Gendered Coal Struggles at the Margins

The Working Lives of Men, Women and Children in Soviet and post-Soviet Tajikistan



Negar Elodie Behzadi

Saint Antony's College

University of Oxford, School of Geography and the Environment

Submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Geography and the Environment

Trinity Term, 2018 / 22.06.2018

Wordcount: 85,564

Supervisors: Prof. Patricia Daley & Prof. Judith Pallot

ABSTRACT

This thesis delves into the working lives of men, women and children in one village in Northern Tajikistan to unravel the way gendered geographies of exclusion have been produced/reproduced and transformed in a context of politico/economic and ecologic change in the post-Soviet Muslim space. I draw on eight months of ethnographic work in the village of Kante, supplemented with life histories gathered during research in other semi-urban and rural areas in Tajikistan. In the post-Soviet extractive landscape of Kante, informal coalmining developed alongside male out-migration and the setting up of a Sino-Tajik mine after the fall of the Soviet Union. Work and resources are organized along gendered and generational lines, relegating the socially weaker groups to the most undesirable environments, and highlighting gendered and generational norms that make such exclusions possible.

This thesis is guided by three research questions: first, why would women and men who experienced a certain degree of gender equality during the Soviet times accept and transmit gendered oppressive norms to the younger generations? Second, to what extent has the transformation of work practices impacted the process of gendered subjectification in Tajikistan? Finally, how do the broader resource struggles that have emerged with the start of the neoliberal global era also impact the gender subjectification process in Tajikistan?

In answering these questions, this thesis first investigates post-Soviet gendered transformations in the Muslim South. It is situated as an academic and political project aimed at building alternative readings of gender and Muslimness in the world. Here, I challenge assumptions about Islam and the idea of an Islamic revival since the fall of the Soviet Union as the main causes of women's oppression and the *retraditionalization* of the Tajik society. Instead, I argue that the cultural, religious, and what constitutes the 'traditional' is never fixed, but grounded in history, and always entangled, transformed, shaped by, as well as mobilized in the wake of broader politico-economic/ecologic changes, and their local manifestations through the everyday work and resource struggles people engage with. I develop this argument by building a feminist postcolonial geography reading of work and resource struggles in the (post)Soviet Muslim South, which I then expand upon in four articles. The first article examines the project of women's emancipation through work in Tajikistan, making visible the production of gendered and ethnic hierarchies through an examination of discourses on,

and material experiences of, work during the Soviet past. The second article focuses on changing masculinities with broader and localized politico-ecologic post-Soviet changes, transforming work and resource struggles, and their impact on women's exclusion. The third article delves into women miners' most intimate experiences of exclusion and marginalization by focusing on their abject/dirty work in mines. Finally, the last article focuses on questions of child labor and the intergenerational retransmission and renegotiation of gendered norms.

By exploring these four themes, this thesis builds a holistic approach to the gender subjectification process in the post-Soviet Muslim South, and more generally in the Muslim South and makes three main contributions. It first expands on scholarship on gendered transformations in Central Asia, by complicating understandings of gender, generation, tradition and Muslimness in this context. Second, it contributes to broader feminist geographical literature on Muslim identities by – on one hand, provincializing research and focusing on the specificities of politico-ecologic changes in the poorest countries of the Muslim Global South; and on the other hand, conceptualizing spatialized intersectionalities and agencies. Finally, this research contributes to feminist labor geography and feminist political ecology literature by reiterating the importance of exploring embodied gendered work and resource struggles as a window onto broader gendered exclusions.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIS: Community of Independent States

CUREC: Central University Research Committee

ESCAS: European Society for Central Asian Studies

FPE: Feminist Political Ecology

IFIs: International Finance Organizations

ILO: International Labour Organization

IMF: International Monetary Fund

IRPT: Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

UNICEF: the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

TSSR: Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic

USSR: Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

This thesis contains words in Russian and Tajik. I have used the following Romanisation system: 'ғ' as 'gh,' 'ӣ' as 'i,' ҷ as 'j,' 'ҳ' as 'h' and 'қ' as 'q.' and 'ӯ,' ir. All of the translations, unless indicated, are my own. I have marked foreign text in italics.

The term kolkhoz and sovkhoz have been italicized but not translated

Kolkhoz: collective farm in the fomer Soviet Union

Sovkhoz: state-owned farm in the former Soviet Union

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the hospitality, generosity and openness of my research participants in Tajikistan. I would first like to express my deepest gratitude to Isso, Makhoula, Albina, Janana, little Umed, Goldasta in Kante; and Apa Nadira, Sayebeh, Kheraban, Sajideh, in Kaftorkhona. Thanks for opening your world and homes to a stranger, for your patience and your sense of humor. Thanks Apa Nadira for calling yourself my Tajik mum. Thanks to all the elderly in Kante and Kaftorkhona who have shared with me their memories of life, war, loss, and joy. Thanks to all the children in the school, for all your questions about 'life there'. Thanks to N. for trusting me. This project is dedicated to all of you.

I am deeply grateful to my DPhil supervisors in the School of Geography and the Environment, Prof. Patricia Daley, and Prof. Judith Pallot, who have both been a constant source of inspiration. Thanks for your advice, mentorship and sharp reviews. Thanks as well for being women academic role models. I am honored to have had the chance to learn from you.

I would also like to thank my Confirmation of Status examiners, Prof. Linda McDowell, and Dr Elena Katz, for their time, generosity, and their extremely constructive and helpful reviews of the early drafts of this thesis.

I am also greatly indebted to the ESRC, the Clarendon Fund, Saint Antony's College, and the School of Geography and the Environment in Oxford, for their financial support. This project could not have existed without this funding.

At the School of Geography and the Environment in Oxford, I would like to thank all the colleagues, friends and students who have made this journey intellectually stimulating, and the SOGE a friendly place. Thanks to Ian Klinke, Sneha Krishnan for their generous mentorship, and friendship. Thanks to Dan Boss, Christine Schenk, Derek McCormack, and many others. Thanks to the friendships of the DPhil room 1. Thanks to all the NSEG students, and all the students at Mansfield College for their curiosity and eagerness to share ideas.

I would also like to warmly thank all the patient re-readers of this thesis. Special thanks to Hanno Brankamp who has been an exceptional friend, coach, and re-reader, over these last weeks of DPhil; thanks to Sneha again for being so generous and encouraging;

thanks to Stephanie Postar and Jenny Hough for being so thorough. Thanks so much Conrad and Christine for your amazing maps.

I would also like to thank all my friends in Tajikistan and beyond who have supported me and helped me throughout and beyond my fieldwork. I am grateful to Adiba Aliemova, Christine Oriol for access to the field and great conversations on life in Tajikistan; Joe Schottenfeld and Lucia Direnberger, for our friendships and co-authorship, thanks to Juliette Cleuziou. I am also eternally grateful to Veronique Geoffroy for being an amazing friend, for giving me a home, shelter and family in Dushanbe; Heloise Troc for opening her home to me and for her fascinating stories of life in Afghanistan, India, Haiti, and the rest; Loulou Grappe for telling me to put my head into the snow and for being such a reliable friend.

Thanks to the LHOP for being a family, for being inspiring, loving, nurturing feminists, women, tortoises, lamas, academic coaches, life partners, and 'Y's: Stephanie Postar, Ali Avery, Jak Wagnon, Sarah O'Brien, Mariana Da Silva, Matt Elliott. Thanks for the sound of guitar, for our dances in the kitchen, for always reminding me that there is a life out there. Thanks to Nawel Benziane, Sarah Marmouz, Alexia Kieffer for these last twenty years of friendship, and of course, my 'Sange Saboor' Helene Belliart.

I am immensely grateful to my family, for their faith, love, and support. Thanks Nazanine, Rouzbeh and your families, thanks to the 'wondercousines'. To my parents - I honor memories of you, Shahrokh, writing your own PHD, in your second language, filling these white sheets of paper with your beautiful handwriting, after nights of arduous work in your taxi. I am eternally grateful, Fourough, for your unconditional love, for all the handfuls of almonds delicately left on my desk, for the cracked up pomegranates, for your dedication and patience. Thanks to both of you for your readings of Hafiz's poems with two voices when I needed beauty and courage. Thanks for transmitting me the love of questioning the world we live in.

To Claudia. We started this journey together. Your memory has been following me throughout and given me the strength to decide to close it. You are always with me.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Gendered exclusions: work and resource struggles in the Muslim (post)Soviet periphery

Sitting at the deep end of the gallery on a coal bag that he has just filled, Mirzo takes a break. Between two heavy breaths, he sips the tea his wife has carefully prepared for his working day. I cannot distinguish his face in the darkness of the mine. 'Mohalemma, ho, mohalemma!' – 'Teacher, hey, teacher!' he hails; this is how people call me in the village. I do not recognise his voice, it is drowned out by the donkeys' brays, the clapping of their hooves against the dirt and black ground of the gallery, and the rhythms of the ten or more pickaxes that hit the mountains' loins to wrest the black gold. I try to breathe. The air is thick, moist, sweaty, filled by the animals' scent and coal particles.

Someone is reaching us from behind, I turn my body, and lower my head – there stands Saido, his nose blackened by coal. He is so little that his head does not even reach my waist. He is holding the leash that ties him to the donkey's neck, and displays this embarrassed smile, the same one as when he fails to remember how to conjugate the verb 'to be' in our Thursday morning French class at school. Like most children from the age of five in the village, Saido goes mining everyday day after school, and is always too tired to do his homework. Like most children as well, he has already fallen off the donkey, has broken a leg, an arm, a hip. Mirzo hails me again 'Mohalemma, ho, Mohalemma!' I can see him now. The whites of his eyes stand out from his blackened and sweaty face, he has swapped the blue suit and black tie that he wears every day for loose trousers and a hat. He is the village school's mathematics teacher. Every day after school, he comes here with his 'comrade' and Saido, his ten-year-old nephew, to hit the coalface, to fill up ten or more coal bags and sell them on the illegal market. 'You don't make a living with teaching here, it's not enough'.

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, people continued working 'as usual' in Kante. This village in the heights of the Fann Mountains in Northern Tajikistan was once part of a Soviet collective farm, mainly cultivating tobacco. The elderly remember the ten years of civil war that followed the fall as a period of hunger and uncertainty. This is when men started leaving the village; Kantegui mountaineers became fishermen, joining a man who had left the village to start fishing in the Kamtchatka peninsula, sometimes never to come back. Like in most Central Asian countries, seasonal male migration became a way of life. Men's bodies are tossed around from construction site to

construction site in Russia, sometimes bodies beaten up, and dead corpses of men sent back to their homeland for burial. For those who remain, there is 'nothing', 'nothing to do', 'nothing here'. 'Coal is all we've got, but at least, we have it. Otherwise men would all go away'.

The smell of the burning mineral never leaves the air in Kante. Down the black mountain, drivers wait during the cold months of the year for their hungry trucks to be filled with coal bags that will then be sold all around the country to warm houses which once were fuelled by gas coming from the neighbouring Uzkek Soviet Socialist Republic. Armies of artisanal miners go back and forth every day followed by their donkeys and children in the coal galleries dug after the fall of the Soviet Union to extract the resource. From the highest point of the village, you can also see the red and orange containers of the Sino-Tajik mine that set up in the village in 2013. Behind the premises is the Southern slope of the village's mountains, ripped open. Once occupied by the artisanal miners, it has now been blown away by dynamite and taken over by 'the Chinese'. Illegal miners are not allowed there anymore, and around three hundred men from Kante and surrounding villages work there day and night to extract the resource with big machinery.

When I ask Mirzo why there are no women in the mines, he pauses, surprised. 'Our women do not work' he says, with pride. 'They only sit at home'. Mirzo's response contrasts with tales from the Soviet times of women who were driving tractors or running collective farms, women standing up all night to tie the bundles to meet the production quotas; with images of piles of medals[1] received by former Soviet work heroines that older women display with pride. It also contrasts with this image of Manzilla, my hostess in the village, waking the whole family up every morning before running to the cow shed to milk the animals, or pulling off branches for the stove with the whole weight and strength of her six months pregnant body, running downhill with a heavy load on her back to the house.

Finally it contrasts with the everyday life of the nineteen women in the village who go mining every day and sometimes at night. Women load and unload heavy bags of coal, drag their donkeys up and down mountains. Some of them hit the rock with their pickaxe in this hidden place far up from the village, where they know that they can go unseen. Women miners' work is shameful, (*ayb*) in Kante, their mining area an unnamed place, a place that disturbs. Men are embarrassed (*sharm mikonan*), they do not let

[1] See Photograph 1 and 2 of woman (brigade leader) medals from the Soviet times

women work near them. Coal is also hard (*khin*), and more difficult to extract there than further down the mountains where only men mine. The road to the illegal market next to the women's mining area is also frozen during the harshest months of the winter; coal buyers do not dare to go up, and often just stop at the base of the mountains, near the men's mines, where the illegal market is bigger. Excluded, women are also constantly bullied by other men and women in the village.

From exhausted women's bodies in the collective Soviet farms, children's broken legs and hips in the artisanal mines, men migrant's bodies tossed around from the Baikal to Kamchatka, and women miners shamefully hiding to extract coal, Kantegui's embodied stories of life and work all shed light on the everyday and multiple levels of exclusions experienced by men, women, and children at the margins of the post-Soviet space. Stories of left-behind women's exclusion from access to natural resources, children's work at the margins of society in one of the 'worst forms of child labor'[2], and men's movement between and across borders in search of work, expose the brutality of a socio-spatial landscape marked by the relegation of the socially weaker groups to the most undesirable environments, and their socio-spatial exclusion based on gendered and generational lines. This dissertation delves into these gendered and embodied stories of exclusion. In particular, it takes the working lives of women, men, and children at the margins of the post-Soviet space as a starting point to unravel the ways gendered geographies of exclusion have been produced/reproduced and transformed in a context of politico/economic and ecologic change, in post-Soviet Muslim Tajikistan.

By doing so, this dissertation builds three interrelated narratives, and raises three sets of geographical questions: First, it tells a story about gender and post-Soviet change, and raises questions about the types of gendered transformations experienced in the post-Soviet era, at the margins of the post-Soviet space. It is hence first committed to disentangle what has often been raised as a contradiction and/or paradox, (Kandiyoti 2007) in the post-Soviet world in general, and especially in the Muslim post-Soviet South – expressly, an apparent retrenchment towards patriarchal, conservative norms, and Islam, since the fall of the Soviet Union, despite seventy years of socialist gendered ideologies, equality policies, and attempts to undermine traditional and Islamic ways of life. This contradiction triggers multiple questions that this study investigates: why would women and men who experienced a certain degree of gender equality during the

[2] Mining is considered by the ILO (2013a) as one of the worst forms of child labor

Soviet times accept and transmit gendered oppressive norms to the younger generations? But also, how and why does this transmission occur?

Second, this study tells another story – one that builds on feminist geographies and is concerned with theorizing the relationship between work, gender, bodies and exclusion. By studying men, women and children's working lives, it enquires about the everyday, embodied and intergenerational livelihood and work struggles people engage with, to make a living, but also to be and to become gendered selves in the poorest country of the post-Soviet space, and in one of the poorest countries of the Global South. This study asks: how do gender and gendered exclusions come into being through everyday work practices? How are they made and remade, at multiple scales? How are they reproduced and transformed across generations – from the global to the most intimate scales of the body?

Finally, by anchoring this study in the everyday lives of men, women and children in a derelict extractive landscape built around coal mining, between the formal/the informal, the legal/the illegal, the artisanal/the industrial, the global/the local, this dissertation elucidates the complexity and violence of the gendered resource struggles that are entrenched with the neoliberalization of economies in post-Soviet Tajikistan, but also more generally in the Global South. It specially questions the relationship between these gendered exclusions, the resource struggles people engage with, and the emergence of capitalist modes of production/reproduction and extraction of resources, inquiring into how resource struggles also produce gendered beings in a neoliberal global era.

By raising this set of questions in the context of Tajikistan, this study situates itself as a major academic and political project of deconstructing conventional, orientalist and neo-colonial discourse on Muslims in the world. In particular, it advances a feminist postcolonial geography concerned with unsettling and resisting the epistemic imperialism produced through representations of Muslim populations in the world. Through everyday, embodied, and situated stories of life, work, gender and resource struggles, this study unravels the teleological, orientalist and culturalist perspectives that subtly permeate development discourses on gender and post-Soviet transformations in Central Asia, and disputes the way they tend to misuse and re-appropriate the concept(s) of *(re)traditional(ization)*.

Here, I specifically object to a focus on Islam and the idea of an Islamic revival, as the main causes for women's oppression, and the retrenchment towards patriarchal norms since the fall of the Soviet Union. Instead, I show the importance of studying factors

beyond, but also along with religion, which shape men and women's everyday gendered geographies of exclusion in Muslim countries. I highlight how the cultural, religious and what constitutes the 'traditional' is never fixed, but grounded in and produced by history, and always entangled, transformed, shaped by as well as mobilized in the wake of broader politico-economic/ecologic changes, and their local manifestations through the everyday work and resource struggles people engage with. By doing so, I foreground the everyday and embodied lives of men, women and children at the margins, as sites of epistemic privilege (hooks 2015) through which to make visible, readable and valuable alternative geographies of gender and Muslimness.

This chapter is organized as follows – first I address the context-specific rationales for following the study aims. To that end, I unravel the gender questions that arise from the historical and contemporary context of post-Soviet Muslim Tajikistan, as well as discussing the uses, and risks of misuses of the concept of *retraditionalization* for the analysis of gender, change, Islam and tradition in this context. By deconstructing the concept of retraditionalizaton, I build the groundwork for the second part of this chapter which briefly introduces the conceptual framework of this dissertation that will be developed in Chapter 2. It advances the feminist postcolonial geography of work and resource struggles in the Muslim Soviet periphery that this dissertation aims to build, and its reliance on four main scholarly pillars, which I will expand upon in Chapter 2. These are: (i) the new feminist Central Asian social science, (ii) feminist postcolonial geography of Muslim identities, (iii) feminist labor geography (iv) feminist political ecology of resource extraction. In the same section, I briefly introduce the feminist postcolonial ethnographic approach taken in this study, and the case-study it draws upon. I then announce the four objectives that I will follow in this dissertation. To close this chapter, I highlight the different scholarly contributions this dissertation seeks to make and outline the structure of the thesis.



Photograph 1: Brigade Leader in Kante



Photograph 2: Brigade leader's medals

Background and rationale: the 'Gender questions' in (post)Soviet Muslim Tajikistan

Gendered histories and political ecologies

Histories

This study of gendered geographies of exclusion in Tajikistan is embedded within multiple context specific rationales, all encapsulated in the need to decipher the 'gender questions' in this country, and more broadly in the Muslim post-Soviet periphery. Over the past forty years, Tajikistan, a small mountainous Persian-speaking country of eight million inhabitants in former Soviet Central Asia, underwent major dislocations. After seventy years of adherence to the Soviet Union, marked by the establishment of a Marxist socialist regime centred on ideals of collective, central economy and gender equality, the country became independent. The fall of the Soviet Union and the formation of a new autonomous nation after the collapse opened the way for the emergence and formation of new post-Soviet national and gendered ideologies. Post-Soviet national ideologies are characterized by what is often referred to as a voluntary re-investment of traditional norms, and Islamic faith, and a practical retrenchment towards patriarchal norms that manifest through women's restricted socio-spatial mobility, and their exclusion from work in the public sphere (Commercio 2013; Akiner 1997).

This retrenchment towards patriarchal gendered norms is not specific to the Muslim post-Soviet periphery and has been widely documented in all post-Soviet countries (True et al. 2000; B. Einhorn 1994; Einhorn 1993; Funk & Mueller 1993; Rudd 2000; Rainnie, Smith & Swain 2002; Buckley 1997; Ashwin & Bowers 1997). First analyzed as a consequence of the economic collapse that forced women out of the workforce during the transition from a socialist to a capitalist economy, this move back to the home was also theorized as the result of changing ideals of femininity marked by the movement from the strong working woman embodying Soviet values to a sexualized woman associated with the domestic sphere and consumption (Bridger et al. 1995; Buckley 1997; Lipovskaya 1994; Attwood 1990). The five Central Asian countries[3], although they followed similar trends, present some particular challenges with regards to gender that

[3] Central Asia is comprised of the five former Soviet Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

vindicates specific attention (Hämmerle 2008; Kasymova 2008; Megoran 1999; Cleuziou & Direnberger 2016; Güneş-Ayata & Acar 2000; Kandiyoti 2007; Racioppi 2009).

These countries' complexity first stems from the difficulty in theorizing, recording and evidencing their gendered histories and legacies. The Soviet Union undertook a specific socio-political project in the Muslim South – one that echoes the broader ideal of Marxist gender equality applied in the rest of the Soviet Union, but also one centered on the liberation of women from tradition and Islam. This project materialized through specific gender policies – including the *hujum*, or assault, violent unveiling campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s where women were forced to unveil (Northrop 2004; Kamp 2006). It also materialized through the politicization of women and their integration into Soviet local institutions[4]. Work and the integration of women into the workforce were particularly important in this project (Lubin 1984; Kandiyoti 2007). Whilst authors have already highlighted the partial ineffectiveness and contradictions of Soviet gender equality policies in the region (Lubin 1984; Kandiyoti 2007; Kamp 2016; Northrop 2004; Edgar 2007), there is still very scarce knowledge of the articulation, experience and legacies of these ideologies in the understudied case of Tajikistan. Historical research on Soviet Central Asian women has also tended to focus on analysis of policies and archival texts, leaving behind possibilities for more embodied, mundane and everyday histories of the Soviet past to emerge (Kamp 2006)[5].

Political economies / Political ecologies

This dissertation seeks to decipher this historical complexity as well as unpacking contemporary politico-economic and ecologic challenges that further complicate gendered questions in this setting. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, most countries of the CIS[6] entered into an unprecedented economic and political crisis (Burawoy & Verdery 1999; Bönker et al. 2002). Tajikistan immediately entered into a civil war in which 50,000 persons were killed, and which destroyed most of the infrastructure (Heathershaw 2009, p.51). Often interpreted as a battle of ideologies between reformist democrats espousing agendas of national revival and political Islam versus conservative party elites, the war ended in 1997, with the ratification of a peace agreement. This agreement led by international organizations established the basis for power-sharing

[4] Mainly in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

[5] Scholars in Central Asia have advocated for the use oral histories – see Kamp (2006) for instance.

[6] The Community of Independent States

between the government (mainly constituted of former elites gathered around the president, Emomali Rahmon) and the democratic/Islamist coalition (represented by the IRPT, the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan).

This agreement failed to set up a liberal democratic peace-building process as envisioned by international institutions (Heathershaw 2009). Power-sharing was not respected, the opposition was gradually dismantled and President Rahmon consolidated his power through constitutional reforms and the establishment of an authoritarian, undemocratic regime (Heathershaw 2009; Olimova & Tolipov 2011), leading to what some have referred to as an 'acute crisis of legitimacy' (Olimova and Tolipov 2011, p3). Constant acts of repression against the IRPT, harassment and sometimes murder of its representatives culminated in the banning of the party in 2015, and the exile of its leader, Kabiri. This has led to what some have referred to as the end of a political transition and the institutionalization of Emomali Rahmon's dictatorship (Lemon 2016).[7]

Besides failing to establish an equitable power sharing arrangement, the peace agreement of 1997 also led to the introduction of the neoliberal model of transition that had been already applied in most post-socialist countries – structural adjustment policies were put in place and the privatization of common properties with the help of international development organizations initiated (Heathershaw 2009; Olimova et al. 2006). Commentators, in the early years following the setting up of these policies, denounced the role played by the deconstruction of state welfare policies, rising female unemployment, failing wages, rising prices and land privatization in shaping women's greater vulnerability (Falkingham 2000a; Falkingham & Baschieri 2004; Hämmerle 2008; Kasymova 2008; Kanji 2002; Behzadi 2012). Almost thirty years after the fall of the Soviet Union, however, Tajikistan still remains the poorest country of the CIS (World Bank 2017), and the need to reassess the impacts of these transformations on women's everyday lives is still significant.

Gendered trends that appeared as a new phenomenon following the fall of the Soviet Union are also now entrenched in the socio-cultural fabric of the country. Women's exclusion from formal employment and their relegation to spaces of informal and precarious labor is now embedded in an established gendered division of labor (Staneva & Arabsheibani 2014). Similarly, seasonal male migration for work to Russia that

[7] See next section on questions related to Islam

emerged in the country after the fall of the Soviet Union has now become a way of life.[8] In 2015, 42% of the share of the GDP came from remittances, which positioned Tajikistan as the country the most heavily dependent on remittances in the world (World Bank 2016, p.xii). This migration pattern creates a national economy heavily dependent on the Russian neighbor, the fluctuation of its labor market, its financial security and its exclusionary and arbitrary migration policies. Recently, the global financial crisis, the devaluation of the ruble and restrictive Russian migration policies have had major impacts on migration patterns, leading to considerable declines in remittances[9], widespread return migration and the search for new alternative livelihoods for Central Asians (Lang 2017; Marat 2009; Laruelle 2013).

Constituted of 90% of men (TAJSTAT 2011, p.10), widespread migration flows also raise questions concerning their local socio-cultural and economic gendered impacts – first in terms of the gendered/intergenerational economies and relations that bind the Tajik society, and second in terms of socio-spatial (im)mobility for those conventionally referred to as the left-behind (Olimova & Bosc 2003; Cleuziou 2013; Eggenberg 2011; Reeves 2013). Protracted male absence impacts familial structures and relationships through increased financial dependency for those who stay behind, a rise in women *de-facto* heads of household, tensions between young wives and their husbands' family, but also the upsurge of separations, polygyny and divorces (Cleuziou 2016a; Reeves 2013). In some instances, the rise in child labor in Tajikistan has also been analyzed as one of the intergenerational consequences of male migration to Russia (Haarr 2005; Akilova 2017). While differential rates of male/female migration have been widely studied in the growing literature on labor migration in Central Asia, little is known about the way gendered and intergenerational norms and identities are also produced and transformed throughout this process (Reeves 2013). Yet, migration has deeply subjective and personal impacts for those who leave, as well as those who stay behind, raising questions about how migration produces, reproduces and transforms identities at the intersection of gender, age, but also class.

