raised in the community. I discovered that many parents and grooms preferred covered girls from Islamic families, who could read the Qur’an and practice Islam. Girls from these families were valued as religious, pious and submissive. As women from these families followed gender segregation, the weddings and other ceremonies were arranged according to their needs. Hence, women practising Islam became the driving force towards the increasing number of Islamic weddings.

During my fieldwork I visited a number of Islamic weddings. These weddings are all different and there is no one system for organising them but the following description covers elements common to most. The wedding was organised in the wedding hall (*Toyhona*), and guests, waiting staff, photographer, videographer and entertainers were all female. It was led by an *otin* (religious female practitioners) who opened the ceremony by reciting Qur’an: the *Fotiha* (Chapter 1), followed by the *Yaseen* (Chapter 36) or the *Taborak* (Chapter 67). When the bride and groom arrived at the restaurant the *otin* invited them into the hall with the old traditional wedding song *yor-yor*.<sup>30</sup> The bride and

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<sup>30</sup> *Yor-yor* - Uzbek traditional song which is usually sung during the wedding celebration, especially as the bride is entering the wedding hall (the song is about a bride and her wedding)

groom walked, accompanied by the music, to the centre of the hall and everybody stood up. The groom left the bride with her best friends so there were only women at the party.

Next, the groom's grandmother opened the ceremony by pronouncing the blessing (*duo*). The *otin* entertained everybody by telling *hadith* and real stories from people's lives, then offered speeches to friends and relatives of the bride and groom. During the wedding, female singers performed traditional, religious Uzbek and Arabic songs. The music was generally very slow but there was some dance music as well. The few technicians controlling the sound and equipment and the assisting musicians were mainly men, but they sat in the corner with their back to the hall. At the same time the groom and male guests celebrated a separate wedding in another hall.

At an Islamic wedding, most women dress in some type of *hijab* or in a long dress with sleeves, and cover their heads. This dress code is not compulsory, however, as one guest told me, 'I feel really awkward in my sleeveless dress among all these women; it seems as if I am naked among them.' Thus, women who are not covered still usually try to dress modestly. The dresses themselves may vary from traditional Uzbek to Arabic, or Pakistani and Turkish, since Islamic dresses, like other Islamic goods, can be imported from places such as Turkey, India, UAE, China and Mecca. Indeed, the range of Islamic dress available in Uzbekistan is another indication of the reach of 'foreign' Islam.

In Islamic weddings, the bride and groom's families usually practise Islam. If only one of the families is Islamic, however, the decision as to which sort of wedding will be cel-

ibrated is negotiated between them. They also negotiate the bride's ability (if the bride is Islamic) to maintain her piety (that is, to cover her head and practise her prayers) in a 'European' family, and the 'European' bride's need to adopt these practices when joining an Islamic family. These conventions were explained to me by one of my respondents (*Zamira*), whose family was not Islamic but who had married into an Islamic family. Before her wedding, both families agreed that she would cover her head, and soon after the wedding her mother also covered her head because she felt awkward to be the only uncovered woman when she visited her daughter. Another of my respondents (*Movluda's daughter*) married an Islamic man and, again, both families agreed that she would cover her head after the wedding. However, she wore a white European wedding dress for her main wedding reception (*nikoh bazmi*). My fieldwork observation showed that women organise these weddings and they apply these changes on wedding practices. Hence, they take part in these changes as they are main actors.

These changes happening in Uzbek women's life indicate a fusion of new Islamic trends with traditional ones. By negotiating with other parties women find ways to cope with everyday life and to find space for their needs. The discourse of authority has changed, but women have found that their self-identification as Muslims has not necessarily been simplified by independence. Different forms of Islam are being proposed to them, and they have to choose which to adopt and which to contest, and how best to do these things.

During the Soviet period women tried to cope with changes institutionalised by the Soviet state. Although at that period women's life in the public arena was changed by the



Soviet ideology, in the private arena (at home and in ceremonies) they kept their traditional way of life. After independence Islamic women negotiated space (for example, for gender-segregated Islamic weddings) and freedom (for praying, following Islam etc) for themselves. Women did not only practise Islam at home but they moved to the public arena and started organising Islamic weddings. These changes also affected other women who started adopting an Islamic way of life when they were driven into the community of Islamic women, which I will discuss in the following example.

Sometimes arranging an Islamic wedding ceremony can cause misunderstandings, especially if one side is not an Islamic family. For example, I attended one Islamic wedding at which two women - one *otin* and one singer - were very upset. They had been invited to the wedding to lead and entertain guests, but when they arrived in the hall of the restaurant some male guests were already seated there. Moreover there was a band of musicians, with male musicians and a female singer and a dancer. The *otins* said:

What kind of Muslimness is this, women and men are all mixed up. Why did they call us if they have all these musicians for entertainment? We had a different agreement with these people... I am not talking in front of all these men!

*Otin* and singer had been invited to lead the wedding by the groom, who wanted to show respect to his future bride (who is covered) and her Islamic family. The groom and his family invited *otins*, but they did not have enough knowledge as to how to organise an Islamic wedding, and were unaware that these *otins* would not perform in front of male guests. After talking to each other, the two upset *otins* planned to leave the wedding. The groom's mother started negotiating with them, explaining 'my son wanted so much an Islamic wedding (*toy*), please at least could you open the wedding by giving the blessing (*duo*), and performing a couple of songs.' The *otins* agreed to open the

wedding ceremony, but the male singers and all male guests were asked to leave the hall while they recited couple of chapters (*suras*) from the Qur'an and performed. Then a singer who had come with the *otin* sang *Yor-Yor*; and the bride and groom entered the hall and sat. After singing a couple of Islamic songs (*salowats*), the *otins* were paid, and left. All the men then re-entered, and the band of musicians continued performing.

During my observations of Islamic weddings I noticed there are different variations in these ceremonies. People arranged Islamic weddings according to their Islamic knowledge and piety. In these weddings usually the groom's and bride's families negotiate and come to an agreement. I have seen a number of Islamic weddings which differ from each other very much; in some of them the groom sits with the bride in the hall; in some, even male guests participate in the ceremony; there was even one wedding where Russian and Korean guests were served alcohol in a tea-pot (see appendix 4 for details of this wedding). Sometimes confusion and misunderstanding occurs and this shows that still no one model for these weddings has been decided.

With the majority of people in Tashkent still celebrating European weddings, Islamic weddings are much debated. My respondents had varying reactions. Malika Opa (49 years old, *tabib*) represents that part of Uzbek society which regards the re-emerging 'Islamic' weddings as a return to pre-Soviet tradition and faith, and celebrates the fact that they can now be openly celebrated. She said:

these are real Islamic weddings which we can finally celebrate. During the Soviet period we lost our tradition and faith. Alcohol, open dresses, mixed gender weddings are Russian culture and they changed our life and all ceremonies at that time.

However, this opinion is by no means universally held. Feruza (65 years old, teacher) clearly had a different view of what the traditional Uzbek wedding was, and saw the new ‘Islamic’ wedding not as a return to tradition, but the introduction of something new. She said,

Some of these weddings turn into Qur’an reading, sermon listening practice, with not enough music and dance; we always had music, and people enjoyed dancing at weddings, but some of these weddings have become too boring.

The feminist activist Tokhtakhodjaeva (1995, 182-183) supported this view, arguing that Islamic weddings have become ‘another method of propaganda’ because they emphasise the differences between Europeanised and Islamic society.

During 2007 and 2009, when I started my fieldwork, Islamic weddings came to their high point, when some wedding ceremonies even saw the performance of the *shom* (*magrib*)<sup>31</sup> prayers. In one wedding I attended, when it was time for the prayer (*shom*), *the otin* (religious female practitioners) announced a separate space was available for whoever wished to pray. While the prayer was underway the guests were asked to keep quiet. However, since 2010, these types of weddings have been decreasing, as a result of unofficial pressure from *mahallas* and officials to regulate wedding practices. It can sometimes seem that self-identification as a Muslim could remain complicated under the current state as it did under a Soviet state, despite the great change in the discourse of authority.

This is an important phenomenon, which shows how women could transform the wedding ceremony from the one which was celebrated with toasts, alcohol, and men and

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<sup>31</sup> *Shom* Uz. (*magrib* Ar.) is one of the five Islamic prayers. During the summer time, days are longer and *magrib* prayer happened to fall during the wedding celebration time, 7.00 - 8.30 pm.

women mixed, to one where the whole wedding stops and waits until they pray. Women use their agency to change and adapt their life according to their needs whenever possible. By using their piety, Islamic women gained time and place for their prayers in the wedding ceremony by adapting it to their needs. However, nowadays praying during the wedding ceremonies is not allowed.

During my fieldwork I observed, therefore, that there has been a big shift in the organisation of Islamic weddings, and that these have retained several elements of the old traditional Uzbek weddings. Women have had a major role and have been a leading force in all these transformations. They have adapted to new ways of celebration and retrained themselves into new professions.

#### **4.1.3.                    *State policy on Uzbek ceremonies***

Pomposity and waste during life-cycle practices and other celebrations has regularly been criticised by state officials and religious institutions, both before and after independence.

Organising grand weddings and other ostentatious practices, taking on debt and competing with others through material consumption occurred even before the establishment of Soviet society, with *Jadids* (Muslim modernist reformers) in local newspapers continuously discussing the problem during the early 1900s. The fight against unnecessary expenditure continued during the Soviet period, through the only official, Soviet-controlled, religious organ functioning in the whole of Central Asia, SADUM (Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Central Asia and Kazakhstan). All *fatwas* were published ac-

According to the Soviet state's policy and regulations, which covered *qalin* (bride price), *Ramadan*, fasting, weddings, funerals and other ceremonies. These practices have been the subject of a great deal of interest from Uzbek and Russian ethnographers, who have written about their cost, pomposity, irrationality and so on (Abashin 2003, Nasrutdinov 1996).

After 1991, people started practicing life-cycle and religious rituals openly, and began competing in the organising of weddings and other ceremonies. The *ZAGS* ceremony had, indeed, become increasingly expensive. Arifkhanova (2002) found that by 1998, it required up to fifty or more participants. Expenses, usually paid by the groom's family, could include from six to twenty (or more) expensive, exclusive cars, all blowing their horns, and a party for the guests. Those unable to pay could incur huge debts. In order to regulate and cut expenditure during wedding ceremonies state officials and *mahalla* elders advised people to combine the *ZAGS* ceremony with the main wedding (*nikoh bazmi*) celebration. This meant the *ZAGS* registration was conducted during the main wedding celebration, with an official *ZAGS* worker registering the marriage in front of all the guests, bringing about a substantial saving. This interference by the Uzbek state has had a particular effect on the nature and cost of weddings.

These practices also were criticised by Uzbek scholars. The Soviet-period scholar Aminov (1987) criticised organising life-cycle practices and women's *togora* practice (see below). Along with the Soviet ideology he criticised religious clerics (*mullas*, *otins* and *qoris*) who lead all these practices and therefore encourage people to spend. After independence Boriev (1995) continued Aminov's discussion, dividing life-cycle prac-

tices into progressive (*ilgor*) and regressive (*qoloq*). Another version of the duality between ‘old’ and ‘new’, ‘false’ and ‘pure’, ‘foreign’ and ‘Uzbek’ which characterised the various discourses of authority. Furthermore he argued that ‘rituals and practices are preserved by women, who will always follow backwardness (*hurofot*) more than others.’

Both Soviet and post-Soviet scholars have shown the tendency to divide religious or other life-cycle rituals into ‘pure’ and ‘folk’, or ‘backward’ and ‘progressive.’ The tendency towards ‘distinguish a folk from an elite, and a real from a false Islam’ identified by El-Zein (1977, 249) never gone away.

#### **4.1.4.                    *The arrangement of wedding ceremonies***

Any analysis of the changes to Uzbek wedding practice must take account of its many elements. These vary from the grand to the simple: matchmaking (*sovchilik*); the first date of a groom and bride (*uchrashuv*); engagement (*fotiha*); ZAGS (the civil registration office); setting up the bride’s new home (*mol yoyar*); bride price (sheep, food, money, cloth etc.) delivered to the bride’s home (*toy*); religious marriage (*nikoh*); the main wedding ceremony/party (*nikoh bazmi*); the bride’s special greeting/bowing down practice (*kelin salom*); and the bride’s first visit to her parents’ home (*charlar*).

The celebration of these practices may vary from town to town, from region to region, and according to social class. I discuss every practice in detail below with its changes and variations, including state regulations, the control of the mahalla, and how women organise these practices. Further, I argue that women create strategies to cope with

change and transformation in their daily lives - and that this reveals their agency and self-expression as they navigate the social and gender realities in Uzbekistan.

During the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods, most wedding ceremonies were conducted at home, and many aspects of their organisation such as preparing, cooking and cleaning were thus classed as women's work. Kinship ties play an important role in the social and economic life of Uzbek people. Wedding celebrations require a great deal of work and are usually organised in private houses by family, relatives and community. However the 1990s saw the new phenomenon of people celebrating weddings in restaurants and wedding halls (*Toyhona*), more information on which is given later in this chapter.

Different explanations have been offered for this shift of location. For Hadicha Opa,

Young people, daughters-in-law and daughters don't only want to work during wedding ceremonies. They want to dress up, dance in the party and enjoy these gatherings. There is lots of work before and after these ceremonies that needs to be done. That's why people prefer to invite guests to a restaurant, where all services are provided. (...) After the wedding has finished guests go back to their own homes. If you have a wedding in your house, you never know when it will finish because women usually sit longer and sometimes they might stay overnight.

This is also one of the new trends which have occurred recently. It demonstrates how private occasions have become public occasions by moving the location of the wedding ceremony from the home to the hall. By this transformation women have gained some time for themselves. Before, women had to cook, do all the preparation, serve and then clean everything, while after this change they have also started enjoying the celebration. There is debate among women themselves, some (especially younger generation) saying this change gave them time and space to enjoy celebrations and others (especially the older generation) saying it was a great time when during weddings people had the house full (with relatives and friends) for a whole week or more, with everybody helping the

preparations and enjoying the process of the wedding. I would argue that changes in the economic, social and global arena are influencing Uzbek weddings as well. There is influence of Islamic and European culture on these weddings and women are principally making sure to adopt the right forms for themselves, which I will talk about in detail in the third part of this chapter.

## 4.2. PART TWO - Institutions connected with wedding practices

### 4.2.1. *In-laws (Qudalar)*

*Quda* means ‘in-law’, and the parents of the groom and bride recognise each other as *qudalar* (suffix *lar* plural). The institution of *qudalar* is one of the most important parts of Uzbek life and ceremony, since marriage creates not only the union of two individuals, but builds alliances between families. The saying is *Qudachilik ming yilchilik*, which means ‘when you have a *quda* you are tied to your *quda* for 1000 years.’ Two families will become closer to each other for a long period of time after their children marry. *Qudalar* are always respected and have a special room or the best table in all ceremonies. They will be served first and with the best food, and always receive special attention from the other *quda* side.

During my fieldwork I observed the institution of *qudalar*, and Mastura Opa’s experience about *qudalar* matches. ‘*Qudalar* from a bride’s family always act more carefully and respectfully toward the *qudalar* from the groom’s family because their daughter is now in that family. When two families are connected with each other through the mar-



riage of their children, it is very important for the families to be equal. They have to be equal financially and also in their standing (reputation and respect) in the *mahalla* and in society. When one *quda* side sends lots of presents (*sarpo*), dishes of food (*togora*), arranges a meeting and serves the other side's guests, then the other side has to return all these presents and services in the same way. During wedding ceremonies a lack of equal assets can lead to many problems. Exchanging *sarpo* and *togora* between *qudalar* is a whole system of social communication between two households, showing their respect, wealth, power and social status. Either side may become upset at the quality or quantity of presents, the number of guests invited to the ceremony, the quantity of food served, etc. Unpleasantness at this level is one of the main reasons for the eventual separation of couples and families'.

During my field observation I noticed that *qudalar* had a greater status than other guests in the ceremonies. This was obvious and accepted by other guests as well, as most of these guests themselves had *qudalar* and it is socially accepted behaviour to respect and to treat them carefully. The communication between *qudalar* includes a whole procedure which consists of showing respect, exchanging presents, keeping in touch and other actions. I argue after becoming an in-law (*quda*) a woman's status changes; the communication between *qudalar* is important to maintain peace and unity between the young married couple and, especially, affects the life of the new bride in her new household. Therefore, the bride's mother takes good care of her *qudalar* and shows them a lot of respect.

#### 4.2.2. *Food presents (Togora)*

*Togora* literally translates as dish. It can be a present, or something contributed to a ceremony by relatives and friends such as a tray, box, bag or basket filled with food, cookies, pastry, chocolates, breads or sweets. Every *togora* is wrapped in a tablecloth and filled with different food.

In wedding ceremonies, *qudalar* often send each other from four to twelve different types of *togora* (see appendix 16) and relatives, neighbours, close friends and members of the *Gap* all contribute *togora*. At some weddings, the number of *togora* can reach twenty or more. A few days before any gathering, people will talk to each other and agree on what type of food to contribute, choosing from a list. Someone buys all the bread, another one buys all the fruit and someone arranges some type of soft drink. The food from all *togora* is usually served to the guests. It would be very difficult for one family to afford all this without help from friends and relatives. At the end of the ceremony the host fills the *togora* of the relatives and friends with bread, cookies and sweets which are left from the ceremony.

My fieldwork observations showed that woman are the main actors in the whole process and they arrange, negotiate, keep or change these practices. Sometimes, instead of sending many *togora* of food to each other, the two families negotiate and agree a monetary exchange. In this case, the groom's mother gives money and the bride's mother buys or prepares the equivalent food by herself. It is possible for the families to negotiate to reduce the burden of the wedding process, for example to minimise the number of guests

invited to a particular ceremony, to decrease the number of *togora* exchanged, and even not to conduct all the ceremonies. This can happen, for example, in situations such as the one described to me by Hadicha Opa (60 years old), who works in her *mahalla* not only as an *otin* but an advisor on women's issues as well.

One of my very close friends came and asked me to lend her some money for a wedding. She lost her husband a few years ago. She is bringing up her five children alone. She was planning to marry off her first son. I gave her advice on how to escape from debt: instead of spending lots of money, you have to plan a wedding wisely and save your money. As I taught her, she talked to her *qudalar* and they agreed to limit *togora* to two instead of the usual ten or twelve. They decided not to do *charlar*, which is another ceremony with large expenses. It worked out for her very well because she saved her money and nobody will say a word about the wedding because everybody knows that she is a widow.

In 2002 a serial shown on Uzbek TV highlighted problems connected with the practice of *togora* and called 'the forty problems of forty *togora*' (*Quirk togoraning quirk nogorasi*). The serial developed around wedding arrangements; the relationship between the two *quda* sides; their sending each other *togora* and presents; and examples of pomposity and consumerism during this process. Many discussions in *mahallas* and state institutions, and in the media, have addressed the need to decrease *togora*, and regulate pomposity and competition among people.

The preparation and conducting of a wedding is a very big project. Some people borrow money to arrange weddings, which was criticised throughout Tsarist, Soviet and post-Soviet periods. With the current financial difficulties some Uzbek families are having problems to arrange elaborate ceremonies and the above example is one of the solutions to these problems. From my field observations I noticed that the main organisers of the practices and the ones who make sure that they are properly conducted are women. Although they follow the everyday trend and publicly-accepted rule of organising several

different practices, they can also use their agency to choose, change or add some practices according to their needs, as the above example shows.

#### 4.2.3. *Bride Price (Qalin)*

Certain Uzbek wedding practices come in the form of payment or exchange. One of these, *qalin*, the money given by the groom's family in exchange for the bride, has existed for centuries. It was criticised throughout the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods (Behdudiy 1909, Suhareva 1955, Snesev 1975). Its size depended on the social and material position of the groom's family. Suhareva (1955) pointed out that fathers have always made the final decision about their children's destiny, and the marriage of a son or daughter was considered in terms of social status, property and social relations with future relatives. The financial burden of *qalin* meant that boys from poor families might not marry until they were in their 30s or 40s.

The Soviet state considered both polygamy and *qalin* as the most oppressive institutions for women and issued various laws to eliminate them. In spite of the fact that these practices were banned, people continued conducting them, just as they did *nikoh*. Suhareva (1955) claimed that although '*qalin* as a price for a bride disappeared, some parts of this ritual remained.' In fact, it had merely been transformed into the practice of presenting very expensive dresses to the bride and her relatives, as an obligatory condition of the wedding.

Historically, different types of marriage practices have existed in order to avoid the payment of *qalin*. One widely-practised form of marriage contract in Central Asia, en-

gagement while the baby was in her mother's belly (*bel quda*), was made before the betrothed was born (Kirgizy, 238). In the practice of 'engagement from the cradle' (*beshek quda*), two families engaged their children while they were in the cradle (*beshek*). In the practice of 'biting the ear' (*quloq tishlash*), the parents arranged a betrothal between a little boy and girl. The little boy gently bit the girl's ear, after which the girl was his future bride and the families would send presents to each other and gradually plan for the marriage of their children. *Qaychi quda* literally translates as 'scissors in-laws', which occurred after the practice of two families exchanging brides, with a groom's sister, niece or aunt marrying a bride's brother or uncle (Nalivkin 1886, Jumanazarov 1999). The above-described practices all helped to avoid *qalin* and allowed poor families to avoid financial difficulties; however, they have almost disappeared in Uzbekistan and during my fieldwork I did not meet any of these practices. I did, however, encounter a different practice designed to avoid *qalin*, when the groom moves into his in-laws' house (*Ich kiyov*), which I discuss further below.

After a long battle from state officials, *qalin* has almost disappeared in Tashkent. However, one of the practices used to avoid its payment has survived: *ich kiyov* (literally groom inside the house). *Ich kiyov* is used very rarely, and entails the groom moving into the bride's home to live. After marriage, it was usually the bride who moved to her husband's house, and when there are few boys in the family, normally/usually (it is accepted among Uzbeks) the youngest son and his wife stayed with his parents and looked after them. There are also rare cases when a family has no son and arranges for one of the daughters and her husband to live with them. In this case the *ich kiyov* – the groom – has to look after his in-laws and the whole house. This is almost never a comfortable

situation, although the occasional man enjoys it, especially if his bride is from a rich family and the move improves his financial status. Suhareva (1955) argued that the practice of *ich kiyov* was not popular, and the groom's self-respect usually prevented it. However, Mastura Opa expressed a different view: that for families without sons, *ich kiyov* provides a means for a male, in this case the son-in-law, to look after the bride's parents, and organise their burial and other practices connected with their death. For some families, therefore, the practice of *ich kiyov* is a solution to the problem of aged parents living alone.

All the above-described practices for avoiding *qalin* are kept and conducted by women. It shows that historically, even if the patriarchal system by which family members traded their women remained intact and unchallenged, women made sure to choose the right family and the right 'opposite' mother, whose daughter could be a suitable bride for their son, and they maintained the relationship between two families in order to arrange a wedding one day. Certainly, these practices are the exception from the rules of *qalin* which requires the groom's family to pay a lot of money for the bride. This exception shows that women always had ways to change or negotiate certain practices and to find ways to cope with hardships of the everyday life.

After long criticism from the Soviet state the practice of *qalin* almost disappeared in Tashkent and most of the other regions of Uzbekistan. However this practice has been replaced with a new practice, which is called 'sut puli'. 'Sut puli' is translated as money for milk, which means money given to the mother of the bride for suckling her. The amount of *sut puli* might be between \$500 USD and \$1000 USD, or more.

#### 4.2.4. *Wedding presents (Sarpo)*

A *sarpo* (presents prepared for the bride, groom, sometimes relatives or guests) is another ritual which has existed for centuries in Uzbekistan. It is a form of reciprocity, which is exchanged among women according to family status, age and economic and social status. For women giving or receiving *sarpo* among guests is especially important, as if it is expensive and good quality *sarpo*, it shows her place and respect in the community. It consists of cloth, dresses, material, shoes, coats or scarves given to the bride, the groom, *qudalar* or guests at the ceremony, and represents yet another expense.

Some mothers start collecting *sarpo* for their daughter's wedding when she is very young, by putting things inside a wooden box called a *sandiq*. A *sarpo* should consist of about ten to fifteen dresses, warm clothes, a few pairs of shoes, several scarves, a few sets of make-up, perfume, gold accessories and bedding.

Usually the bride's family buys furniture for the sitting room and the bedroom, which nowadays may be (given what is being sold in the local market) Italian, Belarusian, Turkish, UAE or Chinese. In spite of the fact that every Uzbek women has a dream to arrange her daughter's wedding with the best *sarpo* and furniture, not every woman can afford it. Those women then buy inexpensive items. A few buy on credit and take years to pay off the debt. The total expense of *sarpo* can make it difficult for a family to pay for the marriage of a daughter, and daughters may therefore be married off in less attractive circumstances. When the financial needs cannot be met, there are always ways in which the two families negotiate and usually it is women who try to find ways and in-

investigate possibilities. The best place for this is ceremonies, where women share their everyday lives, consult each other about their concerns and usually find solutions, as discussed in the following example.

During my fieldwork at one ceremony I heard Salima Opa (65 years old, pensioner) talking to *otin* about her son, who had been married twice but had not been happy with either marriage. Salima Opa was looking for a covered, good, Muslim girl who prayed five times a day and asked advice from the *otin*. The *otin* said that an old, very poor man had three daughters (aged 35, 28 and 20) but could not afford three weddings. All three read the Qur'an, the *otin* said, had knowledge of Islam, prayed five times a day, and were fast and hard workers. Because their mother had passed away, the father was alone and he would marry his daughters happily to someone from a good family. She said that they would not, however, be able to arrange all *sarpo*, buy furniture and perform other practices. For Salima Opa and some women like her, the girls' piety, religious knowledge and willingness to work outweighed the father's inability to pay *sarpo*. She answered that she would try to send matchmakers to check the family and girls.

The social and economic changes of the post-Soviet period brought about changes to the structure of marriage practices. One example of this, as described by Tojihon Opa (60 years old, pensioner), is the son of her neighbour, who was married to a business woman. This man had a very bad marriage the first time, and after his divorce, he found himself a wife who provided him with a job and a car. His financial status changed. According to Uzbek culture, his wife would normally look after his mother, and do her housework. The businesswoman, however, hired a woman for this work. Tojihon Opa



said that her neighbour is happy and relaxed, feeling that finally she has a daughter-in-law. Tojihon Opa was envious and said she wished her son (who is divorced) could find someone like that.

This is another example of an older generation of women accepting new ways of life. Ideally, a bride takes care of the whole household including cooking, cleaning, washing, etc. In the above example, the mother-in-law accepted her son's working business-woman bride as she managed to do all the work of the wife by just hiring a maid and, besides, was working and providing for their family. The bride was using her status and financial position to provide her mother-in-law with what she wanted. Instead of working hard and serving the whole family, she was using her money and position and thus changing the whole system of the relations between bride and in-laws. Although this is not a common case, it proves that women can find ways to cope with their life and change or adapt to certain situations.

#### **4.2.5. Ceremonial leaders**

As mentioned in Chapter 3 on Islam, the ancient administrative and social unit known as the *mahalla* is of tremendous importance in the civic life of Uzbek people and its traditional structure remained unchanged under Soviet and post-Soviet rule. The *mahalla* organises the welfare of the people, attempts to reduce expenditure during ceremonies, helps families in need and counsels residents on marriage, divorce and disputes. This means the *mahalla* is a great help during ceremonial occasions, when in some *mahallas* it can provide several specialists such as the *imam* and *otin*, women in charge of organising different practices (*dasturhonchi*), a person in charge of tea (*choyhonachi*) and

cook (*oshpaz*). Below, I discuss the role of these leaders and ceremony specialists; the changes to their remit; their work under Soviet and independent rule; their place in ceremonial life; and how their role has been navigated and reinterpreted by women, who maintain and keep the services of these people.

The institution of *dasturhonchi* has existed for centuries, the word coming from ‘*dasturhon*’ (tablecloth). *Dasturhonchi* are always women, and their role is to organise the ceremony, prepare food, set tables, prepare *sarpo*, organise *togora*, meet people and wash dishes. Family and relatives help the *dasturhonchi* to organise her work and at the end of the ceremony the owner of the house pays her both in money and with *patnis* (trays filled in with sweets, bread and cloth). During my fieldwork I observed that the position of *dasturhonchi* has almost disappeared in Tashkent, with a relative taking responsibility for all of these jobs. Only one woman (Mashkura Opa) still carries out this role, and explains why it is disappearing.

Mashkura Opa is 75 years old, was born in the *mahalla* where I used to live (*Yangi Bozor*) and has worked there for the last 50 years. She started her work on the *mahalla* committee as a person in charge of women’s issues and after retiring from this role became a *dasturhonchi*. She has found that ‘people stopped inviting *dasturhonchi* for their ceremonies, because they prefer to use one of the family members or relatives. They don’t want to pay as they want to save their money.’

This is a matter of regret for Mastura Opa, who saw the *dasturhonchi* as a keeper of tradition and a repository of information:

It was very useful when we used to have *dasturhonchi* in our ceremonies. Sometimes the host might forget to prepare something important for the ceremony and the *dasturhonchi* would remind her. It is very important to have someone who knows everything about a ceremony, who can arrange the table and all the people.

I also suggest that one of the reasons that people have less need for this job in Tashkent might be the fact that people have started conducting most ceremonies in wedding halls and restaurants. However, the role of *dasturhonchi* may vary from region to region and although they scarcely exist now in Tashkent, Kandiyoti (2004) found them to be still very common in the Fergana Valley.