In addition to their impact on gendered migration, these broader politico-economic transformations also raise emergent issues around the neoliberalization of resources and the multi-shaped, multi-scaled gendered exclusions they produce**.** Whilst research

[8] 42 per cent of the share of the GDP came from remittances in Tajikistan in 2015 which puts Tajikistan as the country the most heavily dependent on remittances in the world (World Bank 2016, p.xii)

[9] In the case of Tajikistan in 2013–2016 this number fell by 36 per cent (Lang 2017, p.3)

has widely focused on the privatization of land and the negative impacts on women in post-Soviet rural states, it has rarely investigated the consequence of other resource struggles opened by the neoliberalization of the Tajik economy (Kandiyoti 2003; Shahriari & Danzer 2009; Kandiyoti 2002a). Yet, the collapse of the Soviet Union has in Tajikistan also led to new forms of resource struggles around water and mineral extraction including coal for which the gendered implications remain unknown (Dorian 2006; Gilbert 2012; Laldjebaev 2010; Ito et al. 2015). These questions are crucial, in particular for rural communities, which, following decollectivization and the dismantlement of Soviet industries, found themselves living in stressed environments and in search of new local livelihoods. The fall in raw material prices, and economic sanctions against Russia have also driven the Tajik economy into crisis. Searching for new models of development, the Tajikistani government has been inviting large investments in mining (coal, gold, silver antinomy, precious stones) in mountainous regions of the country, where socio-economic vulnerability is high. China, in particular, is becoming the leader in terms of direct investment in the economy of Tajikistan – under the concept of 'One-Belt, One Road', the country has developed bi-lateral agreements with most Central Asian states (Rahimov & Mamadjonov 2015). In this new extractive landscape, where Chinese companies are invited to dig into the Tajik mountains, the specific case of Kantegui gendered work and resource struggles appears as an illustration of how these broader transformations impact men, women, and children's everyday lives.

The concept of (Re)tradition(alization): gender, Islam and representation

Uses and misuses of the concept of retraditionalization

A focus on these politico-ecologic and historical sides of the gender questions in Central Asia and their relationship with what men and women refer as their 'traditions' and 'customs' (Mirzo's belief in Kante, for example, that 'our women do not work') is all the more important in the post-Soviet Muslim periphery. The use of the concept of retraditionalization as an all-encompassing term to describe social change in Tajikistan and other Central Asian countries might lead to some misinterpretations that this research aims to counteract. One of the most obvious misuses of this concept is to be found in the discourse of development organizations and NGOs (Direnberger 2011a; 2011b; Behzadi 2012). Previous work that has focused on discourse analysis of development organizations' narratives on gender and post-Soviet change in Tajikistan

has highlighted the way through which prevailing social norms, the resurgence of gender stereotypes and the *re-emergence* of conservative practices linked to a supposed Islamic revival were often defined as what hinders gender equality in Tajikistan (Direnberger 2011a; 2011b; Behzadi 2012). While the negative impacts of economic transformations on women are acknowledged, cultural norms and tradition seen as embedded in religion are often cast as the ultimate barriers to development (Direnberger 2011a; 2011b; Behzadi 2012). Their resurgence/re-emergence is also systematically associated with a supposed Islamic revival since the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of its gender equality policies.

These discourses matter in the context of Tajikistan, first because they frame one aspect of the main gendered post-Soviet narratives in the country and highlight the way simplistic, but also to a certain extent neo-colonial and orientalist ideas on gender in the Global South that have long been critiqued by feminist postcolonial scholars, travel (Mohanty 1991; Abu-Lughod 2001). These ideas reproduce simplistic notions of tradition as immutable and as anchored in religion. They also conflate Islam with conservative gendered practices. Second, these discourses illustrate how an appealing concept can be used in a self-explanatory way: as a return to gendered traditions related to Islam that would have been forgotten and eradicated during the Soviet times and that have reappeared with a post-Soviet return to Islam. Such assumptions neglect both the contemporary and historical complexity of the link between tradition-gender-Islam. The objective of this research is not to analyze this discourse: more research is needed in order to unravel the specific ways this concept is used in the context of Tajikistan by development and other foreign actors. Here, however, I find the misuse of the concept of retraditionalization in this context enlightening as it reveals the necessity to remain wary of the way certain concepts navigate between academia, everyday use and other discourses, sometimes reproducing asymmetric gendered, racial and religious hierarchies.

Perhaps this misuse also reflects some degree of epistemic confusion related to the polysemous character of the concept in academia - confusion that this research, following the paths of a growing number of Central Asian scholars starts to overcome (Werner 2009; Roche & Hohmann 2011; Commercio 2014; Cleuziou 2015; Direnberger 2011; Beyer 2015). Much has been written about retraditionalization, tradition, traditionalism, traditionalizations, (neo)traditionalism in Central Asia and the contemporary centrality of these ideas and concepts cannot be denied (Werner 2009; Roche & Hohmann 2011; Commercio 2014; Cleuziou 2015; Direnberger 2011; Beyer

2015). The 2015 ESCAS (European Society for Central Asian Studies) conference focused specifically on this idea of tradition and retraditionalization on all aspects of socio-economic and political life in the region. This interest grew from an emergent interest within the academic community, which reflected existing socio-economic, political and cultural patterns – including a reinforcement of certain conservative norms and practices since the fall of the Soviet Union and the use of notions of notions of tradition and cultural authenticity in the post-Soviet process of national identity making (Megoran 1999; 2008).

With regards to gender, scholars have engaged with notions of retraditionalization in insightful and informative ways. The works of Shirin Akiner (1997) and Deniz Kandiyoti (2007) have become seminal in Central Asian gender studies: both texts deconstruct the opposition between, and the duality of, modern/traditional in the post-Soviet Muslim context. These texts have been followed by analyses of the gendered politics of retraditionalization in post-Soviet Central Asian identity making. These readings focus on top-down retraditionalization or retraditionalization *from above* (either in Soviet history or in the contemporary period) and refer to the way through which traditional gendered norms are operationalized in political discourses either through marriage and family law, or questions of motherhood (Cleuziou & Direnberger 2016; Direnberger 2011b; Direnberger 2011a; Roche 2016). Others have contrasted this view from above by foregrounding the idea of a 'retraditionalization from below' and by highlighting the role of women in embracing certain traditions (Commercio 2014, p1).

While these analyses have provided interesting insights, they remain incomplete on multiple aspects. First, research on the gendered politics of retraditionalization has often focused on discourses to the detriment of an exploration of lived experiences (Kandiyoti 2007; Direnberger 2011a; Megoran 1999). These shortcomings have just started to be challenged through attention to the way gendered discourses of nation/identity-making are also reproduced, lived, transformed and bargained by women themselves (Cleuziou & Direnberger 2016). Second, the way retraditionalization is defined might in some instances lead to simplifications (Commercio 2014; Miles 2015). In her analysis of young women enrolled in universities in Tajikistan and Kirghizstan, Commercio (2014, p1) defines retraditonalization as a ' return to traditional values, family life and religion, which entails, in part, women being moved out of the workforce'. Commercio (2014) insightfully connects the pattern that she identifies to the politico-economic context of impoverishment and destitution in post-Soviet Tajikistan as well as she highlights the role of educated urban women themselves in this

process. By doing so, she challenges conventional assumptions that link tradition to rurality and Islam. Her analysis, however, presents two major issues that can also be found in the way other authors have also reused her conceptualization as a descriptive term (Miles 2015). The first one is related to the way though which history is treated, or rather the absence of historical grounding. How to speak about retraditionalization without deconstructing what the prefix '–re' seems to imply: a form of teleological perspective of change, a linear perspective, the existence of immutable traditions and laws. The second relates to the way Islam is presented – rather than exploring women's experiences of Muslimness, such analyses relate retraditionalization to an Islamic revival, hence presenting a rather monolithic view of Islam as an external reality rather than a lived religion (Commercio 2014; Miles 2015).

In this research, I depart from such analyses. While recognizing the reinforcement of practices such as polygamy, early marriages, the growing inappropriateness of women's work outside of the home, increased signs of piety[10] and bride kidnapping[11], I remain wary of the use of the term retraditionalization. By doing so, I follow the work and position of feminist anthropologists of Central Asia who have explicitly or implicitely objected the use of this term. For Cleuziou (2015, p 2), writing against retraditionalization is one way of inscribing the feminist anthropology of Central Asia in Abu-Lughod's (2008) academic and political project of 'writing against culture'. Too often used as an etic rather than emic concept, retraditionalization for Cleuziou (2015) is placed onto social analyses or used as a descriptive term. She reminds how using the retraditionlization concept might lead to overlooking how 'not all sources of traditional authority are being reinforced by current socio-economic and religious processes' (Cleuziou 2015, p2). Her analysis echoes other anthropologists' research that has investigated the complexity and interaction between discourses and practices of traditionalization, focusing on specific gendered dynamics rather than an overall retraditionalization of gender (Werner 2009; Roche & Hohmann 2011). These authors (Werner 2009, Roche & Hohmann 2011) all work and rework Hobshwam and Rangers (1983) approach of tradition as not fixed, not immutable, nor anchored in religion, but as fluid changing and socio-politically constructed. All write about 'invented traditions' (Hobshwam and Rangers 1983) from above and from below, researching local histories and grounding their analysis into the everyday lives of Central Asians.

[10] Full veiling

[11] In Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan

This thesis hence adds to this growing literature. First, it recognizes the necessity to clarify readings of Islam in Central Asia, and reveal its nuances and complexity. Islam is indeed a reality for men, women and children's everyday lives in Central Asia, and in Tajikistan – amongst the eight millions of Tajikistanis, 98 per cent identify as Muslims.[12] The seventy years of the Soviet Union were also, like in all countries in the Muslim Soviet South, marked by a control over Muslim institutions and religious practice (Nourzhanov & Bleuer 2013). While for most of the 1990s, scholars agreed on the existence of a form of revival similar to what occurred in the rest of the Islamic world in the 1970s and 1980s, more recent scholarship has challenged this idea (Nourzhanov & Bleuer 2013; Jones Luong 2004). Historians have shown how, despite the large extent of control operated by Soviet authorities on the practice of religion, Islam had remained central to the definition of Central Asians and Tajikistanis' identity during the Soviet times (Nourzhanov & Bleuer 2013). The control over Muslim institutions has even in some instances been analyzed as being at the root of the everyday, folk Islam characteristic of Central Asian countries, and its persistence throughout and beyond the Soviet era (Poliakov 1992; Olimova & Tolipov 2011). Women, in particular, have been identified as major actors in the practice and reproduction of this everyday Islam in Central Asia and the broader Soviet Muslim South (Tett 1994; Tohidi 1996; 1997).

Contemporary analyses have also challenged monolithic and simplistic views of Islam by highlighting its complex entanglement with post-Soviet politics. These analyses often object to the use of the term 'revival' to focus on the idea of post-Soviet transformations of Islam in Central Asia (Jones Luong 2004). In Tajikistan, the everyday practice of Islam is deeply entangled with political battles since the end of the war. Power struggles between political Islam and the current government[13] led to what can be seen as a form of operationalization of faith. Islam became a central component of the nation-building process in Tajikistan, and its meaning has been constantly re-negotiated by the state. In order to control political Islam and build its authority, the president engaged in a process of definition of what constitutes the appropriate Tajik Islam (Olimova & Tolipov 2011; Epkenhans 2011).

This interference by the state is characterized by multiple tactics of control, such as attempts by the president to deify his cult, the de-politicization of Islam and the

[12] Figure based on census data (Lemon 2016)

[13] See previous section

undermining of the IRPT through the legal adoption, in 2009, of the moderate, traditional, everyday and apolitical Hanafi school[14]; the 2004 ban on women and children from entering mosques; the ban of headscarves in official institutions (Olimova & Tolipov 2011; Epkenhans 2011); and finally the recent forced shavings of men in Tajik streets.[15] In some circumstances, these violent attempts to control the spread of Islam have been invoked as justification of the return to more traditional norms[16] (Direnberger 2011b; Behzadi 2012; Gunn 2003).

Second, by complicating the relationship between gender, tradition and Islam this dissertation resists the way notions of retraditionalization may replicate gendered caricatures that permeate representations of Muslim communities in the world, and in particular in the poorest regions of the world. By focusing on women as the ultimate sufferers, the use of the concept of retraditionalization might reproduce ideas of the victimized Central Asian woman – similar to that of the 'Third World woman' whom Chandra Mohanty (1988) has criticized in Western scholarship (Behzadi 2012). Such idea also echo orientalist representations of Muslim women that have been criticized by feminist postcolonial anthropologists like Lila Abu Lughod (2002) and Sabah Mahmood (2001; 2004), as well as by geographers and other social scientists in most parts of the

[14] In Tajikistan, around 89.2 per cent consider themselves as followers of the Hanafite branch of Sunni Islam (Olimova & Tolipov 2011, p.2). The Hanafi school of Islam is conventionally seen as a moderate form of Islam, deliberately separated from political power. In September 2008, President Emomali Rahmon made an official speech for the 17th anniversary of Tajikistan's independence. In this speech, President Rahmon reminded the importance of Islam for the Tajik national culture. In 2009, the Hanafi Branch of Islam was also legally recognized as the mainbranch of Islam in Tajikistan in the new law 'On Freedom of religion and Religious Organizations', becoming a state religion. This adoption of the Hanafi school has been interpreted as a way to control and manage other forms of Islam, conventionally more political, to emerge and spread .

[15] For a recent discussion of questions of political Islam and security in Tajikistan see Edward Lemon's (2016) doctoral research on security and Islam.

[16] This argument is based on the idea that the control over political Islam prevents access to religious education and leads to men and women's absence of knowledge of their rights under religious laws, and the application of traditional gendered norms without a clear understanding of religious precepts – this argument has been used by IRPT representatives and members to fight against the absence of religious education in Tajikistan (Behzadi 2012). This argument has already been developed for the whole region. According to Gunn (2003), governmental efforts to manage and control religion in Central Asian countries exacerbates the very Islamist threat that they intend to contain.

Muslim world (Falah & Nagel 2005; Dwyer 1999; Dunn & Hopkins 2016), where women are represented as devoid of agency. Finally, they highlight the contemporary relevance of a debate that the anthropologist Victoria Bernal (1994) identified more than twenty years ago in her research on gender, culture, capitalism and Islam in Sudan. While feminist research in most of the Global South has long been divided between analyses that rely on capitalism or culture as the main determinant of women's exclusion and oppression, as Bernal (1994) notes, nowhere else has the influence of culture been presented as more important as in the analyses of Muslim women. Today, the need to go beyond Muslim men and women as solely religious selves is still crucial, in order to change the way academics and non-academics speak of and write about Muslims in the world (Falah & Nagel 2005; Gökariksel & Secor 2015).

Conceptual framework and methodology

A feminist postcolonial geography of work and resource struggles in Central Asia

To respond to the main questions raised by this thesis, I specifically approach questions of gender and change in the Soviet and post-Soviet Muslim periphery by building a feminist postcolonial geography of work and resource struggles. This conceptual framework draws on four different and interconnected bodies of literature, the first of which I refer to as the new feminist Central Asian social science. This body of literature, that has emerged over the past ten to fifteen years across disciplines such as history, politics, anthropology and development, built refined readings of gender and transformation. Taking a feminist and/or postcolonial approach to Soviet and post-Soviet change, this literature has developed insightful readings that help decipher some of the major contradictions that are often found in analyses of shifting gendered regimes in the region. This includes the use of postcolonial theory (Said 1979; Bahbba 2004; Spivak 1988) in order to make sense of the material and sometimes contradictory effects of Soviet gender and nationality policies in the Muslim Soviet South (Kandiyoti 2002c; 2007; Edgar 2007; Northrop 2004). It also includes emergent and refined analyses of the way men, women and children produce, reproduce and resist gendered norms, but also how they invent, reinvent, use and sometimes operationalize notions of tradition and specific interpretations of religious norms and/or beliefs (Mcbrien 2009; Werner 2009; Reeves 2011; Reeves 2013; Cleuziou 2016a).

This concern in building nuanced readings of notions of gender, tradition and Islam in Central Asia echoes broader literature that has challenged caricatural representations of gender and Muslimness globally. Here, I propose to open Central Asian feminist studies to this broader research. In particular, I aim to challenge the parallel marginalization of Central Asian experiences in post-Soviet studies and in Muslim geographies, based on the combined idea of a 'post-socialist difference'[17] (Stenning & Hörschelmann 2008, p.312) and a 'Muslim difference'. To do so, I draw on two main concepts/approaches central to feminist scholars in the Muslim world, and the way they have refined notions of gendered subjectification, or the coming into being of gender along and beyond religion – first, the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989; 1991; Hill Collins & Bilge 2016), and second, the specific theorizations of agency developed by feminist scholars of the Muslim world (Mahmood 2001; 2004; Bilge 2010a; Sehlikoglu 2017).

Intersectionality provides a lens through which to observe how relations of power are produced at the intersection of multiple axes of oppression such as gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, age and race that are embedded within interlocking social institutions, political economies and (post)colonial histories (Crenshaw 1989; 1991; Hill Collins & Bilge 2016). This concept is particularly useful in the analysis of Muslim lives – its use and the specific ways it has been expanded by geographers of Muslimness complicate previous understandings that predominantly focused on culture, tradition and religion, by highlighting the multiple intersecting and spatialized components with and beyond culture that produce oppression (Hopkins 2006; Hopkins 2017; Dwyer 1999). In parallel, theorizations of agency developed by scholars of the Muslim world (Mahmood 2001; 2004; Bilge 2010a; Sehlikoglu 2017) similarly challenge and complicate culturalist perspectives by re-centering attention on notions of embodied agency as forms of capacity of actions within systems of subordination. Such readings are particularly helpful in the context of Central Asian identities, as they open room to explore the way gendered norms and traditions anchored in religion are also lived, experienced, transformed, transmitted and negotiated at the most intimate scales, as well as how they are shaped by broader structures of gendered exclusion.

In parallel, a conversation between feminist literature and, in particular, geography of Muslim identities and Central Asian feminist research also constitutes an opportunity to

[17] This idea of post-socialist difference has been developed to critique the marginalization of post-Soviet literature from conversations with other theoretical bodies of literature, and to call for attention to the fine line that exists between the recognition of such difference and essentialism and determinism in the study of post-Soviet countries.

open analysis of Muslim lives to topics and issues previously under-researched and undertheorized that are specific to the Muslim post-Soviet South, and in some instances reflective of the broader Global South. In rural remote areas of Tajikistan, where the neoliberalization of economy and resources manifests through emergent forms of work and resource struggles, the inappropriateness of women's work, their relegation to spaces of marginal and precarious labor, the shaming of some of their work and their restricted access to natural resources reflects local interpretations and renegotiation of tradition and religion. These work and resource struggles also reflect broader gendered transformations and their entanglement with politico-ecologic changes, revealing first the necessity to investigate Muslim gendered lives beyond the divide of culture/economy, and second the necessity to ground understandings of men, women and children's lives in the materiality of shifting socio-economic environments.

Such a relationship, I find, is better deciphered through the use of two bodies of literature – namely feminist labor geographies (McDowell 1999; McDowell 2009; Nagar et al. 2002; Wright 1997; Wright 2006; England & Lawson 2005) and feminist political ecologies (Rocheleau et al. 1996; Elmhirst 2015; 2011a; Sundberg 2017; Mollett & Faria 2013; Sultana 2015; Nightingale 2006). For feminist theorists, the study of work and working practices constitutes a privileged angle to understand exclusions that are produced at broader scales, and their embeddedness within switching modes of production/reproduction and broader political economies (Meehan & Strauss 2015; Lawson 1999; England & Lawson 2005; McDowell 2002b; Nagar et al. 2002). Work is as Thomas (1999, p.vii) recalls 'an inescapable and endlessly fascinating part of the human condition'. Here, I draw on a conceptualization of work as both including paid employment and unpaid work carried out by men, women and children (England & Lawson 2005). Following feminist theories, I particularly explore work as a site of reconstruction of notions of masculinity, femininity and sexuality (McDowell 1999; England & Lawson 2005; Alexander & Mohanty 1997). The study of work provides a lens to understand how gender norms are reproduced, transformed and challenged with changing politico-economies.

While this large feminist literature on labor provides valuable tools to understand the relationship between changing gendered regimes (the cultural and the economic), it often leaves the question of the environment out of its scope. Here, it is in the broader feminist political ecology (FPE) literature that I find a way to challenge this silence and explore the relation between gender, work and resource struggles. As a subfield of political ecology, the emergence of FPE in the 1990s (Rocheleau et al. 1996) was marked

by an interest in gendered aspects of resource access and struggles. Later analyses have also helped to develop understandings of how gendered identities, at the intersection of multiple axes of difference, are also constitutive of and constituted through relations with nature and resources (Nightingale 2006; Elmhirst 2011a). Combined together, feminist labor geography and feminist political ecology provide a unique lens to re-theorize the changing relationship between gendered transformations in Muslim Central Asia, and men, women and children's work and resource struggles in a neoliberalizing environment. Together, these two bodies of scholarship also reveal how the intimate experiences of both work and resources are connected to broader scales such as the nation or the global political economy, as well as how they shape the way gender comes into being (Nagar et al. 2002; Truelove 2011).

Case-study and feminist postcolonial ethnography

In this thesis, I particularly draw on this notion of connectedness between different scales. Situated in feminist and postcolonial epistemologies, this thesis draws on the relational thinking characteristic of feminist geographical approaches, to make visible the role of space, place and their connections with broader scales in the construction as well as experience of oppression (Mcdowell 1982; Nagar et al. 2002; Marchand & Runyan 2000). Through immersion into men, women, and children's everyday and embodied working lives and resource struggles, this thesis simultaneously tells a unique story and contributes to building an alternative geography of Soviet, and post-Soviet gendered change. By delving into one in-depth, interpretative and holistic case-study in Tajikistan I make visible the active role of one locality.

Case-studies are 'intrinsic', in that they allow us to explore the complexities of one specific place, as well as 'instrumental' - illuminating the intricate webs of wider socio-cultural and political issues localities are embedded in and productive of (Stake 2005, p.32). The case-study area chosen for this research is constituted of one main site[18], around the village of Kante and its neighbouring town, Sarvoda, in Northern Tajikistan, in the Ayni district[19]. Multiple reasons that will be discussed in the methodological chapter[20] of this thesis led to the selection of this case-study. The main reason, however, resides in the fact that despite its physical remoteness, the village of Kante is marked by Soviet history, as well as being deeply impacted and productive of post-Soviet changes,

[18] For details on the case-study area, and maps see Chapter 3.

[19] See Map 1, Chapter 3

[20] Chapter 3

and broader global politico-ecologic transformations through the neoliberalization of resources and economies.

As illustrated through the vignette that starts this introduction, men and women were both working either in the tobacco *kolkhoz* collective farm Kante was part of, and/or in the antimony, mercury and coal mine which maintained headquarters in the town of Sarvoda. Today, Kantegui men, women and children's everyday lives reflect broader gendered trends in the country – the widespread migration of men to Russia, the installation of a Sino-Tajik mining coal company, the growth of illegal/informal activities and women's relegation to marginal spaces of labor, the increase in child labor and the exclusion of women from work and access to natural resources. All these aspects make this village an illustration of post-Soviet change at the margins, but also of global change in the Global South.

These exclusions, are also mediated through notion of 'honor' and 'shame' that are often seen as the main way through which Islam manifests in people's everyday lives in Tajikistan (Harris 2004). These notions, first identified in the 1960s as included into a fixed system that rules gender relations in Muslim societies (Peristiany 1966), are based on the idea of a control over women's socio-spatial mobility and sexuality by men, and the shaming of inappropriate performances of gender. The prevalence of these notions open specific questions about how they are used to justify women's exclusion, but also how they are entangled with broader global politico-ecologic transformations and their local impacts on men, women and children's everyday lives. Finally, Kante is situated in one of the main coal reserves in Tajikistan, making it an illustration of forms of struggles that may also happen in other zones of mineral extraction in the country, but also in other parts of the world marked by the neoliberalization of resources.

The in-depth study of work and resource struggles in Kante that this thesis builds is also complemented by insights and memories of women from several other locations in the Southern part of the country, in the Khatlon region[21]. This data were mainly used to complement the case-study of Kante and its neighboring town of Sarvoda with other historically grounded data in places that reflected Soviet development in the country, and in particular women workers' histories. The objective was to ensure that knowledge produced through the historical analysis of Kante and Sarvoda was also reflective of broader historical trends in the country.

[21] See Map 1 and 3 in Chapter 3

This research was conducted using a feminist postcolonial ethnographic approach[22] (Abu-Lughod 2016; 1991; 2000). I spent eight months in Kante, between September 2014 and August 2015, lived with two different families in this village, and taught children in the local school. I also complemented this ethnography by regular visits to Sarvoda and to the village of Kaftorkhona in the Southern part of the country. Throughout the research process, I have been particularly attentive to questions related to relations of power between the researcher and researched, and of representation. While these aspects will be further discussed in Chapter 3, it is important to note their centrality in this thesis, as these methodological issues are also deeply entangled with questions of research politics. I have been throughout the research process from the beginning of the research design to the writing/dissemination stage driven by one major question that also runs through this thesis – how to carry out research with/on vulnerable, marginalized Muslim communities and, in particular, on women's oppression in a context of increased Islamophobia in the West? How to simultaneously challenge culturalist views of Muslim men, women and children in the world, and acknowledge the existence of forms of oppression?

Research questions, objectives and main contributions

The main research questions, as raised earlier, are:

(1) How have gendered norms transformed from the Soviet to the post-Soviet era? Why would women and men who allegedly experienced a certain degree of gender equality during the Soviet times accept and transmit gendered oppressive norms to the younger generations? How and why does this transmission occur?

(2) To what extent has the transformation of work practices impacted the process of gendered subjectification in Tajikistan? How are gender norms, identities and exclusions made, remade? How are they reproduced, transformed across generations, and at multiple scales, from the global to the most intimate scales of the body?

[22] See methodological chapter

(3) What is the relationship between the gendered exclusions experienced in post-Soviet Tajikistan and the resource struggles people engage with? How do the broader resource struggles that have emerged with the start of the neoliberal global era, impact the gender subjectification process in Tajikistan?

To address the research questions, I identified four key objectives. These are:

(1) To explore the historical socio-spatial (re)construction of gendered exclusion in Tajikistan by assessing the extent to which the Soviet objective of women's emancipation through waged work was achieved in previous decades in the case study area.

The emancipation of women through integration into the workforce was a central tenet of the Soviet endeavor in Central Asia. In Tajikistan, the extent to which this objective was achieved has never been studied. Within this first objective, the research will investigate discourses on work and gender during the Soviet times in Tajikistan and the way they materialized in space through the socio-spatial organization of work in the town of Sarvoda, near the village of Kante, and in the former tobacco *kolkhoz*. More specifically, I investigate lived memories of work in these places, exploring how gendered and ethnic hierarchies were produced through discourses and experiences of work. This objective challenges the teleological claims that underlie simplistic conceptualization of retraditionalization, without knowledge of the place-based experiences of men and women, and without understanding of how women's emancipation through work was achieved.

(2) To investigate the impact of the neoliberalization of the economy and resources in Tajikistan, on men and women's work and resource struggles, focusing on the relationship between changing masculinities and women's exclusion in Kante.

The privatization of the ownership and exploitation of natural resources in Tajikistan, large-scale unemployment as a result of the dismantlement of Soviet collective farms and industries and the demand for cheap labor in Russia has given rise to new work and resource struggles. In Kante, the installment of a Sino-Tajik coal mining company, the rise in activity in informal coal mining, seasonal male migration and the exclusion of women from the workforce are all consequences of the neoliberalization of the economy and resources. This objective seeks to understand the relationship between the transformation of these working practices in Kante and changes in the social construction of

masculinities and femininities. It also interrogates the impact of these transformations on the exclusion of women from the workforce and from access to natural resources. Pursuing this objective is a way to investigate gendered identities beyond culturalist claims that associate gendered exclusion to Islam, by observing their relationship with broader scales politico-economic/ecologic changes.

(3) To explore the embodied experiences of gendered socio-spatial exclusion by women themselves, investigating their role in (re)producing and negotiating these exclusions through their everyday life, work and resource struggles.
This objective focuses specifically on the experience of marginalization of women miners in the village of Kante. Here, the goal is to observe the way exclusion is experienced but also renegotiated at the most intimate levels – the body and the everyday. This approach challenges the idea of Muslim women as devoid of agency that is central to the retraditionalization narrative, as it seeks to demonstrate women's active role in (re)producing and also negotiating gendered oppressive norms.

(4) To explore the way gendered norms are transmitted to the younger generation through the gendered and intergenerational division of work.
This objective unpacks the relationship between the gendered and intergenerational division of labor in families in the village of Kante and the (re)production and (re)transmission of gendered norms. In particular, it explores the differentiated gendered experiences of child miners, the underlying gendered norms that justify this specific gendered and intergenerational division of labor and the way parents and the broader community in the village retransmit oppressive norms to young women through the organization of children's labor. This objective responds to the teleological and culturalist claims that underlie the idea of retraditionalization of the whole Tajik society by observing how and why norms are transmitted, beyond a sole focus on Islam.

This thesis is constituted of four articles, submitted to academic journals[23]. Each article corresponds to one objective: Article 1 (Chapter 4) focuses on the work of Soviet women workers in Tajikistan, mainly answering objective 1. Article 2 (Chapter 5) develops an

[23] I submitted Article 1 to *Central Asian Survey*; Article 2 *to Geoforum*; Article 3 to *Gender, Place and Culture,* and Article 4 to *Development and Change*

analysis of changing masculinities and women's exclusion, Article 3 (Chapter 6) focuses on women miners and agency and finally Article 4 (Chapter 7) explores the intergenerational transmission of gendered norms through child labor.

By addressing these objectives, this thesis contributes to four bodies of literature and opens some major geographical issues around notions of agency that will be further developed in the conclusion of this thesis: (i) The new feminist Central Asian social science, and its retheorizations of gender, Soviet and post-Soviet change in Muslim Central Asia (True et al. 2000; Funk & Mueller 1993; Ashwin 2000; Kandiyoti 2007; Edgar 2007; Kamp 2009; Kamp 2006; Northrop 2004); (ii) Feminist postcolonial geographies of Muslim identities, with reference to gendered subjectification processes in the Muslim World (Hopkins 2009; Falah & Nagel 2005; Abu-Lughod 2002); (iii) Feminist labor geographies (McDowell 2009; McDowell 1999; Oberhauser et al. 2004); and (iv) Feminist political ecologies (FPE), with particular reference to extractive landscapes (Resurreccion & Elmhirst 2012; Elmhirst 2011a; Truelove 2011; Mollett & Faria 2013; Nightingale 2011).

Thesis outline

The thesis consists of eight chapters. Its main body comprises of four papers mentioned above, which have been submitted to academic journals (Chapters 4 to 7). A literature review (Chapter 2), a methodological chapter (3) and a Conclusion (Chapter 8) also tie these four papers together. These chapters tell a story that responds to the main aims of this study and investigates the gendered subjectification process in Tajikistan through multiple angles. Each paper also acts as a stand-alone piece, intended for an audience who, unlike any reader of this thesis who would have delved into the first three chapters, will not know the context of the study. Each article hence repeats elements of rationale, context and methodology that the readers of this thesis will already be familiar with. This format leads to a large number of interruptions and repetitions. It also presents some benefits - in particular, each article goes in depth into one of the four objectives of the thesis, providing a singular angle on the main research aims addressed.

Chapter 2 develops the conceptual framework introduced in this introduction by examining the relevance to the study of the different set of literatures that this dissertation draws upon: the new feminist Central Asian social science, feminist

postcolonial geographies of Muslim identities, feminist labor geography and feminist political ecology,

Chapter 3 delves further into the specificities of my case-study area and introduces the particular methodological approach adopted in this study. Here, I show how a feminist postcolonial ethnographic approach can be used in ways that challenge the traditional representations of Muslim communities through the spectrum of religion. I particularly highlight the role of the feminist researcher in opening spaces for a relational politics, and challenging predominant representations. I also describe and justify the set of ethnographic methods used – participant observation, informal discussions, in-depth interviews (including oral histories, interviews with children); as well as the use of visual methods for the historical article. I also discuss the specific challenges faced by the use of these methods. This chapter includes a discussion of my own positionality and questions of risk and ethics – it discusses some of the specific issues faced during the research and some of the limitations of the use of feminist methodologies, what I refer to as 'feminist dilemmas'.

The four following chapters are the four articles – I use here excerpts of the articles' abstracts to summarize their content. Chapter 4/Article 1 is constituted of the first thesis article – *Gender, Ethnicity and Space in the Soviet Muslim Periphery: A Feminist Postcolonial Geography of Women's Work in Tajikistan*. This article explores the articulation and experience of Soviet gendered ideology in the Muslim Soviet periphery. Used for economic purposes, women's work was a key medium for fulfilling the ideological objective of women's emancipation from religion and tradition that was inherent to the Soviet endeavour in Central Asia. Through a postcolonial feminist geography approach attentive to questions of representation and material lived experiences, this article explores the way gender, ethnicity and space were co-produced by Soviet rhetoric and re-inscribed and contested in places. By contrasting textual and iconographic analysis of state press on and for women with oral histories of workers in various *kolkhoz* and semi-urban places, including with *pishqadam* women (advanced/work heroines), this article illustrates the hybrid nature of the Soviet regime and its legacies. By doing so, it particularly adds to theoretical debates on gender and postcolonialism in Central Asia

Chapter 5/Article 2, entitled *Muslim Masculinities and Women's Exclusion: a Feminist Political Ecology of Honor and Shame* explores the gendered process that leads to women informal miners' restricted access to natural resources, their exclusion and

stigmatization in a context of protracted male migration, and the neoliberalization of the economy and resources. It is particularly concerned with understanding how and why this process is mediated through notions of honor and shame in this post-Soviet extractive landscape. This article develops a feminist political ecology reading of honor and shame and attends to reconfigurations of masculinities and emotions in an environment of transformation. It particularly challenges the idea of fixed Muslim masculinities entrenched into codes of honor and patriarchy anchored in religion. Instead, it reveals how cultural notions of honor and shame are mobilized in the wake of embodied and emotional work and resource struggles, leading to women's exclusion from natural resources, and reflecting localized and everyday gendered impacts of broader resource struggles in a neoliberal era.

Chapter 6/ Article 3, *Working Bodies at the Margins: Abject Work, Shame, and Agency among Muslim Women Miners in Tajikistan*, focuses on the embodied experiences of marginalization of women artisanal coal workers in Kante. Drawing on a conversation between feminist labor geographies, and Sabah Mahmood's theory of 'embodied and affective' agency, this paper aims to explore the most intimate geographies of gendered exclusion, and challenge the claim that Muslim women are devoid of agency. Through ethnographic portraits of women miners, the article first explores the role of narratives of social shame in the process of abjection of women workers' bodies and the production of their socio-spatial marginalization. It then shows how women in positions of non-conformity also process shame through everyday working practices. The corporeal work they perform to maintain their sense of self in a position of non-conformity (re)produces their own marginality. Through their embodied work, women also reclaim space, and open new spaces of becoming and transformation. By exploring Muslim women's oppression at the margins, this article also opens a reflection on how to reconcile the grounded work of cultural translation with a feminist emancipatory politics.

Chapter 7/ Article 4, *Muslim youth, gender, and intergenerationality: boys and girls miners in Tajikistan*, explores the coming into being of gendered identities amongst children and youth in the post-Soviet Muslim South. Building on interviews and participant observation with children coal miners, and their parents in Kante, it conceptualizes this (un)making of gender as a socially reproductive work or life's work, intergenerational, embodied, and entangled with children's work within and around mines. Investigation of the dialectical relationship between these two types of work reveals how retransmission in Kante, of norms of femininity revolving around docility,

chastity and modesty conventionally attributed to Islam in Central Asia, is the product of the emergence of capitalist relations of production/reproduction and extraction of resources since the fall of the Soviet Union. Youth, through their embodied labor, learn appropriate norms of femininity and masculinity anchored in religion. They also negotiate their gendered identities in ways that both rework traditional and religious norms and capitalist modes of production. This article first taps into the development debate on one of the worst forms of child labor by examining the socio-cultural and gendered norms that justify, normalize and naturalize its existence. It also opens new geographical possibilities for researching Muslim youth in the Global South grounded in feminist postcolonial thought.

The concluding chapter (Chapter 8) of this thesis links the research findings to the conceptual framework, and highlights the contributions made to the main bodies of literature, which I engaged with. I interrogate the ways in which the use of feminist political ecology and feminist labor geography can help build more nuanced and complex readings of gendered transformations in the post-Soviet Muslim South. Second, I highlight broader theoretical questions raised by this thesis, focusing on what this research brings to questions of agency in feminist and broader human geography, and questions of research practice within cross-cultural research with Muslim marginalized communities. I also address the policy implications of this ethnographic work, focusing on questions of gender and mining, with particular attention to child labor in mines. I finally address pathways towards future research, highlighting the necessity for greater focus on the role of the state and development agencies in shaping landscapes of gendered exclusions in Tajikistan and Central Asia.

CHAPTER 2: BUILDING A FEMINIST POSTCOLONIAL GEOGRAPHY OF WORK AND RESOURCE STRUGGLES IN MUSLIM CENTRAL ASIA



Photograph 3:History book

Introduction

This chapter develops the conceptual framework for the feminist postcolonial geography of work and resource struggles in the Muslim (post)Soviet periphery that informs this thesis. To do so, it draws on the four bodies of literature introduced in Chapter 1: the new feminist Central Asian social science, feminist postcolonial geographies of the Muslim world, feminist political ecology, and feminist labor geography. The chapter is divided into three main sections: The first section engages with the new feminist Central Asian social science that this thesis builds on, and discusses the way this body of literature has developed analyses of the causes, processes, and experiences of post-Soviet transformations that complicate issues of gender, identity, tradition, Islam.

In the second section, I open a conversation between this new feminist Central Asian social science and broader feminist postcolonial geographies of the Muslim world. In

particular, I show how this conversation can refine understandings of processes of gendered subjectification (or the coming into being of gender) in Muslim Central Asia and in the Muslim Global South by identifying three main points of conversation: first; through an engagement with the way feminist scholars of the Muslim world and, in particular, feminist geographers have theorized the concept of intersectionality; second, through their development of notions of agency; and finally, through what I refer to, following Mills and Gokariksel (2014), as the 'provincializing' of Muslim geographies, and an opening to analyses of the ways through which gendered subjectification occurs in places, such as post-Soviet Central Asia, that are marked by unprecedented politico-ecologic changes.

The last section of this chapter entitled, 'Gendered work and resource struggles', develops the feminist political ecology and feminist labor geography approach taken in this thesis, in order to make sense of how broader politico-ecologic transformations impact the process of gendered subjectification in the Muslim post-Soviet South. Here, I show how the multiple theorizations of the way gender comes into being, but is also resisted, along/with changing politico-ecologic structures, can build a more nuanced reading of post-Soviet gendered, cultural and religious transformations in this setting. I highlight how an emphasis on the relationship between gender, work, resource struggles and the body adds to this understanding.

The new feminist Central Asian social science: alternative stories of (post)Soviet gendered transformations

Expanding early gender studies in post-Soviet Central Asia

In the post-Soviet Muslim South, and specifically in Central Asia, the concept of gender itself seems to have entered the region with the fall of the Soviet Union, as a practical term introduced by the development community (Kamp 2009). Drawing on the 'Gender in Development' paradigm, international organizations, donors and non-governmental organizations in the early 1990s alternatively used the term gender and/or women to address questions such as domestic violence, the enhancement of livelihoods, education and/or the development of women's business skills . These practical concerns for women's condition were echoed in early scholarship on 'gender in transition' in the region. Often produced in collaboration with international gender and development experts (Kamp, 2009), this literature has similarly focused on question of poverty, rights,

employment, and migration, using international development theoretical frameworks (Kanji 2002; Hämmerle 2008; Kuehnast & Nechemias 2004; Haarr 2007). While this literature has contributed to making visible the unprecedented changes experienced in women's everyday lives in these poorest regions of the post-Soviet South, the theorization of gender it relies upon often tend to reproduce ideas of women as victims of processes of post-Soviet change.

Reducing early Central Asian gendered scholarship in the 1990s and early 2000s to development-oriented literature would not do justice to the locally, historically and theoretically grounded analyses that have also emerged from different social science disciplines during this period. Perhaps of most significance for Central Asian studies is the debate amongst historians about the relevance of a postcolonial theoretical framework to analyze both the Soviet modernist project of women's liberation in Central Asia and its legacies (Kandiyoti 2007; Edgar 2007; Northrop 2004; Kamp 2006; Khalid 2007a; Khalid 2006). While the possibility of strict comparison of the Soviet project with other colonial histories has often been discredited (Khalid 2007a; Kamp 2009), many gender scholars have found concepts and theories developed by postcolonial literature helpful, in order to decipher the experiences and effects of Soviet policies on the production of gendered and ethnic hierarchies and categories (Edgar 2007; Edgar 2006; Kandiyoti 2007). These analyses offer documented readings of the Soviet past that constitute a valuable basis for contemporary analyses – including understanding the role of Soviet policies of women's emancipation in the production of some notable contradictory effects[24].

In parallel, the opening of Central Asian countries' borders to Western researchers in the 1990s has made possible the production of in-depth ethnographies accessible to a non-Russian speaking audience. In common with historical postcolonial gendered analyses, these studies act today as baselines to understand Soviet and post-Soviet gendered ideologies, and their lived experiences in these under-researched areas of the world. In Tajikistan, these include rich anthropological accounts that captured peculiar and meaningful moments of change. Gillian Tett's (1996; 1994) ethnography for instance explores questions of identity, including gender, in one Tajik village in 1990-1991, the last years of Soviet rule. By looking at marriage practices, Tett (1996) captures the ways in which villagers in one remote site in the Soviet Union reconciled their

[24] Chapter 4 / Article 1 provides an illustration of the applicability of such approaches to the analysis of the Soviet past in Tajikistan.

Communist quasi atheist ideologies with their Islamic practices. Colette Harris' (2004) ethnography similarly builds on extensive fieldwork carried out in Tajikistan from the year 1994, in the midst of the Tajik Civil War. By digging into the life of one family and drawing on Butlerian concepts of performativity, Harris (2004) builds a compelling picture of the functioning of power in inter and intra-familial relations of oppression and domination. Focusing on the everyday lives of her participants, she theorizes their everyday acts of subversion as forms of resistance to both hegemonic Soviet gendered norms and community social control.

Despite the richness of this early work on gender in Central Asia, commentators have noted a lack of cohesiveness and theorizations in Central Asian research and called for more sophisticated readings of shifting gendered regimes. In her exhaustive literature review of Central Asian gender studies, Kamp (2009) highlighted multiple shortcomings including (i) a partial engagement with theoretical understandings of gender; (ii) in some instances, a conflation of gender with women; (iii) a common focus on issues of women and inequality inspired by development agencies' interests and reliance on 'gender in development literature'; (iv) a tendency to focus solely on religion in ethnographies of gender; (v) an absence of work on masculinities; (vi) a tendency to omit historical understandings of gender in contemporary research, and (vii) finally a certain degree of disciplinary boundedness. This dissertation does not deny the current need to address these shortcomings. However, since Kamp (2009) undertook this exhaustive literature review, almost ten years ago, Central Asian studies have witnessed the growth of research in multiple disciplines of social sciences, including history, development, politics, and anthropology that has addressed some of these silences, and produced insightful and nuanced readings of gendered Soviet/post-Soviet transformations.

A New feminist Central Asian social science

This thesis is grounded in this emergent body of research that I refer to as the new feminist Central Asian social science, and in particular, its dedication to build alternative and complex narratives of gender and change in the Soviet past and the post-Soviet present that explicitly or implicitly rewrite notions of gender, tradition, and Islam[25]. This new body of research first complements and builds on previous Central Asian research on gender in Central Asia and do not claim any radical rupture with previous literature. By bringing these readings together, and identifying them as a cohesive body of research,

[25] See Chapter 1 for a review of the concept of retraditionalization.

this dissertation opens up the possibility to recognize in their developments a common academic and political project that revolves around three main tenets grounded into feminist and postcolonial politics: first a recognition of a move towards more patriarchal gendered norms since the fall of the Soviet Union in Central Asian countries, and a commitment grounded in feminist epistemologies to make gendered oppression visible and knowable (Haraway 1988; hooks 1989; hooks 2015; Rose 1993; Mohanty et al. 1992); second, the commitment to destabilize the cognitive maps of gender, tradition, history, change and Islam in Central Asia in ways that challenge caricatural, neo-orientalist, a-historical, discourses on Muslim Central Asians; third, the reliance of feminist research that goes beyond gender as a category of analysis to address the socio-political and economic construction of gendered norms, identities, and practices at multiple scales from national discourses to everyday lived experiences.

These nuanced readings of shifting gendered regimes include feminist research on gender and nation in post-Soviet Central Asia (Megoran 1999; Kandiyoti 2007; Cleuziou & Direnberger 2016). This literature has built analyses that go beyond understandings of gender and tradition as fixed and embedded within religious systems by deconstructing the role of narratives of nation-building in the reconstruction, and operationalization of tradition. In her seminal work in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, Kandiyoti (2007) unravels the ways in which return to traditional gendered ideologies in post-soviet Central Asian gendered ideologies was primarily a political strategy of 'redeployment of a form of cultural authenticity in the service of new ideological goals'. For Kandiyoti, the post-soviet politicization of gender occurs at the intersection of multiple competing claims, with new imaginaries of the nation that invoke Islam and tradition on one side, paralleled by simultaneous rejection of its radical expressions; and on the other side, the promotion of gender equality in a feminist liberal fashion by the international donor community. Her research has served the basis for multiple readings in other Central Asian countries drawing on empirically rich work and other bodies of theories, including feminist (geo)politics [26] (Cleuziou & Direnberger 2016; Kudaibergenova 2015; Megoran 1999). Authors like Direnberger (2011b), for instance, have documented how the reconstruction of the state in post-War/ post-Soviet Tajikistan was underpinned by an essentializing gendered discourse that re-invokes elements of tradition to rebuild the political legitimacy of a government in crisis. Research on gender and nation in Central Asia has also scaled down analysis of post-Soviet gendered geopolitics to the local level, in order to analyze the lived experiences of

[26] For a full description, Cleuziou and Direnberger's (2016) special issue in Nationalities paper on this theme

nation building processes, and the ways women reproduce, but also negotiate, amend and subvert hegemonic discourses (Cleuziou & Direnberger 2016).

In parallel, recent anthropological work has also provided in depth and insightful analyses of the everyday production of gendered norms, practices and identities, revealing how elements conventionally associated with tradition were lived, but also operationalized, transformed, and resisted by women themselves. Cynthia Werner (2009), for instance, provides such analysis through a focus on the apparent revival of non-consensual bride abduction[27]. Drawing on ethnographic accounts in Southern Kazakhstan, the author explores the transformation of this practice during the Soviet and post-Soviet era. She deconstructs its cultural authenticity by dissecting its history, and revealing how local contemporary actors reconstruct notions of tradition to justify popular views, leading to a shift in power relations between men and women, and the greater control of men over women's mobility and sexuality. Cultural values of honor and shame, are according to the author, not fixed but localized, historicized, and mobilized in order to ensure the maintenance and reproduction of patriarchal control . Despite the recognition of a shift towards greater patriarchy, Werner (2009) highlights the agency of women in resisting bride abduction, sometimes at great cost to themselves and their families.

Similarly, the work of Juliette Cleuziou (2016a) builds a compelling picture of the 'renewal', of polygyny in Tajikistan. Drawing on feminist conceptualizations of kinship and marriage, Cleuziou (2016a) opposes the conventional reduction of polygyny to its religious dimension. Instead, she foregrounds women's own views and analyzes polygyny as a matrimonial and economic strategy in order for women to access symbolic and material resources in a post-Soviet context of economic desolation. Building on Kandiyoti's (1998) notion of the 'patriarchal bargain', Cleuziou (2016a) debunks culturalist analyses that paint women as passive victims of oppression and Islam by highlighting the subtle negotiations Tajikistani women enter into and the tactics they use to uphold patriarchal norms in order to maximize their own power.

The disassociation of signs of piety, conventionally attributed to religion, and notions of tradition/retraditionalization also applies to more overt signs of religiosity such as women's veiling. In her ethnographic research in Kyrgyzstan, Julie McBrien (2009)

[27] Bride abduction is a practice in which a man abducts and captures the woman he wishes to marry. In Central Asia, bride kidnapping is mainly practiced in Kyrgyzstan. Some instances of bride kidnapping have been identified in Tajikistan. This practice is however not as widespread as in Kyrgyzstan.

remains wary of a local interpretation of the adoption of the *hijab* as a form of resistance. Her findings, however, still challenge conventional associations of veiling with tradition by highlighting how this sign of piety, in some instances, epitomizes individual struggles in the post-Soviet re-evaluation of 'multiple modernities' (Mcbrien 2006, p.140). By delving into the internal dilemma experienced by one woman, the author shows how her Kyrgyzstani participant's turn to religion is at odds with Soviet and Western notions of appropriate modern gendered behavior and their association of veiled women with oppression and tradition. At the same time, the dilemma illustrates the woman's attempt to reinterpret past Soviet notions of modernity as contemporary ones, and shows the possibility of reconciling modernity, veiling, and Muslimness.

Analyses that rupture the binaries of modernity/tradition - (Soviet) past/ (post-Soviet) present, and national/local - to study the complex ways through which new forms of femininities are constructed, lived, and contested, are also complemented by an emergent body of literature that investigates gender beyond women. Central Asian studies have, for instance, witnessed a flourishing of literature on masculinities over the past decade (Harris 2011; Epkenhans 2016; Reeves 2013; Megoran 2008) including research that has deconstructed national post-Soviet discourses and their re-investment of notions of masculinity and appropriate sexuality revolving around ideas of strength and aggression (Harris, 2011). Focusing on Tajikistan, Tim Epkenhans (2016) deconstructs the historical exoticization by Soviet anthropologists of Tajikistani masculinity (*gavonmardi*) based on the idea of 'men of disorder', violent, aggressive, involved in crime and solidarity networks. Rather, Epkenhans (2016) illuminates the politics behind these representations. He highlights how nationalist discourses operationalize the association of this *gavonmardi* with men's *namus* (honor) based on their capacity to protect the sexual integrity of the female members of the family.

While this literature has mostly focused on the relationship between masculinities conflict, violence, Islam, and nationalist discourse, some of this literature has also contributed to complicate and re-theorize Central Asian masculinities, observing their constructions within the more mundane, although not less political, spheres of everyday lives. Madeleine Reeves (2011; 2013) provides such insights. In her research on masculinities and migration in the Sokh Valley in Uzbekistan, she provides a locally grounded analysis of the ways in which masculinities are co-constituted with the wider patterns of labor migration (2013). Her analysis builds a theorization of Central Asian Muslim masculinities that challenges the tendency to cast manhood in rural Muslim societies as 'rigid, inflexible, and defined with unchanging codes of honor and systems of

patriarchy' (Marsden 2007, p.475)[28]. Her ethnographic material reveals the complex, contradictory and emotional ways through which men negotiate decisions to migrate, often leaving families behind to enter into heavily exploitative and precarious work in Russia (Reeves 2013). It particularly highlights the entanglement of these decisions and experiences with the construction of men's sense of self (Reeves 2013)..

Conversations with feminist postcolonial geographies of the Muslim world: Theorizing gendered subjectification processes in the Muslim South

Intersectionality

This dissertation builds on this new feminist Central Asian social science. It, however, also offers some expansions by opening a conversation between this literature and broader feminist postcolonial geographies of the Muslim world. As already mentioned in Chapter 1, these conversations challenge the double marginalization of Central Asian experiences – first of broader post-Soviet studies, and second of Muslim studies[29]. They particularly open possibilities to engage with theorizations developed by feminist postcolonial scholars, and in particular geographers of the Muslim world.

Here, I first delve into the way this body of scholarship has gone beyond essentialist perspectives of Muslim men and women's identities as fixed into notions of honor and shame anchored in religion (Abu-Lughod 1986; Weidman 2003; Feldman 2010; Lindisfarne 1994). As already mentioned in Chapter 1, gendered norms, practices and roles in the Muslim World, have long been analyzed as embedded into an Honor-Shame System which relies upon the control over women's mobility and sexuality by men, and justifies women's exclusion (Harris 2004; Harris 2011). This system was first outlined by the anthropologist Peristiany (1966) and soon became an anthropological paradigm to define patriarchy within Muslim societies (Weidman 2003). Feminist postcolonial scholars of the Muslim world have since then challenged the rigidity of this system by revealing its flexibility, the multiplicity of gendered identities held by women and men, and the way they negotiate their identities and life choices (Lindisfarne 1994; Feldman 2010).