Another type of ceremony specialist is the cook (*oshpaz*) whose work is important during big gatherings. The cook specialises in cooking *plov* (the national dish) for ceremonies but can cook other types of food as well. Some cooks become locally famous, and during summer, when most celebrations are held, they must be booked well in advance. At these ceremonies people have a person in charge (*samovarchi, choihonachi*) of tea for the guests. As with the *dasturhonchi*, these days this job is usually given to a relative or neighbour rather than a paid worker. The person in charge of the tea heats the tall, oval shaped, metal container (*samovar*) and makes tea in teapots, which younger relatives distribute to the guests in different rooms. In every *mahalla* there is someone who cleans and washes the dishes. Usually this person is from a family without a male head of household or without enough income. Their wages are usually fixed according to the ceremony: for example, for *charlar* they earn 15,000 *soms* per day whereas for the *nikoh* they earn 30,000 *soms* per day as there are usually more guests in attendance. After the ceremony, the host of the family gives this woman money and some of the leftover food.

Musicians and singers are the entertainers at Uzbek wedding ceremonies. Usually the group of entertainers consists of a singer, a comedian, a few musicians and a technician. According to the audience and type of the wedding, the songs might vary from Uzbek, Tajik, Tatar, Turk and Azeri songs to traditional Uzbek and religious (*salawat*) songs. In most weddings or big celebrations, people invite more than one group of singers to perform. Every singer charges a fixed price, which is higher if the singer becomes famous.

Although these specialists functioned during the Soviet period, after independence people's need for most of them increased. The religious specialists *imam* and *otin* functioned discreetly during the Soviet period, but after independence there was a greater demand for them because people started conducting religious practices openly. Many women trained to become *otins* and these *otins* started leading women's ceremonial life and educating them religiously. With the raising of people's religious consciousness and as people began conducting Islamic weddings, singers learnt religious, Arabic and old traditional Uzbek songs. Again, women are arranging their ceremonial life and taking an active role in managing, changing or preserving ceremonial practices.

#### **4.2.6. Matchmaking (*Sovchilik*)**

As noted in Part One of this chapter, Uzbek weddings are very complex, and normally begin with matchmaking (*sovchilik*), a very old practice that is still preserved today. During my fieldwork I learnt that matchmaking (*sovchi*) can be carried out by one or more women, usually the mother of the groom together with her sister, aunt, very close friend, neighbour or relative. It used to be very rare for the father of the groom or another man from the family to perform matchmaking but this has changed; nowadays there

are cases of both father and mother of the groom visiting the bride's house, and even cases when the groom himself has joined his parents to the house of future bride. The practice of matchmaking has changed; usually it is negotiated between families and it is women who are the leading force in influencing these changes.

As with so many other traditional practices, matchmaking (*sovchilik*) was more rarely performed the Soviet period, and revived after independence. During the Soviet period, the practice became less necessary as young people would meet each other at wedding ceremonies, birthday parties and so on, or get to know each other at their workplace, university, school or *mahalla*. Soviet-period brides and grooms usually met each other through friends, school, university or work and matchmaking (*sovchilik*) became only a symbolic practice.

In the Soviet era, the most desirable bride was educated, beautiful, hardworking, or studying; however, since independence, the criteria for a good bride have changed. TV shows such as 'The Best Bride', 'Women's Place in Society', and 'Women and Family' and others portray submissive, hard-working, kind, loving brides. In 'The Best Bride', couples from different cities or regions compete to show how good they are at cooking and dancing, showing their knowledge about family life and bringing up children.

Women have taken the initiative, by contributing to the state's project to create the role of ideal Uzbek women. This new identity has been embraced by women and they have supported this idea by organising courses for brides, and teaching and educating them, and preparing their daughters according to the new social requirements. One of these

examples is Sayora (19 years old), who attended a ‘course for prospective brides’ while waiting for her marriage to be arranged. She said that it was a good experience for her, and she learnt cooking, sewing, baking, managing and coping with family problems, and behaviour (conduct) towards the future husband and in-laws.

As one Uzbek proverb states ‘a nice girl will never leave her *mahalla*’, and another advises matchmakers to ‘check seven generations of the girl before marrying her to your son,’ brides are normally sought from within the *mahalla*. Occasionally family members, relatives, friends and neighbours can be helpful, and some searches extend into other *mahallas*, universities, offices, ceremonies or gatherings. Usually, the candidate for a future bride is someone’s sister’s friend, neighbour’s niece, cousin, or colleague’s neighbour, etc. Some women look for a bride for their sons at ceremonies and celebrations, since at such gatherings, women talk about their family life, grown-up sons and daughters, work and other matters. Those with an unmarried son might start a conversation with ‘I have a son, do you have girls in your *mahalla*?’ and proceed from there. If two women are interested, the boy’s side takes the address of the girl’s side and sends *sovchilar* to her house.

Parents in every household with a girl of marriageable age expect *sovchilar*. In their guest room, they always have a table prepared with food, usually dry foods such as chocolates, cookies and fruit. It is very important to show respect to people who knock at your gate asking about your daughter. The day is often Wednesday,<sup>32</sup> an especially good day for starting a new life, new work or solving problems. According to the prac-

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<sup>32</sup> Wednesday is considered a special day for people to discuss their problems; the practice of *Muskulkushod* is also performed this day (*Murodbahsh, mushkullar oson boladigan, niyatlar amalgam oshadigan kun*)

tice *sovchilar* knock on the door and say that they have heard there is a girl in this house and they have come to see her. The mother of the girl invites the *sovchilar* inside and serves them tea, fresh bread and sometimes even a meal. Usually *sovchilar* come a few times to a future bride's house, and especially if the girl is known as a very nice girl in her *mahalla* every mother tries to match her to her son. Having many *sovchilar* visit a house shows the value of the girl and respect for her family for bringing up such a daughter. A mother starts worrying if she receives no matchmakers.

The above discussion on matchmaking shows that women are perpetuating but also changing this practice. One of the latest trends is when the father joins the mother of the future groom to visit the future bride's home. There are variations on this practice and women try to adapt it to different factors: previously, *sovchilar* could visit a house and knock on the door whereas nowadays they make a phone call and agree on the time of their visit, trying to solve most things on the phone in order to save time instead of visiting house after house as they used to do. I suggest that this practice is maintained because people still need it. I also argue that the whole institution of *sovchilar* is managed by women and involves a very strong network, including family, relatives, friends, colleagues and the whole community, which helps its work.

Mastura Opa said:

the negotiations of *sovchilar* are very diplomatic, and they carefully ask questions about the prospective bride and her family. Since the raising of people's religious consciousness, people have started asking questions including if the bride will be able to continue to practise her religion. Other criteria include attractiveness, and the family's financial status and social place in the *mahalla*. The family is very important, since, as the Uzbek say: 'a bird will do what it saw in the nest' (*qush uyasida korganini qiladi*) and 'if you want a nice bride you have to see her mother first' (*onasini korib qizini ol*).

Usually, a girl's family asks about a boy's work and education, where his family lives, if they have a house or apartment etc. If the mother of the girl does not like the *sovchilar* or their family, or discovers, for example, that the boy works in some not very prestigious place or does not work at all, she will say 'no' while offering some excuse such as 'we are not ready to marry our daughter yet', 'our daughter has to finish her university', 'her dad said we have to wait,' etc. The *sovchilar* will understand the underlying answer and will appreciate the attitude and hospitality of the girl's mother. Mastura Opa called this attitude Uzbekness (*Uzbekchilik*). If the girl's mother likes a future groom's family she will say 'I will talk to my husband and I will let you know.' This means 'we might see you again'. Then both families try to find out about the other.

The case of Dilfuza (24), a university student, illustrates how far *sovchilar* can go in their search for a suitable bride.

The matchmakers come to the University and ask about nice girls for marriage. Then one of the assistants calls a student, finding any excuse, to show her to the woman. Usually students do not know, or sometimes they may guess why they were called. Matchmakers look for feminine, shy, submissive, beautiful, accurate, well-dressed girls and they have to be from a nice family from Tashkent. One of my friends was a typical future bride. She was called very often for show, sometimes even from the lectures. She has long hair, she is beautiful, she doesn't talk much, she is from Tashkent and her family is well known in her *mahalla*.

Dilfuza said she has never been called for a show and the reason, she thinks, is that she is too active, likes to discuss and argue about different issues, and reads widely. Besides, her parents are dead, she lives with her brother and her roots are not in Tashkent. Planning to study abroad, she said "it is good I am not their type."

This example shows that the institution of *sovchilar* is very strong, active and creative and that there are certain criteria among the matchmakers of Tashkent. Although most



girls desire to be chosen some, like Dilfuza, are not very keen on the work of *sovchilar*. Dilfuza used her agency to show that she is different from other girls and she did not want to accept the method of finding her future husband in the traditional way. Although some young women accept social norms set by Uzbek society (marry to a man their parents and matchmakers find them) others like Dilfuza, they re-interpret their position within these rituals and practices. This example indicates there are limitations on renegotiation of a woman's place in the society.

While meeting the girl's family, *sovchilar* present the boy in a good light. Sometimes they exaggerate. Once Dilfuza was invited to her friend Lola's house, and Lola's aunt liked her very much. The aunt started matching Dilfuza to her son, describing him in such a way that Lola asked her aunt whom she was referring to. "It is your cousin, silly!" said her aunt. Later, Lola laughed at what had happened at her house and said "I didn't recognise my own cousin from my aunt's description!"

After a few visits, when the *sovchilar* think they know enough about each other's families, the boy's mother asks if she can see the girl. The mother asks her daughter to bring tea or some other type of food into the guest room. If the mother of the boy likes the girl, she asks her mother if the girl and the boy may meet each other. Then they agree on the day of a date (*uchrashuv*<sup>33</sup>). After some further research, both sides might meet again in the girl's house. If the girl's mother decides to accept the *sovchilar*'s offer then on their next visit she breaks some of their bread and accepts presents which might be a scarf, or any material brought by the boy's mother inside the *togora*.

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<sup>33</sup>*Uchrashuv* – a date, meeting.

### 4.3. PART THREE - Wedding practices

#### 4.3.1. First meeting of the bride and groom (*Uchrashuv*)

The agreed place for the first date (*uchrashuv*) might be a park, some place near a fountain or at a little cafe. Usually the girl comes to the *uchrashuv* with her sister, sister-in-law or aunt. The boy arrives with one of his close female family members. The boy and the girl talk alone, while women from both sides sit somewhere close and chat. Usually after the first date, the girl's family has to wait for an answer. If the boy liked the girl, somebody from his home visits the girl's home and asks if they can meet again in order to get to know each other better. Usually the girl has the right to choose and if she does not like the boy she can refuse to meet him, in which case the girl's mother replies to the boy's family in a very gentle way. Sometimes it depends on the wish of the girl's parents, and the parents try to convince their daughter if the groom's family is respected and its prestige and financial status is good. Again *uchrashuv* is totally under the control of the women of the two families: they negotiate where the boy and girl will meet and which women will accompany them, and during the date women from both sides try to learn about and get more information from the opposite side.

If the daughter liked the boy, then the parents let her to go to a second date. They exchange telephone numbers and they might meet each other alone a few more times. For the second or third date, the boy comes with flowers, chocolates, cake and one gold

present (usually a chain, bracelet, necklace or ring). Then the boy takes the girl somewhere to eat ice cream or cake. After the date he drops the girl at her house with the gold present, chocolate and cake. Everybody in her home meets her happily, as the flowers and chocolates are signs of the future wedding. In this stage the girl gains a new status; she becomes unofficially engaged. The girl's mother feels released and happy. Her status also changes, especially after she marries her daughter off, as in Uzbek life every married son or daughter is like a 'medal' on a mother's chest. When parents marry their children they become respected in the community and the Uzbek expression 'they married sons and daughters' (*ogil qizini chiqargan*) almost confers a respected rank.

After the girl's parents announce their daughter's unofficial engagement, all other *sovchilar* stop coming to the house. On this occasion, family, relatives, friends and neighbours share the cake and sweets presented by the future groom. Everyone tries to get a piece of the cake or sweets for their unmarried relatives, saying that a chocolate from this occasion has magic and it might help the unmarried person find his/her match sooner. After the girl has accepted the present, the boy and the girl can continue meeting each other until their wedding.

Women manage all these practices and they control the whole process. The practice of *uchrashuv* has become more formal since independence, whereas during the Soviet period young people met each other at the University, work or celebrations. After organising the *uchrashuv*, if the girl and boy like each other women from both sides start preparations for the whole wedding process. They communicate with each other and negotiate about the time, date and place of the next ceremonies. Although men know what is

happening in the wedding process and big decisions are always agreed with man of the house, women manage everything.

#### 4.3.2. *Engagement (Fotiha) and bride price ceremony (Toy)*

Before starting the wedding the *qudalar* (in-laws) meet for a final agreement for the wedding ceremonies. Usually a few elder men from the groom's family come to the bride's family to plan the wedding. Sometimes, the elders of the *mahalla* are invited. They fix dates for the wedding ceremonies, and agree on the expenditure, the numbers of guests and presents. The next ceremony is the formal engagement (*fotiha*), sometimes known as the *non sindirish* (breaking bread). During this ceremony parents or the elders of the family break two *non* (bread) together, which means the bride and groom will be together always, sharing everything in their lives. The family and the guests eat the broken bread and some of them take a piece of the bread to their unmarried relatives, wishing them to have their own weddings very soon. Some people celebrate *fotiha* within the family circle and others invite more people and make it a big ceremony.

The next wedding ceremony is the *toy*<sup>34</sup>, which means sending *toy* (*qalin*, presents) to the bride's house. *Toy* is usually brought by two or more of the groom's male relatives. The groom's family sends a large truck of presents (*qalin*), which includes food, sweets, pastry, a male sheep (*qochqor*), and presents prepared for the bride, groom, sometimes relatives or guests (*sarpo*) to the bride's house. The bride's father and his elder relatives meet the groom's side at the gate and invite them into a prepared guest room. First they

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<sup>34</sup> *Toy* is literally translated as feast, big celebration, but at this practice the groom's family sends the bride's family the agreed bride price, in the form of sheep, cloth, shoes, sweets, pastry, vegetables (for cooking) etc. For more details see appendix 15.

serve them soup then they serve food from all twelve dishes (*togora*) sent by the groom's side. At the end of the dinner, they serve *plov* prepared by the bride's family. The rest of the food from the *togora* is served to the guests and people who are helping at the home of the bride.

At the end of the dinner, the oldest person in the room recites the blessing (*duo*) wishing a happy, joyful life to the bride and groom. Then the bride's father presents a traditional quilted robe (*ton*) to the guests from the groom's family as a mark of respect, and thanks for the presents (*toy*). Very rarely, the *toy* can include women, in which case the groom's mother presents them with *sarpo*.

The bride's mother replaces the groom's side's *togora* with the new food brought by her relatives. She adds two dishes to the twelve which the groom's side has brought, thus sending back fourteen *togora* to the groom's home, the two added dishes being a sign of respect and thanks. When the *toy* finishes all relatives, neighbours and friends come to see the *sarpo* sent by the groom's family. When people come to see the *sarpo* they find pre-packed sweets and chocolates inside. They eat these sweets while making good wishes. If anybody has an unmarried friend, relative, or daughter they can take a sweet for her or him.

The communication between the future in-laws is very important and women make sure to follow all the rules of respect, attention, sending presents, serving food, etc. With negotiations over a son's bride, the father makes the big financial decisions but conducting these practices is a complex procedure, managed by women, and in the process of prac-

tising them, women manipulate, change and sometimes cope with the hardships of the process. Women are the ones who choose the clothes, dishes, presents which will indicate status: the exact signifiers are decided by them.

#### **4.3.3.                    *Preparation of the new home (Mol yoyar)***

After the wedding, the bride moves to the groom's home and therefore the groom's family prepares a future home for the groom and the bride. Usually the groom's family gives one or more rooms in their house for the bride, a necessity that is often taken into account when parents build or buy a house. Sometimes, parents build an extension to their house for their son and prepare it well before the wedding. Very rarely, the groom's family provides the groom and the bride with a separate house or flat. A few weeks before the wedding, a couple of women from the bride's family visit the groom's house to take measurements of the rooms set aside for the bride. They need to measure the rooms for carpets and curtains. Sometime in the last week before the wedding, a few women come to the groom's home for preparations of the bride's home (*mol yoyar*)<sup>35</sup>, which means the bride's family bring all *sarpo*, dishes, household items and furniture to arrange the bride's new home. A big car brings all of the bride's 'goods' to the groom's house, and her sister, sister-in-law or aunts arrive to unroll carpets, arrange furniture and hang curtains. Then they fill the cupboards with dishes, china and crystal.

On this day, the bride's relatives bring *togora* filled with *somsa* (samosa) and bread to the groom's house. The groom's family prepares a table with food and drinks. After the

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<sup>35</sup> *Mol yoyar* – wedding ceremony, which happens right before the main wedding ceremony; a few people from the bride's side come and prepare the bride's and groom's house.

women finish decorating the bride's room, the groom's mother invites them to dinner. The groom's mother then refills their *togora* with different food and sends it back to the bride's family. The groom's mother also presents *patnis*<sup>36</sup> to each woman for working hard and setting up bride's house or rooms.

This practice belongs entirely to the women. It is also a time for show, with the women discussing how well the day was prepared, quality of furniture, type of curtains (ordered and made by a tailor), price of carpets, brand of dishes, etc. Although expenditure during the wedding ceremonies was under constant Soviet criticism and continues to be criticised in the post-Soviet period, some women still enjoy decorating their daughter's house with expensive goods while others cope and manage with hardship in order to manage all ceremonies in the same way as the others in the community.

#### **4.3.4. Visit by the groom and his friends (*Kiyov navkar*)**

After the bride's home has been arranged, the groom's and the bride's families prepare for the next practice of *nikoh* and *nikoh bazmi* (reception), the main ceremony of the wedding. The day of the main wedding reception starts with the groom's visit to his in-laws' house with his friends, called *kiyov navkar*<sup>37</sup> (the groom with his friends). There could be ten to twenty or more youths, who come to the bride's *mahalla* with *karnai-*

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<sup>36</sup> *Patnis* – tray, in this context the tray filled up with sweets, fruits, bread and pieces of material.

<sup>37</sup> *Kiyov navkar* is translated as 'groom's army', *navkar* being translated as 'soldier' or 'people who used to serve a king'

*surnai*<sup>38</sup> (a band of trumpets and flutes). They stop their bus and cars far from the bride's house, usually at the beginning of the street (*mahalla*) and walk to the bride's house with the musicians playing. The sound of music keeps spelling consistent invitations to all the neighbours outside to see the girl from the *mahalla* leave. The *kiyov-navkarlar* make a great deal of noise when they pull each other to dance on their walk to the bride's house.

The bride's father and a few male relatives meet the *kiyov navkar* crowd at the gate and invite them into an especially prepared room. Before the groom enters the bride's house, the mother of the bride lays a piece of new, expensive material on the floor. The groom should walk on that cloth, called *payandoz*, which is laid as a sign of respect for him. The parents of the bride perform *sochalak* by showering the groom with sweets and money. The groom's friends, together with the children in the house, pick up the sweets. After the groom walks on the *payandoz*, his friends pull it out. They believe whoever gets the *payandoz* will have luck and will marry next. *Kiyov navkar* shout, cheer and laugh and have lots of fun. The women of the house prepare sweets, money and other necessary things for all these practices and they try to make these practices full of fun and share their joy with community.

In a corner of the room, the bride's family usually prepares a *goshanga*<sup>39</sup>, a place for the groom. *Goshanga* consists of two pieces of white cloth knitted in the middle to make it

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<sup>38</sup> *Karnay – sunray*: usually there is a band consisting of a couple of elongated trumpets (*karnay*) and flutes (*surnay*) and the national small drum (*darbuka*). *Karnai*, *surnai* and *nogora* are the national musical instruments and they are played by musicians during celebrations, ceremonies, national holidays and concerts.

<sup>39</sup> *Goshanga* – special place prepared for the groom. In the Fergana Valley and some regions of Tashkent it is called *Chimildiq*.



easy to pull apart. The groom pulls apart the *goshanga*, opens it like a curtain and sits inside. Mastura Opa explained that this ritual is connected with a boy's passage to manhood: breaking/pulling apart the curtain is the symbol of a man/groom breaking the hymen of the virgin girl/bride, and thus making her a woman: no one says as much but everybody knows it, and when the groom pulls apart the curtain all his friends cheer.

The bride's family serves a few courses of food to the groom and his friends, the main course being *plov*, which the groom feeds to his unmarried friends with his hand, another ritual thought to bring good luck and early marriage. At the end of the dinner the bride's parents present *sarpo* to the groom, an embroidered national/traditional quilted robe (*ton*) with turban (*salla*). Then the parents of the bride invite the *imam* to perform the *nikoh* (see appendix 3 for more information on *nikoh*). After this practice the groom and the bride leave the bride's home together. One of the most emotional moments is when the groom and the bride walk out of the bride's home together and everybody comes to see the bride off; especially, the blessing (*duo*) pronounced by the bride's father, brings tears to most of those participating.

On my interviews I noticed that it is a happy day when a woman marries off her daughter, but also a very important day as she is freeing herself from the responsibility of 'keeping a girl at home' (an Uzbek expression). For every Uzbek woman, finding a good place for her daughter and marrying her without any problems is a big responsibility. A girl's honour is very important for the family, because if there is any gossip (about her dating, bad behaviour, etc) or the girl causes any problems, people blame the mother. Therefore most women feel released after a daughter's wedding.

#### 4.3.5. *Wedding reception (Nikoh bazmi)*

*Nikoh bazmi* is the main wedding reception, held in a restaurant or wedding hall (*toyhona*). Usually this ceremony is organised and paid for by the groom's family, and guests from the bride's side are invited. The numbers of invited guests can vary from 100 to 600 or even more. The family members and close relatives of the groom meet the guests near the entrance of the hall. The guests bring presents or *toyona* (money). A present can be a carpet, jewellery, a television set, a refrigerator or bouquet of flowers. *Toyona* is usually worth \$100 to \$1000 (or more) and is given by relatives or sometimes very close friends. Usually the groom's family returns the *toyona* to the person who gave it when that person marries or has some other large ceremony.

The celebrations surrounding weddings display an increasing appetite for consumerism, a development which has been noted in connection with other life-cycle rituals. These days, some of the roles previously undertaken by female family members have been superseded by technology, fashion and changes to the economy. Different web sites and services help to find a wedding dress, a stylist for makeup, a hairdresser or other services. Invitation cards for weddings and other occasions can still be a simple paper invitation, but more families are choosing to buy special papyrus type paper or even to decorate materials with special stones and perfume: usually rich families try to order something nobody has yet ordered. For example renting a bride's dress can cost over US \$1000, and renting cars is another large expense. The wedding cake can be chosen and ordered from dozens of unique cake styles. People used to send *sarpo* to the bride's house wrapped in a piece of material (*tugun*), but when I started my fieldwork in 2007

they had begun sending *sarpo* inside big television boxes and nowadays they decorate special boxes, draped in velvet decorated with beads and embroidery.

Although some people practise life-cycle rituals in an Islamic way and conduct Islamic weddings, European weddings are still practised by the majority of people. Some Uzbeks have also adopted other European rituals, perhaps reflective of rituals spread through globalisation. The practice of the bride's throwing a bouquet of flowers to her bridesmaids is adopted from European weddings. Women are actors in arranging and performing these practices: according to their degree of piety, interest and life style they choose how to organise and conduct them. They adapt to changes and cope with rules and regulations.

During my fieldwork I visited many wedding halls (*toyhonas*). Wedding halls built in the city can vary from palatial to small, and are used not only for weddings, but also as restaurants and for all kinds of gatherings. These wedding halls offer a wide range of services usually offering three or four party menus ranging from inexpensive to luxurious, and allowing people to bring some home-cooked food as well. Wedding halls offer technical support such as a videographer, photographer, facilities to show the party as it happens on a big screen, music, and visual effects such as fog, bubbles and special lighting. They employ bakers for special cakes and professionals for hall decoration. The wedding hall negotiates charges according to the amount of food and the services people want to hire.

Women are constantly getting more creative in organising these events and always finding ways to cope with difficulties. The expenditure in the life-cycle rituals is constantly monitored by state officials, *mahallas* and the media and press. I observed that in order to cut expenditure and save people's time and effort, the state institutions made a new regulation to combine registration of *ZAGS* with the main wedding ceremony, by inviting an official staff member (usually a woman) from the state registration office to the wedding reception. The official staff member invites the bride and groom to the middle of the hall and conducts the whole procedure in front of all guests. This saved women and whole families the work and expense of one day of preparation, hiring many cars, inviting guests and arranging for the food.

#### **4.3.6. *Traditional bride's greeting (bow down) (Kelin salom)***

After the *nikoh bazmi* finishes, the groom brings his bride to his home and that night they sleep in separate rooms. In the morning, the groom's family serves breakfast to the bride, her *yanga*<sup>40</sup> (a sort of maid of honour) and other guests who stayed with her overnight. In the morning, the bride's mother, relatives and friends come back to the groom's house for the ceremony of *kelin salom* (literally 'bride's greeting'). *Kelin salom* means the bride's greeting by bowing, showing respect in a traditional way. The bride performs her *kelin salom* after breakfast, when her *yanga* leads her out to the courtyard in her traditional silk (*atlas*) dress and her head covered with a special embroidered

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<sup>40</sup>*Yanga* is usually a very close family member of the bride (whom she trusts and can ask intimate questions) such as her sister-in-law, or maternal or paternal aunt. She looks after the bride, supporting her, teaching her how to behave, giving her advice and/or help.

scarf. She bows to the family members and all other guests performing her *salom*. After this, the groom's family members, relatives and neighbours give presents to the bride.

In order to see the covered face of the bride every person has to give *kormana* (a token or present for seeing the face of the bride), a present. Each relative or guest comes forward and gives *kormana* to the bride after which the bride bows a few times performing *salom* as the sign of respect, greeting and thanks. Gifts might vary from souvenirs up to gold earrings, gold bracelets, dishes, cloths, bedding, a television or carpet, the value reflecting the giver's social status, wealth and relation to the groom's family. *Kelin salom* is usually a female ceremony, but the groom's father, uncle or brothers might come with presents to see the bride for a few minutes. The *yanga* of the bride gives a present (such as a tablecloth, scarf, bedding, towel, etc.) to every person who brought *kormana* for the bride. While this exchange of gifts is normally a gesture of thanks and a sign of respect, sometimes the mother of a bride gives very expensive presents to compete with the groom's family.

During the *kelin salom*, the groom's family sets tables with food in the courtyard and singers entertain the guests with music and dance. The main song is a traditional *salom* song, sung only in this ceremony, which uses rhyme to tell, with respect, the character of each member of the family in a humorous manner. While the singer sings this song the bride does her Uzbek traditional greeting (*salom*) by bowing down with her head covered with a veil. At the end of *Kelin salom*, a little boy takes the cover from the bride's face using the stick of the fruit tree. The fruit trees symbolise productivity. The

boy's participation in this practice is to help the bride to become pregnant with a baby boy, demonstrating a societal preference for boys.

The practice of *kelin salom* continued throughout the Soviet period. The Uzbek historian Zoya Arifkhanova (1997) found that during the Soviet period, especially in its later years, '*kelin salom* was not celebrated very grandly and guests would have only tea, but in the 1990s (ie post-independence) *kelin salom* became grand, and people started involving musicians for this practice and preparing two, three or more courses of food' (52). As part of the wider effort by the state to limit expenditure on life-cycle rituals, attempts were made to encourage people to combine the *kelin salom* with the *nikoh bazmi*, with some success. This not only cuts down expense on ceremony, but frequently families do not exchange costly gifts when the two events are combined. This happens when a singer invites the bride, followed by her *yanga*, to the middle of the hall and they conduct the practice of *kelin salom* in front of all the guests who came for the wedding reception.

After the practice of *kelin salom* finishes the *yanga* stays in the groom's house for a second night, which is the groom and bride's first night together. The *yanga* explains to her about sex and behaviour on 'the first night'. Girls are expected to be virgins at the time of their marriage, and in most families, some evidence of the bride's virginity (blood on a sheet) is demanded. It is a very important point for the bride and her family, as the social value of virginity was retained throughout the Soviet period and is still valued among Uzbeks. Usually the sheet or white cloth which is used on the first night is

taken to the groom's mother as evidence. In the morning after the first night, the bride's mother sends *govurdoq* (meat fried with vegetables) to the groom's house.

#### 4.3.7. *Bride's visit to her parents' home (Charlar)*

A few days after the *kelin salom*, the bride's parents conduct *charlar* (inviting their daughter to her parents' house.) The word *charlar* is based on *chorlar*, meaning 'calling' or 'inviting'. In this ceremony, the parents invite their daughter to their home for the first time since her marriage. She arrives with her mother-in-law, husband's relatives and new neighbours. The number of guests is agreed in advance, sometimes as an exchange. For example, if the bride's mother went to *kelin salom* with ten people, the groom's mother had to give each one a tray of sweets, bread, fruits and material. Hence, the groom's mother comes to *charlar* with ten people, for whom the bride's mother prepares similar trays. These practices are all controlled by women and they are practised in the form of reciprocity.

Arifkhanova (2007) stated that in the mid-1990s *charlar* was conducted as a grand celebration with some rich families celebrating it in restaurants. As with other rituals, the *mahalla* as an instrument of the state stepped in to regulate expenditures and display. *Mahalla* regulated these ceremonies by advising to join the practice of *charlar* with that of the *nikoh* during the main wedding party. This would give both families a rest and save them from another big preparation for *charlar*.