[28] Cited in Reeves (2013, p.309)

[29] See Chapter 1

In the analysis that follows, I find the concept of intersectionality[30] particularly useful in order to go beyond the idea of a fixed Honor-and-Shame system, and make visible this multiplicity of gendered identities held by men, women as well as children. The concept of intersectionality has a long history outside of the Muslim world that is linked to Black, feminist, anti-racist scholars and activists (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1982; Davis 1983; Hill Collins & Bilge 2016; Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1989; Crenshaw 1991; Yuval-Davis 2006). These scholars have played a seminal role in decentering feminism from its focus on white, Western, heterosexual, middle-class women. Crenshaw's [31] (1989; 1991) analysis relied on the idea that Black women were erased in conventional and early western feminist analyses of oppression and discrimination, and called for consideration of the mutually constitutive forms of social oppression rather than one and single axis of difference (be it sexism, racism, patriarchy). A focus on 'interlocking categories of experience' (Andersen & Hill Collins 1992, p.xii) allowed intersectional scholars to emphasize relationality, interconnection, and interdependencies of multiple categories of difference, such as gender, race, age, class, ethnicity, and sexuality (Valentine 2007). Categories of oppression are not mechanical concrete social relations. Rather they 'abrade, inflame, amplify, twist, negate, dampen, and complicate each other' (Kressler & McKenna 1978, p.42)[32].

While the concept of intersectionality has often been critiqued for becoming a paradigmatic term - a buzzword, the history, meaning and purpose of which has been altered (Hill Collins & Bilge 2016) - the use of the concept by feminist postcolonial theorists researching Islam has made major advances in understanding Muslim identities and subjectivities (Salem 2013; Weber 2015; Bilge 2010a; Mirza 2013). Bilge (2010a), for instance, highlights how an exclusive focus on gender in analyses of Muslim veiled women concealed other forms of social oppression at the intersection of nation, class, ethnicity, and race; hence resisting forms of Western ethnocentrism and the depiction of Muslim veiled women as oppressed by their men. Similarly, by focusing on gay Muslim men, Rahman (2010) emphasizes the importance of observing Muslim identities beyond a sole focus on women, challenging monolithic representations of Muslim men, and highlighting their multiple identities at the intersection of gender and sexuality. Mirza (2013), in parallel, offers a reading of what she frames as 'embodied intersectionality', highlighting how gender and racialized representations are rewritten

[30] See Chapter 1

[31] See Chapter 1

[32] Cited in Valentine (2007, p.13)

and lived through the body, giving an insight into how women negotiate the 'affective postcolonial' (Mirza 2013, p.5) disjunctures of race and racism in their everyday lives.

Feminist geographers of religion and Islam have particularly added to other disciplinary understandings, by focusing on the socio-cultural geographies of religious intersectionalities (Dwyer 2000; Dwyer 1999; Gökarıksel & Smith 2017; Hopkins 2017; Hopkins & Noble 2009). They have called for an understanding of Muslim lives in an intersectional matrix of religion, age, gender, class, locality, and intergenerationality (Hopkins & Noble 2009) revealing the heterogeneity of Muslims all over the Islamic world (Falah & Nagel 2005; Aitchison et al. 2016; Dunn & Hopkins 2016; Gökariksel & Secor 2015; Mills & Gökariksel 2014), and making visible multiple, situated, and spatialized understandings of identity and belonging. These authors have specifically explored the ways in which religious beliefs, practices, and institutions shape the spatialities of men, women and children in places marked by different socio-cultural and political-economic histories . Research on Muslim youths, in particular, has challenged ideas of a unilateral transmission of gendered norms and beliefs from parents to children and young people, by revealing how Muslim youths also shape and transform their everyday lives (Dunne et al. 2017; Hopkins 2006; Anoop & Kehily 2013; Dwyer 1999). These scholars have also gone beyond ideas of Muslims as solely religious selves, and opened up analysis of Muslim lives beyond the spaces of the sacred and religious by studying the mundane and everyday places within which people become gendered beings (Dunne et al. 2017; Hopkins 2006; Anoop & Kehily 2013; Dwyer 1999).

Such literatures are particularly helpful in the analysis of Muslim Central Asians gendered identities, in that they allow us to highlight how identities and subjectivities are differently situated in relation to multiple axes of power that are mutually constitutive, spatialized, and localized (Gökarıksel & Smith 2017). Here, I postulate that a focus on the historical, intersectional production of axes of oppression, and their reproduction in place is a way to delve into the role of Soviet ideology in shaping categories of gender, ethnicity, and religion. I, however, do not explicitly engage with the concept of race, as this concept is particularly contentious in Soviet Central Asia[33] and more generally in historical analyses of Soviet Union. Literature has already thoroughly engaged with these questions revealing conflicting perspectives between scholars. On the one hand, scholars such as Hirsh (1997) reject the idea of race or racial politics in

[33] For a review of this discussion see Weitz's (2002) article on racial politics without the concept of race.

the Soviet Union comparable to contemporary racial politics. In parallel, authors such as Weitz (2002) argue that despite the rejection of racial ideologies, populations were endowed with immutable traits during the Stalinist period that recall forms of racialization. Following feminist postcolonial scholars such as Edgar (2007) or Kandiyoti (2007), I prefer here the use of ethnicity as a category of analysis for the study of Soviet intersectionalities.

Furthermore, a focus on the intersection between gender, class and intergenerationality is also useful for two other main reasons. First, emergent capitalism has reshaped gendered identities and the meanings of Muslimness in a place marked by socialist Marxist experiments, aiming at eradicating the existence of a class-based society, rendering questions of the intersection of gender and class particularly relevant. Second, - as already mentioned in Chapter 1 - in a place where questions around gendered histories and their contradictions remain unanswered, and where men, women and children adopt more overt signs of religiosity since the fall of the Soviet Union (Commercio 2013; Akiner 1997), understanding how elements of religion shape the process of production, reproduction, transformation, and intergenerational transmission of gendered norms crucial. By focusing on histories, and the coming into being of gender among men, women and children, separately and relationally, this thesis takes a holistic approach to the gendered subjectification process that observes factors that shape gendered identities intergenerationally, beyond and along with religion.

Agency

While engagement with the concept of intersectionality opens up analysis of the historical, ideological, structural and relational (re)production of gendered oppression along different axes of identity such as age, class, and ethnicity, the corollary concept of agency allows us to engage with the lived experiences of these categories and their negotiation. The notion of agency is a concept that has sparked significant debate in the social sciences, including human geography, but also in feminist literature on Muslim identities. The 'structure-agency' question has long been approached as a binary opposition to allow us to understand social change – while structuralists viewed relations of power as inscribed into material, economic, but also cultural structures of power that determine people's lives, liberal humanist perspectives are based on ideas of agency as the free exercise of self-willed power (Bilge 2010b), post-structuralist thinkers have challenged such a binary.

Perhaps most influential to feminist theories are Foucauldian notions of the subject (Foucault 1977; 1978). For Foucault (1977;1978), the subject or subjectivity is not the centered, self-bounded individual drawn by Enlightenment thinking but is multiple and an 'epiphenomenon of discourse' (McDowell & Sharp 1999, p.267). Discourses shaping people's views of themselves 'seep into the grain of individuals, reach right to their bodies, permeate their gestures, their postures, what they say and how they learn to live with other people' (Nast & Pile 1998, p.213). Drawing on Foucault, Butler (1988; 1990) took post-structuralist theories further by inviting a reconsideration of notions of gender and agency through her conceptualization of *performativity*. Opposing biological, as well as purely cultural, readings of gender, Butler argues that gender is an effect of power, produced through discourses, but also performed through a series of acts that are ritualized through the body. Because performance leaves room for an incorrect copy, it also opens up spaces for subversion and resistance to gender norms.

With regards to analyses of gender and agency in Muslim societies, such feminist post-structuralist readings have been particularly helpful. They have generated important insights into how women also subvert the hegemonic male order and specific patriarchal cultural practices, in some instances by redeploying them for their own agendas (Mahmood 2004; Kandiyoti 1998). The main questions raised by these readings are: 'how women contribute to reproduce their own domination, and how do they resist or subvert it?' (Mahmood 2001, p.205). Such a focus on locating women's agency, mainly driven by post-colonial scholars, has challenged the ethnocentrism of notions of emancipated Western womanhood beyond registers of submission (Bilge 2010b; Mahmood 2001; 2004). This scholarship has highlighted the complexity of women's lives, and restored their voices in analyses of Muslim societies (Mahmood 2001; Abu-Lughod 1991). It has also deconstructed ideas of women as 'victims of male brutality who must be rescued from traditional, oppressive male morality, which is imagined as a total control over female bodies and actions' (Ewing 2008, pp.1–2)[34].

In this thesis, I locate my analysis within these postcolonial feminist readings. I also draw on some of the ways feminist postcolonial scholars of the Muslim world have taken these analyses further by highlighting the multiplicity of the subjectification process in Muslim women's everyday lives (Sehlikoglu 2017; Bilge 2010a; Mahmood 2001). In particular, I rely here on Mahmood's (2001; 2004) reconceptualization of 'embodied agency', and the way her views have been dicussed in multiple contexts

[34] Cited in Sehlikoglu (2017, p.78)

around the world (Bautista 2008; Pullman 2015; Bangstad 2011; Ibrahimhakkioglu 2012; Vasilaki 2015). In her research on women's support of the Islamic mosque movement in Egypt, Mahmood (2001: 2004) challenges what she refers to as normative liberal assumptions about freedom and agency, by taking the conversation around the dual character of feminism as both an analytical and a political project aiming to subvert women's oppression further (Butler 1990; Mohanty et al. 1992). In particular, Mahmood (2001) argues that despite the important insights of initial postcolonial feminist scholarship and post-structural theorizations of agency, such a model does not allow us to fully grasp the lives of women 'whose desire, affect, and will have been shaped by non liberal traditions' (Ibid, p.202). In order to make such an analytical project possible, Mahmood (2001) offers a reading of agency that goes beyond its equation with resistance to domination, but as a 'capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create' (Mahmood 2006, p.33).

In this thesis, I depart from Mahmood (2001; 2004; 2006), in the sense that I do not attempt to define forms of pious agency, or focus only on religiosity, or any Islamic movement. By focusing on Tajikistan, I study men, women and children for whom religion is part of their everyday lives, but without focusing on pious subjectivity-making. There are, however, certain elements of Mahmood's (2001; 2004) theorizations which, I believe, can take understandings of processes of gendered subjectification further, and can be applied in many contexts. Central to Mahmood's (2001) theorization is the deconstruction of humanistic notions of freedom that, she argues, still underlie Butlerian and initial postcolonial notions of agency. Mahmood (2001) contests the idea that agency equates to free will, and the subversion of customs, traditions or coercion. While she does not foreclose the possibility for resistance, Mahmood (2001) decouples the notion of self-realization from autonomous will, and agency from notions of emancipatory politics. Instead, she builds a more nuanced, situated and complex view of agency that takes into account the different desires that can emerge in processes of subjectification, including those that appear as inimical to a feminist emancipatory politics[35].

Such views on agency allow us to capture how one can simultaneously reproduce and resist certain gendered norms, building more refined readings of gendered

[35] This is very well illustrated in discussions around veiling and other religious practices. While some strands of Western feminism frame veiling as an oppressive practice, scholars of the Muslim world have analysed veiling both as a form of resistance to racism in the West, and as a way to display pious agency (Sehlikoglu 2017; Bilge 2010a; Bhimji 2009a).

subjectification processes. The work of feminist geographical scholars on question of Muslim agencies often illustrate this ambivalent process, by building understandings of the complex, contradictory ways through which women become gendered subjects, and their multiple and spatialized agencies (Falah & Nagel 2005; Dwyer 2000; Dwyer 1999; Habashi 2011; Bhimji 2009b; Schütte 2013; Alam 2018). Scholars have drawn on Mahmood's (2001; 2004) work to tease out the gendering of religious spaces, and the ways women construct their sense of self in sacred spaces (Bhimji 2009b). Others have gone beyond a focus on religious spheres to focus on the everyday entanglements and spatialities of agencies, in everyday social and spatial mobilities (Schütte 2013). Alam (2018), for example, develops an analysis of self, power, gender and agency in a rural community in Bangladesh, revealing the ways gender norms are produced, reproduced and transformed through village life. Schütte (2013) similarly focuses on women's capacities to negotiate norms, entitlements and relationships in a context of urban poverty, scarcity and patriarchy in Afghanistan. His research focuses on the spatialities of gender relations, drawing on understandings of agencies beyond resistance, through emphasis on women's capabilities to act within structures of subordination and through their everyday lives (Schütte 2013).

Provincializing Muslim geographies: gender and politico-ecologic change in the Muslim South

This framing of the gendered subjectification process is particularly helpful for the analysis of Central Asian lives, as it allows us to both identify the ways structures of subordination are produced, and the ways men, women and children experience, reproduce, navigate and challenge these structures in their everyday lives. In parallel, in addition to opening up analysis of Central Asian identities to theorizations developed by feminist scholars in the rest of the Muslim world, a conversation between Central Asian literature and geographies of Muslimness also constitutes an opportunity to contribute to broader geographies of Muslim identities – in particular, it is a way to 'provincialize' Muslim geographies. Both Alam (2018) and Shütte's (2013) research provides evidence of a growing interest amongst geographers in deciphering the particularities of Muslim lives in Muslim majority settings in the Global South. Such a concern to document the lives of Muslims beyond the West has recently gained momentum amongst geographers (Mills & Gökariksel 2014). In a relatively recent article, Mills and Gökariksell (2014) invite geographers to 'provincialize' geographies of Muslim identities. Their statement is based on the observation that most geographies of Islam and Muslims have so far focused on Muslims in Western diaspora settings. Both authors argue that despite

efforts by scholars to develop research in other contexts, little attention has been paid to how Muslim geographies beyond the West can contribute to understandings of geographies of Muslim lives, besides as a topical or empirical diversification (Mills & Gökariksel 2014).

In this thesis, I specifically follow this call, supporting Mills and Gökariksel's (2014) idea that through focusing on the West research reproduces ideas of Muslims as minorities, separate from others, and as contextually dependent communities. In contrast, a focus on Muslims in predominantly Muslim dominant societies sheds light on the historical, cultural, relational dynamics that construct Muslim identities and relationships - opening pathways to understand that 'what it means to be Muslim is contextually specific and formed through relationship with others' in place (Mills & Gökariksel 2014, p.8). More specifically, locating the study of the gendered subjectification process, the making and unmaking of gender, and its coming into being in Muslim Central Asia, is an opportunity to open up the cognitive maps of geographies of Muslimness to new objects of study. Central Asia has been partly marginalized from broader literature on the Muslim world. Yet, the specific context of the post-Soviet South invites questions and issues about several crucial aspects of Soviet and post-Soviet change developed in the introductory chapter of this thesis, and that are all entangled with the specificities of Soviet/post-Soviet politico-ecologic transformations.

The entanglement of Muslimness with the economic and the ecological in the poorest parts of the world figures amongst these silences. In recent decades, the relationship between gender and Muslimness has been completely transformed in many countries of the Muslim South and the post-Soviet Muslim South, as countries like Tajikistan have transitioned from a Soviet socialist economic system to emergent forms of capitalism. This transformation manifests itself in the intensification of capitalist forms of production/reproduction in the lives of men, women and children, and increased privatization of land and other resources. These unprecedented transformations also impact how gendered norms are transmitted and transformed amongst the current generation in comparison with the last Soviet generation. Yet, in Tajikistan, as in the rest of the Muslim world, the entanglements of these everyday gendered experiences of politico-ecologic transformations and notions of what constitutes Muslim femininities and masculinities remain understudied (Holvorson 2005; Falah & Nagel 2005). By 'provincializing' (Mills & Gökariksel 2014) geographies of Muslimness, and opening such geographies to the Central Asian Muslim South, this thesis, therefore, offers the possibility to investigate how Muslim gendered identities are also produced, reproduced

and transformed with broader politico-ecologic changes and their local manifestations through everyday work and resource struggles in a context of emergent capitalism.

Gendered work and resource struggles: feminist labor geographies and political ecologies

In order to decipher the complexity of this process of gendered subjectification in a shifting Central Asian environment, I here draw, on theorizations of work, gender and environments that are grounded into two bodies of feminist theories – feminist labor geographies and feminist political ecologies. In this section, I explore research in these different fields as well as the connections between different set of theories, focusing on the ways in which feminist scholarship has challenged conventional readings of gender, work and resource struggles. I particularly expand on earlier structuralist and post-structuralist approaches driving attention back to the materiality of everyday lives. I highlight how embodied practices, knowledge and emotions are entangled with broader lived experiences of politico-economic and politico-ecological transformations. Ultimately, this (re)materialization of feminist knowledge aids an understanding of how gendered oppression functions, as well as redefining questions of how gender comes into being, at the intersection between the cultural, the religious , the ecological and the economic.

Work, environments and political economies of gendered exclusions

Across the social sciences, feminist scholars have made major contributions to the understanding of the ways in which ideologies and experiences of work are productive of gendered exclusions (McDowell 1999; England & Lawson 2005; Oberhauser 2002; Hanson & Pratt 1995; Lawson 1999; Wright 2006; Wolkowitz 2006). One of their main contributions has been to unravel the socio-spatial gendered dichotomy that underwrites the way work is traditionally defined within capitalist patriarchal political economies (McDowell et al. 1984). Feminists have first revealed how work, in Western industrialized societies, is conventionally associated with masculine waged work in the public sphere, whilst women's unpaid work within the domestic sphere is considered as non-work and devalued (McDowell et al. 1984) . Marxist and socialist feminists' theories, although later critiqued for a focus on class to the detriment of women's oppression (Kuhn & Wolpe 2013), have been historically seminal in denouncing these binaries between home/work, paid/unpaid labor, public/private, production/reproduction and

the exclusions they produce (Dalla Costa & James 1972; Vogel 1983; Gimenez 1998; Gimenez, Martha; Vogel 2005).

While children's labor and their exploitation under capitalist systems figures at the heart of Marx's writings, unwaged reproductive labor, the domestic sphere, or caring work do not appear significantly (Katz 2017; 2004). Marxist feminists challenged these silences by highlighting how the unrecognized work of women's labor in the home constitutes a commodity central to capitalism (Gimenez 2005; Vogel 1983). Social reproduction, generally defined as consisting of (i) biological reproduction; (ii) the reproduction of the labor force (subsistence and training); and (iii) the provision of care (Teeple Hopkins 2015) is according to feminists, not the outside of production processes, but constitutes their counterpart. This socially reproductive work is dependent on multi-layered gendered structures of exploitation that rely on the exploitation and enclosure of women's bodies and labor for capital accumulation and expansion (Federici 2004)

These politico-economic readings also gave rise to analyses of women's exclusion from access, control and use of natural resources (Agarwal 1994). Earlier ecofeminist theories (Mies & Shiva 1993; 2003) drawing on the idea of a privileged relationship between nature and women were soon critiqued for their essentialist perspectives and challenged by these historical materialist analyses of gender, work and environments[36]. These analyses highlighted the material conditions and practices embedded into political systems, that produced women's exclusion, from land and resources (1992; Freidberg 2001; Schroeder 1997; Carney 1996). Authors such as Agarwal (1994) revealed the importance of emphasizing gendered divisions of labor in patriarchal capitalist societies in order to understand women's greater vulnerability to the erosion of livelihoods and environments with emerging forms of capitalism.

Drawing on these historical materialist approaches is particularly useful in Tajikistan for multiple reasons. Here I will focus on two. The first of which is related to the contemporary changes experienced in post-Soviet Tajikistan. The politico-economic context of emergent capitalism renders these politico-economic analyses of work, environment and gender particularly relevant. It allows a shift away from a culturalist perspective focusing on Islam, by observing how gendered identities are also entangled with politico-economic change and structures of exclusion. In post-Soviet Tajikistan and Central Asia, for instance, authors have already shown how women were often the

[36] See Nightingale (2006) for a review of this literature.

losers in the process of land reform and transformation from a socialist to a capitalist economy following the fall of the Soviet Union (Kandiyoti 2003; 2002a; Tursunova 2012) – revealing how processes of gendered transformations are cultural, but also shaped by the context of privatization of resources.

The second reason is historical. The Marxist and materialist theories that drove early expansions of definitions of work and the first denunciations of women's exclusions from resources, drew on earlier Marxist theories that have also shaped the Soviet practical experimentation of the 1930s in most Soviet republics. The Soviet ideology framed women's reproductive work within the capitalist system as the main cause for their oppression. It framed their liberation from home through integration into productive work within a socialist system as the condition for their emancipation (Buckley 1989; Ashwin 2000). In Central Asia, the collectivization of the 1930s drew women into the socialist labor force and turned them into producers (Kandiyoti 2007; Kamp 2016; Lubin 1984). It also led to the establishment of anti-child labor legislation all over the region (Akilova 2017). Raised by the Soviet as a success, the effectiveness of these experimentations remains, however, only partially questioned, and still needs to be assessed, in particular in the context of the under-researched Soviet Muslim periphery (Hämmerle 2008; Kandiyoti 2002b; Buckley 1997).

The social construction of gender, work and the environment

While politico-economic analyses have made visible women's material exclusion under capitalist systems - from work in the public sphere, from the recognition of their labor within the home, and/or from access to natural resources; later poststructuralist theorizations have expanded previous historical materialist analyses through attention to the social construction of gender, work (McDowell 1999), and environments (Nightingale 2006). This change in analytical focus drew on a switch from theorizations of gender as a fixed, pre-given category of analysis to the understanding of gender as an emergent feature of society, multiple, socially, discursively and spatially constructed (Mcdowell 1992). Within studies of gender and the environment, these social constructionist theories led, amongst other environmental issues, to new concerns around the gendered discourses of environmental rights and resources, and the types of social and spatial inequalities they create (Rocheleau et al. 1996). The emergence of 'feminist political ecology' (PFE) as a discipline coincided with these new theoretical advances. Dianne Rocheleau's (1996) volume, which coined the term FPE, has been seminal in highlighting the ways in which gender relations are salient in the material

and symbolic construction and experience of environmental issues, deconstructing the ways in which women's exclusion is produced.

During the same period, feminist analyses of labor followed a similar theoretical switch, moving from strict political economic analysis to the study of the socio-spatial construction of gendered/sexual and occupational segregation (Lawson 1999). Sexual divisions of labor that lead to women's overrepresentation in unskilled, semi-skilled work, homework, precarious, informal and other forms of temporary and casual labor rely on gendered stereotypes that define men and women's appropriate types of work and that are socio-politically constructed (McDowell 1997; Hanson & Pratt 1995; Lawson 1999). Essentialist views on women's or men's bodies perpetuate this segregation, as generalizations about women's height, strength, fertility, sexuality, and dexterity, continue to define their suitability for some, but not other occupations. These notions of the gendered appropriateness/inappropriateness of certain types of work intersect with other socially constructed axes of difference, such as age, as illustrated by the way child labor has been framed within different societies and throughout history (Abebe 2009; Nieuwenhuys 2009; Bourdillon 2006). Scholars have shown for instance how children's work was embedded in a sexual and intergenerational division of labor based on gendered norms (Punch 2001; 2009; Dyson 2010). Cultural gendered expectations not only shape the types of work children engage with but also impact upon the meaning and value of their work (Dyson 2008; 2010)

In addition, women, men, and children who challenge appropriate (and locally variable) gendered and intergenerational norms through participation in forms of work that do not comply with conventional divisions of labor, are considered as out of place (England & Lawson 2005; McDowell 1999). Mining provides an illustration of such work - despite the large-scale involvement of women in/around mining in both the Global North and South, mining and miners have historically and more recently been associated with hypermasculine traits (Lahiri-Dutt 2015; Jenkins 2014) These gendered stereotypes lead to the invisibility and devaluation of women's work in this sector; causing, in some instances, women's actual experience of marginalization and discrimination, and their exclusion from access, control and use of resources. In many countries, women were, for instance, banned from entering mines, their presence underground associated with bad luck (Jenkins 2014). Extreme cases of this process of exclusion also appear in diverse other work contexts, within and beyond mining, whereby the gendered inappropriateness of certain types of work lead to the construction of workers as abject, and/or dirty (Simpson et al. 2012; Tyler 2011; Ashforth & Kreiner 2016).

In the context of the Soviet/post-Soviet periphery, exploring the elements of continuity/discontinuity in the forms taken by gendered/sexual/intergenerational occupational segregation, and issues of exclusion from resources, constitutes a privileged lens to identify the extent to which gendered norms, at the intersection with other axes of difference, have changed. While Soviet gender equality policies promoted women's work in traditionally masculinized positions and banned children's work, post-Soviet gendered ideologies tend towards the redefinition of a traditional sexual division of labor that associates women with the home (Bridger et al. 1995; Buckley 1997; Lipovskaya 1994; Attwood 1990). In the specific extractive landscape of Kante, this manifests through a new gendered division of labor – with predominantly male migration, the informalization of women's work, restrictions on women's access and use of natural resources, and the shaming of their work in mines. This thesis delves into the underlying constructions of gender that make this gendered division of labor and resources possible.

(Re)negotiations, and (re)scalings: Embodied gendered subjectivities, work and resource struggles

Historically and geographically variable constructions of gender, age, sexuality determine the socio-spatial experiences of work and environments, as well as producing specific exclusions – from certain types of work, and from the control, access and use of natural resources. Studying these exclusions acts as a window into how gendered power relations are produced in specific contexts. At the same time, it provides a lens to explore how these exclusions are also negotiated and contested through everyday work/working practices (England & Lawson 2005; McDowell 1999; Wright 1997; Nagar et al. 2002) and resource struggles (Nightingale 2006). Such a statement relies on a view of gender, work and environment as mutually constitutive and gendered identities as reconstructed and challenged through work and resource struggles.

Both feminist political ecologist and labor theorists have particularly focused attention on the embodied practices, along with household micro-politics, where gendered renegotiations occur[37] (Dyer et al. 2008; McDowell et al. 2007; McDowell 2009; McDowell & Court 1994; Sultana 2009; Waite 2006; Sultana 2011; Truelove 2011). Within feminist labor geography, the work of Linda McDowell has been seminal in foregrounding the body as a site to investigate the forms of embodied labor that women and men perform at work (McDowell 2009; 2007). For McDowell (2009), scaling down

[37] For a discussion of questions of embodied labor see Article 3.

economic geographical analysis by focusing on the body is a way to explore changing geographies of labor. The significance of the body/embodiment is not new. As the feminist scholar highlights: 'a fleshy person has to turn up everyday, whether to a coalface or an office' (McDowell 2009, p.10). In the context of the contemporary service economy in the West, the expansion of interactive forms of employment requires, however, a greater use of the body. According to McDowell, this economic turn has also led to the 'commoditization of the body' (McDowell 2009, p.1). Finally, the author highlights the centrality of the role of emotions, and the emotional labor that men and women perform at work, to this turn to a post-Fordist service economy.