Guests in this ceremony can be limited to between twenty and fifty people, and in some households it is celebrated only within the family circle. Sometimes the two sides come

to an agreement not to conduct one or more ceremonies, or to combine them. This was how my neighbour Mukarram and her in law (*quda*) agreed to skip the *charlar* and instead send the couple on a honeymoon to a holiday place in the mountains. Women control their ceremonies and often, women change some parts or even the whole ceremony according to their needs.

Women are the key actors in such negotiations, as Kandiyoti (2004, 338) argues, since they both preserve customs and negotiate changes in the ‘rich ritual life [that] is considered part and parcel of national identity as well as [a] key marker of one’s social standing in the community’ (338). As I have made clear in many parts of this thesis, it is mainly (though not exclusively) women who organise ceremonies and try to keep them in order. These ceremonies are a very important part of women’s lives, because they have so much close, friendly interaction during them.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

This chapter describes marriage and practices connected with weddings, one of the most important social events of Uzbek life. In the first part of this chapter I discussed the types of marriages existing in Uzbekistan, the history of marriage, and how ceremonies are organised and celebrated. I discussed how the Uzbek state controls life-cycle rituals by issuing decrees, and the official support for the *mahalla*’s role in implementing state rules and regulations.



Given Soviet and current day economic and political realities, wedding practices in Uzbekistan changed: first by adopting different rituals from (Russian) European-style weddings, and later by reviving forms of old Uzbek practices. However organising weddings has always been managed by women and they take an active role in preserving (and changing) these practices.

There are several important factors in organising and conducting wedding practices; these are family status, class, effective communication and exchange between two families. I argue that family, relatives and *mahalla*-community relations are important actors in celebrations and practices. Observing only the one small institution of *sovchilar* and their work shows how strong the network of this institution is and how family, relatives and community live interdependently.

In the second part I talked about wedding rituals and their history in the context of post-1991 socio-cultural change and transformation. I discussed changes in wedding practices, with some of them revived, some disappeared, and some of them newly developed after independence. Women's interest increased on Islamic type of wedding, which was a new (forgotten old) way of celebration. These weddings emphasised difference between Islamic and 'European', 'modern' society. There are some practices done by women only during the wedding ceremony which are claimed as either Islamic, or un-Islamic, or old Uzbek practices. However, at most weddings, people have continued to perform rituals and popular folk customs for years and kept doing so because their parents did so, or because they find them enjoyable. Although religious rituals were targeted and banned, these rituals continue to be practised by people.

I also argue that although many practices are performed as ‘fun’ (the groom pulls apart *goshanga*, *payandoz*, throwing sweets on top of bride and groom etc. (see 4.3.4.)) in fact they have meaning and symbolise masculine power and women’s submissiveness, as well as people’s wish to have children. Having a family, conducting a grand wedding, inviting and feeding lots of people and having many children continues to be an ideal life for many Uzbeks

## CHAPTER 5: BIRTH AND BRINGING UP CHILDREN

### Introduction

As with marriage rituals, pre-Soviet and Soviet researchers gathered ethnographic data and interpreted it through the lenses of their times and political preoccupations, generally describing practices they did not approve of as ‘backward’ and equating traditional or religious practices with folklore: the ‘dual Islams’ appearing once more. Again mirroring the analyses of marriage practices, since the rise of religious consciousness which accompanied independence, new Islamic interpretations have been put on birth and child-rearing practices.

The practices connected with belief in ancestral spirits, fetishism, animism, witchcraft and evil eye were conducted by other Central Asian nations as well as Uzbekistan. During the Soviet period extensive research was carried out by Soviet ethnographers into this practices in different regions of Uzbekistan. But, since independence, people have been changing their habits and questioning and debating them. In this regard, there are many questions asked during Friday mosque visits and extensive written information has become available. Some practices have ended, others are practised very rarely, but a few continue.

In pre-Soviet Uzbekistan, Russian scholars recorded local family life and practices. A great deal of very interesting data was gathered (in particular Nalivkin 1886, Troiskaya 1927, and Gershenovich 1928), and articles published (Bartold, Maev, Horoshin,

Grebenkin, Ostroumov, Likoshin and Arandarenko) in *Turkestanskiye Vedomosti*<sup>41</sup> (Shodmonova 2011,) about women's lives, the bringing up of children, and the ceremonies and rituals of the time. During this period and early in the Soviet era, studies emphasising childhood education were carried out by *Jadids*, for example, Avloniy (1978), Behdudiy (1914), Mahmudhoja (1914, 1915) and Fitrat (1915).

Women's living conditions in pre-Soviet Uzbekistan were poor. Statistical information from this time shows that one of the main reasons for the unequal male and female populations was women's higher mortality rates, given their unequal social status and early marriage followed by birth complications (Burieva 1997). These problems impacted on women's health and raised female mortality rates. Early marriage and poor living conditions during this period are discussed by Tashbaeva (1989) and Suhareva (1955). Child mortality was very high and many children died from contagious diseases during the first few years of their childhood (Burieva,1997). Using the standard Soviet argument Tashbaeva (1989) noted that people's cultural backwardness led them to explain death and disease by reference to evil, supernatural forces.

During the Soviet period, the state improved medical care, reducing mother and infant mortality rates. Many maternity care centres, consultation centres for the protection of mother and child, children's polyclinics and medical care centres were opened, and the number of midwives/gynaecologists increased (Tashbaeva 1989). During the Soviet period the state institutionalised childcare by organising kindergartens in every region, and encouraged women to have more children by supplying different benefits and present-

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<sup>41</sup> Periodical newspaper printed in pre-Soviet Uzbekistan during 1870-1917.

ing medals. During the Soviet period, research into family life was continued by Russian Soviet ethnographers such as Suhareva (1955, 1959), Monogarova (1969), Lobacheva (1975), Kislyakov (1959, 1969), Cnesarev (1969), Karmisheva (1969, 1976), Firshtein (1978), and Uzbek Soviet ethnographers Jabborov (1967) and Tashbaeva (1989). Their research was based on the family life of Uzbek people, analysing their life-cycle events and other practices. Most of the local practices were criticised and the Soviet state tried to inculcate a new, Soviet style of life in Uzbek families. The research of the Soviet scholars labelled most of the local practices as *old*, *bad*, and *awkward* traditions, or as ‘vestiges from the past’.

After independence, the state increased its attention to new generations by dedicating different years to pinpointing the needs of children, the younger generation, mother and child, etc (appendix 17). In these years, work was done on the protection of women and children, including the creation of the ‘*Soglom avlod*’ fund, a fund for children. The state also organised social and sports activities for children. The Uzbek state encouraged a return to national customs and traditions in the decree<sup>42</sup> published by the Cabinet of Ministers with regard to the government’s ‘mother and child’ programme, which supported ‘the heritage of ancestors’ - the traditional technique of bringing up children. The state decree on the ‘Year of Comprehensively Advanced Generation’ declared ‘the main attention moved towards the new generation. That is because there are many problems in the world connected with youth, such as alcoholism, drug-addiction and the influence of extremism. The decree stated, ‘it was important to protect youth from all these evils’.

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<sup>42</sup> Decree number 68 issued on February 5<sup>th</sup> 2001 by the Cabinet of Ministers.

In this chapter, I review the practices connected with birth and the bringing up of children in the neighbourhood of Tashkent how the Soviet State attempted to control these and how they changed, or were changed, after independence; and analyse women's agency in their modification, continuance or rejection.

## **5.1 PART ONE - Pregnancy**

### **5.1.1. *Conception and antenatal care***

Any analysis of changes to antenatal practices during and after Soviet rule must take account of the central place childbearing and the raising of children has always taken, and continues to take, in the public and private lives of Uzbek women. As an example of this, I observed during my fieldwork that women who have given birth to many children and are from respected families are often invited to participate in rituals connected with children and marriage, whereas less fecund women are not. Having been successful themselves, mothers of large families are invited to perform practices and ceremonies they believe will share their good fortune with the new bride and bring her 'a good life'. As Rahima Opa mentioned in conversation:

Family and children are an important part of our people. As an Uzbek proverb says, "a house with children is as full of life as a market, and a house without children is as empty as a cemetery" (*bolalik uy bozor bolasiz uy mozor*). People with many children are respected in Uzbek society. When people meet each other for the first time they usually ask "how many children do you have?" It is the first topic of conversation and people talk about their family and children with pride.

The introduction of Soviet ideas regarding the importance of a woman as a citizen and a worker hardly changed the Uzbek perception that her importance is, rather, as a mother

and wife. Generally, in Uzbek families girls are brought up to be kind, submissive and caring. The value of the family and children soaks into their mind from their childhood. Emphasis on the central importance of children to a married couple begins even before the wedding. Motherhood is expected of the bride and to signify the expectation of motherhood, before the actual wedding the mother of the bride puts some children's clothes inside a wooden chest (*sandiq*) to express her wish to have grandchildren. Nor is this a private wish to be made and celebrated within the immediate family: a bride's future fecundity is considered a topic of public interest, expressed during the wedding ceremonies through different practices.

One practice is sitting children on the laps of the groom and bride; another is the custom of a boy pulling the veil off the bride's head after the ceremony of *kelin salom*, symbolising childbearing. Childbearing is further symbolised by the eggs and mutton - associated with fertility - which are served during the wedding celebrations. At almost every wedding, boiled eggs and *to'sh* (breast of lamb<sup>43</sup>) are served to the groom because it is believed this gives reproductive strength to the groom on his wedding night. Snesev (1969) noted that people served eggs to both bride and groom during the wedding feast. Almost every wedding ritual is followed with the supplication (*duo*) carried out by the elders of the family, which says 'May Allah bring the celebration of a newborn, next year' (*Kelasi yil shu kunlarda beshik toylarga yetkazsin*).

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<sup>43</sup> Mutton is considered as *issiqlik* food for the groom. Food is divided into two categories among Uzbeks: *issiqlik* (hot food) and *sovuqlik* (cold food). *Issiqlik* food gives strength and increases activity (horse meat, lamb, mutton, honey, coffee, etc); *sovuqlik* food calms the body and mind (lemon, green tea, etc). It is considered '*issiqlik* food' will help conception therefore it is recommended for bride and groom.

Practices connected with childbearing and fertility have been mentioned by ethnographers working in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods in different regions of Uzbekistan. In some parts, grain (wheat, rice, corn and chickpeas) sewn into the corner of the bride's mattress are believed to make the newly married couples fertile. Similarly, the Qungiroi people from Denov sew patchwork mattresses (quilts) for the bride as they believe that patches (*quroq*) will help to produce many children. In the Qumqorgon region ten eggs would be put in the groom's pockets when he went into the bedroom for his first night with his bride. This was believed to bring him good luck, meaning the bride would soon become pregnant. In the Denov region, a couple of eggs are given to the bride and groom during their first night together and both have to eat these eggs that same night. In the Surhandarya region, a little boy and girl are rolled on the bed to help the bride and groom have sons and daughters soon (Hamraqulova, 2002).

In Juz, older women who have had many children are rolled on the bed in which the bride and groom are to spend their first night together (Snesarev, 1969). The belief that contact with children will produce children was noted by Buriev (1995), who mentioned women sitting two-year-old boys on the laps of the bride and groom when they go inside the *chimildiq* (a piece of material which curtains off a corner of the room). This belief is reflected in the same source by a story where a bride is taken to the ceremony on horseback with a seven or eight-year old boy (usually her brother or nephew) sitting with her on the horse.

Despite the Soviet state's desire to suppress what it regarded as superstition, and its attempts to associate local practices with 'backward' beliefs and replace them with more



modern ones, my fieldwork revealed that some women who self-identify as pious Muslims, but still believe that there are evil forces and spirits, demonstrating a fusion of traditional and Muslim beliefs which survived even 73 years of Soviet education. According to my informant Lola (30 years old), the first forty days of seclusion (*chilla*) for newly-married couples and pregnant women is meant to protect them during a period in which they are considered to be very vulnerable. During this period people avoid women who cannot have children, who have suffered miscarriages or whose children have died, and if such women are present at a wedding, they are not allowed in the bride's room. The practice of *chilla* was also mentioned in pre-Soviet (Nalivkin 1886), Soviet (Troitskaya 1927, Karmisheva 1969, Frishtein, 1978, Kislyakov 1959) and post-Soviet scholarship (Arifkanova 2002, Nasrutdinov 1996).

Childbearing is discussed very soon after the wedding, when relatives, neighbours and friends start asking the mother-in-law if there is news, which means whether her daughter-in-law is pregnant. When such news is forthcoming – that is, when the bride becomes pregnant - family members and close friends share the news, and grandparents begin to plan and talk about the rituals and practices connected with a child.

### **5.1.2.                    *Seeking fertility help from doctors, tabibs and saints***

Seeking fertility treatment is another area which reveals that a mix of Islamic, traditional and westernised or Soviet innovations have been absorbed into the everyday lives of women who self-identify as Muslims. During my fieldwork, I observed cases where a new bride was unable to get pregnant and found herself under increasing pressure from her in-laws, her husband and the community. Grandmothers expect grandchildren: they

dream of conducting children's ceremonies then circumcision ceremonies, followed by weddings. Children are an extension of the family and in every *duo* (supplication) performed by the elders, children and weddings are mentioned. When a daughter-in-law cannot become pregnant, the elders of the family in particular start worrying and her fertility becomes the whole family's concern.

Hadicha Opa said:

One of the main functions of women is to bear children. If a woman who cannot conceive, sometimes she is called a tree that doesn't bear fruit (*mevasiz darah*). Some people avoid women who cannot get pregnant. If a woman does not conceive for a long time, people say that she is under the spell of witchcraft, or that she is ill. Family members will take action and start consulting doctors, *tabibs* or saints. If a bride does not conceive for a year or more, her mother or mother-in-law will take her to the doctor. At the same time, they may send the husband to see a doctor. Any medical problems are treated according to the doctor's prescription.

Seeking a doctor's assistance is not the only course followed by women in need of fertility assistance. Some women I listened to talked about *tabibs* and the treatments they use. It was interesting that women visit particular *tabibs* on the basis of recommendations from their friends or relatives. When a woman gets pregnant after treatment, the reputation of the *tabib* is naturally increased, because these newly-pregnant women will advise others (see appendix 9 for 3 different *tabibs*). Some people pray for a baby during the Islamic practice sacrifice of an animal (*qurbanlik*). They then divide the meat into 1 or 1.5 kg pieces and distribute these to relatives, neighbours and friends (mainly to poorer people). The recipients eat the meat and then pray that God will bless the donor family with a baby.

Sometimes people visit one of the many sacred places, usually the tomb of a holy person, to pray for intervention. During my fieldwork, I noticed that most of these visitors

were women. Women visit saints' tombs such as Bahovuddin Naqshbandi in Buhara, Shahi Zinda's in Samarkand, or Zangi Ota's in Tashkent and others (for more details on these visits see appendix 7 and 8). Most people in Tashkent visit Zangi Ota. Women visit these places, worship and ask for a cure for their problems. When they find a cure, they come back. During one visit, I interviewed a woman who had brought a child for its first haircut. The woman explained that because her daughter-in-law became pregnant after her visit (*ziyarat*) to this place, she decided to have her grandchild's hair cut here. One of the *mullas* cut a little bit of the child's hair and the woman gave him money.

During my fieldwork trip to Bukhara, I talked to a few young women who were going *ziyarat* to the tomb of Naqshbandi to seek help to get pregnant. One of these, Zamira, was accompanied by her mother-in-law. Zamira had been married for three years but was not yet pregnant. Doctors could find no reason for this, and so her mother-in-law decided to take her on this trip because her friend's daughter had become pregnant after visiting the Naqshbandi tomb. Zamira said "I tried the best doctors and *tabibs* in Tashkent and all kinds of medicine, herbs and steam, and nothing helped. This trip is my last hope, miracles happen and our friends got pregnant after their trip to the tomb of Naqshbandi last year." Her comment neatly demonstrates the multifaceted belief system this woman has incorporated into her life: modern medicine, traditional healers and miracles.

Sometimes, but very rarely, if women could not get pregnant the family adopted children but on most occasions, these marriages ended in divorce. The common solutions to

childlessness are divorce and polygamy (Burieva, 1997). Although polygamy is not officially allowed in Uzbekistan, it exists and (assuming the first wife is barren) means the man may have a second opportunity to have children (for more information see Chapter 4; 4.1.1.).

### **5.1.3. *Practices during pregnancy***

The introduction of state health care under the Soviets meant that the majority of Tashkent women went into hospital for antenatal care and to give birth. Many of the Islamic and local practices surrounding pregnancy, birth and the care of a newborn were necessarily changed or hidden in these circumstances. As with rituals related to marriage, however, some of these (although not all) re-emerged after independence, having been discreetly carried out, or modified, in the private domestic sphere ruled by women. The observations below are backed by my own fieldwork, but also by the data collected over several decades of Soviet rule by the ethnographers mentioned above, illustrating the continuance of life-cycle ritual under two regimes.

When a woman gets pregnant, her family members get *suyunchi* (good news presents) from their elders. The news about a baby gets round very quickly. First, the husband tells the news to his mother, then one of his family members goes to the bride's family and informs them of the pregnancy of their daughter. The bride's parents give *suyunchi*, usually money, sweets or some cloth, to the person who brings the news. The local practice of *suyunchi* has been used for many years; it was also mentioned in pre-Soviet (Nalivkin 1886) and Soviet scholarship (Firshtein 1978, Karmisheva 1969).

After a woman gets pregnant, different customs are followed by the woman and her family to protect her from the evil eye, witchcraft, bad luck, eating the wrong food, visiting certain places and other feared eventualities. Food is a special subject during pregnancy and a woman's cravings (*boshi qorong'i*) are treated in a particular way in Tashkent. Some people believe that if a pregnant woman is not able to eat what she wants, her baby might have blue eyes, blond hair or some other similar problematic condition. Exceptions to letting a woman eat what she pleases include eating horse (considered difficult to digest, *issiqlik*) or camel (which could extend her pregnancy since camels are pregnant for twelve months).<sup>44</sup> The prohibition on horse meat during pregnancy was also mentioned in different ethnographers' work (Firshtein 1978, Snegarev 1969, Bayalieva 1972, Hamraqulova 2002). Pregnant women are also advised not to look at ugly animals or things because this might make their children ugly.

The growing Islamic consciousness of Uzbek society after independence has had its effect on rituals around childbearing and pregnancy just as it has had on marriage (see Chapter 4). The criticism of Soviet ethnographers that such rituals were 'backward' was resisted by the many people who continued to practise them, but the post-independence insistence of religious leaders and *otins* (religious female practitioner) that these same rituals are 'un-Islamic' has seen many women reject them, choosing what they perceive as the correct observance of Islam over tradition. In this respect at least, it is women who have decided how 'Islamic' their family will or will not become. Particular examples of this are the practices *Buvishshanba*, *Mushkulkushod* (cult of female saints) and

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<sup>44</sup> The same information in relation to camel meat is also mentioned by the following authors, Snegarev 1969, Bayalieva 1972, and Hamroqulova 2002.

using amulets as protection for evil eye, which during my fieldwork I noticed have almost disappeared.

One of the women from an older generation, Muqaddas Opa, informed me that when her daughter could not get pregnant, and then to ease the birth of her child when she finally managed it, she used to ask help from female spirits and perform practices such as *Buvi Seshanba* and *Mushkilkushod* (cult of female saints). However, she complained that nowadays young women do not practise these rituals. When I started my fieldwork women had almost stopped practising them but there was still debate and criticism of these practices among women. It was also stated Arifkhanova that according to her fieldwork conducted in Tashkent (2005) these practices almost disappeared.

## **5.2 PART TWO - Postnatal practices**

### **5.2.1. *Birth and chilla***

Secrecy surrounds the birth itself: as soon as a woman starts her contractions, family members try to hide this from other people. A typical example was Zaynab Opa's chosen way to deal with her daughter-in-law's parturition. She did not mention her daughter-in-law's visit to the maternity ward until after the birth of her granddaughter. Keeping birth secret is mentioned by Firshtein (1978), who said hiding the process of birth from everybody (even the neighbours) was because, especially at this time, the mother and child are vulnerable and could be harmed by evil. Interestingly, as Firshtein (1978) pointed out, this secrecy not only meant that outsiders did not know, but even that the

midwife could be called at the last minute. The reason given was that when more people knew, the birth might be complicated and continue longer. Carol Delaney (1991, 63), who did research in Islamic village in Turkey found a similar practice to the Uzbek one and concluded that ‘the secrecy is due in part to shame’.

Zaynab Opa’s daughter-in-law was taken to the maternity ward during the night. As soon as she left, Zaynab Opa made a *duo* (supplication), and prepared some money and a white scarf (*oqliq*<sup>45</sup>). She intended to use these to celebrate after the woman had been delivered of her baby. After the baby’s birth, her son came home and received his *suyunchi* (present for good news) from her, then he went to his wife’s family’s house to collect *suyunchi* from the wife’s parents. After the birth, Zaynab Opa called her relatives and friends and told her neighbours, and the news spread to other neighbours, who came to congratulate her.

Women stay in hospital from about three to five days, but may stay longer if delivery is difficult. Zaynab Opa’s daughter-in-law came out of hospital in four days. The day of coming home from hospital is a special occasion and during the Soviet period it was celebrated within the small circle of the family. However, nowadays these occasions are organised by videographers, with posh cars and Disney characters.

The celebration described below was for Zaynab Opa’s second grandchild, and the ceremony was smaller than for the firstborn. Still, a videographer was hired to record the entire procedures of the day. Everything started by Zaynab Opa’s son arriving in a lim-

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<sup>45</sup> *Oqliq* - a white scarf or white piece of material, which it is believed will make any task easy; the concept of *oqliq* also exists in the Fergana valley and is mentioned in Ashirov’s research (2007).

ousine at the hospital to pick up his wife and child, accompanied by two more cars carrying other relatives. He gave presents and flowers to the midwives and nurses who had helped with the birth. Further, when her daughter-in-law returned home from hospital with her newborn baby, she entered walking on a new piece of material (*payandoz*<sup>46</sup>, more details Chapter 4, 4.3.4). Zaynab Opa showered (*sochalak*) mother and child with money and sweets, which were then picked up by children and guests. Often people take these sweets to their own daughters or daughters-in-law for good luck (wishing they might also have a baby). At the end of this celebration, Zaynab Opa's mother made a long *duo*. A few days later, the videographer delivered an album and a video cassette with the family movie he had made.

The practices connected with birth and children have changed since independence. As with the marriage rituals, the practices which re-emerged after Independence have been subject to influences from the changing outside world and the practices connected with birth have also started adopting new trends. Among the trends I observed during my fieldwork is that fathers coming to pick up the baby from the maternity ward sometimes bring with them a few people dressed up as Disney heroes. In the practice of birth the notions of 'shame' and 'secrecy', are changing under foreign and particularly American influence into something 'open', 'fun' and 'modern'.

Another recent innovation is dressing a female baby in bridal clothes when she is taken home from the maternity ward. Traditionally, as Hadicha Opa explained to me, babies were swaddled in their grandparents old, cotton clothes, which was also mentioned in

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<sup>46</sup> New piece of cloth. Laying *payandoz* at the entrance is an old practice. Its meaning is to show respect, love and attention to the person; people also use this practice when they have very respected guests, and during wedding practices for the groom and bride.



Soviet (Arifkhanova 2005, Firshtein 1978, Karmisheva 1969) and post-Soviet studies. The older custom was practical because the old clothes were worn and soft, and the baby's body could breathe inside the material. It reflected the parents' wish for the baby to be like the grandparent and live as long a life as the grandparent had.

Again mirroring pre-and post-independence wedding rituals, the extravagance in celebrating a birth was already noted – and criticised by - Soviet and pre-Soviet commentators, and has continued, but in a different form. People now compete with each other at the celebration of a birth on the number of cars, the number of guests, the quality of the video, the baby's presents and much more. Some people call this the extravagant 'dream' (*orzu-havas*), and fieldwork observations show that the conspicuous consumption of goods is partly competition with others and partly the use of extravagance to show and share joy.

### **5.2.2.            *Naming and call to prayer (Azan)***

Naming children happens with the father, grandfather or imam from the mosque whispering the *azan* (call for prayer) and the child's name into a baby's ears during its first three days. In the pre-Soviet period, when women gave birth at home, people arranged the practice of the *azan* to the baby the day after he or she was born. However, as this is one of the religious rites of passage connected with birth and children, and was most subject to scrutiny during the Soviet period when women delivered their babies in hospital, it was not easy to arrange for someone to visit to call the *azan* to the baby. Therefore during the Soviet period the practice did not disappear, but simply went under cov-

er and people started performing it at home discreetly. After independence, as with other religious practices, people started performing it openly.

The example of mother-of-two Gulnora, thirty years old, illustrates the mix of traditional, Islamic and developing rituals surrounding childbirth. When she arrived home with her first son from hospital, the whole family met her with a hired band of musicians, a video recorder and many guests. On the following day, the family arranged for an *azan* for the baby. The imam asked the baby's mother to stay on the praying carpet (*jay-namoz*) with the baby in her arms. He recited the *azan* for the baby, then called his name. Sometime later, after the baby's tummy button had dried up and the umbilicus had dropped off, the baby was bathed by the two grandmothers who also cut his hair during his *chilla*. After every ritual, a table was set, food was cooked, the grandmothers or elders of the family made a *duo* (supplication) for the child and the family and guests talked about everyday life. Although Gulnora managed all of this for her firstborn, she was unable to carry out some rituals with her second (daughter), because her mother-in-law was sick at that time, so it was difficult and not appropriate to celebrate.

The name given to each child has its own importance, for each has a meaning and history. According to Firshtein (1978) in northern Khorazm, the custom was to name a male child after his grandfather. During my fieldwork in Tashkent, I observed that family elders - usually the grandparents - chose the names of firstborn children. Younger children were named by their parents, or by other members of the family. People choose names according to family status. Generally, boys' names give a quality normally assumed to be masculine (*Jasur*, - Brave, *Gairat* - Zealous, Energetic, *Olim* - Scholar) or

to convey strength (*Temur* - Metal, *Pulat*, - Iron, *Toshmat* - Stone). Some boys' names start with a suffix or prefix, which represents the position, status, generation or history belonging to their family. Names starting with *Saeed* (*Saeed*, *Saeedakbar*, *Saeedolim* etc.) mean this family are descended from the prophet; names with the suffix *Haji* (*Hojimurod*, *Hojiakbar*, etc) mean the family has religious, saintly, or pure blood. Most girls' names mean things like beauty, state of the soul, love or happiness (*Lola* - Tulip, *Barno* - Beautiful, *Malika* - Princess, *Guzal* - Beautiful, *Mehribonu* - Kind, *Yulduz* - Star). Some common names start with a suffix or prefix *Gul* or *Dil*, which means flower or heart/soul (*Gulchehra*, *Gulnoza*, *Dildora*, *Bahtigul*, *Dilorom*).

The state, period of time and political system can also affect children's names. During the Soviet period some Uzbek people adopted names for their children which were not common. Frishtein (1978) mentioned that Uzbek people started naming their children with names from other neighbouring Soviet republics. Another Soviet ethnographer, Karmisheva (1969), mentioned that instead of naming their children after their grandparents, young Uzbek couples had started giving their children different, new names such as Klara or Tamara, which were not traditional Uzbek names. She also said that Uzbeks used their fathers' names as family names and in her research she found that Uzbeks had started changing their fathers' names into patronymic (*otchestvo*) names, which was the specific structure to Russian naming. One of my friends was named *Damir* during the Soviet period, which is a short version of 'long live peace' (*Dazdravstvuy mir*). I would argue that these changes were adopted by Uzbek people to blend in with the 'Russian', 'modern' life and were a step towards adopting the 'Soviet' identity.

However, after independence and with the rise of Islamic consciousness and change of identity, the trend in naming children has changed. Uzbek people have started calling their children by the names of the prophets or other religious people, for example, *Muhammad Amin, Omar, Ibrohim, Yusuf, Muso, Abdulloh, Maryam, Robia, Hadicha* and *Aisha*; or after significant figures in Uzbek history, such as *Ulugbek, Temur, Alisher* and *Bobur*.

Sometimes, under different circumstances, people change their children's names. As thirty-eight-year old Mohira said, a name can also change the child's character. The original name of her daughter was *Nargiza*, but then Mohira was told that *Nargiza* is a flower that grows in hell. She changed her daughter's name to *Muslima* (Muslim female), and said that after that, her daughter's character changed. This might also happen if a child keeps getting ill or has other problems. Forty-year-old Karima was advised to change her son's name from *Bobur* to *Abdulla* because he kept getting ill. She agreed that her son's original name, a historical person's name, was 'too heavy' for her little son to carry.

The naming of children is an important process for every parent, and the period of seclusion for forty days known as *chilla* is practiced immediately after birth.

### **5.2.3.                    *The first forty days (Chilla)***

The number of forty is significant in some cultures and religions. The practice of *chilla* has a long history and is practised by different ethnic people in Central Asia and else-

where in the world. It is the first forty days after a major life-cycle event such as birth, marriage or death, during which people are vulnerable. This practice was researched in pre-Soviet (Nalivkin 1886), Soviet (Troitskaya 1927, Karmisheva 1969, Frishtein, 1978, Kislyakov 1959) and post-Soviet scholarship (Nasrutdinov 1996, Arifkanova 2002, Hamraqulova 2002, Ashurov 2007). The Soviet ethnographers usually criticised the practice of *chilla* as ‘backward’ and Karmisheva (1969) claimed that *chilla* had almost disappeared from Uzbek women’s everyday life.