While I do not focus on the service economy nor on the West in my analysis, I find McDowell's (2009) theorizations particularly enlightening in the case of post-Soviet lives. As mentioned by the author, the changing nature of economies transforms classed, gendered and raced labor as well as shaping ideas about which types of bodies should do what. This process shapes appropriate norms of femininity and masculinity, defining who can work where, and for which wages. It is also a personal process, intimate, embodied and emotional. In the context of Tajikistan, focusing on the body at work and as an object of work, and on the work of emotions, is a useful lens to observe how changing economic geographies from the socialist Soviet to emergent post-Soviet capitalisms have shaped the lives of men, women and children.

Such a focus on the body/embodiment and its connections with broader scales also dominates feminist political ecology analyses. Shubra Guruani's (2002) research, for instance, highlights how women collectors of fuel in the Himalayas invest forests with emotion/meaning and memory, showing how resource use goes beyond utilitarian economic needs. Harris (2014) in parallel observes that resource access is crucial for people's livelihoods, but also for their sense of self, belonging and dignity. Sultana (2009) similarly explores everyday embodied and emotional practices around contaminated water in rural Bangladesh. She highlights how women's lives are reconfigured by the emotional struggles around access to water that in turn shape their decisions .

Other authors such as Truelove (2011) go one step further by connecting embodied everyday practices to the marketization of resources. Her research on women's water practices in India links the body to the city and the state. In a context where urban planners develop market-led approaches to water, Truelove shows how women's everyday relationships with water are affected by these changes through entering into

illegal and dangerous water practices. Such practices particularly affect young girls in marginalized slums who are often withdrawn from school to fulfill their water duties. By focusing on everyday embodied practices, Truelove challenges claims made by governmental and non-governmental actors that promote the commodification of water. Instead, by focusing on embodiment and the everyday, she demonstrates how capitalist logics ignore non-productive needs (Harris 2014; Sundberg 2017; Truelove 2011).

In the analysis that follows, I focus on such embodied work and resource struggles, and their connections with broader scales. Underlying this focus is a decade of feminist research on notions of bodies/embodiment that contributes to (re)materialize gender subjectification processes. Feminist geographers, in particular, have highlighted the importance of gendered and sexed bodies in the making of socio-spatial relations (Nast and Pile 1998): discursive constructions define which bodies are in place, and which bodies are out of place. At the same time, feminists, and in particular corporeal feminists, have played a crucial role in retrieving the 'weighty materiality' of the body (Longhurst 2001, p.5). In this thesis, I draw on the corporeal feminism of authors like Longhurst (1995; 2005b; Longhurst & Johnston 2014) and Grosz (1994; 1993), and their call to take the body as the primary source of knowledge and experience, and as the primary site of the production, construction and renegotiation of gender.

By doing so, I rely on a view of bodies as more than a black box, a surface onto which relationships of power are mapped. Instead, I call for attention to how bodies are 'lived, and interwoven and constitutive of systems of meaning, signification and representation' (McDowell & Sharp 2014, p.42). These systems of meaning are partly constructed through historical transcripts, and their legacies embedded within colonial narratives and the types of gendered and ethnic hierarchies they create (McKittrick 2006). They are also lived, in and through the body, and its emotional materiality (Davidson et al. 2007; Pile 2010; Thien 2005). These emotional realities construct places and spaces, relationships, and the way people become gendered subjects, as I show in the next chapters. Following the relational thinking characteristic of feminist analysis, the rest of this thesis highlights the way these personal, intimate, embodied, and emotional gendered experiences are central to understanding how people become gendered subjects, at the same time as they are constitutive of and constituted by global changes (Nagar et al. 2002; Truelove 2011; Marchand & Runyan 2000; Sultana 2009).

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the overall conceptual framework this dissertation draws upon. I began by reviewing the literature that I referred to as the new feminist Central Asian social science to demonstrate how Central Asian scholars have already developed nuanced readings of gender, Islam, tradition and post-Soviet change. Following this, I opened a conversation between this Central Asian literature and with broader postcolonial feminist geographies of the Muslim world. This conversation, I argue, allows us to re-theorize the process of gendered subjectification in the post-Soviet Muslim South, and more generally in the Global South.

An engagement with theorizations of intersectionality and agency aids an understanding of the processes of gender subjectification. Here, I showed how these two concepts together provide a lens through which to understand how the coming into being of gender, and other categories of difference, such as age, class, generation, religion, were always produced by broader political economies and postcolonial histories. Men, women and children, however, are also all agents in the production, reproduction, and negotiation of these categories of difference. At the same time, a conversation between these two bodies of literature is also a way to 'provincialize' geographies of Muslim identities by engaging with concerns that are specific to the Muslim South and in particular the Muslim Global South. In this thesis, I particularly engage with issues related to politico-ecologic changes, the neoliberalization of economies and resources, and their local manifestations through men, women and children everyday work and resource struggles.

Finally, drawing on feminist labor geography, and feminist political ecology, I showed how theorizations of gender, work, resource struggles, and the body in a shifting politico-ecologic environment could construct more refined analyses of this process of gendered subjectification. Ultimately, such approaches enable us to observe the everyday lives of men, women, and children in the Muslim South, by engaging with ways of becoming beyond and along with religion. They also allow us to challenge culturalist readings by revealing the entanglements between the cultural, the economic, the ecologic, and the religious.

The following chapters draw and expand on this conceptual framework. Each chapter engages and takes further aspects developed in this chapter. While the following chapter (Chapter 3) focuses on my methodological approach, detailing the specific feminist postcolonial ethnographic approach adopted in this thesis, Chapter 4/Article 1 builds a

feminist postcolonial geography of the Soviet past. Chapter 5/ Article 2 delves further into questions of the relational construction of masculinities and femininities and their relationship with politico-ecologic changes. This chapter also adds to Central Asian readings of tradition and Islam by developing a politico-ecologic reading of notions of honor and shame in the extractive landscape of Kante. Chapter 6/Article 3 then explores women's embodied experiences of work in this context, focusing on women miners, and the way they experience but also resist their marginalization. Here, I particularly expand and draw on Mahmood's theorization of agency. Finally, Chapter 7/Article 4, focuses on children miners, and explores their labor as a site of intergenerational transmission of norms in a changing politico-ecologic environment. Together, these articles contribute to build a feminist postcolonial geography of work and resource struggles in Muslim Central Asia.

CHAPTER 3: A FEMINIST POSTCOLONIAL ETHNOGRAPHY AT THE MARGINS



Photograph 4: View of Kante from below

Introduction

This chapter delves into the particularities of my research design and methodological approach. It is organized into six sections. In the first section, I focus on the feminist epistemologies that underpin this research. I also introduce the feminist postcolonial ethnography and grounded theory methodological approaches adopted in this study. In a second section, I describe my case study, showing how the specific exploration of Kantegui lives, and its enrichment with other locations provides a localized and grounded reading of how neoliberal restructuring impacts localities in the Global South, focusing on the post-Soviet Muslim South. In the third section, I detail the more practical aspects of conducting this research by focusing on questions of access, living arrangements, language and ethics. The fourth section of this chapter expands on the ethnographic methods used in this thesis. I particularly discuss both the reasons why I used these methods and the main challenges I have encountered through their

application during fieldwork. A fifth section addresses questions of data analysis and writing. Finally, the last section of this article develops what I refer to as the 'feminist dilemmas' that occur while carrying out research. I first address issues of gender, race and positionality in cross-cultural research. I finally raise questions related to issues of representations of marginalized Muslim communities that have been central to the way I conducted my research and wrote this thesis.

Feminist postcolonial epistemologies, ethnography and grounded theory

Epistemologies

Situated in feminist and post-colonial epistemologies, this research seeks to uncover 'subjugated knowledge' (Hesse-Biber 2012, p.26). It particularly relies on Haraway (1988)'s conceptualization of knowledge as situated, partial and constructed. It also uses the margins as sites of 'epistemic privilege' (Harstock 1983) from which to understand how hegemonic power operates, and is negotiated (hooks 1989). While it calls for telling the lived experiences of the oppressed and the marginalized as a standpoint from which to both observe and reverse oppressive relations of power, it also advocates for an exploration of the broader socio-political, economic and environmental processes that construct lived experiences of oppression and marginalization (Harding 1987). Informed by feminist geographers' specific epistemological approaches, it is concerned with making visible the role of space, place, and their connections with broader scales in the construction as well as experience of oppression (Mcdowell 1982; Nagar et al. 2002; Marchand & Runyan 2000). The everyday and the intimate, from the locality to the home to the body, are all seen as spaces connected to broader scales, as well as sites of reconfiguration and transformations (Nagar et al. 2002; Katz 2001a; Katz 2001b). Lived and everyday experiences of marginalization in places reveal how the local is both constituted and constitutive of the global (bid). Through immersion in the everyday life of men, women and children in a village in Tajikistan, this dissertation simultaneously tells a unique story, as well as it contributes to building an alternative geography of Soviet, post-Soviet change, and global neoliberal transformation (Nagar et al. 2002; Katz 2001a)

Ethnography

A feminist postcolonial ethnography of women, men and children's lives was used in the field site to understand how people create and experience their worlds, as well as inhabit their social space (Delyser et al. 2010). First, feminist ethnography is a project committed to focus on marginality and power differentials at the intersection of gender, race, sexuality, nationality, and age; second, it acknowledges the way these power relations are imbricated with the process of carrying out research; and third, it produces scholarship that is politically committed to challenge the issues studied (Davis & Craven 2016)(Davis & Craven 2016)(Davis & Craven 2016)(Davis & Craven 2016). Drawing on feminist postcolonial theories (Mohanty et al. 1992; 1988; Abu-Lughod 1991; Abu-Lughod 2002) has allowed me to address contentions related to the dangers associated with the assumption of a universal women's experience, and the way it erases power differentials between 'self' and 'other', researcher and researched, during the ethnographic process (Schrock 2013).

Here, I follow Abu-Lughod's (1990; 2000; 2017) call for a feminist ethnography that recognizes difference in sameness and engages with the treatment, actions, feelings, and interactions of the ethnographer with the subjects of research as part of the production of knowledge. I develop a 'view from below' (hooks, 1989) that emphasizes the contextual and interpersonal character of knowledge, and is based on experiences within the realm of human agency and everyday reality (Ghosh 2012). At the same time, I draw on the gendered and racially embodied and emotional experience as a tool for research (Longhurst et al. 2008; Abu-lughod 2017). Underlying this research is also a commitment to an 'ethnography of the particular' (Abu-Lughod 2016) and a dedication to 'write against culture' (Abu-Lughod 1991) by resisting the conventional and caricatural representations of Muslim populations. Such a project aims at challenging ideas of culture as fixed, static, discrete, homogenous, and seeks to reveal the different positions through which people experience culture (Abu-Lughod 1991).

Grounded theory

In this thesis, I adopted a grounded theory approach to qualitative research (Charmaz et al. 2003). The process of data construction followed the idea that 'what is to be studied emerges from the analytic process over time rather than being designated a priori' (Clarke 2012, p.390). I utilized an inductive approach of going back and forth between data collection, coding, literature and analysis (Charmaz et al. 2003; 2008). This has allowed the discovery of topics of inquiry that emerged from fieldwork. While my initial

purpose was to study gender and informal activities, the socio-spatial marginalization of women miners, and child labor were themes that emerged due to the specificities of my field site. The study of children was added after my first fieldwork in Kante. Four themes emerged clearly during the process of fieldwork and came to define the structure of this thesis: (i) the historical construction of gendered exclusion; (ii) masculinities and broader politico-ecologic transformations that justify women's exclusion; (iii) the experience of women miners, and (iv) the transmission of gendered norms to younger generations through child labor. The specificities of my case study that lead to the exploration of these themes are detailed in the following section.

A Case-study at the margins

Tajikistan: recent history, political economy/ecology and Islam

Before entering into the description of my fieldsite, this section contextualizes the specificities of Tajikistan's recent history, political economy/ecology, and the extent of religious and secular change in the country. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Tajikistan entered into a civil war after the fall of the Soviet Union. This war initially opposed four main regional groups (the Khudjandi, the Kulobi, the Badakhshani and the Gharmi), which controlled different resources – cotton, drugs, and industries. The conflict has often been analysed as the result of tensions around means of production and resources, added to religious tensions. Two main groups ultimately formed during the war – a first group led by the former Tajik communist Party and Emomali Rahmon (the current president), and a second group forming the UTO and constituted of a new group of religious intellectuals (Dudoignon 1998; Nourzhanov and Bleuer 2003; Heathershaw 2009). The main objective of each group was mainly the question of material access to resources – including cotton, drugs, lands and industries (Dudoignon 1998). The conflict had dramatic material and demographic impacts on the country as already highlighted in Chapter 1. It also weakened the central control of the state and the economy (Nakaya 2009). During the war, commanders related to the government continued controlling various parts of resources and the state, occupying land, properties and state-owned enterprises by force (Nakaya 2009).

In 1996, the IFIs (International Finance Institutions) started macroeconomic assistance to Tajikistan: the World Bank and the IMF engaged into a process of deregulation and privatization of state-owned enterprises (Nayaka 2009). This process, instead of

denationalizing companies led to the reaffirmation of wartime elites' control over enterprises (Nakaya 2009). As Stephane Dudoignon (2004, pp133-134) mentions, privatization occurred 'in secrecy', and former commanders and armed groups took control over cotton, land, properties, apartments, shopping centres (Nakaya 2009). Meanwhile, Rahmon took advantage of the financial institutions' support in order to set up an institutional framework that would undermine its political opponents (Nakaya 2009). In addition, when the reform started leading to deficits, the government re-established control over finance and trade (Azimov 1997), illustrating Rahmon's conscious effort to reinstate personal control over income-generating industries (Nakaya 2009).

While the 1997 peace agreement was supposed to secure the power-sharing (see Chapter 1), Rahmon took advantage of the support of international organizations to further consolidate its power, and set up an 'oligarchic economic control' over resources (Nakaya 2009, p 266). This is evident in multiple aspects of the Tajikistani economy, starting with the cotton and broader agricultural sector (Nakaya 2009, Hofman and Visser 2014). Farm indivualization started in the 2000s as a pressure from international organizations and multilateral institutions (Hofman and Visser 2014, p 3). The privatization of land and agriculture, however, did not reach the initial hopes of these institutions. Rather, agrarian structures are today marked by, on one hand, highly fragmented individual farms, and on the other hand, large scale cotton farms controlled by elites. This process of land and agrarian reform has led to the large scale exclusion and dispossession of women (Behzadi 2015), like in other Central Asian countries (Kandiyoti 2002). Similarly the energy and aluminium sector remains largely controlled by Rahmon. The state owned enterprise TALCO resources is still a fully state-owned enterprise, the company is not governed by a board of directors and only reports to the Tajik President (Heathershaw 2011). The company has also been involved in multiple scandals of fraud and corruption (Heathershaw 2011).

This large degree of elite control and authoritarianism is also evident in other aspects of the economy. The Roghun Dam controversy and arrangements (Ito et al 2016; Ladjebaev 2010) for instance illustrates how denationalization-globalization, in Tajikistan, occurs in tandem with the centralization of power in the hands of elites (Heathershaw 2011). Construction of the dam began in the 1980s, during the Soviet times. At the end of the civil War, the Tajikistani government revived plans that had been halted during the war (Ito et al 2016). In 2005, the project restarted with the ambition to build the tallest dam in the world, supported by international investments

(Menga 2014). International organizations have, at several instances, stalled the construction process, driving attention to the transnational economic, environmental and social costs (Féaux de la Crois 2015). In 2009-2010, Rahmon, however, launched a campaign of forced share-buying among citizens (Féaux de la Croix 2015). State employees (teachers, nurses, students) were pressured to buy shares, sometimes to a value greater than an annual salary, resulting to disastrous economic consequences for families (Féaux de la Croix, 2015, Ibanez Tirado 2015).

This simultaneous opening to transnational actors and high control of the state is also visible in the development of mining. Central Asia, since the fall of the Soviet Union, has become the focus of the global mining industry (Kotilainen et al 2015). Tajikistan has a long history of extraction of gold, silver, coal, antimony, mercury and ore that can be traced back to Soviet developments (Kotilainen et al 2015). The contemporary period is however marked by new relationships between the state and the extractive resource industries (Heathershaw 2011, Kotilainen et al 2015). The heavy control of the state over administration and business remains an important characteristic of Tajikistan in the Central Asian landscape (Kotilainen et al 2015). At the same time, a feature of the local assemblage is the multinational composition of mining companies, with a growing role played by Chinese investments in the region (Kotilainen et al 2015). The Chinese play a particularly important role in the development of coal mining in the country (Bankwatch 2017), which has highly increased after independence. The government has allocated high financial support for the development of coal production since the early 2000s (Bankwatch 2017), and has created a favourable environment for international investment. Most of these mines are operated by joint ventures involving foreign actors, including the Chinese (Bankwatch 2017)[38].

The complexity of these economic transformations has led commentators to raise questions about the type of economy Tajikistan was moving towards - can we speak about a neoliberalizing Tajikistan, a country in transition to neoliberalism? Can we even speak about neoliberalism given the high control of elites and the state? Hofman and Visser (2014, p 5) write, for instance, about a transition from 'state socialism' to 'something else', highlighting how this something else remains undefined, or indefinable. Others reject the analyses of the Tajik state as a 'weak state that is suffering from a failure of leadership' formed solely around the president's power and interests (Heathershaw 2011). Heathershaw (2011) argues, for instance, that the Tajikistani state

[38] For a discussion of Chinese investments in Tajikistan, see Chapter 5/Article 2

is connected to broader globalization trends. For the author (2011, p 147), 'Tajikistan's official institutions, in cooperation of global actors from multinational corporations to donor agencies, have been incorporated within certain global economic and political assemblages'. Perhaps, rather than speaking of the failure of neoliberalism or its absence, one could analyse the Tajik case as one form of 'variegated capitalism' (Peck 2007) mixing forms of neoliberal capitalist development (through opening to transnational actors, global networks, private investments, aspects of financial deregulation), and an authoritarian controlling state. The exclusion of women from access to and ownership of land, the forced stock-buying in the Roghun Dam project, the transformation of remote villages into an extractive landscape where informal mining overlaps with Tajik-foreign industries, are all illustration of the specific forms taken by neoliberal development in Tajikistan.

The high level of authoritarianism is not limited to the economic aspects of Tajikistani post-Soviet developments. As already mentioned in Chapter 2, Emomali Rahmon has, since the peace treaty agreement in 1997, attempted to control the spread of political Islam, leading to the official banning of the IRPT in 2015. Rahmon's attitude towards Islam is, however, ambiguous (Cleuziou 2016): one the one hand, Tajikistan is a secular state and the president attempts to control a moderate, fundamentalist or internationalist Islam. On the other hand, he also defines what constitutes the right form of Islam for the Tajikistanis, leading to what some have interpreted as a form of renegotiation of the nation's secularism (Cleuziou 2016) This includes regularly participating to religious ceremonies, showing respect to the local Islam (Cleuziou 2016). Finally, the president has developed a complex discourse against what he sees as a foreign Islam, condemning religious extremism and wahabism (Cleuziou 2016). He forces Tajik students who study in Islamic universities to come back home, organise mass shavings of men in the streets (see Chapter 1), opposes the black hijab that he associates to prostitution in a speech given in 2015 (Rahmon 2015) and instead promotes the colourful Tajik *'rujmol'* that he associates to an authentic Tajik Islam (Miles 2015)

This high degree of control is reflected in everyday life in Tajikistan – through the constant reminders of the dangers of ISIS and extremism in local media (TV, newspapers), and the way men and women speak about their fear of their Muslim neighbours such as Afghanistan. As already highlighted in Chapter 1, the practice of Islam remains central to the life of the Tajikistanis. While this research does not focus per se on signs of religious piety or religious practices nor on political Islam, it takes the

way men, women and children express their Muslimness in this political context as a central element of analysis. The following chapters will particularly highlight how being a Muslim is imbricated with other aspects of everyday life such as everyday gendered work practices, school, marriage, in the specific area where the research was carried out. At the same time, rather than investigating the institutions and/or politics of Islam, this research is interested in the mundane ways through which Muslimness is lived in this broader shifting politico-ecologic environment. [39]

A local reading of (post)-Soviet change: Kante and Sarvoda



Photograph 5: First visit to Kante with Christine Oriol

First time in Kante

> *I visited the village of Kante for the first time in September 2014. Christine Oriol, a French development consultant whom I met in my first weeks in Dushanbe, and who became one of my main key informants, had offered to take me to Pinion, one of Kante's neighbouring villages, where she had lived in 2013 to assess whether it could become an interesting site for my research. Christine, a Rural Development Coordinator and Climate change specialist for the NGO GERES, had lived in Pinion for one year whilst she was running a rural development project in the area in*

[39] For data on Islam in Tajikistan, see Chapter 1

2013. We spoke to men and women in the streets and drank tea with her former host family. Before leaving Pinion, Christine asked if we could stop by her friend's place, Afsar, up the mountain in Kante. She had met Afsar a year before on a day when she was walking in the mountains on her own. Afsar spoke good Russian as he was going back and forth between Kante and Irkutsk at Lake Baikal, and wanted to practice his Russian with Christine, so they became friends. As she was leading me through the sinuous dirt roads up the mountains, Christine also remembered a time when Afsar phoned her a long while ago. 'It was late at night. He wanted to get drunk', she said. 'He was crushed. He could not handle it anymore. Life was too hard. He was about to leave for Russia again. He just wanted to forget'.

Out of breath, we finally arrived at the first house in Kante. An old rusty gate still displayed two carved stars[40]*, remnants from the Soviet past and the former tobacco kolkhoz (collective farm) Kante was part of before 1991. In Sarvoda, eight kilometres down the mountain from the village, vestiges of Soviet times, including old ruins and old Soviet blocks, recalled a distant past. We slowly continued to walk towards Afsar's family home. The doors were all shut and the house remained silent. When Christine announced herself, Firoza, Afsar's sister-in-law, ran out. She promptly put her shoes on and rearranged her headscarf. She greeted Christine warmly, invited us into the guest room where a tablecloth* ('dastarkhan')[41] *was spread on the ground covered with all sorts of food, which signalled a recent family social event. Afsar's mother had just passed away, as we later learnt. Afsar's youngest brother and Firoza's husband – Morad - joined us in the room, followed by Afsar and Morad's father. We all sat around the tablecloth.*

Afsar did not live in his father's house anymore. He had made enough money in Russia to build his own house far up in the village.

His father said, 'Afsar used to work in his own coal gallery. He was making good money, but when the Chinese arrived, he had to leave it' (…). I told him don't go back to Russia, your mother is sick, and you won't leave your wife and children up there in the house on their own, your wife is going to get scared(…). Now look, his mother is dead, and he is coming back tomorrow. He is going to stay in the village now, he won't go back to Russia'.

[40] See photograph 5

[41] See photograph 6

Morad, Afsar's brother, interrupted their father: 'he is working for the Chinese now! Working with the Chinese is bad (vayroon). *They are not good people (…). They don't have any education, they did not even have toilets, we had to build toilets for them! They used to give us chopsticks to eat, but we did not know how to eat with chopsticks!'*

The same evening, Christine and I left the village without seeing Afsar. However, we came back the day after, hoping to finally meet him. We started walking up the dirt and rocky roads to reach Afsar, his wife Manzilla, and their three children's newly built house - 'the last one of the village' said his father the day before. On the way to their house, we saw a group of young boys, coming down the mountains on donkeys, loaded with bags[42]*. Afsar's brother was with us, I asked who were these young boys. ' They just went to coal* (komor), *added Morad.*

This first encounter with Afsar, Manzilla and their three children, suddenly added another perspective to the multiple livelihoods that men engaged with in Kante since the fall of the Soviet Union: 'I don't really want to go back to Russia' said Afsar 'I'm here now, I want to stay with the family'. When I said that I was French, Afsar got excited about the idea of me supporting the school 'You could stay here, and teach' he said. One week later, I set up in the village, became the new French teacher (Mohalemaye Fransozi) *in the local school.*

[42] See photograph 7



Photograph 6: Table cloth set up for celebration



Photograph 7: Young boys coming down the mountain with coal bags on donkeys

This vignette retrospectively tells the story of my first visit to Kante and touches on the multiple reasons that led to the selection of Kante and the neighboring town Sarvoda as my field sites. It reveals how everyday life and the memories of the Soviet past in Kante

and Sarvoda blur the boundaries between the mundane and the unusual, the ordinary and the extraordinary, and have the potential to rewrite local narratives of Soviet and post-Soviet broader scales development.

The physical and spatial remoteness of Kante is one of the first elements that captures the attention. The village of Kante[43] is located on a hillside in the Fann Moutains in the country's northern Sughd Province, and has approximately 1500 inhabitants. It is eight kilometres from the nearest town of Sarvoda, which is connected to Kante via two dirt roads and is 130 kilometres from the capital Dushanbe. However, to reach Sarvoda on the M34 highway, which connects the Tajik capital to the country's second largest city Khujand, one has to go through the five kilometre long Anzob tunnel that is often popularly called 'the Tunnel of Death'. Although the tunnel was officially opened for the first time in 2006, it is still permanently under construction. Constantly flooded, the tunnel has no ventilation, and is scattered with potholes and construction machines, but circulation is still permitted. When considered impassable, the tunnel is sometimes closed for weeks. The alternative route to reach the Northern part of the country adds at least another four hours to the journey, and passing over the Anzob pass at 3.372 metres above sea level. Narrow and muddy, the pass is closed during winter, and has a reputation as one of the most dangerous routes in Tajikistan.



Map 1: Tajikistan with main research sites

[43] See Map 1 and Map 2

Histories and political-ecologies

Despite its remoteness, Kante is deeply marked by the former Soviet presence. Kante's history of collectivization still animates the village and makes it a typical illustration of development in Soviet Tajikistan, as well as an engaging site to investigate women's lived memories of modernization under Soviet rule. Kante was part of a *kolkhoz* (collective farm) consisting of six neighboring villages. The Abolqāsem Lahūtī *kolkhoz* was named after the Persian communist poet and political activist involved in Iran during the Persian Constitutional Revolution, and in Tajikistan in the early Soviet era. Like in the rest of the country, land around Kante was collectivized in the early 1930s. This period of forced collectivization was accompanied by an interdiction for men and women to practice their faith in public[44]. It is also when the *kolkhoz* Lahuti was formed in order to produce tobacco for the center. Members of the *kolkhoz* were also involved in livestock farming, and the production of staple foods (wheat, potatoes). Whilst women were mainly working in the *kolkhoz*, men in the village were mainly working in the 'Anzob combinat', a mercury, antimony, and later coal mine that opened in 1937, and whose headquarters were first based around Sarvoda. The town of Sarvoda was constructed to shelter workers and engineers of the enterprise *('combinat'),* including those coming from Russia and other Soviet Socialist Republics.

Today, Kantegui's everyday lives and their working practices reflect broader trends in the country, making of this village an illustration of post-Soviet change in Tajikistan, and in Central Asia. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to the dismantlement of the collective farm. Tobacco fields were abandoned, and land started being used for the production of subsistence crops (wheat, potatoes, carrots, tomatoes, fruits). Commercial agriculture is marginal today, and villagers only sporadically sell their surplus at the market in Sarvoda. Water shortages were signaled as the main reason for the disinvestment of commercial agriculture in the village. After the end of Soviet rule, men started migrating immediately like many across Tajikistan and Central Asia generally. Seasonal migration became the most important livelihood strategy in the village. Most men in the village have migrated or will one day migrate to Russia for work, mainly on construction sites. They usually go to the Kamtchatka peninsula, where one man in the

[44] The historical data in this interview is based on the oral history interviews carried out, in particular with the village's history teacher

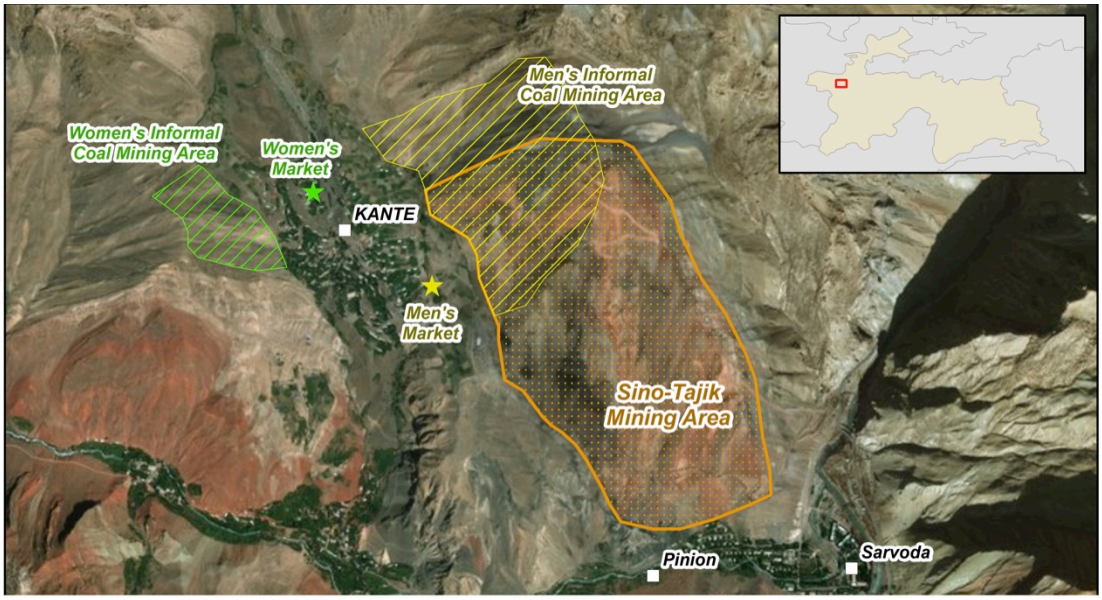
village started a fishing boat in the 1990s, or to Irkustk, Sverdlovsk, or Moscow. Pervasive unemployment and male labor migration paralleled a retrenchment of women towards the home in the village.

Specific and extraordinary events make also of Kante a unique site, and exert to open wider and urgent questions that also reflect the types of resource and gendered struggles that occur in places in the Global South, as a result of global politico-environmental shifts and the neoliberalization of resources. Coal is the distinctive element of life in Kante - the whole village lies on a reserve. During Soviet times, households were provided with coal by the center to warm their houses. Russian engineers had identified the coal potential of Kante and set up in the village between 1950-1958, and in 1979-1989, but did not start exploitation in the village. After the end of the Soviet Union, supplies ended, and households started digging their own galleries and extracting coal in order to warm their houses and cook. In the past ten years however, an informal market has started to become significant in the village. Truck drivers started coming to the village to buy and then resell coal on informal markets all over the country. Conflicts between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, however, transformed the exploitation of the natural resource in the whole country and the village. With Uzbekistan closing the taps that were providing the country with gas in 2013, the whole country turned to the production of coal. In 2013, a Sino-Tajik concession (TALCO Resources) set up in the village and started exploiting coal through an open pit mine in the small South-Eastern slope of the mountain encroaching on the artisanal mining territory[45]. This legal mine now employs around 300 men from the village of Kante, the town of Sarvoda, and from neighboring villages.

Mining in the village is socio-spatially organized along gendered lines – the informal mining area in the village (where around 500 men work) is the most important mining site for extraction. Hidden in the mountains, there is an exclusively female informal mining area where nineteen women mine everyday. Coal is harder to extract there, the informal market smaller, and the site is inaccessible during the winter months when the road that leads up to it freezes. The women miners hide to perform what the community perceives as a shameful activity. Children also work in mining from the age of five (around 200 children) mainly with men, but sometimes with women. They usually work with a relative and lead the donkey whilst an adult extracts coal from the gallery with a pickaxe. Women and children's involvement in informal mining in Kante may appear as

[45] See Map 2

a marginal, or even anecdotal phenomenon. However, it reflects widespread practices all around the world, their prevalence in situations of economic desolation, and their increase with emergent forms of capitalism in the Global South (Abebe 2009; Hilson 2010a)



Map 2: Informal and formal mining areas in Kante

Histories from the cotton fields: *Kaftorkhona* and the Southern plains

This research is based on the contemporary and historical in-depth case study of Kante and Sarvoda and is complemented by narratives of former Soviet women workers from other former *kolkhoz* in the country gathered by myself during several trips in 2014-2015 and by Lucia Direnberger. This data was mainly used to complement the case-study of Kante and the neighboring town of Sarvoda with other historically grounded data in places that reflected Soviet development in the country, and in particular women workers' histories. One objective is to ensure that knowledge produced through the historical analysis of Kante and Sarvoda is also reflective of broader historical trends in the country. These (hi)stories of cotton fields in the Southern plains of Tajikistan have mainly been used for Chapter 4 / Article 1 of this thesis, which examines the history of work in Tajikistan and in particular the narratives of work heroines[46] in the country.

[46] During the Soviet times (starting with the Stalinist period), men and women were promoted by the system as shock workers, work heroes and heroines. In Tajikistan, the women who were promoted were called advanced ('Pishqadam').

'Cottonization' (Nourzhanov & Bleuer 2013, p.67) was one of the central tenets of Soviet modernization in Central Asia and Tajikistan in particular. Following the Soviet tradition of concentration and monopoly production, emphasis was put in all Central Asia and Tajikistan on cotton production. Kaftorkhona is a product of the forced collectivization of the 1930s and the displacement of people from the hills and Northern mountains that occurred in Tajikistan to work in cotton fields (Nourzhanov & Bleuer 2013; Dudoignon & Noack 2014). Stories of Soviet women workers there hence illustrate the way work was organized in the main agricultural activity of the country.

In Chapter 4 / Article 1, I focus on the village of Kaftorkhona[47] where I carried out ethnographic research in 2012 (Behzadi 2012). I visited this village several times in 2014-15. This village is situated in the Southern plains of the Khathlon Province, 15 km from the city of Kulob, and is one of seven villages that was organized into the 'Karl Marx' cotton *kolkhoz* in the early 1930s. The same chapter also draws on three women workers'life history interviews collected by Lucia Lucia Direnberger (Graduate institute, Geneva) in the Kulob province around the towns of Vakhsh and Sharitus in 2011-2012[48] . These three women were all Soviet 'work heroines' who were working in cotton *kolkhoz* in this region. They were all directors of a *kolkhoz*, and one of them even was a Deputy of the Supreme Soviet[49]. While parts of this thesis draw on data collected by Direnberger, most of it is based on my own long-term involvement in the different sites described above. The following section details some of the practical aspects surrounding life in the field and research in Kante, Sarvoda, and Kaftorkhona, with regular visits to Dushanbe.

Conducting research in Tajikistan: access, everyday life, language, and ethics

Access

As mentioned in the introduction to my case-study, access to Kante was obtained through an NGO worker who had lived in a neighboring village in 2013. Christine Oriol was a recognized figure in the village of Kante, whose work in agriculture had been

[47] See Figure 1, map of the different research sites in Tajikistan

[48] For confidentiality reasons, Lucia Direnberger specifically asked not to refer to the specific names or locations of these kolkhoz. These life histories gathered by Lucia Direnberger focus (amongst others) on sensitive questions on gender based violence for her own research.

[49] The Supreme Soviet of the Tajik SSR was the main legislative institution of the Tajik SSR.

greatly appreciated. She was known for her language skills – both in Tajiki and Russian, and for her openness to the local ways of life. Having worked as a shepherd in the French Alps before coming to Tajikistan, she was also known for her lonely trips to the mountains and had impressed villagers with her capacity to find her way. Her introductions in the village contributed to building trust with Kantegui villagers. Christine also introduced me to Adiba Aliemova, who was working for the NGO GERES in Sarvoda as an administrative assistant and a translator. Adiba who lived in Sarvoda and spoke fluent English, Russian, and Tajiki, acted as a key informant in the town, and in some instances as a translator. In Kaftorkhona, I initially gained access the first time in 2012 for my Masters research (Behzadi 2012) through the NGO Oxfam who had an agriculture and gender program in the village. During my fieldwork in 2014-15 however, I directly contacted my former hostess in the village. She acted as my key informant and introduced me to many interviewees.

During my second field trip, my access to the field was however denied and I was forced to leave Tajikistan with only two days' notice on March 9, 2015. I only managed to get back to Tajikistan on May 10, 2015 for a third trip. All foreign visitors who go to Tajikistan with a non-tourist visa or who visit for longer than 30 days must register at the migration offices (OVIR) within 3 days of arrival in the country. When I went to the OVIR for my registration, the official refused to register me and asked for an additional letter of invitation from the Slavonic-Russian Tajik University that had issued such a letter in the first place. Even though I got in touch with my initial contact at the university, they refused to write a second letter and eventually withdrew all support. The contact also asked me to pay $10,000 if I wanted to stay in the country without further complications (according to the contact, $10,000 correspond to what foreign students are expected to pay to study at the university). I reported the issues to the French embassy and was asked to leave the country in emergency in March 2015. This expulsion meant that I lost extensive time to conduct research in the following months.

Cases of support withdrawal for researchers in the post-Soviet space are common. One case of arrest was reported in Tajikistan in June 2014 which targeted a Tajik national (Alexander Sodiqov). Dr John Heathershaw, chair of a taskforce at the Central Eurasian Studies Society that considers political risk and safety in fieldwork since the arrest of Alexander Sodiqov, has analyzed my situation as 'one of many cases of bureaucratic or political trouble or violence against researchers for political reasons in Tajikistan over

the last few years'[50]. This incident also coincided with the controversial parliamentary elections in Tajikistan in February 2015.

Living arrangements and relationships

I lived in two different places in Kante, and with two different families. I first stayed with Afsar, Manzilla and their three children until December 2014[51]. From February 2015 onwards, I lived with another family, neighbors of Afsar and Manzilla, who were also part of the same extended family (*avlod*) – Gulnaz, Tora and their three children. The main reason for changing my living arrangements was that Afsar and Manzilla's house was constituted of only one single room which I shared with the couple and their children. These living arrangements had initially been helpful for creating strong bonds and proximity, yet my decision to move was motivated by a desire to leave privacy to the family.

My time in the village was interrupted by regular trips to Dushanbe, the capital city, the city of Sarvoda, and Kaftorkhona. When in Sarvoda, I lived with Adiba. Her multiple contacts in Sarvoda facilitated interviews in the city, and in particular life history interviews with men and women who had experienced the last decades of Soviet rule and the fall of the Soviet Union. My stays with Adiba, a Tajik widow, were also an opportunity to learn more about the differences between village life, urban life, different socio-marital arrangements, and age, relating to constructions of femininity. During my trips to Kaftorkhona, I mainly stayed with my host family that had already welcomed me during my Masters research in July 2012. Similarly, the strong ties built with this family gave me the chance to conduct interviews with women in the village.

When in Dushanbe, I stayed with Véronique Geoffroy, a French diplomat for the European Commission working on development and health programmes. Through my connection with Véronique, I also met a large number of development and international organization representatives and entered into multiple informal discussions about questions of gender, development, as well as child labor in Tajikistan. These contacts have also given me the opportunity to disseminate my research more widely in Tajikistan, especially in policy circles, for Unicef, and for the University of Central Asia.

[50] Email exchange with Prof Heathershaw February 2015

[51] See Photograph 8 of Afsar and Manzilla's house in the village (my first hosts'house)



Photograph 8: Photo of my hosts (Afsar and Manzilla)'s house

Language: communicating with the researched

My research in Kante, Sarvoda, and Kaftorkhona has mostly been conducted in *Tajiki*, a variety of the Persian language, close to the *Farsi* spoken in Iran, but written with the Cyrillic alphabet. As a French national who was born in Iran, I learned Farsi from a young age. Before embarking on fieldwork, I taught myself the Cyrillic alphabet in order to be able to read and understand texts. In some instances, language differences between Farsi and the Tajiki constituted barriers to communication. However, these differences were sometimes enriching, and lead to better capture the meaning given by men and women to particular terms. As I had already identified in my research in 2012 (Behzadi 2012), language differences often constitute an opportunity to open a dialogue in order to deconstruct hegemonic terms (MacLean 2012). Delving into the local meanings of honor (*namus*) and shame (*sharm/ayb*) has for instance constituted a chance to make visible the underlying and localized gendered norms that often remain hidden. This in turn, allowed me to ground theory in the everyday lives of men, women and children in Tajikistan.

My lack of knowledge of Russian also played an interesting role in research. Men in rural areas of Tajikistan, speak both Russian and Tajiki, whilst women mostly speak Tajiki. Knowing Russian often appears as a sign of openness, education and cosmopolitanism. While Russian-speaking researchers in Tajikistan, even females, have traditionally more access to men than women, my situation put me in the reverse position. I was spontaneously associated with women's sphere, partly because of my language skills. In some instances, I also interacted with men and women who did not speak Tajiki – this included discussions, and interviews with Russian speaking men and women, and or the Chinese mine manager in the village of Kante. For all these interviews, Adiba, who spoke English, Russian and Tajiki fluently, accompanied me. Adiba translated the interviews in Russian in Sarvoda. The Tajik official translator for the Sino-Tajik mine translated the interview that I had carried out with the Sino-Tajik mine manager.

Ethics

I followed Oxford University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) guidelines, drawing in particular on the professional guidelines from the Association of the Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth[52], as they best reflected the specific concerns that are usually raised during long-term ethnographic, cross-cultural research abroad, with immense power differences between researcher and the researched. Ethical questions were present throughout the research design – from the selection of my topic to questions of access, during the actual conduct of fieldwork, but also through the interpretation of data and analysis.

The choice of my topic and field sites, in particular, raised several ethical issues. The first one revolved around questions of illegality. Both child labor and artisanal mining were illegal practices at the time when I carried out research. This raised two major ethical issues – the first one revolved around my relationship with the Tajik authorities, while the second concerned my relationship with research participants. With regards to the Tajik authorities, I decided to keep a degree of opacity with regards to my topic in order to be able to undertake this research. With regards to my research participants, the issue of illegality entailed being particularly sensitive to participant's desires to remain entirely anonymous, and respect their desire to remain silent in some instances. I have as much as possible tried to avoid intruding into people's lives.

[52] https://www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.shtml

The next two sections will deal separately with the other ethical issues that arose during different phases of the research. In particular, I detail the set of ethnographic methods used during fieldwork, and discuss the challenges this entailed (including ethical questions), and the way I responded to each of them. I apply this same order in the section that follows the description of my methods, by engaging with the ethics around writing and dissemination. Finally, the last section of this chapter focuses on the research-related 'feminist dilemmas' that accrue from my fieldwork, and elaborates on particular ethical issues and questions of positionality.

Ethnographic methods in a feminist postcolonial vein

Ethnographic field methods were chosen in order to reflect the feminist commitments of this research. The personal involvement in people's everyday life that ethnographic methods entail, gave me a thorough insight into the way people interpret their world (Hoggart et al. 2002). Through immersion, ethnographic methods allowed me to lessen the power imbalance between researcher and the researched, and to even create a more collaborative form of data collection. In this section, I describe each of the methods chosen, their purpose and the way they allowed me to answer the specific questions raised by this research. I also draw out their specific limitations by showing how my own positionality influenced their use.

Participant observation: 'lived, sensed and emotional worlds'

Method

Participant observation was chosen for the capacity it offers to understand the 'lived, sensed, experienced and emotional worlds' (Delyser et al. 2010, p.129) of the participants, and the insight it can give in the way gender, intersecting with age, sexuality, and class, socially and spatially organizes people's everyday lives. Through engagement with the everyday lives of the researched, I also aimed to reduce, as far as possible, the distance between researcher and the researched. Through the eight months spent in Kante, I became part of the community in multiple ways.

My position at school allowed me to gain a social position that went beyond my role as a researcher. I was the 'village French teacher' *(mohalema),* as men, women and children called me. This position enabled me to gain trust and to be invited in multiple community settings – including weddings, and circumcision ceremonies *(tui).* This

position also gave me insights on the impact of work in mines on children's everyday lives, and allowed me to create a personal relationship with those children.

Living with two families allowed me to develop privileged relationships with members of these two households (both parents and children). In addition to the understanding of intra-household gendered and intergenerational relationships that this setting offered, it also allowed me to gain access to these two families' broader extended family[53] *(avlod*) and to be considered as attached to this broader family, and respected. This relationship allowed me also to regularly visit the mines (both the Sino-Tajik mine and the artisanal mines) with family's members (including children) who were working there. It finally opened multiple intimate and informal discussions with my hosts that allowed me to get an understanding of hidden aspects of life in the village, rumors, including the stigmatization of women miners, and the existence of the women's mining area. The intimate settings of the household also opened discussions on aspects related to sex/sexuality with women, and differences between 'other' and 'self', 'us' and 'them'. These discussions touched on multiple and sometimes intimate themes – including body care, sexuality, differences in terms of reproductive care and intergenerational support for the elderly, women's life choices, intra-marital relationships, gendered employment opportunities, and children's duties.

The spatial location of my two households also enabled me to discover women's mining areas that would have probably left unknown if I had lived elsewhere. These two houses were situated at the far end of the village in close proximity to the hidden mining area. This geographical location led me to walk by the mine every morning to go to school down the village, to see women miners on an everyday basis, speak to truck drivers, and notice the different activities between younger and older women. Even though I noticed and inquired about this activity early on after my arrival in the village in 2014, women miners usually denied any involvement for a long time and systematically refused to be interviewed about it. They also refused to be accompanied into the mines for fear of being denounced to the police, but also due to the stigma and shame, which that space and work carried.

My long-term presence and involvement in the community was conducive to gaining trust and to building strong personal relationships that gave women miners space to share the details of their involvement in 'illegal' activities, as well as their most intimate experiences of stigmatization. The fact that I returned to the village in February 2015

[53] The two families were part of the same extended family

was first seen as a sign of commitment to the village. In addition, trust of the youngest women miners was particularly gained through friendships and recognition of our 'sameness'. Like them, I was perceived as a single woman, who worked, was mobile, and who has had multiple lovers in her life. With time, the most stigmatized women miners became friends and were willing to tell their stories to a broader audience, as long as 'their husbands' and 'other men in the village' would never hear about their intimate lives. This is the case, for instance, for Nadirah and Sayebeh whose words are at the heart of chapter 6/Article 3 of this thesis.

Challenges

My own positionality in these settings presented ethical challenges. First, as a teacher in the village school I was in a figure of authority which, in some instances, appeared as a problem, and had a particular impact on my relationship with village children. My interest in mining was known to both adults and children in the village. To gain my attention and interest, children were particularly eager to share their experiences, and did not fear my disapproval. However, sometimes I observed that children who did not want to share their experiences felt obliged to do so, because of my position as a teacher. Therefore, in these situations I always made sure to gently withdraw instead and ensure that those children were talking to me under pressure. This entailed for instance taking consent as an on-going process of back and forth with children themselves and parents, rather than a prior agreement (Morrow 2008; Skelton 2008).

But my position as a schoolteacher also impacted my relationship with adults. While most of the villagers expressed their gratitude for my voluntary work in the school, male and female teachers appeared to be more suspicious of my presence. My level of education, affiliation to the University of Oxford, my situation of financial privilege, and my mobility were sometimes considered as threatening. This appeared clearly through the recurrent questions about the reasons why I would work for free in the school, and the way I was funding myself. One of the male schoolteachers once expressed his disapproval of my presence in the village. He threatened to 'cut my ear' if I was not coming back to the village with money to give to the Kantegui after the end of my research. He also shared details of his life choices, including how his refusal to work for the police during Soviet times had lead him to get 'stuck' in a life he disliked as a teacher in Kante. Unlike me, who 'had it all'; he, 'had nothing'.

The use of my own embodied and emotional experience as a tool for research (Longhurst et al. 2008; McMorran 2012) also produced more specific challenges. The

friendships I built with women miners in particular were sometimes considered suspicious. Some villagers insinuated that I myself was becoming a a miner *(komorkesh),* implying that I should also be put in the same social category in the village. At the same time, my awareness of bridging gendered norms and trespassing during my fieldwork was used as a tool for research (Cresswell 1996) – the bridging of norms was in fact used as a way to make these norms visible. At the same time, the bridging of some norms of appropriate femininity also put me in uncomfortable situations and lead me to what I have referred to as a feminist dilemma[54]. I expand upon these specific issues in the last section of this chapter.

In-depth semi structured interviews

Participant observation in Kante was complemented by in-depth semi-structured interviews. This specific type of interviews was used for the flexibility it offers in the way issues are addressed and the openness it leaves for participants to engage with different themes that are of importance to them (Hoggart et al. 2002). In that sense, it also seemed suitable to the objective of giving voice to the researched that is central to this project. I conducted different types of semi-structured interviews with different participants: (i) first life/oral histories in Kante, Sarvoda, and Kaftorkhona[55]; (ii) second, work life interviews with women and men in Kante; and (iii) third, interviews with children and young people.

Life/Oral histories[56] with men and women in Kante, Sarvoda, and in the Southern former cotton kolhozes

Because oral life histories allow researchers to uncover hidden historio-geographies and place-based lived memories, it was deemed a suitable method for investigating the lived experiences of women work during Soviet times from the standpoint of marginalized voices (Hay 2010; Roets & Goedgeluck 2007; Perks & Thomson 2016; Sangster 1994; Berger 2013; Jackson & Russel 2010). Feminists in particular have argued for a use of oral history as a way to recover the experiences of those, such as women, whose lives are in in danger of being 'hidden from history' (Berger & Patai 1991; Perks & Thomson 2016; Sangster 1994; Kamp 2006)). In the context of the present study, this method was

[54] In this section, I will discuss questions related to my gendered, racial positionality in the village, and questions of negotiating distance/proximity with the researched.

[55] These oral histories were complemented by data gathered by Dr Lucia Direnberger, and in particular three interviews in Sharituz and Vasht with former *kolkhoz* workers.

[56] See Photograph 9

used in order to challenge the rarity of historical accounts of women's lives in Soviet Tajikistan, and to record the voices that may easily be forgotten (Kamp 2006). These (hi)stories were a means to record aspects of social life that are often omitted from conventional historical written record (Jackson & Russel 2010). This objective is also in line with postcolonial concerns to make visible and readable voices that are traditionally erased from academic accounts (Lewis & Mills 2013; Spivak 1988)

Oral history is hence more than a method to 'fill the blanks' of traditional ways of recording history (Sangster 1994, p.7). Whilst issues of forgetting, lying, exaggerating, can be raised as one of the limitations of the oral history method, I advocate here along feminist oral historians that there is no such thing as one truth to be retrieved, but multiple truths, always situated, always mediated (Sangster 1994). Building a 'history from below' (Jackson & Russel 2010, p.172) entails interrogating how memory is constructed by the researcher and through a narrative that may reflect more how people see themselves and how they wish to be seen. It is also the expression of ideologies, shaped by gender, race, and class. Because this research aimed precisely to unravel the way these ideologies and categories were both constructed and lived, oral history became particularly useful for the objective of examining Soviet women's lives in Tajikistan.

Overall, I carried out thirty-eight oral history interviews with men and women between the ages of forty-one to eighty-three, amongst whom were eleven men and twenty-seven women[57]. Nineteen oral history interviews were carried out in the village of Kante, five in the village of Kaftorkhona, seven in Sarvoda, and one in Dijigrout[58]. Among the women interviewed, five were of *pishqadam* (advanced women/work heroins) in the former *kolkhoz* that Kante was part of, and in the former *kolkhoz* which Katorkhona was part of. This data was used in chapter 4/Article 1 and complemented by the three interviews of *pishqadam* women in the Khatlon province that were carried out by Lucia Direnberger.

The selection of participants reflected my concern with recording narrative accounts of the life and work of men and women, who were socialized during Soviet times, and in

[57] Among the women interviewee, six were also older women miners, and three interviews were carried out by Lucia Direnberger in the region of Khatlon

[58] Small village on the way to Sarvoda where the headquarter of the Anzob Combinat set up in the early 1930s before moving closer to Sarvoda. The first Russians working for the combinat settled in Dijigrout

particular the narrative of the elderly whose stories were in danger of being forgotten (older men and women in their seventies and eighties). These interviews, which sometimes lasted several hours, focused on experiences of work during the Soviet times in the *kolkhoz* and industries, as well as the gendered, intergenerational and racial division of labor and its spatial aspects that were dominant then. Further, this provided crucial insights on the perceptions and experiences of change after the fall of the Soviet Union. Interview with the mullah of the area in Sarvoda, and the history teacher in Kante gave me an understanding of the history of Islam in the village and small town. Often, these interviews were illustrated by thorough descriptions of photos from Soviet times, by old communist party cards, Soviet medals, and other personal documents. This material was often used for illustration during our conversations. Photos also often revealed the sharp contrast between past and present ways of life.