The practice of *chilla* is divided into two parts: small *chilla* (*kichkina chilla* - twenty days) and big *chilla* (*katta chilla* - forty days) (Tashbaeva 1989). Following childbirth, during the *kichkina chilla*, it is important that all women are especially careful about the mother and child’s health and well-being, keeping the room of the mother and baby clean and protected. Mother and baby are not allowed to walk outside after sunset, and cannot meet people who have a serious illness or are thought to be bad luck. *Chilla* following birth was mentioned in Delaney (1991) as *logusalik*, and is explained as a period during which women are ‘open to evil influences and infections’. Most of the Soviet literature described how during this period the mother and baby are usually looked after by one of the female relatives. Frishtein (1978) stated that during the *chilla*, people kept a light on in the room, believing this could protect them from harm and evil spirits. As I observed during my fieldwork, although women in Tashkent know about the practice of *chilla*, some of them - especially young women - do not follow it, and in some parts of Tashkent the practice is losing its meaning.

The *isiriq* (*arpa badiyon* Uzbek or *feneal* [fenel] Latin) is another practice which is used during *chilla*. This practice consists of burning the dry stem, seeds and leaves of a special herb to make smoke. People burn *isiriq* to chase away evil spirits and it is also used as protection from the evil eye. *Isiriq* is burned in the room of a newborn baby or a new bride and groom, and in the household of deceased, especially during *chilla*. Women believe it cleans up all types of germs, and protects babies and mothers from being harmed by *jinns* or the evil eye. This practice also was mentioned in a few Soviet writings, and nowadays is not very popular. At the practices organised in the *Yangi Bozor mahalla* I did not see any women using *isiriq*; however, I noticed women of the *Eski Bozor* still use this practice.

After her *chilla* is over, the woman visits her parents' home, a practice which in the Tashkent region is called *chilla guzaron* or *chilla qochdi*. Hadicha Opa described how when her daughter visited her to introduce her baby to her family, to celebrate the end of the *chilla*, and when she came home, she was accompanied by her mother-in-law and a few of her husband's relatives. The practice is organised by the two families and celebrated by relatives and guests. Hadicha Opa also invited some of her relatives and neighbours and served food to the guests. When her daughter arrived, Hadicha Opa met her daughter and baby near the gate, throwing some money and sweets over them (*sochalak*). At the end of the event, Hadicha Opa gave *sarpo* and sweets to her daughter, baby and guests.

#### **5.2.4. Breast-feeding**

As with the process of giving birth itself, Soviet medicine – in particular, the hospitalisation of new mothers - altered several Uzbek rituals and beliefs connected to breastfeeding, although many of these, like other beliefs, were passed from woman to woman in the private sphere and re-emerged after independence. During my fieldwork, I learnt that despite the years of women giving birth on wards, many still believe that babies must not be breastfed in front of strangers to protect them from the evil eye. This may be related to Delaney's (1991) observation that 'when a woman is unable to nurse, it is said that a curse (*nazar*) has been placed on her' (72).

Mashkura Opa explained to me that the practice of wet-nursing is disappearing in Tashkent, and I did not meet it in my fieldwork. She said that in the past, when a mother could not nurse her baby or if she died in childbirth, a relative or neighbour wet-nursed that baby. When this happened, the father gave *sarpo* (presents) to the wet-nurse. If the wet-nurse had children of her own, they were considered siblings to the woman's children, i.e. *kokrakdosh* (children who fed at the same breast, 'breast-mates'). They were thus considered too closely related to marry. This form of kinship is discussed by Delaney (1991, 72) who says:

(w)hen a woman was unable to nurse an infant, another woman would take over. She would become the baby's *sut anne* (milk mother), and by so doing she would establish kinship not only between herself and the child but between the child and her own children.

This wet-nursing and kinship relation among children was discussed by Karmisheva (1969, 218), who stated that 'when a mother loses her milk or if she is dead, in the past people used to take a baby to a wet-nurse; nowadays they take it to consultation (poli-clinics).'

The introduction of bottles and formula under the Soviets has led to the almost total suppression of the Uzbek breast-feeding tradition. Karmisheva (1969) stated that Uzbek women used to breast-feed their children until they were two or three years old, or they became pregnant with the next baby. The nursing period became shorter in the Soviet era. The same was confirmed by Mashkura Opa: ‘women used to nurse their children for two to three years but young women now do not want to nurse their children so long. Some women start feeding their children with formula within a few months of birth.’

This change started when the Soviet state implemented a technique and duration of breast-feeding, which had a profound effect on traditional Uzbek understanding and construction of kinship. As Mashkura Opa explained:

there was a period when, after giving birth we women used to stay in the maternity ward about five to seven days. Mothers could give milk to their babies only two to three days after the actual birth. For the first few days, they pumped all the women’s milk, boiled and fed it to all the children in the ward. Only after two or three days could mothers breast-feed their babies. Probably this method of breastfeeding was useful because they said mixing different mothers’ milk would help to develop the babies’ immune systems and make them grow stronger. We knew that milk kinship in Islam was important. We were told that children breast-fed by one mother become sisters and brothers. If breast-fed by the same woman, children were not allowed to marry each other when they grew up. Women couldn’t breast-feed another child without their husbands’ permission. But after the breast-feeding method used during the Soviet period, all the children became brothers and sisters. Everybody had been fed mixed milk and it is interesting how different states look at the same thing differently. The method probably worked for that time.

Mashkura Opa’s story suggests that the breast-feeding method used during the Soviet period was an attempt to control and alter local beliefs and behaviour. By creating a new order in the system of childcare, the State was breaking boundaries between families and encouraging people to think more nationally. Because almost all women in this period gave birth in maternity wards, they followed the State’s system, even when, within



the family, they were told a different narrative about breast-feeding. Besides, the Soviet state needed more working hands in the plants and kolhoz fields (translate), and Uzbek women breast-feeding their babies for two to three years would not help to build Communism. However, Hadicha Opa, who also experienced the Soviet method of nursing, suggested a different reason for its introduction: that during ‘the first days after delivery, a woman becomes weak and this method was introduced to give these women a rest.’

Breast-feeding and mother’s milk remain very important, sacred concepts in Uzbek life. Many everyday expressions are connected with mother’s milk. For example, the expression “I am not happy (the mother regrets) having breastfed you (*bergan sutimga noroz-iman*)” is almost a curse. The saying explains that some habits picked up at a very early age (like a mother’s milk) become part of the person and can only be ended by death (*Sut bilan kirgan jon bilan chiqadi*). Mother’s milk is also connected with the practice of *sut puli*, or bride price, which has been replaced by the practice of *qalin*. The link, as Delaney (1991) argues, is that :

(a) woman’s body is the continuous source of sustenance for the child. By depleting their own substance to substantiate a child, women establish *sut hakki* (milk rights) to be supported and sustained by their grown children. It is a reciprocal feeding arrangement, a kind of old age security (73).

Since independence, there have been various projects related to the health and well-being of mothers and children, including *mahalla* committees, polyclinics and other organs of the state. Breast-feeding is promoted by the state through various programmes and discussions in the mass media. On the religious front, references are made to the Qur’an (Chapter 2, Verse 233) referring to a mother’s responsibility to breast-feed her child and provide the baby’s main source of food. Most women do breast-feed their babies, al-

though after six or seven months of breast-feeding, mothers gradually add different foods and wean their children.

### 5.3 PART THREE - Infancy

#### 5.3.1. *Cradle (Beshik)*

The Soviet state did not succeed in eradicating all Uzbek local practices. One of the traditional Uzbek birth practices most targeted by the Soviet state was *beshik*, which is the cradle where Uzbek people used to bring up their children. Frishtein (1978) stated that because of the development of medical care and social structure of the Soviet system, some backward practices existing in the everyday life of Uzbeks had disappeared forever. He claimed that the traditional cradle *beshik* was disappearing and that people were using beds and cots instead; he also mentioned women sending their children to kindergartens.

During the Soviet period it was argued that use of a *beshik* causes babies' heads<sup>47</sup> to become flat and did not allow their bones to develop correctly. Nobody scientifically proved any harm from the practice, however, and as Sul-tonmurod Olim (1998) has argued, the state banned *beshik* not for scientific or safety reasons, but ideological ones. Contrary to the Soviet criticism, Uzbek women argued that the *beshik* is a safe, warm place for a baby and their great-grand-parents were brought up (*ota-bobolarimiz katta*

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<sup>47</sup> There are some people who do have a different shaped head, i.e. the backs of their heads are a little flattened; very often, when people talk about this, they mention the *beshik*, saying *maybe he was brought up in a beshik*.

*bolgan*) there. Since independence, the *beshtk* was praised as a marker of Uzbek identity and the markets started filling up with different varieties of *beshtks*.

*Beshtk* have been used for centuries in Uzbekistan, and were mentioned in Mahmud Qoshgariy's '*Devonu Lugatul turk*', written in the eleventh century (Qoshgariy M. 1960). *Beshtk* are used in almost all regions of Uzbekistan and also in other parts of Central Asia. The construction and use of the *beshtk* is the same in all regions, and during my fieldwork, I observed many. It is a handmade wooden carved cot on rockers usually made of fruit-tree wood (mulberry, apricot or peach). It rests on the floor, and is easy to move from one room to another. A *beshtk* has a very interesting toilet system, which consists of a fitted pipe for urine (*sumak*<sup>48</sup>) and a chamber pot (*tuvak*). There is a hole in the bottom of the *beshtk* to place the *tuvak*, which is made of clay or plastic. The *beshtk* is fitted with a mattress and sheets, and a hole is made to accommodate the *tuvak*. Usually there are a few mattresses. The lower one is called *qobuzloq*<sup>49</sup> and filled with millet (*tariq*). The next one or two are filled with cotton and there is also a very small flat pillow. The *beshtk* usually has two different covers: a thick cover in winter and a thin one in summer. The *qolbog* (made for strapping down the hands) and *oy-oqbog* (made for strapping down the feet) help to keep the baby secure in the *beshtk*.

Hadicha Opa said:

fitting and decorating the *beshtk* is a great pleasure for women, who shop for, or sew, the necessary parts. For the first child, a new *beshtk* is normally purchased by the parents, while subsequent children use the same *beshtk*. Traditionally, a baby was kept inside the

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<sup>48</sup> *Sumak* - a pipe for urine, shaped in a different way for a girl than for a boy baby

<sup>49</sup> *Qobuzloq* is a special mattress used only for *beshtk*. It is very light and filled with *tariq* (millet). It is a very comfortable mattress that does not allow the baby's body to sweat too much.

*beshtik* most of the time until it was two or three years old. Nowadays, most children are kept in their *beshtik* for about one year or less.

The *beshtik* is carefully cared for and people treat it like a sacred object (Sultonmurod Olim, 1998). The *beshtik* can be also the site of shamanic rituals and beliefs, including protection from the evil eye. To protect their children from the evil eye, parents hang a black bead with a white spot (*kozmunchoq*) on the *beshtik* or on the arms of the children, or stitch it onto the clothes of the baby. Some also try to protect the baby from the evil eye by hanging amulets inside the *beshtik* or keeping symbolic objects under the baby's mattress or pillow, like bread, a knife, garlic or a mirror (see appendix 11 for more information). All of these practices were mentioned in Soviet ethnography; however they have almost disappeared from Uzbek women's everyday lives in Tashkent.

Hadicha Opa informed me that she brought up her three children in the *beshtik* during the Soviet period. When she took her children for their general medical check-ups, the doctors confirmed that the children were growing normally and her children had no problems with deformed legs or heads, which were among the problems doctors looked for. Hadicha Opa expressed a common belief when she said:

the *beshtik* keeps the baby warm; the baby's muscles grow straight; it is easy to move and carry the *beshtik* even when the baby is sleeping in it. The baby is always comfortable inside a *beshtik* because his or her bottom is always dry. My older children looked after the younger ones when they were in the *beshtik*. They would rock the *beshtik* and play with the child inside.

Sanobar (52 years old, a shop assistant, who brought up her four children and one grandson in *beshtik*)<sup>50</sup>, whom I interviewed in the market, sews sheets, pillows covers,

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<sup>50</sup> Since independence, when craftwork was revived, she opened a little shop in the old town, just outside the big market. She told me a great deal about *beshtik*, but I also noticed she gave advice when she sold her goods, e.g., which mattress is good for summer or winter, which cover is better protection from flies or mosquitoes, etc.

etc. for *beshiks* and sells *beshiks* in the market. She confirmed that people kept making *beshiks* during the Soviet period in spite of state criticism, and many Uzbek families brought up their children in *beshiks*. Sanobar argued that nothing can replace the *beshik* as it is a very comfortable cot used by people for centuries to help mothers keep their babies warm, dry, comfortable and safe. Because there is a pot inside, no nappies are needed, so the *beshik* allows families to save money. She acknowledged the argument used during the Soviet period against *beshik* (that baby's heads became deformed) but argued that deformation, if any, occurred because of misuse of the *beshik*:

there are rules about how to keep a baby in the *beshik*, but some mothers do not follow them. Mothers have to keep a regime for the baby by taking the baby out of *beshik* from time to time, giving babies body massages, playing with baby, putting mattresses outside in the fresh air, and changing the pot. Some mothers keep babies for an overlong period inside the *beshik*, and when they take baby out of the *beshik*, fail to protect the baby from drafts, which can cause problems.

Debate continues among women and some women, especially the younger generation, do not want to keep their children in *beshik*. Whatever the strength or nature of Soviet and post-Soviet criticism, however, it became clear from my fieldwork that the *beshik* is still used by some mothers in Tashkent but usage of *beshik* among Uzbeks generally is decreasing. I noticed that women in the *Eski Bog mahalla* used *beshik* for their children more than women in the *Yangi Bozor mahalla*. That may be because the *Eski Bog* is an old traditional *mahalla* and as women there know each other very well, they keep, share and pass this practice among each other. In the *Yangi Bozor mahalla*, on the other hand, most people do not know each other and some younger women do not know how to use the *beshik* at all. Especially during the celebration of *beshik toy*, which I will discuss next, it is compulsory for parents of the women to bring a *beshik* as a present. In that case every woman at least has a chance to try to use a *beshik*.

### 5.3.2. *Celebration of Beshik toy*

The celebration of *Beshik toy* was practiced throughout the Soviet period. People started celebrating this practice with even more extravagance in the late Soviet period (Arifkhanova 2002). However after independence it almost disappeared and one of the reasons for this is the reviving religious practice of *aqiqa* which I will discuss in the next section.

*Beshik toy* is the celebration of a child's birth. It is usually for the firstborn in the family and organised and participated in by women. It is usually arranged in the groom's house by inviting the bride's female family and guests. Men do not participate although sometimes, a few men who are family members may be noticed helping during the ceremony. The *beshik* is bought, decorated and presented by the maternal grandmother. In addition to the *beshik*, the maternal grandmother and her relatives bring many presents such as a cot, walking chair, bicycle and various toys. At the same time, the maternal grandmother brings *sarpo* to her daughter, son-in-law and *qudalar* (the paternal grandparents). *Sarpo* consists of clothes, fabric, shoes, and scarves.

Mastura Opa described the *beshik toy* during the Soviet period as a grand family celebration with organised music (*karnay* and *sunray* – traditional Uzbek musical instruments) to which many relatives, neighbours and friends were invited. Women would cook a few courses of food and set the tables. The extravagance of the *beshik toy* celebration reflected the financial status of the family (Karmisheva 1969). In the Khorazm and Surhandarya regions (Snesareva 1957 and Hamraqulova 2002), some wealthy fathers would sacrifice a cow to offer a feast to neighbours and relatives. Some organised

a *kopkari* (competition between horse-riders to deliver headless sheep to their final destination). This practice, while a celebration of the newborn and to share the family's joy with others, is at the same time about showing wealth and status, and is a competition about who can celebrate with the greatest extravagance.

*Beshik toy* is followed by the practice of putting the baby into the *beshik*. Through my interviews, I learnt that some women put babies in the *beshik* three days after birth, while others may wait a week or more. Hadicha Opa said that she used to put her babies in the *beshik* during their *chilla* period, starting on a Wednesday, following the old belief that Wednesday is a good day for starting something new or for solving problems. Hadicha Opa's mother put her (Hadicha Opa's) first baby inside the *beshik*. In other households, people invite their mother or a married woman who has many children to carry out this practice. Putting a baby in its *beshik* is a ceremony attended by family members and close relatives. I watched Hadicha Opa putting her grandson inside the *beshik*. The whole ritual was carried out in a lighthearted way, with the whole family joining in.

Before putting the baby into the *beshik*, Hadicha Opa burned *isiriq* (appendix 14) around and inside the *beshik* and placed the head of the *beshik* pointing in the direction of Mecca (*Qibla*). Then she placed the baby the wrong way inside the *beshik* and asked everybody "Is it this way?" and they said "No", then she placed baby again in the wrong way and asked "Is it this way?" and everybody said "No," then she put the baby in the correct way and everybody said "That way!"

This practice is mentioned by other ethnographers (Sultonmurod 1998, Hamraqulova 2002). After strapping the baby inside the *beshtik*, Hadicha Opa's daughter-in-law nursed her baby. She nursed the baby first with her right breast then with the left breast. The concept of right and left is important and it is used in many other rituals as well. At the end of the ritual Hadicha Opa threw some sweets and money (*sochalak*) over the covering of the *beshtik*. Guests and children attending the ritual picked these up.

Below I discuss the practice of *aqiqa*, which has become more popular since independence, and compare this practice to the *beshtik toy* which has decreased. I will discuss the changes happening to these two practices and the reasons for them.

### 5.3.3. *The practice of Aqiqa*

With the revival of different religious practices since independence, the pre-Soviet Islamic practice of *aqiqa* (the sacrifice of an animal on the occasion of a child's birth) has largely replaced the local Uzbek practice of *beshtik toy*.

Uzbek people used to celebrate *aqiqa* in the pre-Soviet period; however, during the Soviet period it was suppressed because it was Islamic. Only a very few of the older generation retained knowledge of it. During my fieldwork, some respondents said they had not heard of *aqiqa* during the Soviet period at all and another, Nasiba (45 years old), said that she heard about it from her neighbour, whose grandmother was an *otin* (religious female practitioner), and that they had celebrated it.



However, after independence, more people started carrying out this practice when they gained religious knowledge through Friday sermons in the mosque, audio or video cassette sermons and TV programmes. Some people replaced *beshik toy* with *aqiqa* and a few performed both ceremonies separately, while others combined *aqiqa* with other rituals. Hadicha Opa invited me to a *charlar* (the bride's first visit to her parents' home after the wedding) and said that they would be celebrating the *charlar* of her daughter and the *aqiqa* of her grandchild (her son's second child) at the same time, as combining these two ceremonies saved money, time and a lot of work. Concerning *aqiqa*, she explained that 'the sacrifice is done to pay for the life of the child just as the prophet Abraham did.'

My fieldwork indicates several differences between *beshik toy* and *aqiqa*. First of all, a *beshik toy* is a local Uzbek practice and usually celebrated for the firstborn of the family, whereas *aqiqa* is prescribed for every Muslim child. People can change or vary the practice of *beshik toy*; for example, there are no requirements for the number of sacrificed animals (usually sheep). Some people sacrifice one, some two, and others simply buy meat from the market. They can conduct this practice one month after the child's birth or one year after, according to their convenience and plans. In contrast, the practice of *aqiqa* has certain requirements. *Aqiqa* is usually conducted within the first month of the child's birth and requires the sacrifice of two sheep for a newborn son and one sheep for a daughter.

Arifkhanova (2006) argued that economic problems in the country and people's financial difficulties are the reason for the disappearance of the *beshik toy* in Tashkent, but I

would argue that women are the main force behind its replacement with *aqiqa*: it is their increasing reluctance to use the *beshtik* for their babies which has led to the disappearance of *beshtik toy*, and the rise in their religious consciousness which has seen the increased popularity of *aqiqa*.

#### **5.3.4. *First teeth and first steps***

There used to be different local practices connected with children such as first teeth, first hair, first step, etc. Most of them are disappearing and some of them are celebrated within the small circle of the family and with neighbours in Tashkent.

One of these practices is the cutting of the first teeth, performed by mothers and intended to help the child. My respondent Gulnora (32 years old, PhD student, married has two children) cooked popcorn when her son started cutting his teeth. She said cooking popcorn would help the child's teeth since they pop out one by one the same way that popcorn does. Some women cooked *mastava* and *moshkichiri*, (soups with rice and beans). Zaynab Opa said that the earth could influence a baby's teeth: if a baby is teething during the dry season, it might be difficult because the earth is hard and the baby will have difficulty cutting its teeth. In contrast, if a child cuts its teeth during the wet, rainy season, then they are thought to come through more easily.

A child's first steps are important for the family and are celebrated joyfully within the family circle. Children usually start walking at around nine months to one year. When someone sees a child walking, they inform the parents of the child and take a present for the good news (*suyunchi*). In Tashkent, some people roll homemade round baby bread

(*kulcha*) between the feet of the child when he/she starts walking. They do this in the family, witnessed by a few people. For example, my neighbour, Gulnora, called some of her neighbours' children for her son's walking ceremony. She rolled a few *bublik*s (round pastries with a hole in the middle) between her son's feet then afterwards she gave them to the children, along with some sweets. She said 'rolling *bublik* between a child's legs helps him to walk and the child will walk like a wheel going round and round (*pildirlab yurib ketadi*)'.

## **5.4 PART FOUR - Early education**

### **5.4.1. *Nursery and School years***

During my fieldwork, I observed that it is mainly mothers who look after children and are responsible for their upbringing during their early years. Boys, once they reach five to seven years old, start to follow their fathers to some places and learn how to behave in a man's world. While during the Soviet period there were many kindergartens, nowadays some children are raised at home whilst others still attend kindergarten. In Tashkent, some kindergartens are owned by the government and places there are limited. Private kindergartens can be expensive and not generally affordable, with foreign language teaching, swimming pools, much better food, and more activities on offer.

Children start school at about the age of six or seven. The schools are mixed gender, and boys and girls sit together in the same classes. Schools do not provide special religious education: children get their religious education mainly at home. Most children also

help their parents at home and mainly play in the courtyard (*hovli*) or in the street in front of the house. Children visit each other for parties, *toys* and other gatherings with their parents. They learn behaviour, cultural values, practices and rituals from their parents and the community by watching and participating in them. Daughters are closer to their mothers, and they learn housework and play in the house or courtyard.<sup>51</sup> Most children play computer games if they can, using the internet in internet cafés, as very few children have their own computers.

#### 5.4.2. *Difference in bringing up girls and boys*

This section discusses bringing up children, different approaches used in this process and the importance of the parents, family and the community's place in this process. Children's behaviour in Uzbek society is valued very highly. Children are expected to be respectful and obedient. Hadicha Opa mentioned the proverb which says, "a child is dear but his or her behaviour is dearer" (*bola aziz odobi undan aziz*).<sup>52</sup> Parents naturally try to set a good example and teach children good manners from their early childhood, because, as the Uzbek proverb says, "a bird does what he sees in his nest (*qush uyasida korganini qiladi*)."

During my fieldwork, I noticed people used proverbs, sayings or stories to describe situations or to evaluate a person or his or her actions. Children are taught to respect their parents from an early age, and a parent's place is sacred in the family. This is reflected

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<sup>51</sup> *Mehmon-mehmon*, *hola-hola* (sounds different in Tashkent) *hanchalak* (swing), *skakalka* (skipping robe), ball, *yashin topaloq* (hide and seek) are the main games girls play.

<sup>52</sup> This means the child is dear, loved and precious but that his/her good behaviour is even more valued.

in the Uzbek proverbs: ‘if your father blesses you, God is with you,’ (*ota rozi hudo rozi*), and ‘paradise lies under your mother’s feet’ (*jannat onalar oyogi ostida*). It is also reflected in the important place grandparents have in the upbringing of their grandchildren: grandparents pass down the culture, tell old tales, *hadith*, proverbs and poems. Most children learn about Islam at home especially from their grandparents.

Raising well-behaved children is closely connected to family honour. A number of Uzbek sayings are used in daily life to show the influence of the behaviour of a child on the family or on the father. The child’s behaviour can be praised with thanks (*rahmat*) or they can earn a curse (*la’nat*) directed at their parents. When a boy gives his seat up to an elderly person in the bus, he is praised with the words *barakalla, otangga rahmat* (may Allah give you *baraka* (blessing) which literally means ‘thanks to your father’). When people say *otasiga tortibdi*, it means ‘he has become just like his father’, which most of the time has a negative meaning<sup>53</sup>; or ‘he is his father’s son’ (*ota ogil*) which is more positive. The same is true of the curse ‘I curse your father’ (*padaringga la’nat*), which is one of the worst things a child can be told about his behaviour. It brings shame on the father and family when children behave in a way that causes this curse on the home.

Uzbek people are very community oriented and the community is very important in the upbringing of children. The proverb ‘seven neighbours are parents for a child’ (*Bir bo-laga etti qoshni ham ona, ham ota*), shows that the *mahalla* is deeply involved. Children are always being watched by neighbours and praised for good actions, and are told off

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<sup>53</sup> *Boshimni kotarolmai qoldim, yuzimni erga qalatding, sharmanda qilding* and *yomon otlig qilding* are also used to comment on the negative behaviour of a child that should make his/her father ashamed.

for any bad manners. In addition, family members spend time with children, and this bond is very important for how children learn about behaviour, for example, during family gatherings, such as weddings and other celebrations. After independence, the state gave its support to the institution of the *mahalla* and stressed its role in the upbringing of children.

People bring up girls and boys differently. When talking about the mother's place in bringing up daughters, Mastura Opa started by pointing out that daughters are mainly brought up by their mothers and the female side of the family, and sons (once they are older) mainly by their fathers and male relatives. In Uzbek families the mother has an important place in her daughter's life, for teaching and bringing up their daughters with cultural values, housework, cooking skills and associated behaviour. In an Uzbek family the mother has huge responsibility and it is the mother who will be judged or blamed if her daughter does not show she has been taught values and skills.

A mother's most important task is to prepare her daughter to take care of her future family, and most girls, by the age of sixteen to seventeen, have learned to do their mother's main work in the house. During my fieldwork, I observed that the community bond is very important in people's lives. When matchmakers start their search for a new bride, they talk to the neighbours of a girl. A girl's behaviour in the *mahalla* is always watched by neighbours and the community. For example, Mastura Opa, describing her neighbour, Karima's daughter, said:

Malika has grown up in front of my eyes; a very hard-working nice girl; always greets you with a smile and she was ‘her mother’s hands and feet’ (expression meaning she can do all the work at home, *onasini oyogiyu qoli*). I have never seen her outside talking or wasting time. That’s why she has married into a very nice family and she is happy.

As Mastura Opa went on to explain, during puberty, and especially after the daughters start menstruating, they are kept at home close to their mothers. Fathers are still close to their daughters, but a kind of boundary appears between father and daughter. Usually, misbehaviour by a daughter is dealt with by her mother or aunts. A father does not often tell his daughter off, and for some subjects, he talks to his daughter through his wife. The relevant proverb says that ‘if you keep telling off a girl, she becomes used to it’ (*qiz bolani kop urishsa beti qotadi*). Boys are brought up by their fathers, uncles and brothers. They help their parents with some household chores. Very often, boys join their father on trips to the shops, or to visit relatives, mosques and other places. Most of the time, children receive their religious education within the family. Those who practise Islam teach their children the basic principles from an early age. Thus, some children know short *suras* of the Qur’an and a few of them can pray. During Eid (religious holiday), some children attend prayers with their parents. It is only since the first few years after independence that children have been able to attend one of the many courses that opened to teach Arabic language and the Qur’an. However, very soon the state policy toughened toward Islam, and courses teaching Qur’an and Arabic have been closed.

#### **5.4.3.                    *Circumcision***

Although the practice of circumcision was banned by the Soviet state, it never stopped. Its earlier origins were denied by Snesev (1971), who used literature written in Arabic to argue that, historically, the practice of circumcision did not exist in Central Asia before Islam arrived. He also argued that although most religious, and backward, practices were dying out in all Central Asian countries, the particular practice of circumcision had remained and was practised everywhere in this region. He was aware that supporters of circumcision hid the actual practice in birthday celebrations or those for starting school. His argument was that this practice belonged to the past and could not be maintained alongside Socialist principles.

Circumcision has indeed long been a widespread practice in Central Asia. Contrary to Snesev's (1971) statement, Uzbek scholar Mahmud Sattor (2004) argues that circumcision is one of the most widespread practices among Central Asian countries and existed during the Ahura Mazda–Avesto period in Iran and Turan (an ancient name for part of Uzbekistan). In my fieldwork, I found circumcision was generally referred to as *sunnat*<sup>54</sup> *toy*, but some people also called it *hatna toy* (feast of circumcision), *ogil toy* (feast for boy), *kesdirish* (cutting), *bolani qolini halollash* (to purify, to make *halol* a boy's hand), or *chukron* (circumcision).

In the *mahallas* where I carried out my research, circumcisions were performed on boys aged three, five, and seven years old. Arifkhanova (2002, 2006), Snesev (1971), Ashirov (2007), Mahmud Sattor (2004) and Hamraqulova (2002) mentioned the same age for circumcision in different regions of Uzbekistan. Circumcision is a special step

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<sup>54</sup> *Sunnat* - from Arabic *sunnah*, practice done by the prophet Muhammad, in this section I discuss particular practice of circumcision, which is called *sunhat* in Uzbek, *sunnah* in Arabic.



for boys moving from one stage of life to another, and is usually celebrated by sacrificing a sheep and arranging separate gatherings for men and women. In the *mahalla* where I lived, all the boys had been circumcised, and Mastura Opa informed me that all her three sons were circumcised during the Soviet period, bearing out Snesev's suspicions that the practice had continued. They had organised the actual *toy* and called it their son's birthday party, and her husband invited the master (*usta*) to perform the circumcision. Only men participated in the ritual.

During my fieldwork, I observed that there are different practices connected with circumcision. Women do not take part in the actual process of circumcision; the mother of the boy waits in the next room keeping her finger inside flour at the time of the actual procedure. This is done when the *usta* performs the operation, the boy's mother can reduce her son's pain by poking her finger into flour. This practice has been observed in other regions as well. For example, in Denov (Surhandarya region) the mother places her pinkie finger inside flour (Snesev 1971, Hamraqulova 2002). In the Fergana region (Ashurov 2007), the boy's mother puts her pinkie finger in oil and another finger in flour to reduce her son's pain (Ismailov 1992). When I asked my respondents the reason they use the pinkie finger, they answered that they do this to reduce their son's pain and they learnt it from their parents. These practices help women to communicate with each other, to share their feelings and worries, and distract them from the actual process. The actual operation is performed by men and all the participants are men; women only organise and cook for the celebration. I have also observed that some people arrange for their children's operation to take place in hospital, with the circumcision done by doctors. The celebration of this rite of passage is followed by the ceremony of *Sunnat toy*.

#### 5.4.4. *Circumcision celebration (Sunnat toy)*

Throughout the Soviet period *Sunnat toy* (celebration, feast) was celebrated as a public gathering, with about two hundred or more invited guests. Well-known singers and dancers can also be invited to perform and entertain. Almost every Soviet ethnographer mentioned that in spite of the ban on the practice people conducted circumcision and celebrated it under different names such as ‘birthday party’, ‘start of school’, etc; however, they also confirmed that these celebrations were grand and celebrated with many people.

As Sattor (2004) mentioned, this is one of the three responsibilities every Muslim father has towards his son: to organise his circumcision, and to educate and marry him off. Thus, after the birth of a boy, the parents start saving money for the *sunnat toy*, performing a big *toy* for the first boy in the family and smaller ones for subsequent boys. In some regions (Boriev 1995, Nasturdinov 1995, 1996, Snesev 1975) wealthy people used to organise wrestling, *kopkari* (competition between horse-riders to deliver headless sheep to their final destination), and animal fights with cockerels, quail (*bedana*) or male sheep (*qochqor*) during *sunnat toy*.

Zaynab Opa said,

a *toy* for one’s son is every man’s dream: to have a son and to invite people for the feast to celebrate the son’s circumcision. This may be especially true after they have been at another person’s *toy*: there is the desire to reciprocate, by inviting them and throwing a *toy*, sacrificing an animal and cooking food.

After independence, circumcision celebrations became smaller, and not as grand as in the Soviet period. The reason for this might be the state policy on expenditure and waste which affected most life-cycle rituals. Parents started to combine the practice with the wedding, anniversary, birthday or jubilee celebrations of other family members (Arifkhanova 2002). During fieldwork, I observed that some people had circumcised their son a few months or even years before organising the ceremony of circumcision. The circumcision among Uzbek families is not conducted according to the age of the child, but at a time convenient for the family. They organise the actual celebration when they are financially ready. One example was of a neighbour whose son was circumcised when he was three years old, but the celebration was organised two months later. One important part of the celebration is reciprocation - paying debts back by inviting people, cooking, feeding (*halqqa osh berish; qarzdan qutilish etc.*).

#### **5.4.5.           Presents**

The guests brought presents and gave money, called *toyona*, and people could give 20,000 *soms* or even more (e.g., \$100 to \$1000). The family makes a list of the presents offered, because they are like debts and must be reciprocated. Guests brought *toyona* and *togora* to the celebration. In some regions of Uzbekistan, richer people or close relatives bring a sheep, a bull, a goat or money, but the most common gift is money.

On the actual day of the circumcision ceremony the boy is dressed up in a new embroidery robe tied at the waist with a *chorsi* (silk square of material used instead of a belt), and an Uzbek scull cup (*doppi*) or sometimes a turban (*salla*). During the *sunnat toy* I

participated in with neighbours, the boy was dressed in a robe and *salla*, looking like a little bridegroom.

Traditionally, a young horse (*toi*) decorated with amulets and ribbons in its hair, and draped in velvet, was a common present. When it enters the family courtyard, it denotes pride and honour for the household, and the boy is put on the horse and given a ride. A horse still remains an important present, usually brought by the boy's uncle or great-uncle. Although the horse is still the symbol of wealth, it cannot be of much use in the city, and so an alternative to ownership has been devised in order to maintain its ceremonial use. The problem is to perform the practice of decorating and presenting a horse while also finding a way to cope with the horse after the celebration. Nowadays in Tashkent, some people rent a horse instead of buying one. However, during my fieldwork, I observed people had started substituting large household necessities for the horse, replacing it with white goods (a washing machine, refrigerator, etc.) or some other necessary furnishing, something women might prefer.

Although the actual circumcision practice still conducted, the celebration of the practice is decreasing and people celebrate in a smaller circle. This was also mentioned by Arifkhanova (2002), who argued that the reason for this practice disappearing is people's economic condition. She also mentioned that some families combine the *sunnat* with the practice of *aqiqa* or other practices.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have discussed practices and rituals connected with birth and the raising of children. During the Soviet period, the state banned or changed many religious practices connected with the birth of children, and Soviet scholars portrayed local practices as backward and harmful to the health of children. These practices nonetheless continued underground (Snesarev 1969, Suhareva 1955, 1959, Lobacheva 1975, Kislyakov 1959, 1969, Karmisheva 1969, 1976, Firshteirn 1978). The Soviet state introduced other practices which were meant to encourage a Soviet approach to life.

The practices of *azan*, *beshik* and circumcision were subject to particular change, being practised more discreetly, or at different times in the child's life or under different names. Because the Soviet state targeted mainly religious practices, the local practice of *beshik* and celebration of *beshik toy* survived. The religious practice *aqiqa* stopped and was replaced by *beshik toy*, which could be defended as a local tradition, even if it was criticised as 'backward'. However, since independence the religious practice of *aqiqa* has replaced *beshik toy* again. I argued that these changes occurred because of the raise of religious consciousness among Uzbek people, especially among women who are the keepers of these practices and force of these changes.

What did not change under either political regime was the very important place children have in Uzbek people's lives: they try to celebrate every occasion related to children with community and friends. Just as a conversation with the British starts with the weather, in Uzbek life all conversations start with children and family. Uzbek people are most concerned about weddings and children. In most *duo*, people repeat similar sayings such as 'may we see more weddings (*toylarga etkazsin*); 'let us see celebrate

*beshik toy* in the next year' (*yanagi yil shu kunlarda beshik toylarini koraylik*); or 'let them have many children' (*bolali chaqali bolsin*). Many practices are connected with the wish to have children, as described throughout the chapter.

Since independence, some people have turned these practices into show and competition and, as in other areas of life-cycle ritual, the state has attempted to control the related expenditure and extravagance. New trends have also appeared, such as the dressing-up of new babies as brides, which also reflect the wishes of parents that their children get married. People also dress up boys as grooms for their circumcision ceremony (in robes and turbans). It is important to mention foreign influence in Uzbek practices such as dressed up as Disney heroes.

Women have always had pressure on them to have children, and raising children is considered an important part of family life. Some women still continue to visit saints and *tabibs* for help with fertility. As with the other life-cycle rituals described in this thesis, women are keepers of these practices and children learn these practices and cultural values from their childhood.

## CHAPTER 6: DEATH AND FUNERAL PRACTICES

### Introduction

Chapter 6 discusses funeral and death practices in Tashkent and is structured thematically, like the chapter on marriage. In Part One, ‘Death and before death practices,’ I discuss the concept of death in Uzbek life, and funeral practices during the pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet periods. In Part Two, ‘Burial practices’, I discuss the process of washing, shrouding (*kafanlash*) and burying the dead, and the practices connected with this process. In Part Three, ‘Funeral practices conducted after burying the dead’, I discuss the set of practices performed by the household of the deceased, and particularly relatives, supported by neighbours, friends and the *mahalla*. The areas covered in this chapter include women’s place at these various ceremonies, and related government regulation. The transformations that occurred in funeral ceremonies between the Soviet period and independence are described.

Halima Opa, my neighbour, was one of the seven members of our *mahalla*’s women’s group ‘Gap’ (see Introduction) where we used to get together once in a few weeks. I knew her for three years and learnt from her a lot about our *mahalla*, its people and their everyday life. She passed away in 2010 and as I knew her and her daughter-in-law very well, I participated and helped in almost all her funeral practices. Most of the practices discussed in this chapter are a description of these. I also participated in the funeral

practices for another neighbour, Muattar Hola<sup>55</sup> (82 years old), whose daughter-in-law Karima was part of our women's group 'Gap'.

## **6.1. PART ONE - Death and before death practices**

### **6.1.1. *Funeral practices in the pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet periods***

Death is another stage of life-cycle rituals. A number of funeral practices are conducted by Uzbek people in the neighbourhoods of Tashkent. Scholars of the pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet periods have expressed different opinions on these practices with some of them criticising these practices for waste, expenditure, pomposity and backwardness, and others (Snesarev 1969, 1957, Nasritdinov 1996, Boriev, 1995, Suhareva) claiming that traces of pre-Islamic ritual, particularly from the Zoroastrian religion, have influenced these Uzbek life-cycle practices.

#### **6.1.1.1. The pre-Soviet and Soviet periods**

In pre-Soviet Uzbekistan Russian scholars (Nalivkin 1913, Likoshin 1916) observed different practices connected with death. Likoshin discussed reciprocity in these practices and stated that people used to set tables and organise feasts out of a sense of obligation and to pay back their debt to people who had invited and fed them in the past. It

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<sup>55</sup> *Hola* Uz. - (Aunt) is an honorary suffix and is attached to a person's name. It is translated as aunt and very often people add *Hola* on other women's names as a mark of respect.



was considered a disgrace not to give a feast and some people would end up in debt by following tradition. Uzbek scholars, the *Jadids*, also criticised these practices.

During the early years of the Soviet state, members of the young Uzbek *intelligencia* and *Jadids* continued to criticise ceremonies and related expenditure. One of the articles written in this period, entitled ‘The customs that are destroying us’ (*Bizni kemiruvchi illatlar*), was published by a representative of the *Jadids*, Behdudiy (1915), who criticised people for wasting the money of the deceased on funeral ceremonies that impoverished the household or left it with new debts. He said these practices were ‘our enemies, a disease for society, which will destroy peoples’ lives and could lead them down a dangerous path.’

As *Jadids* were modern Uzbek reformers they were interested in their nation’s future, its prosperity, education and social development. They criticised some of the practices because they saw them as obstacles to the Uzbek nation’s progress. In contrast, the reason for the Soviet criticism of these practices, which I will discuss further, was different: they were interested in getting rid of all local practices connected with Islam, and educating the Uzbek population about Soviet ideology.

Research into funeral practices was continued by other Soviet ethnographers (Snesarev 1975, 1978, Suhareva 1950, 1975, Aminov 1987) and mainly was criticised as old, awkward and irrational, and believed they prevented people’s social, political and educational development. Snesarev stated that there are similarities between Zoroastrianism and Islam, and argued that these similarities show how vestiges of one religion remain

in the next. In addition to this, Snesev (1969) discussed various practices meant to prevent death in the family including burning of *isiriq* (appendix 14) used to clean a house after death which he described as Zoroastrian element.

As Aminov (1987) pointed out, funeral ceremonies were becoming more complex and a big social problem. He argued that these practices were not followed only by less-educated lower class people, but also by the higher classes and the *intelligencia*. The Soviet state took control of people's ceremonial life and these practices were discussed by different institutions. The XXI *s'ezd* (congress) of the Uzbekistan Communist Party stated 'it was the responsibility of the *intelligencia* (*ziyoli*) to organise (the nation's) political education' and that 'people's real traditions teach them to be wise, hard-working, honest, modest, humble and humanist; vestiges of the past (*eskilik sarqitlari*) and backward rituals (*irim sirim, hurofot, qoliqlik*) had to be eliminated, through actions such as *hujum*' (Aminov 1987). The same politically-motivated criticisms of the Soviet state, therefore, were directed at funeral rituals as at those connected to birth and marriage. However, after independence these practices were criticised by Uzbek ethnographers and Islamic authorities which I will talk about next.

#### **6.1.1.2. The post-Soviet period**

During the first few years of independence in Uzbekistan, debate on funeral practices changed direction, mirroring that on ceremonies and practices connected to birth and marriage many customs, traditions and religious rituals that had been banned by the Soviet state were reintroduced. This led (Nasritdinov 1996) to expenditure on some funeral

ceremonies being even greater than that on wedding ceremonies. In some households, people sacrificed a sheep and cooked huge amounts of food. By the time these households had conducted all the funeral practices, they had emptied their house. In order to control and monitor these practices, the state issued several *fatwas* and decrees about expenditure, waste, conduct and respect toward real Uzbek tradition. One of these decrees was issued on 28 October 1998 by the Uzbek state, which had started controlling people's ritual life with the help of *mahalla* committees and religious leaders. Death and death-related practices are discussed in detail below.

After independence Nasritdinov 1996 and Boriev, 1995 continued the debate started by Snesarev (1969, 1975) saying that funeral practices have developed over the centuries and include pre-Islamic and Zoroastrian elements, including the concepts of fear of the dead; looking at death as unclean; the ritual cleaning of the house after a body is taken away; keeping a dish (*kosa*) full of water; keeping a stone at the place where the body was washed; and cleaning the clothes and belongings of the dead by leaving them in the sun or beneath the stars. If the deceased was young, visitors would not like to take anything, because they believed that it might affect them or bring death to their family. And in contrast, if the deceased was old, people would happily take the gift, hoping to have a similarly long life.

### **6.1.2.            *Death in Islam***

In the process of my fieldwork I observed that most Uzbeks look at death as the final destination of human life in this world, and the beginning in the other world. Islamic knowledge teaches that people die when their time given by Allah is finished and the

angel of death (*Azroil*) comes to collect their souls (*jon* or *ruh*). They find it important for a dying person to make the Islamic statement of faith (*shahada*) while dying, as this means departing to another world with faith (*iman*) (Nastitdinov 1996).

The concept of death was explained by Shoira Opa as follows:

after the soul leaves the body, the corpse is washed, wrapped in white cloth, (*kafan*) and buried in a grave after the *janaza* prayer. An *Azroil* angel takes the souls of the dead and the angels *Munkar* and *Nakir*<sup>56</sup> question the dead in the grave. For forty days, the body swells and after forty days it bursts, then starts to rot; reptiles will then start eating the body and the body will be transformed into soil. But by then the soul will have left and will be waiting for judgement day, when each soul will be weighed according to the good or bad deeds the person did in life; they get their book (*nomai amol*)<sup>57</sup> from their right or left side. People will walk across a hair-thin bridge (*Pilsiroi koprigi*) that leads to Paradise (*Jannat*), and the righteous will go over the bridge but the damned will lose their balance and fall.

People divide death into two categories: the first type is natural death, which usually people expect and are prepared for. This is when people die after living a long life, marrying off their children, having grandchildren and achieving their goals (*orzu havas korib*). The second type of death includes any unexpected or sudden death (*bevaqt olim*). Protection from unexpected death is often a subject of prayer (Nasritdinov 1996). The idea of different types of death is echoed by Parry (1994, 158-162), who talked about ‘good death, which occurs at the right time and at the right place’, and ‘bad death, when ‘a person did not die his own death.’

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<sup>56</sup> *Munkar* and *Nakir* – (Arabic منكر ونكير) (English translation: the Denied and the Denier), angels who test the faith of the dead

<sup>57</sup> *Nomai amol* – it is believed that after death every person will receive a book of all their deeds (good and bad); if their good deeds are more than their bad deeds, the dead person will receive their book from the right side.

During my fieldwork I observed that women talk to each other about death, give advice as to how to prepare practices, and support each other by helping and sharing stories from their or other people's lives. I heard a few pre-death stories where people prepared for their death because they felt it coming. My informants said that some people before their death see visions, hear or talk to some beings, or even get information through their dreams. One of these stories was told by Nilufar (40 years old and a school teacher):

My dad had totally changed before his death and I think he knew that his death was close. Although he never liked to stay in other people's homes overnight, just before his death he spent his last three weeks in his daughters' flats. The last time we all went to his house to pick up his clothes, he didn't want to go inside, and he stayed near the gate looking inside, towards the garden covered with the snow, very strangely as if he was saying goodbye. The first week he stayed in my home and we all had a great time. Then he spent a week in each of my two sisters' homes. He died in my third sister's home. We all thought he knew that he will die soon.'

#### **6.1.2.1. Preparation for death**

Sometimes, when doctors have treated a patient for a long time and they know that they cannot help this patient any more, they send the patient back to his or her home. The family members may try to prevent the person's death in different ways. For example, my neighbour Halima Opa was being treated in hospital for the last stage of cancer when doctors allowed her to return home. Back home, first she was treated by a *tabib*, who prescribed her a special diet and herb tea, and told her to read *duo* from the Qur'an. The *tabib* also used a knife on the patient while reading *duo*. As Shoiria Opa said:

this is the traditional way of witchcraft. The person who performs such practices is called a *domla* or *tabib* but besides reading the Qur'an they also read different *duo* which are not from the Qur'an. These people make contact with *jinn*s (supernatural creatures in Islamic mythology) and ask help from them. These types of *tabibs* use a knife, beads (*tas-beh*), twig (*hipchin*), drum (*doira*) and other objects to cure their patient.

As discussed in Chapter 3, some *tabib* use shamanic accessories to cure their patients and while reciting from the Qur'an, and claim they are performing Islamic practice. When Halima Opa got worse and her death looked inevitable, older members of the *mahalla* advised her son to find a *domla* to perform the practice of *chilyasin*.<sup>58</sup> The latter is usually done by a male *domla*, by reading chapter *Yasin* from the Qur'an forty times. Halima Opa's three sisters and some relatives arrived in her house. All this time she stayed in a quiet room and her sisters took turns to look after her. Halima Opa asked to see relatives and friends to settle old debts and ask forgiveness (*rozilik*). When her health deteriorated her older aunt sat nearby keeping her company, talking of nice things and expressing the wish that she would get better. Halima Opa's aunt read *suras* from the *Qur'an*, kept dripping drops of water in her mouth and repeated the Islamic statement of faith (*shahada*). Her aunt said that if Halima Opa got very thirsty, the *shaiton* (devil) would give her water and take her faith in exchange. I heard the same story from other women.

Meanwhile, her son and daughter-in-law started tidying their house and freshening it up with a quick re-paint to prepare it for the funeral practices. During fieldwork I observed that usually before a wedding, funeral or other big occasion people prepare their house by painting, decorating and cleaning.

When I came to see Halima Opa, her three sisters and her daughter-in-law were looking through the *olimlik* (all the necessary things for washing and wrapping the body after the death) in the wooden box (*sandiq*). These are the things Halima Opa collected over

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<sup>58</sup> *Chilyasin* – reading chapter (*sura*) *Yasin* from the Qur'an forty times (for more information see appendix 12).

time and prepared for her last journey. There were white material for the shroud (*kafan*), new buckets, a big dish, a scoop and a bar of soap. The *olimlik* also included presents (*sarpo*) for the professional persons who wash (*yuvgich*) and bury the body (*gorkov*) and the people who would help them. Inside the wooden box these women found almost all the necessary things and for the few other things they decided to go to the market.

I witnessed these practices in the summer of 2010, but the practices of reading the chapter *Yashin* forty times (*chilyasin*), preparing *olimlik* and asking forgiveness (*rozilik*) existed in the pre-Soviet and Soviet periods and have survived by women passing them on to each other. I also observed that although men are involved in the process of the funeral, the main actors of almost all the practices are women. They plan and organise all the practices even those which belong to their own funeral.

#### **6.1.2.2. Death**

During my fieldwork I observed people believed that the soul (*ruh*) of the dead flies away from the body through the mouth; comes out as steam (very rarely seen); and that it is very small and shy, unwilling to get out when there are lots of people or noises around. The same belief was mentioned by Nasrutdinov (1996) and Snesarev (1975). Women cover any mirrors in the room with a cloth, because they believe that the soul is something physical and that when the soul of the dead person comes out, it might look in the mirror and be frightened. The dead are called *murda*, *mayit*, or *olik* and people talk about the corpse as an object. A corpse loses its character as a person, as a human and as a relative, and becomes something different: respected but not alive, cared for but carefully kept at a distance.

Halima Opa's daughter-in-law explained her aunt's actions:

When Halima Opa died, her aunt gently closed her eyes. Before the body became cold, she tied the jaw closed because it could have dropped open. Then she tied the large toes of the two feet together, to keep the legs straight. The aunt took all the jewellery off and put the deceased's two hands at her side. We kept a bouquet of basil in her room.

The same deathbed practices have been observed during both the Soviet and post-Soviet period by the ethnographers Nasrutdinov (1996) and Snesev (1957). They mentioned that people kept basil in the room of the deceased and also burned *isiriq* (appendix 14) to keep out the smell of the body.

Next morning family members had to prepare Halima Opa's body for her last journey. When I came to their house, her body was in the middle of the room with the head pointing towards the north and the feet towards the door. Her face was covered with a white cloth, a Qur'an was placed above her head and a few women sat by the body and read the Qur'an, saying the body should not be left alone. The room is not available to certain people, such as pregnant women, newly-married girls (especially during their first forty days), and children, except in rare circumstances, because all these people are considered to be vulnerable to the effect of seeing the dead body (*ogiri tushadi*<sup>59</sup>).

## **6.2. PART TWO - Burial practices**

Most Muslim burials in Tashkent are held within twenty-four hours of death. As soon as the person has died, family members inform all other close family members, neighbours, relatives and friends. All these people come as soon as possible and help prepare for the funeral. They open the gate of the house, and sons, uncles and male relatives

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<sup>59</sup> *Ogiri tushadi*, or *yuki tushadi* – person might take on the burden of the dead and become lethargic, tired or ill.



wait for visitors near the gate. People start the funeral (*janoza*<sup>60</sup>) as soon as all the closest family members have arrived (they might wait overnight, but no longer than that). When someone dies, women from the household hang a piece of the dead person's clothing on the wall. If the deceased is a male they hang his coat or *doppi* (skull cap). If the deceased is a woman, they hang her dress or scarf. These clothes are the sign to tell visitors the gender of the deceased.

Part Two discusses practices connected with burial; the process of preparing the body by washing and shrouding (*kafanlash*); the process of burial; and the job of the specialists who wash the corpse (*gassol*) and dig graves (*gorkov*).

### **6.2.1.            *The specialists and practices for preparing the dead body***

For centuries people have felt fear and disgust towards death, and the specialists whose work related to it, such as those who wash the deceased body (*gassol*) and gravediggers (*gorkov*). After independence, although some people's attitude toward death and these specialists remained, with the rise of Islamic consciousness people started questioning these practices and interpreting them in a different context. If previously death, a dead body, a dead person's clothes, etc were regarded as 'unclean' and 'frightening,' more recently people have started looking at these things from a religious point of view and now interpret the washing of the dead body as a good deed (*savob*). Further details of these professions are discussed below.

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<sup>60</sup> Islamic funeral *Janoza*, attended by *domla* (religious clergy) and men, it consists of Islamic prayers devoted to the soul of the dead.

### 6.2.1.1. The specialist (*Gassol*) who washes the body

The ritual of washing the body is a specialised skill, and the people who perform it are called *gassol* or *yuvgich* in Tashkent; in other parts of the country they are also called *murdashoy* (a Tajik word). This job is performed according to the sex of the deceased. Historically, there were communities of *gassols* and the profession was usually passed through family line. People considered the job and *gassols* themselves as unclean (*makruh*) and avoided them because contact with them was believed to be unlucky. Nasturdinov (1996) wrote that since ancient times people from other *mahallas* have not invited *gassols* to their ceremonies and weddings, and when *gassols* had their own celebrations, people from other *mahallas* did not attend.

From the above we can see that usually people with one or more family members or relatives who were *gassols* could choose this profession. They obtained the skills by becoming an apprentice (*shogird*) to a master *gassol* and at the end of their training received their master's blessing and permission (*fotiha*) to perform the job. This process was also discussed by Nasturdinov (1996) who conducted research into funeral practices in the Qashqadarya region of Uzbekistan. The blessing and permission (*fotiha*) given by a master to an apprentice is believed to protect a new *gassol* and help with the work. Therefore, people say that although it is possible for someone to help a *gassol* to wash his or her close family members, it is not recommended to do so continuously without taking this blessing (*fotiha*).

Although historically this profession was kept semi-hidden, with the growing influence of Islamic knowledge since independence, people have started asking questions about the work of these specialists. People claimed that according to Islamic teaching any people can learn how to wash the dead, and that by doing this work people can obtain merit (*savob*). More people have therefore started helping to wash the bodies of the dead. I heard a few women recommending that every Muslim should wash a dead body: indeed, Hadicha Opa said that every Muslim person should wash at least three dead bodies, since that would earn great merit (*savob*). She said washing the dead would remind you what is expected for you at the end of your journey.

During my fieldwork I observed that as soon as someone dies, the family calls a *gassol* and may send a car to bring them. The *gassol* comes alone or with an assistant, and usually three to five people undertake this task: the *gassol* is in charge, and additional people help by pouring water, turning, holding, moving and wrapping the body. The helpers are usually daughters, sisters, aunts, close relatives or neighbours of the deceased.

When the task is completed, people give the *gassol* presents (*sarpo*) from head to toe. The *sarpo* includes *kalish* (black rubber shoes), material for a dress and trousers, a scarf and a towel. They also give the *gassol* some of the dead person's clothes, and some money and food. Sometimes people give the *gassol* a piece of jewellery that belonged to the deceased. Some people wear a golden ring or earring and tell their family members to give it to the *gassol* when they die. It is important to make the *gassol* happy (*rozi*), since people believe that if the *gassol* is unhappy, the dead person will not be in at peace in the grave. Sometimes people state in their will who they would like to wash their

body after death. The family also gives some clothes or material to the people who helped the *gassol* to wash the body.

These practices were carried out in private spaces throughout the Soviet period, mainly by women coping with the changes which the state attempted to enforce.

One story from Halima Opa's funeral shows how some families may defy state prohibitions on expenditure when these conflict with religious beliefs. On the day of Halima Opa's funeral, the *dasturhonchi* (Mashkura Opa, a person in charge of organisational and practical work of the rituals) invited a *gassol* who came with her assistant. The *dasturhonchi* was unhappy, since she had asked the *gassol* to come alone. After the *gassol* and her assistant completed their job, the *dasturhonchi* gave money to the *gassol* but very little to her assistant. The *sarpo* for the assistant was also not as much. The *dasturhonchi* argued with the *gassol*, saying she should not have brought her assistant as people from the household could have helped her. As the *dasturhonchi* was connected with the *mahalla* committee, she was following guidelines about expenditure and waste. She explained to me that the *mahalla* authorities are trying to cut expenditure and therefore she asked *gassol* to come alone, as the family of the deceased has to give *sarpo* and money to each *gassol*. A few days after the funeral Halima Opa's daughter-in-law started dreaming that her mother-in-law was hungry and kept asking for tea; then her son also dreamt that his mother was unhappy. When the women of the *mahalla* found out about the daughter-in-law's dream they advised her to take some clothes and food to the *gassol*, to make her happy. This story is a perfect example of people's continuing belief

in the supernatural power, and how difficult it is for the state to penetrate the private arena controlled by women to regulate what goes on there.

#### **6.2.1.2. The practice of washing the body**

During my fieldwork, my experience of each *gassol* was different. I learned that some *gassols* talk to the corpse. Sometimes, while washing the body, the *gassol* asks the deceased to loosen a hand, not to be shy, to have peace in the grave, etc. This is different from people talking about the body after they have finished the process of washing, when they might remark whether the body was soft or hard, or easy or difficult to wash. However, Qanoat Opa, a 61-year-old housewife, also suggested to me that *gassols* talk to corpses because they can have volition, for example by raising the arms as though to protect parts of the body.

During the fieldwork I observed that usually all people who help to wash the corpse need to take a bath (*gusul*) beforehand and afterwards. Menstruating women are excluded. For washing a body they use a new dish, bucket, and soap. Warm water (*mahram suvi*<sup>61</sup>) is prepared and once the water has been dedicated to this purpose, people avoid dipping a hand inside the bucket to check the temperature. Instead, some water is taken out and poured on the hand. The water is also covered when carried, to protect it from any stranger's gaze or contamination. People are not to see the water unless they have had their *tahorat* (ablution).

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<sup>61</sup> *Mahram suvi* – water prepared for washing the body of a dead person.

I helped to wash the body of my 82-year-old close neighbour Muattar Hola who had been sick for a few months before her death. I asked her relatives whether I could participate, and they agreed. First, the *gassol* starts the preparation of the shroud (*kafan*), the white cotton sheet, by cutting it in pieces. A man's shroud requires thirty metres and a woman's about twenty-five metres. Hadicha Opa said:

some people, particularly older people, have prepared their *kafan* beforehand, because if you prepare your *kafan* it is a big *savob* for you, and if someone from your *mahalla* needs a *kafan* and you give them yours, this doubles your *savob*; and then you can always buy another one.