I encountered multiple challenges during these interviews. In addition to issues of forgetting, or hearing, one must acknowledge the fact that life stories are inherently relational and dependent upon the temporal and socio-spatial context of their narration, as well as the identity of interviewees (Jackson & Russell 2010). The process of narration itself which sometimes tells more about how the narrator sees him/herself and how (s)he wishes to be seen. It is fair to assume that my interest in coal and women may have influenced the way people presented their own histories during interviews, and emphasized some elements to the detriment of others.



Photograph 9: Oral history interview in the village of Kante

Work-life interviews with men and women in Kante

In order to explore the changing work lives and resource struggles men and women have experienced since the demise of Soviet rule, I undertook forty-two interviews with men and women miners and non-miners in Kante. I selected interviewees in order to reflect the diversity of gendered livelihoods occupied by men and women. This entailed interviewing both men and women from a diversity of age ranges, and occupations.

The men I interviewed either worked in the formal Sino-Tajik mine as wage laborers, came back from seasonal migration to Russia, worked in the informal mines, or earned their livelihoods as shepherds. Some men also worked for industries in the Southern city of Kulob or in the Northern city of Penjikent. Interviews with men revolved around their embodied experiences of migration, work in the illegal mines, and work and conflicts with the Sino-Tajik mine. Moreover, we discussed questions related to 'appropriate' work for women and children. I encountered several challenges in carrying out these interviews. Whereas having contact with men who were part of the extended family of my hosts were relatively unproblematic and fluid, my relationship with men who were *not* part of these family circles was much more challenging. This entailed getting many refusals from men to be interviewed[59].

Women who did not work in the mines similarly represented a wide range of occupations, age, and socio-marital categories. I particularly selected women interviewees in order to reflect this diversity – wives of women working in the informal mines but themselves housewives *(khanechin)*, wives of informal miners who were also housewives. I also interviewed women who had been divorced and decided to live with their families again, 'left-behind' women who were living with in-laws and whose husbands were in Russia, widows, and women who had never been married. These interviews were usually fluid exploratory, open, and took place in people's homes, sometimes involving several participants at once.

Interviews with women miners were more challenging. Nineteen women miners were identified in the village[60]. Interviews with women miners focused on their embodied experiences of mining, their experience of stigmatization, and their socio-marital histories. Six of them were older women in their forties that I also interviewed in order to learn about their experiences of the Soviet past. Six of them were daughters-in-law

[59] See next section for details on my positionality

[60] See Chapter 6 / Article 3 for more information about the different categories of women miners

(kelins) of the older women, often in their early twenties. The other six women were in their late twenties or thirties and the most difficult to interview. It is only during my second fieldwork in Kante that they accepted to speak to me.[61]. This difficulty in getting access to women miners constituted one of the main ethical challenge of my fieldwork. I respected their decision not to be interviewed in the first months of fieldwork despite the obvious frustration this caused. However, my long-term presence in the field ultimately allowed me to overcome these initial barriers of trust.

Interviews with children and young people in Kante

Twenty-two children and youth were interviewed during the research period – nine male, and thirteen female aged between five an eighteen (five children between five and nine, five children between ten and twelve, eight young people between thirteen and fifteen, and four between fifteen and eighteen). These interviews focused on children's work history, on their embodied feelings in relation to the experience of mining, on the relationship between their work in mines and school, on the division of labor within their families, on their aspirations and future desires in terms of employment, and more generally on gendered roles and responsibilities. These interviews were complemented by informal discussions or interviews when possible with primary care givers (either parents or grand parents) about the reasons they put their children into work, and their perception of child labor.

Interviews with children raised major challenges[62] related to carrying out research with vulnerable participants (Valentine et al. 2001; Skelton et al. 2017; Morrow 2008). The main issue that I encountered was my position of authority as a village teacher for young children[63]. The second issue was related to younger women adolescents who were mining and whose work was highly stigmatized. Their position of vulnerability led to specific challenges in terms of consent, respect of their privacy, and psychological harm. In order to negotiate these issues, I have been particularly careful to consider consent as an ongoing process (Morrow 2008).

[61] For analysis of lies, evasions, and aggressive responses experienced and their meaning, see Chapter 6 / Article 3

[62] Challenges are detailed in Chapter 7/ Article 4

[63] See section on participant observation

Rumors, lies, silences, laughter

Rumors, lies, evasions, silences, but also laughter, and giggles were used in order to understand the experience of women's stigmatization. Women's refusal to be interviewed and their aggressiveness were interpreted as ways to cope with stigma in the village and protect themselves. Rumours were used to understand the way social shame constructed women's experiences of exclusion. Similarly, laughter, giggles, but also the tone employed by women and men in their speech, was also approached as a way to see through the emotional state of interviewees beyond language. Here, I have considered these unspoken feelings and thoughts that are not systematically articulated in stories, but which emerge in other ways telling, in particular in context where sensitive topics are explored (Fujii 2010). In the context of Kante, these unspoken feelings also gave crucial information for instance on how women were transforming feelings of shame into pride (Ahmed 2004; Kosofsky & Sedgwick 1995), revealing their agency in face of exclusion and stigmatization[64]. They also revealed for men, feelings of fear, and contempt[65].

Archives and visual/discourse analysis

The last method used for this thesis is archival data and visual and discourse analysis (Rose, 2001). Chapter 4/Article 1 in particular relies on this method. This method was used in particular to study the rhetoric in Soviet Tajikistan with regards to women's emancipation. Article 1 relies on textual and iconographic analysis of the Soviet press, particularly two Soviet magazines – *Bo rohi Lenin* (Following Lenin), and *Zanoni Tajikiston Sovieti* (Women of Soviet Tajikistan)[66]. It also uses data from publications of Soviet scientific institutions on Tajik and Central Asian women published in Tajik[67].

[64] See Chapter 6 / Article 3 on women miners' embodied experiences

[65] See Chapter 5/ Article 2 on masculinities and emotions

[66] *Zanoni Sovieti Tojikiston* dedicated to women was first published in 1932. The publication stopped during the Second World War and resumed in 1951, with a print run of 1 000 copies. In 1955 the magazine changed its name to *Zanoni Tojikiston [Women of Tajikistan]* and had a print run of 130 000 copies until the collapse of Soviet Union.

[67] Soviet research on women published in Tajikistan in Tajik. After the Second World War, the number of Tajikistani women in the Academy of Sciences and in the University increased and Soviet scholars such as M. Ghafforova, R. Nabieva, L. Nazarova, A. Kamolova, G. Mukhtorova published studies on Tajikistani women's emancipation project and on Soviet women's political and economic participation to the Soviet regime – see for instance M. Ghafforova, *Ba hayiot tatbiq shudani ideyia ozodi zanon*, Stalinobod [Khudjand], Nashriyioti davlati Todjikiston, 1960 ; A.

Lucia Direnberger and I use discourse analysis (Rose 2016) to study both written sources (in the local writings of Tajik social scientists and in the articles of the two magazines studied), as well as figurative images such as cartoons, and other visuals. The use of this method is based on the recognition that discourses create a particular knowledge about the worl, which shapes gendered spaces and subjects. Both the collection of this data and the analysis was conducted by Lucia Direnberger (co-author of Chapter 4 / Article 1). The use of this data was important in the context of Tajikistan as there is a dearth of historical research on women. The following section delves into the way data analysis was conducted.

Data analysis and writing

The data corpus includes mainly field notes, transcribed interviews, and photographs. I have anonymized all the names. I coded the data into themes that have informed the structure of the whole dissertation. In some instances, I have built ethnographic portraits based on a compilation of data coming from participant observation field notes, interview transcripts, and notes on interviews.[68] The use of ethnographic portraits reflects an interest on how single lives may reveal both the individual experiences, and wider trends in the societies individuals are part of (Jeffrey & Dyson 2008). This writing style presents several advantages that are also in line with a feminist postcolonial approach, and reflect a deliberate way of approaching representation in ethnographic work (Abu-Lughod 2016). Ethnographic portraits are a way of writing that leaves more room for the lived experiences of the researched. They are also a mode of representation that challenges the view of the ethnographer's work as an objective cultural description. Through the process of building a portrait, the ethnographer creates space for rumors, silences, laughter, and the broader emotional atmosphere to emerge. Space is also left to acknowledge how telling lives is always a co-constructed process, situated, and relational. The embodied experiences of both researched and

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Kamolova, *Roli zanoni tojikiston dar hayioti jamiatiyu siyiosi respublika*, Dushanbe, Donish, 1984; G. Mukhtorova, *Zanoni tojikiston ba front*, Dushanbe,Irfon, 1990; R. Nabieva, *Oktobri A'zam va ozodchavii zanoni Todjikiston*, Dushanbe, Djam'iati "Donish", 1977; C. Nazarova, *Zanoni Osiyoi Miyona dar solhoi jangi buzurgi vatani,* Dushanbe, Irfon, 1980.

[68] See in particular Chapter 5/Article 3 with ethnographic portraits of women miners and Chapter 6/Article 4 with ethnographic portraits of children miners

researched construct the social field as I will illustrate in all the articles in this dissertation.

Chapter 4 / Article 1 was written together with Lucia Direnberger. The decision to co-author this article was taken in July 2015. The first empirical section of this paper on the Soviet discourse on women and work in Tajikistan is based on Lucia Direnberger's empirical material, primarily on the archival research that she has conducted on two Tajik Soviet magazines on women. The three interviews (oral histories) that she carried out with advanced/ 'work heroines' were also used for the last empirical section of this article. The oral histories of women's work (two last empirical sections) of this paper, however, are based on my own data: participant observation, oral histories.

The reasons for this collaboration were multifold. First, Lucia Direnberger's material is unique and rather exceptional in a country where the historical Soviet past has been largely under-researched. Drawing on this material was necessary in order to be able to situate my own research historically. Second, our discussions (Lucia Direnberger and I were carrying out research at a similar period in July 2015) led us to the conclusion that joining our data would give more strength to our respective arguments, as it allowed us to contrast discourse analysis with oral histories. Lucia Direnberger initially wrote the first empirical section of the conference paper we co-authored in September 2015. I have since then reworked this paper in order to make it suitable for publication and to include it in this thesis.

Feminist dilemmas in cross cultural research

The process of conducting research, writing and disseminating research has also raised specific issues related to first my sexualization during fieldwork and second to question of representations of Muslim communities that I address in the second part of this section. I refer to these issues as feminist dilemmas.

Sexualization during fieldwork: negotiating race, gender, and proximity in the field

Anthropological literature has in the 1980s and 1990s started to address general questions of sex/sexuality, erotic subjectivity, and gendered sexual violence in the field (Kulick & Wilson 1995; Bell et al. 1995). Yet, silence about the risk of sexual and gendered violence during fieldwork still prevails in geographical research and beyond, despite its importance - both in terms of prevalence and in terms of the way they impact

data collection, and the identities of women researchers (Ross 2014)[69]. Following Ross (Ross 2014, p.181), I argue here that silence participates in reproducing the same 'patriarchal cultural taboos that inhibit women from speaking about sexual threats of sexual violence' in the priviledged world of academia. I address this issue by reflecting on my gendered, racial and erotic positionality (Kulick & Wilson 1995) and by discussing the way my commitment to feminist ethnography in a cross-cultural setting has in some instances lead to a greater position of vulnerability through the experience of what I refer to as a 'feminist dilemma'.

Experiences of gendered and sexual violence

Everyday experiences of sexualization were central to my fieldwork in Kante. The local school where I was teaching French was a highly hostile and sexualized environment. Besides two older women, most teachers in the school were men. The history teacher in the village, who was my host's uncle and who I considered as an elder in the village, offered me after a few days in Kante to tell me the history of the village. While I always ensured to meet him at school in presence of other people, he once insisted on us to leave the school in order to visit a friend who was holding pre-celebrations gatherings[70] . There, he ensured that we could be on our own, inquired about my virginity, and invited me to go to the capital city with him and sleep in the apartment that he owned there. Following this event, he also came several times to visit me in my hosts' house and regularly asked me to bathe at his place. During a celebration organized in this house for the circumscision of his grandson Said was also troubled by my presence in the outside space reserved for men[71], and asked me to sit at the dancers' table, who are known to be prostitutes.

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[69] A recent study led by the anthropology professor Kathryn Clancy evidenced that this sexualisation was a major issue. She interviewed 122 men and women and found that nearly half of them had experienced abuse at a research site at the hands of people from the local community, but also project directors, peers, and site managers, including "any kind of inappropriate physical contact, unwanted physical touching, assault, all the way up to rape," "59 percent of respondents had experienced sexual harassment. Women were 3 times more likely to experience harassment than men. And 19 per cent of respondents had been sexually assaulted''.

[70] In Tajikistan, anny ceremony (circumcision or wedding) is preceded by a week of offerings, where people visit the household where the ceremony is held. The hosts in turn, offer food to the visitors.

[71] During weddings, men and women are usually separated in Tajikistan. Men eat outside at tables, whilst women are inside, or in the kitchens

This event was followed by a series of other incidents that happened around and outside the school. The school director regularly asked me to come and spend hours in his office on my own with him, and regularly asked me to go to the mountains on my own with him, which I understood later, was an indirect way to express sexual interest. One male teacher regularly interrupted my class, and was sometimes challenging my physical boundaries in front of students, by for instance whispering advances to my ears during the class and the breaks. After I rejected his advances, he started making aggressive comments on my outfit or holding, including orders to rearrange my dress, and my veil. Other men regularly questioned my relationship with my host, and implied that we had sexual relationships. This sexualization was not limited to the village - I had several incidents in the capital city. I was regularly cat called and, I was grabbed several times during the day in the streets of Dushanbe, and followed by cars at multiple instances. In May 2015, I was sexually assaulted during a brief trip to the mountains outside of Dushanbe. This event lead me to stay in Dushanbe for ten days before being able to go back to the field site. It also caused a greater degree of fear and suspicion during the last months of my fieldwork.

Gendered and racial positionality – negotiating outsider/insider in cross cultural research

The sexualization I have experienced both within and outside of my case-study area was underpinned by gendered, racial and aged constructions. During my time in Tajikistan, I evidenced the construction of an 'imagined feminine Western and/or Russian other' in people's narratives. For men and women in Kante and beyond, Russian and or Western women were considered as free, but also 'loose' and 'available'. As an unmarried woman, born in Iran, raised in France, speaking Farsi as a second language, studying at an elite university in the UK, looking Tajik and with a Tajik name, the messiness of my position led me to experience a multiplicity of gendered and racialized identities. I was either identified as one of 'us' – Tajik - or 'them' – Russian/Westerner. This multiplicity of possible identification is what I argue lead me to a greater sexualization.

My specific 'social location' (Alcoff 1991, p.7) *vis-a-vis* the researched was particularly enabling at some sites, as I had the opportunity to navigate several gendered positions. Women welcomed me into their spaces, and mentioned at several instances my 'sameness' with Tajik women, in comparison with Russians. The presence of my hostess' Russian sister in law in the village[72] was, for instance, the occasion to highlight these

[72] Sofia was visiting for one month with her Tajik husband. They returned to the village for the circumcision of her eight years old son, and after ten years of her husband's absence in the village.

similarities based on physical appearance, hair, skin; but also on ways of being - culture. The Iranians were 'warm' like the Tajiks, they 'smiled', at least they, women, could 'speak with me' said my hostess and other women in the village. Language was indeed an important factor, as most women do not speak Russian in rural areas, whilst most men do. My incapacity to speak Russian was in that case an element of differentiation from both Russians and men. In parallel, my nationality as a French and my level of education made women tolerant with regards to some of my activities that were considered as inherently masculine. This entailed for instance, being mobile, coming and going to several towns or cities on my own, and being unmarried and being childless at the age of thirty.

While this positioning was enabling with women, my relationship with men was more complex. The multiplicity of my gendered positions allowed me to, for instance, work in the school, enter into multiple discussions with men. My identification as an Iranian, and the fact that I look Tajik, however played an important role in me being seen as 'available'. Discussions with other researchers or NGO practitioners who were more Western or more easily associated to Russia because of their language skills and physical appearances made me realise the differences between our gendered experiences. These women were often offered a greater access to men, and benefited from a degree of freedom and proximity that I did not experience to the same degree. Because I was seen as an Iranian woman by blood, I was expected to perform norms of femininity that Tajik (and by association Iranian) women would perform – this included for instance a restricted spatial mobility, and limited interactions with men. Bridging these norms, in my case, had a meaning that was similar as when Tajik women bridge these norms – which is being considered as 'available'.

The 'feminist dilemma'

This specific situation that lead to my sexualisation in the village was central to my research and in part related to my commitment, as much as possible, to follow feminist methodological concerns to acknowledge relations of power by reducing the distance between researcher and researched. It is, however, this specific concern to reduce distance that also, put me in a situation of proximity and vulnerability that made possible these gendered risks. Feeling sexualized was particularly uncomfortable, and threatening. In other circumstances, I would have left, or fought back. My position as an outsider and researcher, my awareness of my privilege, but also my eagerness to belong,

build trust, and secure a position in the village lead me to accept and tolerate situations that I would not have tolerated in other circumstances.

I also had an ambivalent position towards my sexualisation in the village, as it is also in some instances appeared as an interesting element for my research itself. These events made me think and reflect upon the corporeality of ethnography, the question of transmission of gender norms. By bridging gendered norms, I was becoming aware of these norms, and using my own embodied experience as a tool for research. I reflected on how norms are not only transmitted verbally, but they are first experienced through embodied and affective experiences. Finally, my dedication to be 'culturally sensitive' put me in a situation of discomfort – how to acknowledge and voice my everyday sexualisation by Muslim men in the village without reproducing traditional tropes and orientalist perspectives on Muslim men's sexuality, and more generally on Muslim communities themselves that my research aimed to challenge? These multiple contradictions created what I refer to a 'feminist dilemma'.

This account of my sexualization during fieldwork points to the challenges of cross-cultural fieldwork, and the fluid, porous, and ambiguous boundaries between self and other, insider/outsider that ethnographers have to negotiate in the field. Questioning their constructions and impact also participate in 'gendering the field' and interrogating the 'vulnerability' of women researcher, and the types of gendered power imbalances that come from the experience of being a woman researcher (Kulick & Wilson 1995; Bell et al. 1995; Cupples 2002; Ross 2014). Finally, they highlight the way sex/sexuality and the 'erotic subjectivity' of the researcher can also be 'epistemologically productive' as 'desire in the field', as Don Kulick points, whether the desire agent is the ethnographer or someone in the field, is a central means through which researchers became aware of their 'positioned, partial, knowing selves' (Kulick 1995, p.18). They finally show the urgency to drive attention to the gendered risks taken by women researchers, the importance to prepare women geographers to potential dilemmas, and to acknowledge both their situations of privilege and their vulnerability.

Working with and/on Muslim communities: fieldwork, politics and representation

'Writing against culture'? (Abu-Lughod 1991)

My concern with acknowledging power relations and avoiding stereotypical representations of Muslim communities also led to specific issues during and beyond fieldwork related to the politics of representation of Muslim women. Authors have

already revealed how Muslim women's bodies, dress and political subjectivity had become the site of geopolitical struggles since the 9/11 terrorist attack in the West (Gökariksel & Secor 2015). They have highlighted the role of Western feminist discourse in justifying these orientalist constructions, and have advocated accounts that challenge the idea of Muslim women as passive victims. Yet, my experience of fieldwork in Kante brought to light everyday experiences of oppression and marginalization that forced consideration of how and why women were oppressed. This raised several questions. How to reconcile a political commitment to a feminist emancipatory politics[73], concerned with challenging and making visible women's oppression without reproducing the traditional orientalist tropes that this research aims to challenge? How, as a Western academic, to think and write in a way that challenges predominant representations of Muslim communities in the West, whilst still telling people's stories of exclusion and oppression and reflect a concern for social justice? How to reconcile feminist political commitments, which involve making visible women's oppression, whilst still remaining sensitive to the cultural and historical specificities of place? Who is legitimate to raise and speak about these questions, and to speak 'for others'? This section does not aim to respond to these questions. It however calls for the necessity to raise them in the process of research. It discusses how they have influenced and shaped my experience and approach of 'researching' and 'representing' Muslim communities during and after fieldwork.

Multiple spaces of research and representation: rising Islamophobia in UK, France, and Tajikistan

My identity as a French/Iranian raised in France, studying in the UK and researching Tajikistan led me to navigate different spaces of representation during the course of my research. These spaces were marked by a notable rise in everyday and institutional Islamophobia. The years (2014/5) of my fieldwork, and subsequent years, were punctuated by a series of events that marked a switch with regards to questions of Islam both in the West and in Tajikistan. Increasing Islamophobia following the two terrorist attacks in France in January and November 2015[74], the beginning of the 'refugee crisis', the Brexit referendum in the UK (May 2016), and the 'Muslim ban' in the United States

[73] See the discussion on Agency and Saba Mahmood in Chapter 2

[74] The 7th of January 2015, attacks against the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo. This event was followed less than one year later by the Bataclan terrorist attacks on the 13th of November 2015.

(2017) set the geopolitical landscape under which I carried out my fieldwork, analysed my data and wrote this thesis. In Tajikistan and Central Asia more broadly, these years were marked by violent contentions around the politics of Islam. Growing concern about 'jihadists' who flew from Central Asia to join *Daesh* was occupying news broadcasts in the country and in the village in 2014/15. In January 2016, police forcibly shaved 13,000 men and removed the headscarves of 1700 women as part of an anti-radicalisation campaign[75]. Finally, in August 2016, the Tajik government officially banned the Islamic Revival Party (IRP)[76] which was ruled as an extremist, terrorist, organization and imprisoned its leaders.

Muslim women's bodies, dress and political subjectivities became more than ever, in this context, sites of geopolitical struggles Farris, Gokariksel et al 2012, 2015). In France, this was illustrated for by the anti-veiling laws that were passed over the past thirteen years, their specific deployment in the form of the controversial 'burkini ban' in August 2016, and their impact women's socio-spatial mobility. Earlier the same year, the Cologne events had revealed the demonization of Muslim men in the context of the European migrant crisis[77]. Representations of these events in and left-wing media in France and the UK highlighted different sensibilities with questions of the 'secular' and the 'religious', with French representations still legitimizing Western feminism and UK representations being ingrained in questions in postcolonial views on Muslimness and religion[78]. This specific context influenced the way I framed my research questions, and the way I articulated the objectives of my research. My commitment to challenge

[75] See http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-35372754

[76] See discussion in Chapter 1 on Islam

[77] During the 2015/2016 New Year's eve celebrations, there were 24 rapes and mass sexual assaults, mainly in Cologne, as well as in other German cities. The police chief immediately mentioned that men who had committed these assaults and rapes were of North African and Arab appearance and related it to Arab cultural practices. These attacks lead to discussions around Germany's asylum policies, and differences between Muslim and European countries. Blame was mainly placed on the European migrant crisis. These events have lead to following attacks against immigrants in Germany.

[78] See for example the article in Le Monde 19.01.2016, 'Cologne, je prends mes responsabilités, je parle pour toutes les femmes'. This article reports the testimony of one of the victims. It also uses racial stereotypes around whiteness, purity versus blackness and dirtiness to mention the violence of the aggression. For the UK perspective on the events, see for instance article in the Guardian, by Haby Hinsliff, 'Let's not shy away from asking hard questions about the Cologne attacks' 8.01.2016

stereotypical representations of Muslim women was inscribed into a political commitment to contribute to specific academic debates as a Western academic navigating these spaces. The above events fuelled my desire to insert myself into an academic discourse that challenges stereotypical representations of Muslim women. This specific agenda shaped the way I conducted research and wrote about Tajik women's exclusion. The next chapters of this thesis evidence this commitment to make women's oppression visible, while still acknowledging the contradictions, ambivalence and complexity of this oppression, and inviting consideration of factors beyond religion and culture that shape gendered oppression and exclusion.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented my epistemological and methodological approach. I have also detailed the specificities of my field site and the entire fieldwork I have conducted in Tajikistan from September 2014 to August 2015. I adopted a feminist postcolonial ethnographic approach that is concerned with issues around cross-cultural research, and committed to challenge conventional representations of Muslim women and Muslim populations generally. I have heeded the call of feminist postcolonial scholars for an 'ethnography of the particular' and in particular Abu Lughod's (1991) challenge to 'write against culture'. This commitment has greatly influenced the way I have developed and addressed my research questions. It has also influenced the way I have constructed the next chapters of this thesis. I have tried to build more nuanced readings of post-Soviet gendered transformations in Muslim Tajikistan than is often the case, and to acknowledge instances of women's oppression while also challenging essentialist and orientalist representations of Muslim communities.

CHAPTER 4 / ARTICLE 1 – GENDER, ETHNICITY AND SPACE IN THE SOVIET MUSLIM PERIPHERY: A FEMINIST POSTCOLONIAL GEOGRAPHY OF WOMEN'S WORK IN TAJIKISTAN

Submitted to Central Asian Survey

Abstract

This article explores the articulation and experience of Soviet gendered ideology in the Muslim Soviet periphery. Used for economic purposes, women's work was a key medium for fulfilling the ideological objective of women's emancipation from religion and tradition that was inherent to the Soviet endeavor in Central Asia. Through a postcolonial feminist geography approach attentive to questions of representation and material lived experiences, this article explores the way gender, ethnicity and space were co-produced by Soviet rhetoric and re-inscribed and contested in places. By contrasting textual and iconographic analysis of state press coverage on and for women with oral histories of workers in various *kolkhoz* and semi-urban places, including with women with advanced work experience ('work heroines' or *pishqadam*), this article illustrates the hybrid nature of the Soviet regime and its legacies. By doing so, it advances theoretical debates on gender and postcolonialism in Central Asia.

Key words: Gender, Work, Soviet Tajikistan, Feminist Postcolonial Geography, Women's emancipation

Introduction

'Our women do not work', they are housewives (*khanechin*, literally 'who sits at home'), says Mirzo, when I ask him what his wife does for a living. His answer echoes accounts of men and women of all ages that we heard repeatedly during nine years of research in Tajikistan, in rural and semi-urban areas, from the Northern Fann Mountains to the Southern Tajik plains. These comments did not go unnoticed and triggered shared feelings of disillusion and bewilderment. At the heart of our work lies a commitment to a feminist politics concerned with making visible and challenging oppression. These narratives were inimical to our hopes, and they tended to confirm the conclusions of previous literature on gender in post-Soviet Central Asia (Buckley 1997; Akiner 1997; Hämmerle 2008): the deterioration of women's condition since the fall of the Soviet

Union, the naturalization of women's attachment to the domestic sphere and, in some instances, their tolerance of the idea that working outside the home was inappropriate. They also put into sharp focus the contrast between women's present lives, tales and imaginations of the Soviet past – stories of work in the *kolkhoz*, *sovkhoz*, and factories, images of women's bent bodies collecting cotton or tying bundles of tobacco, piles of medals received by 'work heroines'. From these contrasting tales emerged an unresolved question: how to make sense of this retrenchment (if retrenchment there is) towards patriarchal norms given the importance of the women's liberation project in Central Asia's Sovietization?