The cover for the shroud was then sewn by a few women who were relatives and neighbours working under the *gassol's* instructions. When the *gassol* saw my work, she asked me to leave bigger holes in the stitching as 'there should be holes for insects to easily enter.' We all sat and worked in the room with the body in the middle, and family members, relatives and neighbours coming in and out. After washing the body it is usually shrouded and people cannot see the face of the dead, therefore just before starting to wash the body the *gassol* invited everybody to say a final goodbye to the deceased. At this time everybody cried and took turns to come in and say goodbye. When the *gassol* started working the women of the household stopped crying.

The *gassol* started her work with the help of two sisters of the deceased, her niece and me. It took about thirty to forty minutes to wash the body. First the *gassol* undressed the dead woman on top of the wooden bed specially made for washing bodies (*tahta*), which had earlier been brought by men from the cemetery. After undressing the deceased, the *gassol* covered the body from navel to knees with a piece of white material, because it is considered a sin to see the private parts of the dead. Two people held the ends of the material and the *gassol* started washing the body, starting with the private

parts. One woman poured water on top of the cloth. Then the *gassol* washed the body with soap, using square, handmade gloves sewn from a piece of the white material (shroud), although I have heard that some *gassols* have started using medical latex gloves.

One end of the wooden bed was higher, and that was the place for the head of the deceased. When we poured water on the head, it flowed down towards the feet and collected in a big dish. The areas washed are the face, hands, and arms up to the elbow, top of the head and feet and ankles. Then we helped to move the body onto her left side and the *gassol* washed the right side by pouring water on top of the body three times. The same was done on the other side. Then, we placed the body face-up, slightly lifting the upper part. The *gassol* pressed the abdomen to make sure that nothing was left inside, then carefully cleaned away with water anything that came out. After completing the process of washing, the *gassol* dried the body and wrapped it in the shroud. First we wrapped the whole body in pieces of material then put it in one large cloth. After carefully wrapping the body the *gassol* tied it in three places: above the head, and around the belly and feet. Then the women asked male relatives to bring the *tobut* (coffin) into the room. The *gassol* fit a new mattress (*korpa*) inside the *tobut* and we placed the body there.

After washing the body everybody who participates has to take a shower (*gusul*). The dish and bucket used will be given away to the poor or needy, or *gassols* or *gorkov* (see part 6.1.2.3). The water used for washing is poured under a fruit tree or by the garden wall, never on a road or pathway. Similar practices surrounding the washing the body of

the dead were mentioned by Boriev, (1995), Rayhon Ogli, (2004) and Nasritdinov, (1996).

This was my first experience of washing a dead body, and it left me feeling lethargic and tired for several days, as if all my energy had been sucked out. I went to see another elderly neighbour, Muhabbat Hola (80 years old), who once worked as an *otin* (religious female practitioner) but has recently stopped because of her age and health. Before becoming an *otin* she helped her mother who was a *gassol*. I talked to her about my experience; she was disappointed and said that I should not wash any dead again, unless I want to become a *gassol* and take a *fotiha* from a professional *gassol*. She explained that by washing the body I took the burden (*ogirligi* or *yuki tushdi*) of the dead and that this was why I was feeling heavy (lethargic).

Further she told me about her experiences washing the dead. She started working as a *gassol* when she was about thirty-five years old. One day after completing her job, she started her ablution and saw a supernatural presence that made a deep impression on her, after which she became ill and gave up the work. She explained that to wash a dead body, not only one must take *fotiha* from a professional *gassol* but that there is a special *duo* that should be read every time a body is washed. She said that Karima (my neighbour, daughter-in-law of the dead woman I helped to wash) should give me *oqlik* - a white cloth (scarf or towel) and soap. She knew the family, and said she would mention this to Karima.



Here is a living example of the failure of the various regimes to influence on the private life cycle rituals of ordinary Uzbek women: women like Muhabbat Hola have been the custodians of ritual and tradition, and their firm beliefs in blessings, burdens of the dead and other aspects of the ritual have been passed from generation to generation.

### 6.2.2. *Funeral prayer (Janoza)*

*Janoza* is the funeral prayer performed for a dead Muslim, before he or she is taken to the cemetery. During my fieldwork I observed that people in Tashkent generally perform the *janoza* in congregation, and that women do not participate in this prayer. *Janoza* is not required only if a person committed suicide. A special *fatwa*, issued by the chairman of the Central Asia and Kazakhstan Muslim Board, said that committing suicide is a great sin and goes against God's will (Rayhon Ogli, 2004, 49-50).

On the day of Halima Opa's *janoza*, her family members opened the gate and put about twenty chairs outside the house. Women swept the yard and put some water in it to make the dust settle and cool the air. Relatives, neighbours, friends and colleagues arrived from early morning to support the family. As soon as neighbours noticed the open gate, chairs and people sitting outside the house in funeral clothes, they spread the word until the rest of the *mahalla* was aware, and neighbours arrived first to express their condolences and offer help. Some people stopped at the house to express their condolences for a few minutes before continuing on their business. The gates were open very early in the morning (after the first prayer). During the Soviet period, people risked their job, career and Communist Party membership, which was a very important part of a

man's life at that period, in order to perform *janoza*. However with independence people started openly participating in the ceremony.

Halima Opa's *janoza* was performed in the courtyard of her house. The coffin was placed in the middle with the body's right side pointing to *Qibla* (Mecca). The *imam* stood in front of the coffin and the rest of the people stood behind him in rows and followed him in prayer. The coffin was a box made from wood with four long handles so four people could carry it. It was covered with a piece of a special cloth on which chapters from the Qur'an were written. On top of this they put one of Halima Opa's dresses to indicate to people who saw the coffin carried past that the person inside was female. Sometimes female coats are used or the *paranji*. For men a black coat (*chakmon*) is usual. Some older people will buy a new carpet to put on top of their coffin, and in their will ask that this carpet be given to the mosque because they believe that they will get a reward from every prayer made on it. After the *janoza* men carried the coffin to the cemetery.

In Halima Opa's funeral I observed the practice performed to prevent death, and how women are interpreting ritual requirements in different ways, introducing new elements to adopt or counter new influences such as the state's drive for economy. Immediately after the coffin was taken away, the closest female family members came out to the courtyard and cried. The *dasturhonchi* (Mashkura Opa) brought water in a dish (*kosa*), splashed it on the faces of the mourners and the rest behind the coffin in the street. Traditionally, the *dasturhonchi* should have broken the dish by throwing it in the street in order to protect the family from another death. However, instead of breaking it she

brought the dish inside the house and left it under the rose bush, saying we should send it to the cemetery as people might use it, which is a new modification introduced to the ritual by *dasturhonchi*. But Mastura Opa was not happy with her decision, preferring to keep to the old ritual and saying ‘it should have been broken after the coffin left the house; it is not good to keep the dish in the house.’

### 6.2.3. *Graveyards and graves*

Historically graveyards (*qabriston*<sup>62</sup>) were built in higher places and some of them are centuries old. These original positions on high hills were protected from floods, but over time, as cities grew, graveyards appeared in the middle of urban spaces. During the Soviet period, cemeteries were politicised and funerals began to be practised following Communist ideology. Some high-ranking officials organised funerals with open coffins, flowers, speeches, music and tables set with food. Women sometimes participated in these funerals although women in Islam are not allowed to do so. Many graveyards were moved out of town, destroyed and replaced with new roads, buildings, shops, schools and cultural centres. The Soviet project was to westernise cemeteries with decorative trees and gardens, seeking to imitate graveyards in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and the Baltic republics, where cemeteries were said to be like parks, with benches for families to sit for rest and remembrance, access by public transport and cafés close by. Around the 1950s, people also adopted Russian cultural elements including railings, chains, benches, photos and poems on differently coloured and shaped stones and monuments (Aminov 1993, Boriev 1995 and Nasritdinov 1996). The presidium of the

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<sup>62</sup> Regional variations of *qabriston* include *goriston*, *hilhona* and *mozoriston*.

Supreme Soviet of Uzbekistan SSR (Soviet Socialistic Republic) issued a decree on Memorial Day (*Hotira kuni*) to be celebrated annually on the last Sunday in March (Aminov 1987).

After independence, reconstruction in the cemeteries continued with links to the piped water supplies, additional *ayvans* (terraces for visitors to rest), roads and reconstructed paths, trees and flowers. However, the new government also continued its policy of reversing Soviet changes and re-introducing Islamic practices. The Uzbek government announced that the day of remembrance (*Hotira kuni*) would be celebrated on the first of May (Nasritdinov 1996). In mosques, after Friday prayers and other gatherings, the *imams* taught Islamic funeral and grave practices, and how to behave in graveyards. They talked about funeral ceremonies and criticised pomposity. They also criticised placing monuments or photos on the graves. On 4 July 2000, the Uzbekistan Muslim Board issued a *fatwa* on visiting graves. The *fatwa* said visiting graves is *sunnat* and that on entering a graveyard, someone has to say “*Alaikumus salam ya ahlal qubur*” (“Peace to all people in these graves”). It advised that when visiting a grave, someone should read the Qur’an, dedicating the prayer to the dead. Furthermore, the *fatwa* advised that there is no special time for visiting graveyards, and people can visit anytime they want. The deeds which help the souls of the dead are reading the Qur’an and dedicating the prayer to the dead, remembering the dead in *duo* and giving charity to the poor.

Some people prepare a place in a graveyard for all or part of the family, sometimes for several generations. As the Sheikh of one graveyard told me, after about ten or fifteen

years graves can also be reused for the body of another family member. In this case, a gravedigger (*gorkov*) prepares the grave by collecting the bones of the dead, wrapping them in a piece of white cloth and burying them in the corner of the same grave. Then the next body can be buried in the place of the previous one.

A grave (*qabr*<sup>63</sup>) consists of two parts: the entrance (*ayvon*), and a hollow cavity for the body (*lahad*). The length of the *ayvon* is the same as the height of the deceased, half as wide and at least as deep as the middle of a man's chest. From the *ayvon* the *gorkovs* make a hollow cavity for the body towards *Qibla* (Mecca) called the *lahad*, with the same dimensions. The length of the *lahad* is equal to the height of the dead person and the width is half the height. The grave is prepared for men and women in the same way but in some places there is a difference in the height of the grave, being waist-deep for man and chest-deep for women (some people explained to me that women are more sinful and thus need deeper graves than men). Toward the feet, the graves may narrow (Rayhon Ogli 2004 and fieldwork materials). If the process of digging the grave was not difficult, this is attributed to the deceased's soft character and the fact that he was a very nice person. If it was difficult to dig, they say the person was 'very hard.'

#### **6.2.4. Gravedigger (*Gorkov*)**

Some *gorkovs* have chosen this profession because one or more family members did this job, learning it gradually since it takes a few years to become a professional *gorkov*. "It is not easy to go inside of the grave and be alone with the dead," said *gorkov* Mirsaid

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<sup>63</sup> *qabr* - grave also called *gor*, *lahad* or *sagana* in different regions and for different type of graves in Uzbekistan.

Aka; "you should be brave, have a big heart, keep yourself clean and always pray." He told me a story about a woman who died with her newborn baby, both of whom were tied in one coffin. When the *gorkov* took them inside the grave, the body of the baby slipped out and the *gorkov* died of shock, still inside the grave. That happened because the men who brought the woman's body to bury failed to inform the *gorkov* that the mother and baby were wrapped in one coffin.

People tend to talk about the profession of *gorkov* as unclean and can be disrespectful towards them, prejudices criticised by Aminov (1993). Mirsaid Aka said "there is one business man, who I believe thinks he will never die, because in one of the gatherings, I overheard him saying "I would never sit near Mirsaid or eat from the same table with him...." ... I wonder," he continued "who will bury his body?" However, with the increase of Islamic consciousness some people have started looking at this profession with respect – as with that of the *gassol* - and at the *gorkov's* work as *savob* (good deed).

While I was in the graveyard interviewing Mirsaid, I saw a couple of young boys digging a grave, and asked Mirsaid Aka if they were his sons, as usually sons become apprentices for this job. He said they were students earning some money; this is something that happens sometimes, with the *gorkov* usually in charge. A *gorkov* is paid about 100,000 *soms* (equivalent to around US\$40) by the bereaved family (from a rich family, this could reach as much as US\$100) in addition to clothes, shoes, meat and other food. In return, they prepare the grave and inter the body. Often a close male relative puts the

deceased into the grave or helps the *gorkov* in this task, but if they are unwilling to do this, then the *gorkov* does this alone.

Some people still have a fear of death and express disgust towards the funeral specialists. Others see the work of *gassols* and *gorkovs* as risky, supernatural and controlled by spirits, and say that if you fail to take *fotiha* (blessing/permission) to carry out their tasks you might get sick or be burdened with some other problems. Different stories exist about these people and their work. Some *gassols* and *gorkovs* claim they get information in their dreams; some of them know beforehand that their service will be needed at a particular time or on a particular day. There are certain rules and supplications connected to doing these jobs, but, as in other areas of life-cycle ritual, these are changing, as are attitudes to the people who carry them out.

Temporary hired students, for example, are working as *gorkov* to earn money for their everyday life or education. From being taboo, feared and unclean, grave-digging has become an ordinary job, as Islamic education has contributed to people's understanding of the afterlife, death and death-related practices.

#### **6.2.5. *Burying the dead***

Burying a body is the next practice and is performed and attended only by men. During my fieldwork I was told that before people pick up the coffin, they ask how old the person was. If the dead is a man they add one year for the time he was in his mother's womb; if the dead is a woman, they do the same but also add one year for each of her children. Thus if she is sixty-five years old and had four children, this would make her

seventy years old. Bahodir (a forty-five-year-old bank clerk and practising Muslim) explained the process of carrying the coffin as follows:

Each man attending the funeral tries to take a turn carrying the coffin with the head carried forward. People carry the coffin quickly, but very carefully. When strangers pass near a crowd carrying a coffin, they frequently help to carry it, at least for a few steps. They say ‘carrying a coffin at least seven steps is accepted as a good deed (*savob*).’ To indicate the wish to carry the coffin, a man starts at the right shoulder in front of the coffin, then replaces a man who is behind, then moves to the other side and takes it on his left shoulder. After carrying for a while, the man moves in front of the coffin, still placing it on the left shoulder. Every man moves around the coffin in such a circular way. Because walking in front of the coffin is *makruh*, (religiously disapproved but not prohibited) people usually walk behind. Close family members walk in front of everyone else to the graveyard. If the graveyard is far from the house, the coffin is carried at least until the end of the *mahalla* then it is placed in a vehicle (a truck) for the rest of the journey.

At the graveyard, one of the close relatives or the *gorkov* goes inside the grave. The others then pass the body into the grave feet first and with the feet pointing towards Mecca. The person inside the grave reads a prayer, pronounces *duo* (supplication) then prepares a little pillow from the soil, to make the head higher. He then unties the first string (earlier tied by the *gassol*), and turns the face of the body to the right. Then he leaves the grave and they close the hole with clay bricks. Afterwards, people take turns in putting soil on the grave, with the *gorkov* finishing the main work himself. The *imam* meanwhile reads some chapters from the Qur’an. Praying for dead relatives is very important and every *duo* made in the name of the deceased is considered to help the safe passage of the dead. Reading the chapter *Mulk* from the Qur’an helps to protect the dead from the torture of the grave (*qabr azobi*) (Fatwa 2000, Rayhon Ogli 2004, Boriev 1995 and fieldwork materials).



After burying the dead, most of the participating men return to the home of the deceased, the *imam* or elder person reads *fotiha*<sup>64</sup> (supplication) for the soul of the dead, people express their condolences and then they leave. The *fotiha* prayer is devoted to the soul of the dead and finishes with a *duo* asking Allah for peace for the dead. The gate of the house stays wide open and there are always a few men who sit outside the house meeting people who come for the *fotiha*. Some visitors do not know how to recite *fotiha*, therefore, someone always sits near the gate, meets visitors and recites the Qur'an. Visiting men talk to the relatives of the dead, convey their condolences, read *fotiha* and leave. All female visitors go inside, where they are met by the women of the household; they then recite their *fotiha* inside. The gate of the house is closed after sunset, as visitors stop coming after the *shom* (Uz.) prayer (*magrib* (Ar.) the fourth prayer - just before the sunset) which is performed just before sunset. Usually a light is kept on in the house of the deceased for forty days (*chilla*, appendix 12), for the soul which might return. On the following day, before sunrise, men open the gate, clean the courtyard, sprinkle water in the yard, bring chairs outside, and a few men sit there. This continues for three days; after three days the gate is still open for another week but people sit outside only for the next ceremonies and gatherings.

The authorities since independence have tried to shorten the length of these practices. Especially, funeral practices were extended to forty days and in some households people used to sit outside at least twenty days with some people missing their work and children missing school. These funeral practices are further discussed in detail below.

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<sup>64</sup> *Fotiha* is a practice of reading few Chapters (*suras*) from Qur'an completing it with supplication dedicating them to the dead, the act which Muslims in Uzbekistan do when they come to express their condolences

### 6.3. PART THREE - Funeral practices conducted after burying the dead

During the first year after burying the dead, in the house of the deceased, the family members with the help of relatives, neighbours and the whole community perform a set of specific funeral practices. This part of the chapter discusses these practices, the food prepared and served, the place of the community, the role of women what it means for women to conduct these practices, and changes in them.

#### 6.3.1. *The first three days*

After the dead person is buried and the men have returned from the cemetery, family members with the elders of the *mahalla* plan dates and details of the next funeral practices (*maraka*). Funeral practices are gender-segregated with some practices only for men, some only for women, and some for men and women on the same day but at different hours. Elders of the family make these decisions. When they plan a ceremony for a man, there are always a few women visitors, who are family members, friends and neighbours. These women help to organise the ceremony. Usually, the *mahalla* committees and neighbours help the families during the funeral. In the *Yangi Bog mahalla* the *mahalla* committee provides some families in financial need with a shroud (*kafan*).

Usually the next funeral practice is conducted on the third day after burial and is called 'the third day' (*uchi*). This practice followed by 'the seventh day' (*ettisi*) practice, then in twenty days the practice of 'the twentieth day' (*yigirmasi*), and in forty days 'the fortieth' (*qirqi*). Nowadays in Tashkent, more people have started combining these practices; for example 'the third day' and 'the seventh day' are now frequently performed on

the same day. This development was also mentioned by Arifknanova (2006) and Nasritdinov (1996).

The day after Halima Opa was buried, in the early morning family members and close relatives (mainly women) visited the cemetery and read *fotiha* (supplication) for the soul of the dead. On the third day after the death family members conducted the practice of ‘the third day’ (*uchi*) for women. The gate was opened before sunrise, and water was sprinkled near the gate and courtyard. When women entered the courtyard, they met the female members of the household, who were standing in a row. Each visitor gave a hug to each female family member in the row, and conveyed condolences. Sometimes they put their heads on each other’s shoulder while patting the other shoulder, and cried. Female visitors went inside the house where a table was set with food.

In general, every person who knows the deceased is expected to come at least once for *fotiha* (to convey condolence with the act of reading a supplication to ask from God peace and paradise for the soul of the deceased) and to show respect to the family and support them. Some people, like neighbours, friends and relatives, visit the household for every funeral practice during the first year.

Another practice performed on the third day was washing the clothes of the deceased (*kir yuvdi*). Usually washing is performed by one of the closest persons, such as a daughter, sister, aunt or daughter-in-law. Halima Opa’s daughter in-law washed all the clothes, belongings, bedding and towels of the dead woman and hung them in the garden. This ritual is repeated throughout Uzbekistan, although not always on the same

day. According to Nasrutdinov (1996) in some parts of the Kashkadarya region people wash clothes after three days, and in other regions they do this after forty days. People believe that washing the clothes cleans the house, and that this is a form of protection from the dead. This, Nasrutdinov (1996) argues, is a practice left from Zoroastrianism: people still believe that objects affect people's lives. The clothes are then given away. Some relatives might take them, especially if the deceased was an old, religious and pious person. They consider it as blessed (*tabarruk*) and they wish to live as long a life as the dead person. However if the dead person was young, they do not take the clothes as it is said it might bring bad luck or early death to their home.

The idea of *barakah* (in Uzbek used as *tabarruk*) was also mentioned in Torab (2007). In her discussion of women's religious practices in Iran, she stated that the combination of certain attributes (piety, spirituality and intent) on person indicate the presence of *barakah*. She also argued that women's 'practices create the very conditions in which they wish to believe and which in effect help produce the piety that is thought to inhere in a person...' (46).

Although some religiously-educated women, especially new *otins* (religious female practitioners), have criticised these old beliefs as *bid'a* (illegitimate innovations), these funeral practices are changing, with some disappearing, some decreasing and others losing their meaning. I suggest that there are different reasons for these changes; one is the state's cost- and waste-cutting policy concerning funeral practices, and an other is people's learning about certain practices, and choosing what and how to perform. Arifkhanova (2006) also mentioned that funeral practices connected with pre-Islamic be-

liefs are decreasing in Tashkent. Therefore, I argue that although these practices were criticised throughout the Soviet period, the Soviet ideology could not change them and Uzbek women kept them alive. After independence, through Islamic education in mosques and the mass media, people learnt the meanings of these practices, and some started disappearing while others decreased. Hence, I argue that women can choose and change certain practices.

### **6.3.2. *Mourning, crying, food and funeral dress***

One of the funeral practices is crying and mourning for the dead. This starts as soon as a person dies, with the family members crying loudly and opening the gates of the house, to let neighbours and people know about the death. Mourning for the dead starts at the moment of death and can continue from forty days to a year (finishes sooner if the deceased was older). Mourning clothes are put on straightaway by the immediate family and close relatives; these can be black, dark blue or dark green (Nasritdinov 1996). The women of the family cover their heads and take off all their jewellery. Men wear a skullcap (*doppi*) and dark-coloured quilted robe. They then sit or stay near the gate, with a lowered head. All women coming for a funeral cover their head with a scarf. Women wear mourning clothes for the entire period, but men wear these only during ceremonies and at other times they dress as usual. During the period of mourning people do not go to parties and celebrations. Usually people mourn less for an older person; sometimes they even say (especially if the person was over eighty) ‘it was his feast.’ (*toy*). However with raising people’s Islamic awareness the period of morning has decreased.

Crying during funeral practices is a part of the funeral, and is performed usually by women. Nasrutdinov (1996) interpreted the practice of crying during the funeral as another element of Zoroastrianism (*otashparaslar yigisi*); it includes not only crying but beating one's chest, scratching one's face and beating one's head against the wall. Further he described how during the 1970s and 1980s it could also include rhymes or poems: women would cry while chanting words in rhyme about the dead and sometimes they used to hire a special person (*yoqlovchi* or *yiglovchi*) to sing or recite funeral poems (*marsia*), and the rest of the women would join in the chorus (*naqarot*): 'oh my father, oh my loved one, oh my mother or oh my child' (*Voy otam, voy jigirim, voy onam or voy bolam*) (Nasrutdinov 1996, 36). The same practice was discovered by Metcalf (1991) in a Greek village, where female specialists were hired to sing heartrending laments as part of a highly theatrical performance. In the same context she described extreme types of mourning, which could be people gouging their faces, slashing their thighs, burning their breasts, and attacking their friends. However, I have not met these practices during my fieldwork. Mastura Opa explained women's crying as follows:

People used to cry loudly to let others know about their tragedy. Nowadays, they are not crying as they used to. Crying is very important during funeral ceremonies. It takes all the pain and sorrow out of the heart. People who cannot cry keep all the pain inside, which is not healthy; better to bring it out with tears.

During fieldwork I was told that the crying also shows how much people love their dead ones. However, there is a debate about crying during the funeral practices. *Imams* and *otins* have preached different sermons warning people about loud crying. They say you can mourn and cry but do not cry loudly, and do not say anything against Allah. During my fieldwork I observed that the practice of crying was performed by women in a very symbolic way (without beating themselves, scratching their faces, crying loudly etc., as was done in the past). When someone dies the women of the household immediately

call the *otin* of the *mahalla* or someone old from the family and that person reads the Qur'an sitting in the room of the dead. When the Qur'an is heard people do not talk or make any noise. Again, I suggest that with raising people's Islamic awareness period of mourning has decreased, people dressed entirely in black are seen very rarely nowadays and crying practices are changing in Tashkent.

### **6.3.3. *Food prepared during the funeral period***

During the first three days the household members of the deceased do not cook food, and relatives and (especially) neighbours divide this chore among them. Female neighbours provide a tremendous amount of help at this time, assisting in the organising of ceremonies, cooking food, clearing tables and supporting family members. This is an old practice continued since the pre-Soviet period, and is partly consistent with the *fatwa* on 'how to express condolences to families who are holding funerals and how to conduct some other ceremonies' (appendix 19). This states that in *sharia* mourning is permissible for three days; people should not cook in the household of the deceased, or set the table (*dasturhon*) and feed visitors. The *fatwa* also mentioned the *hadith* that 'the Prophet (peace be upon him) asked Jafar's neighbours to bring food to his household because if he had a great grief he was not able to think about food.' These practices, conforming to government policy, I witnessed during my fieldwork. Again, the funerals of my neighbour Halima Opa and Muattar Hola illustrate how these practices are usually carried out.

When Halima Opa passed away, the neighbours talked to each other and decided who would cook for which day. For the next three days neighbours kept sending food to the

house of deceased, which was offered to visitors, members of the family and people helping in the household. This food included different types of soup and the national dish *plov*. A table was also set with bread, fruits and pastry. Salima Opa (housewife, 70 years old) explained:

when we feed people and they pray for the dead, we believe this earns *savob* for the dead. Therefore, we serve food to guests, and we always insist they eat something. For funeral practices we do not cook food made out of flour. The food made out of flour we serve during celebrations, holidays and weddings. As the flour is soft, we believe the body of the dead will get soft if we serve dishes made out of flour. We also do not serve nuts in funeral practices as cracking a nut (pistachios, almonds or walnuts) is said to be as if you are cracking the nuts on the head of the dead.

During the first three days, although it is not permissible to cook in the deceased's household, in some households they perform the practice of *is chiqarish* (feeding the soul of the dead), (appendix 13) and cook *holvaitar* (hot porridge made out of oil, flour and sugar). After Halima Opa's body left the house, the *dasturhonchi* (Mashkura Opa) of the *mahalla* cooked *holvaitar*. The women of the household set the table in the guest room and served food for the guests. Halima Opa's aunt did not join all the women in the guest room but she asked if she could eat in the kitchen. Later she explained me:

it is *makruh* (religiously disapproved of, but not prohibited) to eat in that room as Halima passed away there. When the angel *Azroil* (the angel of death) takes the soul out of the body, some blood spills on the walls and all around us and we cannot see these spots with our eyes. It would take time to clean the room, by reading the Qur'an and doing many *duo*.

People also clean the house by burning herbs (*isriq*), (see appendix 14). The practices of avoiding an unclean body have been discussed by different scholars. Nasritdinov (1996) mentioned the story of *Azroil*, and the practices of cleaning the room in the Kitob and Shahrizabz districts of Uzbekistan. The same was debated in the Soviet period by Snerev (1975) who stated that the Zoroastrian religion regarded dead bodies as unclean and that Uzbek people performed a few rituals for cleaning the house and rooms of the



deceased. Although some households in Tashkent followed these practices, some *otins* and religious clerics criticised these practices as *bid'a* (illegitimate innovations).

#### **6.3.4. Funeral practices**

##### **6.3.4.1. Seventh-day, twentieth-day and fortieth-day**

Funeral practices start with the 'third-day' practice followed by the 'seventh-day' practice but, as I mentioned earlier, some people have started performing only one of these. The next practice is the 'twentieth-day', performed on the twentieth day after the death; followed by the 'fortieth day'. As I observed in my fieldwork, some households, especially those with financial restraints, combined these two practices. At the practice of the 'twentieth-day' relatives remembered the dead within the small circle of the family, and then performed the 'fortieth day' by inviting guests. These practices are performed in the form of charity as meritorious acts (*hudayi, ehson*) or in the form of *da'wa* gatherings (*Movlud, Amri Ma'ruf, Iftor*) by sacrificing sheep, cooking food and inviting guests. The habit of combining a few funeral practices in one was also mentioned by Arifkhanova (2006).

Halima Opa's 'third-day' practice was conducted at home, by organising *mavlud* for women, cooking food, and inviting an *otin* and thirty women. Then they did not perform the 'seventh day', when only the family members and close relatives got together and remembered the dead in the house. The 'twentieth day' (*hudayi*) was organised at home by inviting eighty men (relatives, friends and people from the *mahalla*) and an *imam*,

and sacrificing a sheep. Usually these practices can be held at home, in restaurants or in cafés. This choice can be on the basis of finance (home is less expensive, though much more work) or space (some households cannot manage a large gathering). The household of Halima Opa set the tables for the ‘twentieth-day’ practice in the courtyard. They borrowed tables, chairs, dishes, cutlery and cooking pots from the *mahalla* community.

The tables were set with bread, dried fruits, home-made pastry, sweets and *somsa*. Some relatives, friends and neighbours brought big *togora* full of different food as a help for setting the tables. After eating *plov*, the *imam* gave a sermon and read the Qur’an, and everyone made *fotiha* supplication for the soul of the deceased. Halima Opa’s sisters organised the practice and women from neighbourhood helped setting tables and other work at that day. The main organisational work is usually done by women of the household.

These funeral practices are usually conducted a few days earlier in Tashkent. Nasritdinov (1996) discussed the same thing in the Kashkadarya region, where the twentieth-day ceremony can be conducted on the seventeenth or nineteenth day, while the ceremony of the fortieth day is conducted on the thirty-seventh or thirty-ninth day. This practice, Mashkura Opa (*dasturhonchi*) explained, is connected with finishing the whole set of funeral ceremonies quickly. She said that generally ‘even’ numbered dates are preferable for marriages, because everybody prefers to be in a pair and to live a long life together. In contrast, odd numbered dates are preferred during funeral ceremonies, since nobody wants another death: people want everything to be in pairs except death. This idea, of the magical influence of numbers, is also seen in the dishes served during fu-

neral ceremonies. An odd number of dishes are served to avoid a second death. Although these practices are also criticised and are losing their meaning, some women still follow them symbolically.

#### **6.3.4.2. Thursday and Sunday**

The funeral practices also include visits on Thursdays and Sundays, which are considered as special and good days to pray for the soul of the dead. On those days the members of the household set a table for men in the courtyard and for women in the house. During these days visitors continue coming at a convenient time, read *fotiha* and leave. Usually one of the elders of the family or a relative meets guests and serves them tea. Some people are also offered hot food. The same practices were discussed by Snesarev (1969), Aminov (1987) and Nasritdinov (1996). However, I observed these practices were losing their meaning and were less performed in the *Yahgi bog mahalla*. There are a few reasons for this, such as the state's control over practices, religious clerics' criticism and the fact that people's working hours do not permit them to follow these practices, as was the reason for Muattar Hola's household.

In the second week after the death of my neighbour Muattar Hola, a few neighbours and I decided to make *fotiha* (supplication) at her house. It was Thursday. Karima's son Alisher (fifteen years old) met us near the gate, invited us to the guest room where the table was set and served us tea. As Karima was at work she could not meet us herself. We made *fotiha*, had a cup of tea and left. However, since state and *mahalla* regulations have been introduced, this practice is losing its meaning and people make these visits

less frequently than before: in Halima Opa's household, people did not visit the house every Thursday and Sunday but only couple of times in a month. In the case of Kari-ma's household, as she was at work, she did all the preparations but as she could not meet the women visitors and serve them, she left her son to do so until she came back.

#### **6.3.4.3. *Eid* holidays and the practice of one year**

During the Soviet period, people who lost someone in the family mourned their loved ones for a whole year, including the holy month of fasting - *Ramazon Hait* (Uz.) (*Eid-ul-Fitr*, Ar.) and the sacrificial festival - *Qurban Hait* (Uz.) (*Eid-al-Adha*, Ar.) performing these holidays as funeral practices. In both of these *Eid* days people remembered the dead and in most households people set the table and waited for visitors to come for *fotiha*; some people visited the household holding the funeral and others visited cemeteries to pray for their dead relatives. During *Qurban Eid*, families may sacrifice a sheep for the soul of the dead. Some people sacrifice a sheep and distribute the meat to needy people in the *mahalla*.

Since independence, under the influence of state regulations, the Muslim Board and the *mahalla* committee, many funeral practices have changed. A *fatwa* was issued on conducting ceremonies (*mufti*, Abdurashid Qori Bahromov, December 28, 2002, Tashkent). People were advised to celebrate *Eid* holidays with family members, relatives and friends, or to visit the elderly and the sick. The *fatwa* said that *Eid* holidays should bring people fun and joy; people should not spend their *Eid* days crying and mourning.

In the pre-Soviet period, people used to perform practices such as *first snow*, *first flower*, *first melon*, etc. These practices continued into the Soviet period (Arifkhanova 2006). When the first snow fell, the family cooked food, invited relatives and neighbours, remembered the dead and prayed for their souls. When trees and flowers came into blossom, the family did the same to perform a ‘first flower’ and when melons and watermelons ripened, they performed the practice of ‘first melon’. Women told me that these practices are disappearing, and are now remembered by only a few families who celebrate them privately.

The ‘one year’ is the last funeral practice in the year, and is usually performed in the seventh, ninth or eleventh month after the death. This is the time when family members and relatives stop wearing mourning clothes, and the moment is marked by the practice *oq kiydi*, (literally ‘to dress in white’) which replaces the mourning clothes with the usual clothes. After this practice people put away their black or dark clothes, and wear their usual clothes, including jewellery and make-up.

The above cases (such as Thursday and Sunday practices in Muattar Hola’s and Halima Opa’s household) illustrate that some practices are decreasing or losing its meaning. I would argue that this is because of the state’s control, religious clerics’ criticism and an increase in people’s Islamic awareness. One can say it is people’s financial difficulties and this is partly true; however, we know from historical criticism spanning all three periods that even when Uzbeks had no money (and went into debt) they nonetheless continued to celebrate (see debate of *Jadids*, Chapter 4; 6.1.1.1.) and mourn by perform-

ing grand practices. I argue that increasing Islamic awareness among Uzbek people must therefore be key in those changes.

#### **6.4. Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the meaning of death; its history, and the beliefs and practices connected with it. I talked about preparation for death and people's attempts to prevent death. I then discussed the process of death, and the practices of washing and wrapping the dead body. In the third section of the chapter I described the practice of *Janoza* and talked about graveyards, graves, *gorkovs* and the process of burying the dead.

I have drawn on practices performed during the Soviet period, when considerable research was carried out into funeral practices by the Soviet ethnographers, some of whom (Snesarev, Suhareva) argued that some of the practices performed by women are pre-Islamic and show Zoroastrian influence. At this period most of the practices were found to be vestiges of the past, and the Soviet state suppressed them, implementing new practices and ceremonies in Uzbek women's lives.

After independence the Uzbek state continued controlling life-cycle practices and involved the *mahalla* community in this task. The state issued a number of decrees and regulations concerning organising and performing these practices. Pomposity and waste were criticised. Because of government policy and financial hardship, some families could not conduct certain funeral ceremonies. A great many of these practices and rituals have changed. I argue that women are the main actors in keeping and organising

these practices and that in spite of criticism from religious clergy and the control of the state, women have continued to perform them.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

### 7.1. Introduction

This thesis is a work of anthropological research studying Uzbek women's everyday life and religious rituals in Tashkent. The main focus of the research is the experience and transformation of women's religious and ritual lives after seventy-three years of Soviet rule ended in 1991, which have been explored by comparing data gathered before and after the transition to independence. Uzbek women's life underwent changes during both periods.

The thesis has analysed literature on Islam and women's religious lives; Soviet-period literature, and the oral histories of women who lived during that period. The literature written by western scholars has been critically assessed, and differences to and similarities with the experience of women in Tashkent discussed.

The thesis has analysed three areas of ritual practice: marriage, birth and death. Different practices related to these areas have been discussed in detail, with comparisons between how they were performed in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Women's role in these practices has been discussed.

Although Soviet system granted some benefits on Uzbeks, their religious freedom and Islamic consciousness were under constant attack. All religious and local practices (*nikoh, kalym, djanoza*, etc.) were labelled as 'vestiges from the past' and new Soviet practices were created and implemented within people's lives. Although most of the religious literature almost vanished, people's knowledge of Islam was restricted and some



practices disappeared women continued to practise others discreetly. Soviet policy could not suppress these rituals completely and Soviet ethnographers argued that women had a main role in keeping and performing these practices.

A vast transformation in the religious life of Uzbek people followed independence, including a search for a new identity. Religious practices and life-cycle rituals, which were women's main arena, strengthened. The thesis has analysed the social and community networks which are a very important aspect of these practices.

## **7.2. Argument**

In this study I have argued that women's everyday life and religious rituals have changed continuously, and discussed these changes. The influence of social forces and institutions has been demonstrated. It has been argued that during both Soviet and independent periods, the state has controlled women's rituals by means of different policies, institutions and projects. I support the argument of Babadjanov (2001), which says 'although Soviet and post-Soviet governments have officially declared religion to be separate from the state, in practice they were (and are) state institutions, regulated first by SADUM and now by Muslim Board. The fatwa and regulations of Muslim Board is discussed in the ethnographic chapters.

This thesis is not about gender inequality or women's resistance. This thesis has examined women's choices, and how they use their agency and find ways to act in different historical and cultural contexts. It has argued that women coped with and adjusted to

their everyday life during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods in Uzbekistan. Women express their agency through coping and adjusting; this is a woman's asset, orientation and strategy. Women adapted their religious and ritual life under different political systems, revealing their agency and self-expression, and also took part in these changes. Women took the main role in keeping and performing life-cycle practices, and tried to find ways to continue to perform them during difficult periods and pass them on to the next generation.

A revival of Islam and Islamic practices followed independence. Under the threat of increasingly radical Islam, the state took over control of Islamic schools, Qur'an teaching during private lessons, and the Islamic practices and Islamic weddings which started to be celebrated in the 1990s. Women did not immediately become religious but found their way towards a new life by expressing their agency in coping and adjusting to the changes of that time.

Generally it is accepted that Uzbeks are more 'cultural Muslims', as discussed in the chapter on theory; however, I argue that since the rise in Islamic awareness in Uzbekistan, people have questioned many aspects of their faith, including their ritual life, and the number of practising women has increased.

Furthermore, I argue, women are more communicative than men and communicate within a wider network (kin, relatives, neighbourhood and community). Most of the time, they communicate with each other within the private realm. Ritual and practices

constitute the women's sphere and women are 'guardians' of this realm. They find peace and solutions for their problems, negotiate their status, and share their joy and sorrow.

I also argue that women's life is constructed around the practice of life-cycle rituals and acts of faith. Life-cycle practices are an institution for dealing with women's feelings, supporting their financial position and negotiating their status in the community. Through these practices they not only share their successes and failures but dream about the future (marriage of a child, a grandson's circumcision, etc.); they also help others who are more in need, supporting them by money or other means.

### **7.3. Major Findings**

Since independence the structure, form and meaning of certain practices have altered. These practices have changed according to the social and economic conditions of the household. People have combined or even stopped performing some practices because of their financial restraints. Certain practices have changed in context, such as Islamic weddings, which are practised mostly by religious people. Some previously important practices have started to lose their significance.

The principal research findings are the following.

#### **7.3.1. *Changes connected to state policies:***

The Uzbek state has increased awareness of the need to reduce expenditure on wedding and other practices. A number of decrees and *fatwas* have been issued regarding the conduct of celebrations, simplifying these and limiting their duration and the number of guests. Criticism of the state and intelligencia against waste and unnecessary expenditure during ceremonies continued in pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet periods.

After independence the state turned the *mahalla* into an instrument for controlling neighbourhood communities. The *mahalla* committee took the main role in managing and organising life-cycle practices and in giving advice and resolving family problems. In every *mahalla* a place was created for women advisor who worked on all women's issues. These women provide help to the household and regulate ceremonies and practices of people in the *mahalla*.

*Domlas* and *otins* still play an important role in people's social and religious life. Their roles kept changing during the Soviet and independent periods. The state-registered SADUM functioned during the Soviet period, there were very few officially-registered *domla* and *otins* functioned discreetly. However, during the first years after independence the numbers of *domlas* and *otins* increased and a 'new' type of *otin* appeared. Religious practices became a place for *da'wa* (call, invitation to Islam), and some *otins* used these practices as the stage for preaching a 'different' Islam to women. Women's ritual life became an arena for political, social and religious debates. Soon this movement was stopped by the state and the position of *otin* became subject to an interview and registration by officials.<sup>65</sup> Nowadays *otins* work under the control of the state. *Ma-*

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<sup>65</sup> To obtain a special certificate, *otins* have to go through an interview and pass the registration.

*halla* committees have started using registered *otins* for the practices organised in their neighbourhood.

Every *mahalla* keeps a list of personnel (*imam, oshpaz, dasturhonchi, gassol, gorkov*) whose services are required during these practices; a list of necessary things for burying the dead body; and pots and dishes for people who wish to organise some practices at home. The institution of *dasturhonchi* has almost disappeared because of social and economical changes in Uzbekistan, and women are replacing this work by inviting their relatives.

### **7.3.2. *Changes connected to practices and ceremonies:***

The ceremony of the civic registration of the *ZAGS* has changed from a grand celebration organised on a separate day from the wedding reception to a small practice performed during the main wedding reception itself.

*Beshik toy* (celebration of the cradle) and *sunnat toy* (celebration of circumcision) have celebrated in small scale and are now practised very rarely within the small circle of the family. Nowadays, instead of *beshik toy* people practise *aqiqa toy*, which had almost been forgotten.

Sometimes two practices have been combined as one, such as *aqiqa toy* with *beshik toy, sunnat toy, charlar* or others. Sometimes *sunnat toy* has been joined to wedding or jubilee celebrations.

Funeral practices have also changed, and have become shorter and simpler. Instead of spending forty days mourning and keeping their doors open, people have reduced these practices to around one or two weeks. Some practices have been combined and expenditure on food and the number of people invited to these practices has been limited. Some practices, especially those connected with old local beliefs, have lost their meaning or disappeared.

During certain practices (*aqiqa*, *beshik toy* and weddings) the bride's parents present *sarpo* (presents prepared for the bride, groom, sometimes relatives or guests) to their daughter, son-in-law and his family members. Some people, instead of presenting *sarpo*, have started to give essential household items such as furniture or white goods. This saves the young family from receiving non-essential presents, as household items such as these are useful.

People used to prepare *sarpo*, over several years but this has changed and the family of the bride and groom now buy most of the *sarpo* from the shops a few days (or a couple of weeks) before the wedding. This is because the fashion for goods changes often. At the same time such items as *sandiq* (wooden box), *korpa* and *corpacha* (traditional mattresses presented to the bride) have become less popular.

Foreign influence has entered Uzbek practices; dressed-up Disney characters have started entertaining guests and parents at birth practices; cases of the western practice of 'throwing the bouquet' by the bride have been observed and newborn babies dressed as brides have become a new trend.

The first years of independent rule saw a trend towards more Islamic weddings. Changes to music, the specialists serving at these celebrations and women's outfits all followed.

Circumcision, *nikoh and janoza* are Islamic practices; however, my research materials show that these practices include elements of fetishism, animism and witchcraft. After independence some of these decreased and some disappeared. I suggest that this is due to the revival of Islam, the criticism of religious clergy, the spread of religious information and people's increase in Islamic knowledge.

### **7.3.3. *Changes connected with women's lives***

Women are the major force behind these changes. Women organise, negotiate, cope, change practices themselves and are the main actors in these processes. By negotiating among themselves, women can change the number of guests, presents, meals, etc. Women's interest in Islam has increased, and most of the changes connected to the decrease (*beshik toy, sunnat toy, charlar*), disappearance (*isiriq, amulets, Muskulkushod, Bubiseshanba*) or innovation (foreign and Islamic influence discussed in Birth and Marriage chapters) of some life-cycle practices are due to the rise of their religious awareness and state control over these practices.

Most scholars have described Uzbek people as 'cultural Muslims'. During my fieldwork I observed that women's Islamic awareness has risen after independence, and changes in their life-cycle practices and everyday lives has followed. This study showed that study-

ing women's ritual lives can be relevant for understanding women's religiosity and the process of social change and transformation.

#### 7.4. Thesis questions

During my research I considered the following broad research questions.

- Firstly, I asked which areas of continuity and change can be seen in the ritual life of the Uzbek people following the transition from Soviet to post-Soviet rule. I have discussed the many changes in ritual life following the change of regime, and concluded that rituals which were practised discreetly under Soviet rule are now practised openly.
- Secondly, I asked how the Uzbek state has, since independence, used local practices and rituals in an attempt to transform society. My answer is that the state has promoted some local practices and has used the *mahalla* as an instrument of control, ensuring its specialist personnel were certified and checked, and that these personnel blended in with local women and influenced and regulated their practices. My description of this state policy has shown that the *mahalla*, under the influence of the independent Uzbek state, has succeeded in controlling women's ritual lives in a way the Soviet state did not manage. The state decrees and *fatwas* issued by the Muslim Board helped control women's everyday life and life-cycle rituals.



- Thirdly, I asked how Uzbek women have adapted to the changes in their social life since independence, and have concluded that they have continued to absorb changes into their lives as they did under Soviet rule.
- Fourthly, I asked whether women had instituted any changes in rituals and customs themselves, and have described how women are the principal actors in, and main forces behind, these practices and that they continually arrange, use, control, negotiate and change them. Throughout the thesis I gave examples of women negotiating with each other, with regulations of the state, and with ritual norms to change and adapt them into their lives (see chapters on Marriage, Birth and Death for more details.)
- Fifthly, I asked the consequences of these changes for women's lives, and have demonstrated that changes to certain practices have brought a decrease in cost and labour, and therefore allowed women greater leisure and control over their budget. Some practices, particularly the change of location for weddings, over the last twenty years, has this changed women's whole life: instead of cooking, preparing and organising the whole process themselves, they can also enjoy the celebrations.

## 7.5.

### **Back to Theory**

After the rise of women's Islamic awareness and changes to marriage and other rituals, Islamic weddings became a new trend, followed by gender segregation. Uzbek feminist activists such as Tokhtakhodjaeva have argued that these weddings are a step back to how women lived in the pre-Soviet period, and some Uzbek women questioned what they see as women playing a part in reconstructing their own domination. However, fieldwork observations have shown that women themselves negotiate, organise, regulate and manage these weddings and that they enjoy the changes they have applied to these practices. This echoes with Mahmood's analysis of conceptions of 'self, moral, agency and politics' (5). We might argue that Uzbek women contribute to the new segregation by, for example, reintroducing old, sometimes forgotten, rules; and ask why they are giving up what they gained during the Soviet period. This discussion echoes Mahmood's question as to why a large number of women in the Muslim world actively support such a development, especially at a historical moment when they have more emancipatory possibilities available to them (12).

In her research, Torab (2007) looked at gender through the lens of collective rituals of ceremonial life. She discussed state control of religious rituals and the accreditation of female religious clerics in Iran, which reflects what is happening in Uzbekistan. After Independence and with the flow of 'radical', 'alien', and 'foreign' Islam, the Uzbek state implemented new rules about the accreditation of *otins*, ensuring they preach according to state policy, that is, a 'correct', state-controlled Islam. Hence, there is always an attempt to control, correct, change or regulate Islam by state officials, different religious groups and other means.

The state control over Islamic and local practices implemented during the Soviet period has been continued by the post-Independence state (Babadjanov 2001). During the Soviet period in Uzbekistan, by controlling women's everyday life (practices) the state intended to change their lives and to build new Soviet women; however, since Independence the state has intended to prevent foreign, alien, radical Islam and related practices flowing into women's lives. The Uzbek state has attempted to regulate everyday life and practices with the help of the Muslim Board, which issues *fatwas* and regulations preaching 'correct' Islam. This notion echoes Asad's idea about 'orthodoxy' which claims authority from sacred texts.

The ideas of the group of Islamist feminists discussed in the chapter on Theory echoes the Muslim modernist reformers' movement, *Jadids*. These men were early exponents of theories later taken up by Islamic feminists, claiming that misinterpretation of the Qu'ran had been responsible for women's oppression, and that women were in fact being treated 'un-Islamically'. Interpretation of Islam has been contested throughout the different political systems in Uzbekistan: the *Jadids* used Islam to reform society; the Soviet state (with the help of SADUM) turned it into an instrument of control; the post-Independence state has attempted to promote 'correct' Islam by regulating it through *mahalla* institutions and educational systems. As Asad said (11) 'the world of Islam' is a concept for organising historical narratives, not a self-contained collective agent.' My fieldwork in Tashkent shows that social change and transformation in women's everyday religious lives reveals enormous complexity. The data I collected during fieldwork tends to support Asad's arguments that 'Islam is neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artefacts, customs and moral. It is tradition.' (14)

Rasanayagam (2011) discussed how individuals fashion themselves as Muslim by examining the moral quality of experience. He looked through different embodied experiences and argued that his informants ‘creatively developed their own understanding through experience’ (250). In his research Marsden (2005) discussed the Muslims of Chitral, whose ‘intellectually engaged lives, verbal skills, emotional refinement’ and creative poetry have ‘provoked continual debate.’ He states that the Chitral people’s believe ‘the life of a good Muslim is a mindful life in which the play of refined and emotionally sensitive thought processes is and should be a critical element of everyday human interaction’ (263). Scholarship on Central Asia has revealed that people have different experiences in fashioning themselves as Muslim, and that people’s vision of Islam is diverse.

Asad argued that ‘it is generally impossible to define beliefs and practices, because it is generally impossible to define beliefs and practices in terms of an isolated subject’ (3). Similar to the research of Rasanayagam and Marsden, I argue that women in Uzbekistan fashion themselves as Muslims through conducting religious practices, arranging marriages, mourning their dead, celebrating their everyday lives and continuously passing knowledge to the next generation. From this scholarship and from the data I collected during fieldwork I conclude that the field in Central Asia is complex, and that women’s everyday practices in Tashkent constitute a unique piece of the puzzle which will display the whole picture of Islam in Central Asia; as Asad said, there are no ‘blueprints’ for world religion and sociopolitical systems.

## 7.6. Recommendations

Drawing on my research, I argue that women's ritual life is an important but relatively neglected area. The length of this thesis and the period required by my programme did not allow me to undertake more extensive research. Islam and Islamic practices need more attention, and my specific recommendations are below.

Firstly, religious practices and women's life-cycle rituals in the different regions of Uzbekistan require comparative research, bearing in mind the regional differences in the ways these practices are conducted. Uzbekistan has twelve regions, and although there are similarities, some practices vary. This type of detailed work has not been done since independence; most literature on Uzbek life-cycle practices was carried out during the Soviet period. This type of research will help to observe women's place in society, women's experience in practicing religion, religious rituals and practices, which will help to produce a rounded picture of women's ritual life in the country.

Secondly, it is important to look at the role and work of religious personnel (*otins*, *imams* and other clergy) and religious institutions (SADUM, the Uzbekistan Muslim Board) within the historical context. Keeping in mind that these bodies functioned all the time and that they have an important place in people's religious life, it is essential to study how they operated and what their position is in the lives of Muslims.

Finally, the subject of witchcraft is a vast area and I recommend further in-depth research on the people involved. Very little scholarly attention (Ashurov 2007, Basilov

1986, 1992, Snesarev 1957, 1969, Suhareva 1950) has been paid to the context of Uzbekistan, and most of the work was undertaken in the Soviet period and covered only a few areas of this subject. Consequently there remains a great deal to explore.

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## APPENDICES

### *Appendix 1*

Rahima Opa's father in law

Rahima Opa's (74) experience demonstrates: the Soviet state's policy of forcing religion underground; the fact that clandestine religion was and is largely in the hands of women; and the fact that there has always been a search for religious knowledge among people. Rahima Opa's father and father-in-law were friends and wrote letters to each other in Uzbek, but using the Arabic alphabet. Rahima Opa used to deliver these letters. She was curious and asked her father what was written in these letters. Her father said, "if you want to know, read it." At that period she could not read Arabic, but when she learnt the language after Independence, when she was in her sixties, she finished reading the whole Qur'an. Rahima Opa remembered her father-in-law, a member of the Communist Party, used to come home from work about midday, wash himself and go to the attic (*bolahona*) for rest. He always asked her not to disturb him for a while even if somebody phoned. After a few years she realised that he used to pray there. He would keep his room locked and only sometimes open it for her to clean. She remembered seeing a prayer carpet (*jaynamoz*) there, but she never asked any questions.

### *Appendix 2*

Islamic practices

Islamic practices include *hudayi* (sacrifice), *ehson* (charity, gift), *amri ma'ruf* (preaching Islam), *movlud* (the Prophet Muhammad's birthday), and *iftor* (the first meal eaten after sunset to break the fast during Ramadan). These practices are accepted by most people as Islamic. In Uzbekistan people organise these practices in conjunction with wedding ceremonies, childbirth, funeral ceremonies, a person's 63<sup>rd</sup> birthday (*paygambar oshi* - the age when the Prophet died), before starting a business and on other occasions. During these practices they sacrifice sheep, cook food, and invite relatives, friends and neighbours. On some occasions they sacrifice a sheep and distribute the meat to the poor.

These practices are organised as charity (*ehson*) occasions and they are held in a restaurant, cafe or in the courtyard of a home. The practices of *hudayi* and *ehson* are very similar. All merit (*savob*) earned by these practices is dedicated to the soul of the dead, which is believed to bring prosperity and fortune to the household. *Hudayi and ehson* can be realised by giving money to the poor, distributing the meat of a sacrificed sheep, paying for someone's pilgrimage (*haj*) or paying someone's wedding expenses.

The practice of *amri ma'ruf (da'wa* (call, invitation for Islam) gathering) is another type of charity, mainly associated with *da'wa*, in which the imam or *otin* gives a sermon. An *amri ma'ruf* can be held in a home, but often it is organised for men and conducted in a restaurant or café. *Movlud* is the ritual celebration of the Prophet Mohammad's birth. Usually it is conducted by women, during the Islamic calendar month of *movlud*. In this gathering women sit around an *otin*, listen to a poem or story about the life of the Prophet Mohammad and sometimes join the *otin* in reciting verses of the poem. At the end of the practice, the *otin* reads the Qur'an and everybody joins in a *duo/fotiha* (supplication), and the owner of the household distributes some bread, sweets and dry fruits to participants (usually food from the table is shared by participants, as it is believed having *baraka* (blessing)). Some people during the month of Ramadan perform the practice of *iftor* to remember dead ancestors and send them *savob* and when someone dies in the month of *Ramadan* one of the funeral practices is conducted in the form of *iftar*.

### ***Appendix 3***

The process of religious marriage (*Nikoh*)

During *nikoh* the bride and groom sit facing each other and the *imam* sits between them. According to *Hanafiya madhab* (Islamic jurisprudence) a *wali* (guardian) and witnesses (two men, or one man and two women) must be present. The bride has one of her aunts or *yanga* (a woman who takes care of the bride in all wedding ceremonies) to accompany her, and the groom usually has a friend. The imam talks to both bride and groom about their duties and obligations within marriage then checks that the groom's side has given *mahr* (dowry as a part of the marriage contract that cannot be demanded back) to the bride. The *mahr* can include one or two rings, a bracelet, a necklace (usually gold) or, very rarely, a flat, a house or part of a house. Then the imam asks the groom and bride separately if they agree to the marriage. After he has been given the right answer and the witnesses have confirmed this, he reads some verses of the Qur'an. At the end of the *nikoh* he announces the couple are wife and husband and pronounces a *duo* (blessing) on them.

### ***Appendix 4***

Islamic weddings (*toy*)

#### 1. Islamic wedding

I was invited to an Islamic wedding celebrated in an old neighbourhood of Tashkent. The wedding celebration was held in a restaurant with only female guests invited. The

bride was seated in the centre of the stage alongside her friends. The waitresses, artists, singers, video technician and camera operator were all women. The music was mainly classical Uzbek and religious Islamic music. The musicians with their equipment sat in one corner of the hall with their back to the guests. Women danced and gave toasts. Most of the toasts were in a form of *duo* (supplication). The lady who was leading the wedding was an *otin* and she told stories from *hadith*.

## 2. Mixed Islamic wedding

Rahima Opa, one of my interviewees, invited me to her friend's wedding. Her friend, Mashkura Opa (65), a grandmother of six grandchildren, had organised the wedding ceremony for her eldest grandchild. Mashkura Opa's only daughter had passed away and her son-in-law had become a heavy drinker. So, the grandmother took responsibility for all her grandchildren. As people know her and her grandchildren they helped organise the wedding ceremony. The director of the restaurant gave her a big discount as a *savob*. All her friends helped her by contributing money and time. Among the guests of Mashkura Opa were women in *hijab*, and others without *hijab*. Women and men sat at separate tables. As her eldest grandson studied at a Russian school it was noticeable that most of his invited friends were from different nationalities. His friends, boys and girls, sat mixed and his friends were also served alcohol in the tea pots. At the wedding party, besides Uzbek music there was Russian, Tatar, Armenian, and Georgian (*lezginka*) music. Although this was not a typical Islamic marriage Mashkura Opa's friend tried to combine everybody's interests and to arrange a marriage which everybody could enjoy.

## *Appendix 5*

### Meeting organised for women by the 'Eski Bog' mahalla

In November 2007, while visiting the 'Eski Bog' mahalla<sup>66</sup> (an old part of Tashkent) I attended a workshop on 'Islam and the Family' organised by the local mahalla committee for women. The workshop provided training to educate women about the Islamic way of life through the study of the Qur'an, *hadith*, and stories of notable Islamic individuals. Thirty-five women attended, most of them with their hair fully covered by a *romol* (scarf);<sup>67</sup> some wore a short *romol*, while three women were bareheaded (un-

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<sup>66</sup> Over the centuries the Uzbeks have developed a localised collective way of life in *mahallas*. Constructed over a period of time, the *malhalla* is a traditional urban neighbourhood, the inhabitants of which are likely to be nuclear family units and where there is an 'oksokol' (white beard/older man) who is the head of the community. It is a self-regulating system that enables individuals to raise issues at community level, and help solve problems such as repairing the roof of a very poor family, helping in a marriage ceremony, supporting a funeral, etc. During the Soviet period, the state officially sanctioned the *mahalla* networks, albeit in a very limited way.

<sup>67</sup> *Romol* – scarf to cover the head (some women cover their heads with a small scarf by tying it at the back of the head, and some use a big scarf to cover their head, shoulders and breasts.

scarfed). During the training session, several people from the ‘State Family Centre’, the women’s committee of the city municipality, and the Islamic University<sup>68</sup> lectured on the importance of the family within society and the role of Islam in building and maintaining the Uzbek family. All the speakers spoke about patience (*sabr*), gratitude (*shukr*),<sup>69</sup> and obedience (*itoat*). In one speech, a female graduate student from the Islamic University talked about the Qur’an and the Islamic way of life (lawful (*halol*), forbidden (*haram*), Islamic religious obligatory observances (*farz*), rules for behaviour based on the Prophet’s life as written in the *hadith* (*sunnah*), and etiquette (*odob*)). She told a *hadith* story about the need to be thankful to *Allah*:

Two men didn’t make *shukr* and God gave them all kinds of torture and problems. At the end of the story one of the men said *shukr* and all his problems were solved. This *hadith* teaches us to be thankful to God and be patient in everything. We have to accept all the problems of life and be patient as all of them come from God. God gives us the problems and solves them if we are thankful and patient.

The female speaker from the ‘State Family Centre’ talked about the problems associated with Tashkent *mahallas*, such as prostitution, heavy drinking, violence against women, children lacking concentration and self-control, and suicide among young brides. She asked the audience to inform their *mahalla* committee of the above-mentioned problems in their neighbourhoods. The last speaker at the gathering was Sajida Opa a female religious practitioner (*otin*)<sup>70</sup> of a *mahalla*. She talked about her life in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods and shared her experience of how she became an *otin*.

## **Appendix 6**

### *Otin* (Sajida Opa)

During the Soviet period, Sajida Opa worked as a teacher at a state elementary school. After her retirement, she became an *otin*, reading prayers at gatherings, conducting religious rituals and assisting the locals with their problems. I met her giving a speech in one of the *mahalla* gatherings organised for women. The focus of her speech was Islam, *odob* Uz. (adab Ar. - etiquette) and the role of education in people’s lives. She began her talk with a prayer and said ‘It would be great if we could start all our gatherings with prayers so all our work and life could be blessed by God. Could we dream about this

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<sup>68</sup> Islamic University – government-controlled institution, where students study the ‘correct’ version of Islam. The institution teaches Islam and creates guidelines for the Muslim peoples of Uzbekistan.

<sup>69</sup> *Shukr* – gratitude.

<sup>70</sup> *Otin*-female religious leader. For more details, see Chapter 3.

before our independence? Thank God we are free and now we can say anything we want to.’ Sajida Opa said a prayer and everybody said *omin* (amen).<sup>71</sup>

Sajida Opa highlighted the role of education in everyday life and she said that ‘studying in the morning after *Bomdod Uz. (Fajr Ar.)* prayer is worth a thousand times more *savob* than only having a prayer of *Fajr*.’ She also said ‘everybody in the family should pay attention to their children’s education. It is very important for children to get a good education, both secular and religious. Children brought up with a religious education behave better.’ Sajida Opa told a story from her life, when her daughter-in-law had an argument with her son about a golden necklace. Her son had paid for his sister’s education instead of buying a necklace for his wife.<sup>72</sup> ‘What can gold give you? You can lose it, or just store it somewhere, while what you learn, nobody can steal from you. Your education will open your eyes, lead you and feed you.’

Sajida Opa also mentioned the need to respect teachers and added another personal story. When she worked at the Tashkent State Pedagogical University one male professor asked her and two other people to help him publish his book. As there were no computers at that time, the *otin* typed three copies of his book after her day job, free of charge. In spite of the fact that she was pregnant she worked hard and helped her teacher to publish his book. It is believed that God blessed her and the two other people who helped the professor. All three became very good teachers because they gained from the prayers of their professor. So, she became a teacher and worked successfully at a school for a long time and today, she has religious knowledge as well. Sajida Opa teaches everybody respect, obedience, and to support teachers.

## *Appendix 7*

Trip to the tomb of *Naqshbandi* in Bukhara

My first trip, in 2009, was organised by women of the *Eski Bog mahalla* in Tashkent. I joined a group of thirty-eight women going to *Naqshbandi ziyoratgoh* in Bukhara (650 km from Tashkent) on a big bus. The organiser (Hadicha Opa, *otin* and person in charge of the *mahalla* women’s committee) gathered money from all the women to pay for the bus and buy a sheep to sacrifice in Bukhara. My interviews with the women revealed that everyone had a wish to convey to the saint. A few young women with their mothers or mothers-in-law came to ask the saint for a baby or child. One woman who already

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<sup>71</sup> *Omin* – *omen*, blessing.

<sup>72</sup> There are certain requirements at the state universities of Uzbekistan. Students who pass exams with very high marks are usually accepted by a university and study for free. Students who do not get very good marks still can be accepted, but they have to sign a contract and pay certain fees every year.

had a few daughters wanted a son. Another woman had an ill son and wanted a cure for him. We visited *Naqshbandi's* stick,<sup>73</sup> where some women left money in the holes and others tied on pieces of thread. Everybody drank water from the well of *Naqshbandi*, asking for a cure to their problems; some people filled bottles with water to take home. There were different Sheikhs sitting and reading prayers in a few places. Women asked a Sheikh to pray for them and left him money under a mattress on the bench which was prepared for people to sit. There is no limit on the amount of money which can be offered, and women gave whatever they could afford. We all stayed in Bukhara overnight. In the evening the women talked to each other, shared their problems, cooked the meat of sacrificed sheep and shared a meal from a big pot. Next day we visited a few more sights connected to the holy saints. These trips mean a lot for women, who can combine their wishes to the saint with a short holiday and sightseeing.

### *Appendix 8*

#### Trip to *Zangi Ota* in Tashkent

My second trip was to the shrine complex (*ziyaratgoh*) of *Zangi Ota* (2009) with six women from the *Eski Bog mahalla*. The complex of *Zangi Ota* is situated about fifteen kilometres outside Tashkent and most people from the Tashkent region visit this site. While driving to *Zangi Ota* I stopped my car to ask directions from a young man walking on the street. When this young man learnt that we were going to the saint's tomb, he took part in *ehson* (charity, gift) by asking us to carry his money there to offer to the saint. Women sitting inside my car opened their hands and prayed for him 'May Allah accept your charity' (*Olloh dargohida qabul qilsin*). *Zangi Ota* has been renovated with a big parking space and a place for cooking and eating. Near the gate we gave some money to an old beggar who prayed for us then we visited *Zangi Ota* and *Anbar Ona's* tomb (*mazar*). Most visitors were women, with only a few men present, mainly the site workers with a couple of men who had brought their families. Near the entrance of the tomb I noticed a note on the wall which proclaimed 'asking help from humans instead of Allah is *shirk*' (polytheism). There was a Sheikh sitting inside the *Zangi Ota* tomb. We all sat on the mattress prepared for visitors on the floor. He told us the history of the saint and made *duo* for the saint's soul, and women left some money under the mattress. Then we visited a mosque on the site where women prayed and some left money, a scarf, and material near the box for donations (*ehson quti*). Hadicha Opa said:

*Zangi Ota* has extraordinary power and even after his death he can act as a mediator between Allah and us. You should not ask help from him but you should ask Allah to help you through him. Because he is pure, he is closer to Allah and he has supernatural powers. Allah might accept your *duo* (supplication) and sacrifice if you do it in his site (*ziyaratgoh*).

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<sup>73</sup> A big, fallen tree trunk, commonly called 'the walking stick of *Hoja Naqshbani*'. Some women believe that it truly is the stick of *Naqshbandi* and pray there, leaving some money in the holes of the tree trunk. Others tie pieces of material there, to make a wish.



Our *ziyarat* took about two hours.

## ***Appendix 9***

Three different *tabibs*

1. *Tabib* - Nasiba Opa (52 years old, married, non-practising Muslim).

*Tabib* (spiritual healer) Nasiba Opa, who spent about seven years in Tibet and learnt Tibetan medicine, is much sought-after. She works in her private clinic alongside a few others, and treats her patients with leeches, oils, salt and herbal medicine. Nasiba Opa diagnoses her patients by looking at their nails. She is a covered Muslim woman (she wears the *hijab*) but has her own views on Islam. In one of our discussions on Islam she said, ‘as a healer (*tabib*), if it is necessary I will recommend my patient to drink a little bit of vodka every morning as an *antiseptic* procedure.’ Discussing Nasiba Opa’s *hijab* and ‘Muslimness’, her patient Malika said (32 years old) ‘Nasiba Opa is not a real Muslim, because in Islam drinking alcohol is forbidden (*haram*) no matter how much you drink and for what purpose. Nasiba Opa does not use any *duo* (supplication) or texts from the Qur’an, and she never mentions the name of Allah while treating her patients.’

2. *Tabib* - *Sufiy-tabib*

Unlike Nasiba Opa, *Sufiy-tabib* treats his patients with chapters from the Qur’an, herbal teas, massage, self-prepared drops/medicines, diet, steam and exercise (*sufiy* gymnastics). His patients, Komila (23) and Gulnora (40), talked about their experience and I read some of his brochures. *Sufiy-tabib* is famous and people come to seek help from him, queuing near his gate from very early in the morning. He claims to treat people according to the method of an ancient *tabib*, *Abu Ali Ibn Sino* (known as *Avicenna* in Europe). He also uses the Qur’an during treatments and advises his patients to read it every day.

3. *Tabib* - Malika Opa (49 years old, married, practising Muslim)

Malika Opa (49 years old) is a practicing Muslim woman. She said she has her ‘people’ (spirits) and they help diagnose and treat her patients. Malika Opa prepares medicine from herbs and treats her patients with herb and *duo*. She also recommends a steam bath, certain types of food and herbal tea to her patients. Malika Opa explained faith (*ihlos*) is very important in the process of treatment. She keeps telling her patients ‘I will try to help you but the treatment comes from Allah’. Malika Opa also does *oqi-tish* (cleaning a patient by reading the Qur’an). When she read from the Qur’an she used a whip (*qamchi*) which I thought was a shamanic accessory. When I asked her the pur-

pose of the whip she said it is not for whipping a patient but frightening the harm (*jinn*) which is inside the patient and causing him problems. On my last visit Malika Opa said that she had stopped practicing *oqitish*, because she does not have enough strength/energy for the practice and she gets very tired after the séance.

### ***Appendix 10***

Visiting *Domla* (Olim Domla)

Many young people also believe in fortune tellers (*domla*).

I accompanied Shahlo (26) to Olim *domla* (52 years old, Muslim), who believe to be strong in magic (*dami otkir*). Olim *domla* works in the mosque and outside work hours he undertakes *oqitish* (reading from the Qur'an) and *qaytarma* (practice of sending the harm back) for people who come with their problems. Shahlo could not find a husband and came to Olim *domla* for help. After the séance of *oqitish* Olim *domla* asked her to come back for two more sessions. Next time he asked her to bring a new pack of salt, sugar, tea, a bottle of water and *isiriq* (appendix 14).<sup>74</sup> Although he is not a fortune teller and he works in the mosque, he said that 'there is something in you, I know who did the harm and I will ask for a cure, *Insha Allah*'. During our next visit he read Qur'an and did '*kuf-suf*' (see footnote 8) on Shahlo and opened a few boxes/bags of food (salt, sugar, tea). He also made a long *duo* (supplication) and instructed Shahlo to use salt, sugar, water, tea every day and smoke her house by burning *isiriq* three times. He also instructed Shahlo to read chapter N111, (from the Qur'an) one thousand times every day for forty days and make *duo* asking her wishes from Allah. He said this is a very powerful practice and told the story of a woman who could not have children for nine years but after starting this practice in two months the woman got pregnant and later had a baby.

### ***Appendix 11***

The evil eye

Traditional local belief in the evil eye is an un-Islamic practice (Boriev 1995, Ashurov 2007, Hamraqulova 2002). People use amulets (*tumor*) and different objects as protection from the evil eye. A *tumor* is prepared in the form of a small triangle or square covered with a piece of material. Inside there is a piece of paper with a written text from the Qur'an or a *duo*; some animal parts (the nail of a wolf, eagle or bear; and/or feathers of a peacock, cock or other bird; pieces of grain, chili pepper). A *tumor* is worn around the

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<sup>74</sup> Usually these products should be in a new sealed boxes. The *domla* (fortune-teller, *bahshi* or *tabib*) opens them and reads verses from the Qur'an or other texts, and does *kuf-suf* on open boxes. They believe literally saying these words transforms the magic of the text to the food inside the box.

neck, or hung on the hat or outerwear of a child. Some women keep a *tumor*, garlic, hot pepper or/and bread under a baby's pillow, inside the *beshtik* (cradle), as protection. People used to stitch *kozmunchoq*<sup>75</sup> and *tumor* on a baby's clothes. *Tumor* was also mentioned by Frinshtein (1978), who informed us that women used to stitch amulets on children's hats or clothes to protect children from the evil eye. They believe that children might be harmed by the evil eye and as a result might get sick and/or lose weight. Therefore, people hang different amulets or charms at the entrance of the courtyard of the house, on top of the gate, in one of the trees in the yard, inside the *beshtik* and inside the car. Some people hang *isiriq*, horse shoe (*taqa*) or red hot pepper at the entrance.

My neighbour Karima (46) hung the head of a sheep's skeleton on a tree in the courtyard for protection. She said the first thing seen by whoever entered her house is this skeleton and if that person has the evil eye it will be paralysed by seeing the object. People believe that hanging different objects, or burning *isiriq* (appendix 14) in the house, cleanses the area of *ins-jins* (*jinns*) and protects against the evil eye. For the same reason, people are very careful with a newborn baby's clothes and toys, not leaving them outside in the dark. They have a separate dish for washing a baby's clothes, and after washing these clothes or giving the baby a bath women pour the waste water under a fruit tree. The belief in the evil eye in the upbringing of children also has been mentioned by Delaney (1991).

The belief in the evil eye, as my fieldwork revealed, was mainly held by women who tried to explain death and disease. The persistence or disappearance of practices like this is complex, and their continuing power remains reflected in, for example, proverbs such as 'an evil eye could break a stone' (*yomon koz toshni yoradi*). At the same time, while clearly some of the underlying beliefs are still present, many practices connected with amulets and other fetish objects are losing their meaning and disappearing. During the last few years in Tashkent, amulets have not been seen or used as often as previously. This may be the result of the campaigns organised by religious people through mass media and Friday sermons against superstitious practices.

## ***Appendix 12***

### *Chilla and chilyasin*

The number of forty is significant in some cultures and religions. *Chilla*<sup>76</sup> has a long history and is practised by different ethnic people of Central Asia and elsewhere in the

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<sup>75</sup> These are black beads with a little white spot, reminiscent of an eye. Hence the word *kozmunchoq* translates as 'eye bead'. It is believed to give protection from the evil eye.

<sup>76</sup> *Chilla* – cycle of forty days.

world. It was mentioned in pre-Soviet (Nalivkin 1886), Soviet (Troitskaya 1927, Karmisheva 1969, Frishtein, 1978, Kislyakov 1959) and post-Soviet (Arifkanova 2002, Ashurov 2007, Nasrutdinov 1996) scholarship. According to these researchers the period of *chilla* during which people are vulnerable is the first forty days after a major life-cycle event such as birth, marriage or death.<sup>77</sup> *Chilla* is also divided into two parts, *kichkina chilla*<sup>78</sup> and *katta chilla* (Tashbaeva 1989). The practice of *chilyasin*<sup>79</sup> is also connected to the number forty. This practice consists of reading the *Yasin* chapter from the Qur'an forty times. *Chilyasin* is usually practised in very critical conditions and the *Yasin* chapter is read to solve problems only when there is no other way to help.

### *Appendix 13*

The practice of *Is chiqarish* is remembering the dead (parents, family members, relatives, patron saints, etc.) by feeding their souls with the smell of cooking (frying). During my fieldwork I found that some people still believe that the dead persist in or affect the environment. The belief in ancestors' protection still exists, which is why older people making *duo* may say "let the souls of the ancestors protect you" (*ota bobolarni ruhi qollab quvvatlasin*).

I observed that *is chiqarish* was still practised, despite the revival of Islam and the issuing of *fatwas*, in most life-cycle ceremonies. Karomat Hola<sup>80</sup> (neighbour) told me that:

the soul of the dead (*ruh, arvoh*) comes back to see his/her family and relatives in different forms. We believe that the soul of the dead continues living; that's why we respect and do not disturb them. We conduct different practices to remember them. I used to see my parents and elders do these practices all the time.

Karomat Hola also explained that these practices help people to overcome different problems. She said that she performed it often when she saw an *arvoh kapalak* (a special type of butterfly similar to a big brown moth) in the house, when she missed her dead relatives, when she saw them in her dreams or when it was the anniversary of a dead person. Karomat Hola usually performs the practice on Wednesdays (*murodbahsh* day) because this is the day when wishes come true and the special day for starting big and important tasks.

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<sup>77</sup> For more discussion on *chilla* and *chilyasin* in life cycle events see chapters on Birth, Marriage and Death.

<sup>78</sup> *Kichkina chilla* is the first 20 days and *katta chilla* is entire period of 40 days.

<sup>79</sup> *chilyasin* - *chil* (Persian) - forty, *yahisn* - sura of Qur'an

<sup>80</sup> *Hola* (literally aunt) or sometimes *Aya* is used for women older age

Most women of the *mahalla* cooked *bogirsoq*, *qush tili*, *chak-chak* and *chalpak* – foods particularly associated with *is chiqarish* - on Eid holidays. On the day of *Arafa* (one day before *Eid* holiday) women cook *osh* (the national dish made from rice) and share it with close neighbours. Karomat Hola explained that before cooking all these foods she usually reads the Qur'an and makes *duo* (supplication) for the soul of the dead.

A similar practice was mentioned by Frishtein (1978) who explained that women in Khoresm performed this practice to frighten evil spirits and to feed the spirits of their ancestors. This practice is also mentioned by the Uzbek ethnographer Nasrutdinov (1996), who wrote that on the day of *arafa* (one day before *Eid*) women performed *is chiqarish* and cooked three, five or seven *chozma* (pastries) to remember their dead relatives. Mirhosilov (1972) discussed women offering sacrificial food to *apalar* (patron, good spirits) by performing the practice of *is chiqarish*. When people see the *arvoh kapalak* butterfly they say the soul of the dead is visiting them. Various scholars have mentioned the belief in the return of the dead person's soul as an *arvoh kapalak* (Sne-sarev 1969, Nasritdinov 1996).

#### ***Appendix 14***

##### *Isiriq*

Another practice connected with fire and smoke is *isiriq* (*arpa badiyon* or *Ispand* or *fenel* [fenel] Latin). This practice consists of burning the dry stem, seeds and leaves of a special herb to form a smoke. People burn *isiriq* to chase away evil spirits and it is also used as protection from the evil eye. *Isiriq* is burned in the room of a newborn baby or a new bride and groom, and in the household of deceased. Women believe it cleans up all types of germs, and protects babies and mothers from being harmed by *jiinns* or evil eye. This practice also was mentioned in a few Soviet writings, and nowadays is not very popular.

#### ***Appendix 15***

The list of presents - bride-price (*toy*) for sending to the bride's house (more details on *toy* see Chapter 4; 4.3.2.)

- a *qochqor*, a large male sheep costing about 1,000,000 *soms*<sup>81</sup> (\$400)
- a sack of flour (70kg)
- a sack of rice (about 50-70kg)
- a sack of carrots (50kg) and onions (10kg)

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<sup>81</sup> *Som* – Uzbek national currency

- at least 10-12 dishes (*togora*) of food

The amount of milk money (*sut puli*<sup>82</sup>) might be between \$500 and \$1000 USD, sometimes more. The bride's presents (*sarpo*) are usually packed in boxes. All gift boxes are decorated with flashy, colourful wrapping paper. There are a few pairs of shoes, boots, coats, jackets, jumpers, scarves and dresses. The *sarpo* remains at the bride's home until the day of the main celebration (*nikoh bazmi*). The same day, the groom's family presents *sut puli* to the bride's mother.

### **Appendix 16**

List of *togora* (a big dish of food)

This is the list of *togora* which the groom's family sends to the bride's family in one of the wedding ceremonies (prices current in 2009).

One *togora* of grilled chicken – 50,000 *soms*

One *togora* of 40 *somsa* – 40,000 – 50,000 *soms*

One *savat* of 30 *patir* – 45,000 – 50,000 *soms*

One *togora* of *hasip* – 40,000 *soms*

One *togora* of *shashlik* – 60,000 – 70,000 *soms*

One *togora* of *norin* – 60,000 *soms*

One *togora kievskiy kotlet* (Chicken Kiev) – 60,000 – 80,000 *soms*

One *togora* of fried fish – 60,000 *soms*

One *togora* of baked cookies (*napoleon, medovik, rogaliki*) – 40,000 *soms*

A big basket of fresh fruits (different types) – 50,000 – 80,000 *soms*

A big tray of different chocolates – 60,000 – 100,000 *soms*

A big tray of different dry fruits halva, dry apricots, raisons, nuts, etc.

A big cake – 50,000 -100,000 *soms*

*Somsa* is baked pastry with a savoury filling, such as meat - ground ham, ground beef or ground chicken - with onion.

*Hasip* is boiled sausage made from minced meat with rice.

*Norin* are finely cut noodles with meat.

*Shashlik* is similar to Turkish kebabs on sticks

*Patir* is round bread cooked for special occasions with oil or fat.

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<sup>82</sup> *Sut puli* – translated as money for the milk, the money given to the mother of the bride for suckling her.

## **Appendix 17**

List of years dedicated to individuals, groups or objectives by the Uzbek government

- 1991– *Alisher Navoiy yili* - Year of Alisher Navoiy
- 1992– *Hamshiralalar yili* – Year of Nurses
- 1993 – *Ahmad Yassaviy yili* – Year of Ahmad Yassaviy
- 1994 – *Mirzo Ulug'bek yili* – Year of Mirzo Ulugbek
- 1995 – *Ibn Sino yili* – Year of Ibn Sino
- 1996 – *Amir Temur yili* – Year of Amir Temur
- 1997 – *Inson manfaatlar yili* - Year of Human Interests
- 1998 - *Oila yili* - Year of the Family
- 1999 - *Ayollar yili* - Year of Women
- 2000 - *Soglom avlod yili* - Year of Healthy Generation
- 2001 - *Onalar va bolalar yili* - Year of Mothers and Children
- 2002 – *Qariyalarni qadrlash* - Year of Protection of the Interests of Older People
- 2003 – *Obod mahalla* - Year of the Mahalla
- 2004 - *Mehr muruvvat* - Year of Goodness and Charity
- 2005 – *Sihat salomatlik* - Year of Health
- 2006 – *Homiylar va shifokorlar* - Year of Charity and Medical Workers
- 2007– *Ijtimoiy himoya* - Year of Social Support
- 2008 - *Yoshlar yili* - Year of Youth
- 2009 - *Qishloq taraqqiyoti va farovonligi yili* –Year of Development and Accomplishment in Rural Areas
- 2010 - *Barkamol avlod yili* - Year of Harmoniously Developed Generation
- 2011 – *Kichik bizniss va hususiy tadbirkorlik* - Year of Small Business & Private Enterprise
- 2012 - *Mustahkam oila yili* - Year of the Family
- 2013 - *Obod turmush yili* - Year of Wellbeing and Prosperity

## **Appendix 18**

List of decrees and other documents

Karimov I. (ed.) *Mahalla: notmativ – huquqiy hujjatlar toplami*, Tashkent, 2007, Ozbekiston Mahalla hairiya jamgarmasi, Uzbekiston Respublikasi Adliya vasirligi Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan ‘concerning the official language of the republic of Uzbekistan,’ additions and changes.

Karimov. I. Mahalla: Legal normative documents, Tashkent, 2007, Uzbekistan. “Mahalla” Respublika hayriya jamg'armasi – Mahalla Republic Charity Fund, The Republic of Uzbekistan, Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 'concerning the official language of the Republic of Uzbekistan,' additions and changes.

Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan, (*fuqarolarning oz ozini boshqarish organlari togrisida*) concerning citizens' self-management bodies.

Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan concerning the election of the deputy of citizens' gatherings and his advisors (*fuqarolar yigining raisi va uning maslahatchilari saylovi togrisida*).

Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan (*uzb. Hotin-qizlar qomitasi faoliyatini qollab quvvatlash borasidagi qoshimcha chora-tadbirlar togrisida*) to support the activity of the Uzbekistan Women's Committee.

*Hotin qizlar qomitalari ayollar manfaatining haqiqiy ifodachisi va himoyachisiga aylanishi kerak*

Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan regarding the citizens' self-management body (*fuqarolarning oz-ozini boshqarish organlarida diniy ma'rifat va ma'naviy-ahloqiy tarbiya masalalari boyicha maslahatchi lavozimlarida ishlovchi ayollarni ijtimoiy muhofaza qilishni kuchaitirish borasidagi qoshimcha chora tadbirlari togrisida*).

Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan

*Yosh oilalarni moddiy va ma'naviy qollab-quvvatlashga doir qoshimcha chora-tadbirlar togrisida*

Decree of the Deputy Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan

*Nikohlanuvchi shahslarni tibbiy korikdan otkasish togrisida nizomni tasdiqlash haqida*

*Fuqarolar yiginlarining diniy ma'rifat va ma'naviy-ahloq tarbiya masalalari boyicha maslahatchi faoliyati togrisida namunaviy nizom*

Tangriev (ed.), 2006, *Mahallada diniy ma'rifat va ma'naviy-ahloqiy tarbiya ishlarini tashkil etish (uslubiy tafsiyalar)*, Tashkent, Uzbekistan (Establishment of religious education and ideological-behavioural education in the *mahalla*): methodological recommendations



*Mahalla*: ijtimoiy himoyaning huquqiy asoslari, huquqiy-meyoriy hujjatlar toplami, Tashkent – 2010, Uzbekistan *Mahalla* hairiya jamgarmasi, “*Mahalla ziyosi*” respublika oquv-uslubiy markaz

### ***Appendix 19***

The *fatwas*

The *fatwa* of the Uzbekistan Muslim Board regarding behaviour while visiting graves (my translation from Uzbek, short meaning, Hoji Ismail Rayhon Ogli, 2004, pp. 43-43).

The *fatwa* regarding the expression of condolences to families having funerals, and the conduct of some other ceremonies (my translation from Uzbek in short, pp.44-48, from Hoji Ismail *op cit.*).

The *fatwa* concerning suicide, considered a great sin.

The *fatwa* regarding the organisation of weddings, ceremonies and other gatherings according to the norms

2007 – Ijtimoiy Himoya Yili, (O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidentining farmoni, Yosh oilalarni moddiy va ma‘naviy qo‘llab-quvvatlashga doir qo‘shimcha chora-tadbirlar to‘g‘risida, (O‘zbekiston Respublikasi qonun hujjatlar to‘plami, 2007-yil, 19-20 son, 192 modda)

2007 – Year of Social Support (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, projects to support young families financially and morally.

2012 – Mustahkam oila yili (O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidentining qarori, “Mustahkam oila yili” davlat dasturi to‘g‘risida)

2012 – Year of the Family (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the state project concerning the ‘Year of the Family’).

### ***Appendix 20***

List of principal respondents

1. Rahima Opa: (*Eski Bog mahalla*) 72 years old, a widowed pensioner and practising Muslim with one son and two grandsons. Previously she used to work as a doctor and now she also works as an *otin* in her *mahalla*.

2. Hadicha Opa: (*Eski Bog mahalla*) 60 years old, a married pensioner and practising Muslim with three sons and several grandchildren. Previously she used to work as a midwife, and is now an *otin* in her *mahalla* and also works on the *mahalla* committee as a consultant on women's issues.

3. Shoirra Opa: (*Eski Bog mahalla*) 59 years old, a recently-widowed pensioner and practising Muslim with three children and several grandchildren. This respondent is from a very religious family: her late husband was religiously educated and worked as an imam in the mosque and she is an *otin*. She has always taught the Qur'an to girls.

4. Malika Opa: (*Eski Bog mahalla*) 49 years old, *tabib* and from a practising Muslim family. Her spouse worked as a religious cleric, and she used to teach children and still treats women.

5. Shahlo: (*Yangi Bozor mahalla*) 26 years old, (friend) a graduate of the University of Foreign Languages and unmarried: a modern practising Muslim girl who works for a foreign company in Tashkent.

6. Muhabbat Hola: (*Yangi Bozor mahalla*) 80 years old, a widowed pensioner and practising Muslim. She lives with her son and works as an *otin*; because of her age she works from home and people visit her with different questions. She also used to wash dead bodies (*gassol*).

The following respondents were all neighbours and participants in the *Yangi Bozor mahalla* 'Gap':

7. Mastura Opa: 60 years old, a married pensioner and practising Muslim. She has two sons, is a member of three other Gap groups, knows the ritual life of women in Tashkent very well and used to work in a publishing house.

8. Halima Opa: 64 years old, a neighbour and non-practising Muslim who passed away in 2010. She had one son and two grandchildren, was married, did not work outside the home and was a housewife all her life.

9. Karima: 48 years old, a married, non-practising Muslim with one daughter and two sons, all of whom she has married off. She works at the train station. Her mother-in-law (Muattar Hola: 82 years old practicing Muslim), was the lady whose body I washed with *gassol*.

10. Zaynab Opa: 53 years old, a married, a non-practising Muslim who has been a housewife all her life. She has daughter, son and two grandchildren.

11. Zuhra: 50 years old, a married, non-practising Muslim. She works in the kindergarten and lives with her mother-in-law, husband and three children.

12. Zulfiya: 49 years old, a married pensioner and non-practising Muslim. She has two sons and two grandchildren.