This article addresses this question by exploring the ways Soviet gendered ideology was articulated and experienced in Tajikistan. It does so by focusing on one of the most important mediums used in the women's liberation project in Central Asia – the integration of Central Asian women into the workforce (Lubin 1981; 1984; Kandiyoti 2007). In Central Asia, collectivization in the 1930s turned women into producers and drew them into the socialist labor force. For the Soviets, women's participation in paid labor would provide them with autonomy and push men to treat them as equals (Kamp 2016). In her work on Soviet labor, Lubin (1981, p.183) notes that, while before the revolution practically no women were employed and only 2% were literate, in 1974, 47% of Central Asian state workers were female. This article asks whether this integration of women into the workforce achieved its underlying ideological goal of women's emancipation in Tajikistan.

Scholars who have explored women's liberation policies in the region have already highlighted their complexity, ambivalence and relative ineffectiveness, despite Soviet claims to have achieved gender equality (Lubin 1984; Kandiyoti 2007; Kamp 2006; Edgar 2006; Edgar 2007; Northrop 2004). Within this literature, the assault and unveiling campaigns of the 1920s (*hujum*) has received great scrutiny (Kamp 2006; Northrop 2004), attention commensurate with the degree of violence triggered by these campaigns. This focus on the dramatic however may conceal the ways in which everyday, personal, intimate lives, and mundane acts such as working, passing through, commuting can also be sites where gendered, ethnic hierarchies are recreated, shaped, and contested (Edgar 2007). They might also obscure how these mundane memories act as embodied and spatialized legacies that shape people's everyday and contemporary gendered geographies.

This article addresses these questions by bringing together a gendered analysis of Soviet rhetoric in Tajikistan since the 1930s, with oral histories of men and women workers in several rural and semi-urban areas, in the regions of Kathlon and Sughd. To analyze Soviet rhetoric on women's work, it relies first on textual and visual analysis of Soviet media, particularly two Soviet magazines[79], and Soviet scientific institutions on Tajik and Central Asian women published in Tajik[80]. We then challenge this analysis with ethnographic data, in the form of participation and oral histories with men and women in 2014 and 2015. 5 of the 38 interviews carried out were with advanced (*Pishqadam*) women. We develop two main arguments that highlight the hybridity, complexity and contradictions in the articulation and experience of the women's liberation project in Soviet Central Asia. First, work was never unequivocally emancipatory in Soviet Tajikistan. Soviet rhetoric was a central place where gendered and racial hierarchies were produced, which were then re-inscribed into the socio-spatial organization of work. Second, and contradictorily, women's experiences of work were also in some instances sites of emancipation.

By developing these arguments, this article first taps into an enduring question that has animated Central Asian studies on the legacy of the Soviet project on contemporary gender relations and politics (Kandiyoti 2007; Kamp 2009; Cleuziou & Direnberger 2016). It deconstructs the idea of a sudden retrenchment towards patriarchal norms by revealing how these norms are entrenched in, and to a certain extent have been produced by, the articulation of Soviet ideology in Tajikistan. By referencing the past, we also follow a broader call to build a feminist social science of Central Asia that moves beyond a present-focused analysis of gender relations and delves into Soviet history to understand its contemporary complexity.

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[79] Magazine dedicated to women first published in 1932. The publication stopped during the Second World War and resumed in 1951, with a print run of 1,000 copies. In 1955 the magazine changed its name to *Zanoni Tojikiston [Women of Tajikistan]* and had a print run of 130,000 copies until 1991.

[80] Soviet research on women published in Tajikistan in Tajik. After the Second World War, the number of Tajikistani women in the Academy of Sciences and in the University increased. Soviet scholars published studies on Tajikistani women's emancipation – see for instance M. Ghafforova, *Ba hayiot tatbiq shudani ideyia ozodi zanon*, Stalinobod [Khudjand], Nashriyioti davlati Todjikiston, 1960 ; A. Kamolova, *Roli zanoni tojikiston dar hayioti jamiatiyu siyiosi respublika*, Dushanbe, Donish, 1984; G. Mukhtorova, *Zanoni tojikiston ba front*, Dushanbe,Irfon, 1990; R. Nabieva, *Oktobri A'zam va ozodchavii zanoni Todjikiston*, Dushanbe, Djam'iati "Donish", 1977; C. Nazarova, *Zanoni Osiyoi Miyona dar solhoi jangi buzurgi vatani,* Dushanbe, Irfon, 1980.

Second, by being attentive to questions of gender, ethnicity, their spatial (re)production and contestation, this article reinstates the centrality of a postcolonial framework in building such a feminist Central Asian social science (Adams 2008; Kandiyoti 2002b; Khalid 2007a; Heathershaw 2010; Kandiyoti 2002c; Moore 2001; Sahadeo 2007; Edgar 2007; Northrop 2004). It particularly shows how a feminist postcolonial geography framework (Blunt & Rose 1994; Blunt & McEwan 2002; Lewis & Mills 2013), concerned with the spatial and discursive production of Soviet ideology and its material lived experiences, contributes to understanding the project of women's liberation through work. By focusing on women's working lives, our research follows Kandiyoti's (2007) call to consider how the project of women's emancipation has been lived by ordinary women. It is also grounded in feminist and postcolonial epistemologies, their commitment to make visible the hidden histories of women and their role in rewriting History.

This article is organized as follows. we first address the postcolonial debate in Central Asia. In the two following sections, we discuss the discourses and lived experiences of waged and non waged work in Tajikistan, and the production of ethnic and gendered hierarchies. The last part relates the narratives of advanced (*Pishqadam*) women promoted by the Soviet system, and shows how they navigated boundaries and hierarchies, opening spaces of freedom, for themselves and sometimes beyond.

A feminist postcolonial geography of women's work

Central Asia in postcolonial perspective

Postcolonialism is a contested term – either used as an epochal word to refer to the socio-cultural and political events arising in the period after colonialism; or as a theoretical approach that critiques the ways in which material and discursive legacies of colonialism are still apparent in today's world (Blunt & McEwan 2002; Sidaway 2000; Slater 2004; Young 2001; J. P. Sharp 2009). It is also a methodological approach that provides a lens with which to view the colonial world (Woon 2015). As a theory, postcolonialism is hence concerned with issues of race, identity, ethnicity and gender, their production by colonial powers, and their role in structuring postcolonial societies and identities. In Central Asia, social scientists have long grappled with the question of whether postcolonialism is applicable to this region (Khalid 2007a; Heathershaw 2010;

Adams 2008; Kamp 2009)[81]. Disputes between opponents and advocates reflect alternative and contested uses of the term. On one hand, opponents, drawing on postcolonialism as a 'temporal aftermath' (Blunt & McEwan 2002, p.3), investigate the historical nature of Soviet Central Asia. The question – can Soviet Central Asia be postcolonial if it has never been colonial – is at the heart of their research (Khalid 2007a; Khalid 2007b). Despite recognition of a family resemblance (Beissinger 2006) between Soviet Central Asia and other empires, they dismiss straightforward comparisons, based on the argument that postcolonialism was a central ideological foundation of the Bolshevik revolution (Khalid 2007a)[82].

On the other hand, advocates draw comparisons between Soviet Central Asia and other forms of empires (Adams 2008; 2005; Northrop 2004). They see the territorial fragmentation the Soviets engaged with, the drawing of ethno-national boundaries, and their control over Muslim institutions as inherently imperial (Kandiyoti 2002c). Northrop (2004) highlights expressions of power along lines of hierarchy and difference, with distinct centers and peripheries as a reflection of divisions between metropoles/colonies. Central to the economic sphere, divisions materialized in the Soviets' use of the Muslim periphery as a primary source of commodities and raw material (cotton in Central Asia), mirroring broader patterns of colonial production (Moore 2001).

Within this debate, the socio-cultural and gendered aspects of Central Asia's Sovietization constitute a bone of contention. Opponents like Khalid (2009; 2006) foreground the Soviet socio-cultural revolution as an indication of the inadequacy of the colonial analogy: colonial empires maintain difference based on essentialized categories of civilization, race, gender and religion, and the impossibility for natives to bridge differences with colonizers. In contrast, the Soviets aimed, with the conquest of difference and the 'remaking of human nature' (Khalid 2006, p.239), to overcome cultural, religious and economic backwardness. According to Khalid (2006) this project – to be achieved through the eradication of inequalities, 'indigenization' (*korenizatsiia*) and women's emancipation – is what distinguishes Soviet Central Asia from other imperial projects. However, advocates of a postcolonial reading view these socio-cultural aspects of the Soviet modernist project as a continuation of colonial domination marked by a violent onslaught on existing identities (Kandiyoti 2002c).

[81] See Kandiyoti (2002b) and Heathershaw (2010) for reviews.

[82] See Kandiyoti (2002c) for a review.

This debate is better encapsulated in discussions around the unveiling campaigns (*hujum*). Massel (1974) as far back as the 1970s, argued that in the absence of an indigenous working class in Soviet Central Asia, women were used as a 'surrogate proletariat'. This claim constitutes the ground on which Northrop (2004), using a postcolonial framework, developed his interpretation of the unveiling attacks in Uzbekistan. For Northrop, the Soviet Union is comparable to its tsarist predecessor; the violent local struggles against the anti-veiling laws constitute anti-colonial resistance. In contrast, Kamp (2006) reads these violent responses (murders, rapes of women) as the 'reassertion of patriarchal power' (Kandiyoti 2007). Working from oral histories of women who participated in the unveiling campaigns (*hujum*) by throwing off their veils, Kamp (2006) deconstructs the idea that Soviet ideals of women's emancipation were unilaterally imposed on indigenous women. Instead, she calls for a recognition of women's agency, and emphasizes the local embeddedness of the *hujum* .

While debates on the *hujum* have led to polarized discussions, other authors have developed readings which recognize the grounds for postcolonial comparisons while still encouraging an appreciation of the contextual specificities of Central Asia (Heathershaw 2010; Kandiyoti 2007; Edgar 2007; Sahadeo 2007). These authors often see postcolonialism as a 'critical aftermath' (Blunt & McEwan 2002, p.3), and find the use of postcolonial concepts relevant. In the realm of gender, Kandiyoti (2007a) builds a compelling picture of the processes of Sovietization: neither colonial, nor modern, nor simultaneously both. She identifies a 'Soviet paradox', based on 'the combined and contradictory operations of a socialist paternalism that legitimized and supported women in the Soviet sphere (through education, work and political representation), with a command economy and nationalities policies that effectively stalled processes of transformation commonly associated with modernity' (Kandiyoti, 2007, p 602). Here, Kandiyoti implicitly draws on Bhabha's (2004) concept of 'hybridity' ('third space'/'in-between space'), the ambivalent locus where the colonizer and colonized cultures meet to shape transcultural forms.

Similarly, authors such as Sahadeo (2007) and Edgar (2007) highlight the dual nature of the Soviet ethnic and gendered project, imperial not in intention but in effect. Through oral histories of Soviet Asian migrants in Moscow and Leningrad, Sahadeo (2007) shows that, despite rhetoric on the 'friendship of nations' (*druzhba narodov*), everyday racism ruled the everyday lives of the *Chernye*, the Black of the Soviet Union. In parallel, drawing on feminist postcolonial historians' research on the intimate and sexual politics of colonial rule (Stoler 2002a; McClintock 1995), Edgar (2007) establishes the place of

interethnic intimacy and marriage in post-Stalinist discourse, providing insights on Soviet gender and nationality policies in Central Asia. Not only did the ideal of 'merging' (Edgar 2007, p.486) the Soviet people fail to reach its objective, but it was also underpinned by the construction and maintenance of gender and ethnic hierarchies. Through mixed marriages between the 'backward' people of Central Asia, and the 'advanced' ethnic Russians, Muslim peripheries would escape superstition and tradition.

Postcolonial gendered geographies of work

Here, we highlight the hybrid nature of the project of women's liberation, in relation to work in Central Asia. In her research, Nancy Lubin (1984) exposes the gendered and ethnic hierarchies that organize labor in Central Asia. Focusing on Uzbekistan, she highlights the underrepresentation of Central Asians in industries and urban areas, and their concentration in agriculture and commerce in rural areas, with indigenous women dominating low-skilled and manual jobs. While Lubin asks whether this stratification is a matter of preference or results from discrimination, she contends that most Central Asian women deliberately remained in household work because of their attachment to traditional norms. Kandiyoti (2007) later provides a more nuanced reading of 'tradition'. Drawing on Roy (2000) and Poliakov (1992), she highlights how tradition is not fixed, but a product of the Soviet paradox, highlighting the ways in which the Soviet project of eradicating traditions through resulted in the 'recomposition of traditional solidarity group within the framework of new Soviet institutions'[83] (Kandiyoti 2007, p.608).

Tradition is hence not separate from the effects of the command economy and this gendered segmentation of labor. Soviet ideology called for women to be both 'Shock workers' (Work heroines) and 'Heroine Mothers' (Kandiyoti 2007). While women were pushed to participate in the workforce, differences between men and women were highlighted, and motherhood was elevated to a social duty (Kamp 2016; Cleuziou & Direnberger 2016). In the absence of adequate reproductive support, household maintenance activities remained the work of women (Kandiyoti 2007; Kamp 2016). According to Lubin (1984), compulsory agricultural work was considered an additional burden, which explains women's preference for occupations compatible with domestic work. The gendered division of labor in Central Asia adds to the importance of the domestic economy as a place of kinship, and reworking the shortfalls of the command economy, evidenced in other parts of the Soviet Union (Kandiyoti, 2007). While

[83] For more information on the role of *kolhozes* in reforming traditional and familial ties, see Dudoignon and Noack (2014), *'Allah's kolkhoz'*.

'tradition' was rhetorically used by the Soviets as a hindrance to the remaking of Central Asian societies, its prevalence is entrenched in the reworkings of the Soviet economic system.

Gillian Tett (1996) came to an analogous conclusion through her ethnographic work in a remote village in Soviet Tajikistan. Traditional family ties, centered on the household unit, have, according to Tett, been retained during Soviet times, as they provided a way for villagers to overcome the shortcomings of the Soviet ezonomy system. The maintenance of these norms made possible a cultural, gendered and spatial division of labor based on a public sphere dominated by the Soviet state, and a private sphere which constituted the locus of Muslim religious practices and non-Soviet identity. In this context, women became, what Tett (1994, p.44) calls 'guardians of the faith', and local meanings of Muslim femininity, relying on spatial control over women's mobility, protection of young girls from other males' gaze and women's attachment to the home, were reinvested as markers of indigenous identity.

Tett's (1996) research constitutes the prelude of gendered geographies of power during the Soviet era. Through engagement with a feminist postcolonial geography framework, we however aim to take these analyses further. Central to postcolonial geography is a focus on space and place, its production, reproduction and contestation. In their seminal book on women and postcolonial geographies, Blunt and Rose (1994) start by highlighting the contributions of feminists in exposing the private-female/public-male divide. They however call for a non-essentialist perspective of this dichotomy. Space, for the authors, is not pre-given but active, constructed through text and discourse. The imperial gaze produces women and landscape as sites of colonization and shapes the categories through which the past is discursively constructed. Any critical study of women's colonial and postcolonial geographies should hence explore the visual and textual politics of representation and location.

Here, we follow this call by investigating the spatiality of Soviet rhetoric on gender and work, and its politics of representation (Blunt & McEwan 2002). Our analysis comes with a concern about the materiality of Soviet policies. For postcolonial geographers, discourses are material, and their effects are produced and contested in places. One example is the way urban spaces were both sites of reproduction and contestations of (post)colonial spatial ideals (Lewis & Mills 2013). Similarly, exploring multiple, intimate, mundane spaces of colonialism brings back the materiality of the colonial experience, driving attention to the social and political construction of places and gender, and the

multiplicity of existing zones of contact that constitute the (post)colonial experience .It is also one way to move away from the temporal divides of a past/present that have long dominated discussions in postcolonial theory (Blunt & McEwan 2002) and post-Soviet studies (Ibañez-Tirado 2014), to open up possibilities for feminist, postcolonial, post-Soviet geographies.

The 'backward Muslim Tajikistani': Soviet rhetoric, and the spatial production of gendered and ethnic hierarchies

Work as a space of liberation for women: a political, social and economic project

In this section, we turn to textual and iconographic material to explore the production of space in Soviet rhetoric. We use discourse analysis (Rose 2016) to study both written sources (writings of Tajik social scientists and magazine articles), and figurative images (cartoons, posters). We use this method based on the recognition that discourses create a particular knowledge about the world, which shapes gendered spaces and subjects.

Our analysis first revealed the centrality of spatial imaginaries opposing the socialist East to the capitalist West. As Ashwin (2000, p.10) recalls, Bolshevists conceived labor participation in all Soviet republics as a key driver in 'the project of industrialisation, (and in) 'catching up with and overtaking' the West' . In the Tajik SSR, both female researchers' scientific texts and the Soviet press for women, echo this project. Ghaffarova (1960) underlines the way women's access to technical professions in Tajikistan evidenced the socialist system's superiority over the capitalist West. Rohat Nabieva (1986) similarly uses the establishment of equal pay between men and women in the Soviet Union as an illustration of the West's inferiority. In parallel, Tajik Soviet press celebrates the friendship of all communist women in an effort to overtake the West. Articles published in the late 1950s in the journal *Zanoni Tajikistan* represent women from all Soviet republics, and communist ally countries (Korea, China, Senegal, India, Tunisia), fighting side-by-side to defend socialist values of peace, equality, freedom, friendship and work.

Soviet discourse hence raises women's emancipation in Central Asia as a foundation for socialist construction and work, as elsewhere in the USSR, as central to this objective. The challenge is however more ambitious in Central Asia, and especially in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan where women were secluded prior to the Bolshevik revolution (Lubin 1981; Edgar 2006). By making women's participation in the Soviet economy visible,

early statistics on women's work in the Soviet and Tajik press aims to evidence the progress made towards socialist construction. In 1925, women represented only 9.7% of the labor force in the USSR[84] (Aminova 1985). One can assume a similar if not lower percentage in the RSST at the same date. Not later than 1941, women represent 37.5% of all workers in the TSSR[85] (Ghafforva 1960). In 1958, 56% of workers and 49% of *kolkhozchi* are women (Nabieva 1986). Stories of Tajik women *stakhanovists* (*'Pishqadam'* in Tajikistan), also take over local press. Texts and visuals represent women in conventionally masculine professions – mechanized/technical work such as tractor driving, hydrotechnics or agronomy.

Besides the spatial imaginaries of East/West, articles, vignettes and visuals in Soviet magazines also evidence the production of spatial dichotomies between work/public- and domestic/private spaces. For the communists, women's liberation relied on two main conditions which aimed to guarantee equality between men and women – (i) women's access to work, and (ii) the redistribution of domestic tasks to the people's economy (Kollontaï 1978). In Central Asia however, Soviet rhetoric imbues the domestic sphere with an additional meaning, as the site of production of past revival, archaic, bourgeois feudal and religious traditions, called *'boqimanda'* (what is left from the past). In contrast, the workspace is the site of free Soviet women. The story of Nazokat Shokirova, a Tajik woman, published in *Zanoni Tojikiston sovieti,* in 1953, is one of many stories that celebrate education and work as a medium of women's emancipation.

> 'Promised to a man since she was a child, confined within the household, Shokirova was forced to wear the *faranji*[86]. The story tells that after her wedding, she was beaten up, and threatened to be exchanged against a bag of rice if she disobeyed her husband. The October Revolution saved her: she studied, became director of the 'Red Sewer' (*Bofandai Surkh*) factory in Leninobod (now Dushanbe) and felt 'grateful for Soviet State's efforts towards women's liberation'[87].

[84] Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic

[85] Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic

[86] Traditional Central Asian robe that covers the head and body

[87] "Zanoni ozodi Tojikiston soviet" (Free Women in Soviet Tajikistan), *Zanoni Tojikiston Sovieti [Women of Soviet Tajikistan]*, 1953, n°2, p.22.

Photograph 10 is another example of how these assumptions are represented – men are usually portrayed in magazines as the symbol of tradition, responsible for tying women to the household and denying them access to work, and education.

Hard-working/patriotic women (*zanoni mehnatdousti*) will also experience social recognition, welfare and happiness. Their personal achievements will have collective impact for children and other women as depicted in the story of a *pishqadam* (advanced) woman, Qajrilma-oj Rustumova, found in the newspaper 'Following Lenin':

> 'Our *kolkhoz* was the Dimitrov *kolkhoz*. They appointed me as the leader of a brigade. During daytime I was working with interest and pleasure and in the evening, I was attending classes and learning. In a short period, I learnt a lot and twenty-five other female *kolkhozchi* went to school. I really wanted to learn and gain knowledge. I pushed myself to learn more and more every day. They noticed it, in the *kolkhoz*, and they sent me to follow a short-term course to become a Tajik teacher. I successfully completed the course, I came back to the *raion*[88] and begun to teach. I loved being a teacher and I was a hard worker'.[89]



Photograph 10: 'Fight against obstacles for women's rights'[90]

[88] One of the smallest administrative unit.

[89] *Bo rohi Lenini, 1st of July 1939, n°7, p.18.*

[90] *Zanoni Tajikistan*, March 1959, vol 3, p.7

The production of gender and ethnic hierarchies

As in the USSR more widely, Soviet ideology[91] constructs Tajik women as actors of social and collective change. It however produces contradictions that recall the 'Soviet paradox' raised by Kandiyoti (Kandiyoti 2007). Soviet rhetoric in Tajikistan emphasizes both work and motherhood as patriotic and socialist duties, leading to women's double burden. In Tajikistan, the cult of the 'Mother heroine' is made evident through the constant praising of motherhood as evidenced in this quote from the magazine 'Bo rohi Lenini' in 1939.

> 'Mother-Woman's honor is essential to our country. She raises the next generation and takes care of the whole society. Being a mother is a privilege and an element of pride. For Soviet mothers and their children, all conditions must be set up.'[92]

Soviet press dedicated to women also published individual stories of mothers with multiple children. These stories first reveal Soviet advances made to enhance mothering[93]. They also highlight the role of women in reproducing the 'Soviet people' in the periphery.

In parallel, Soviet ideology shapes women's bodies to accommodate their role as both workers and mothers. Women's bodies must be prepared to carry Soviet children through an 'appropriate development of (their/her) organism' and through 'physical education'.[94] Feminine sport is, like in other parts of the Union (Starks, 2008), considered essential to the enhancement of women's reproductive capacities. In order

[91] This article has not provided a thorough differentiation of the different periods in terms of discourse. We note however that there is an element of continuity throughout the Soviet period. In the 1920s and 1930s, women are portrayed as oppressed. In the 1940s and 1960s, we note elements of continuity in the fight against remnants from the past. Finally, in the 1960s, the Soviet tend to consider the women's question as solved. However, progaganda for women's liberation and against traditions also continues during this period.

[92] *Bonuvoni Tojikiston Soveti* [*Women of Soviet Tajikistan*], 'For the reinforcement of girls' education', January –February 1953.

[93] See the story of Saidmoh Ravajobova, member of the Kalinin Kolkhoz in the raion of Dushanbe, mother of 11 children related in *Zanoni Tojikiston soveti*, n°1, 1954, M. Saidova, « The Mother Heroine », p.9.

[94] See « Sport va tandurustii zanon » (Sport and Women's Health) F. Fridman Rubrique « Paroles d'un médecin », *Zanoni Tojikiston soveti*, n°2, 1956 [première édition, *Jenshi Tajikistana*, 2 février 1936]

to protect their fertility, women should also hold feminine positions appropriate to their bodily capacities – i.e. work in agriculture, sewing factories or schools. In Central Asia, work in *kolkhoz* is particularly feminized. From the early ages of collectivization, journals and Soviet propaganda portray women as *kolkhozchi.* An official state journal published in Tashkent in 1932 mentions for instance that women should only work in mechanized agriculture (Alimova 1998). Soviet posters and magazines also flourish with images of Tajik *kolkhozchi* working hand-in-hand and looking towards the future (see Photograph2 and 3).

The production of these gendered hierarchies is also entangled with the production of ethnic/religious categories. The quote below, from the journal *Kommunistka*, first highlighted by Massel (1974), is one of many examples which illustrate this orientalist view of Tajik women, producing the idea of the backward Tajikistani in need of saving by the superior, modern Soviet.

> 'From the pram to the tomb, a Muslim woman has been educated to silence and obedience. Her 'full obedience' is related to the arbitrary and unlimited power of her husband. What is her choice but to be submitted? The life of an Oriental woman is nothing else than an endless tragedy. She has never known man's sympathy or recognition' [95]

While in the Russian center, the Soviets focuses on class as the main site of struggle for achieving women's liberation, in Tajikistan, religion and tradition also constitute key focuses. For Bolsheviks, women's oppression and patriarchy are the product of the bourgeois feudal and capitalist system (Buckley 1985). In contrast, the Soviets frame women's oppression and liberation in Central Asia as a cultural and religious issue. This focus on the cultural at the expense of the structural similarly reflects the orientalist underpinnings of this approach (Yegenoglu 1998; Lewis 1995). Religion and tradition are cast as 'backward' in Soviet ideology, 'remnants from the past' (*boqimanda*) that must be overcome to achieve women's emancipation, as evidenced in the following extract from the journal *Women of Soviet Tajikistan*[96].

[95] Niurina, *Kommunistka [The Communist]*, (quoted by Massel 1974, 122).

[96] *Zanoni Tojikiston soveti* [*Women of Soviet Tajikistan*], Mai juin 1953, N°3 « Tarbiya kommounistii zanon va mouboriza ba mouqobili boqimondahoi boi-feodali ».

‘We have to educate new generations to fight against ancestral traditions (*an’ahaho va odatho*) (…) The fight against remnants from the past (*boqimanda*), superstitions (*khurofotho*) and against religious traditions (*urfi odathoyi dini*) is one of the most important tasks of the communist education’



Photograph 11: Frontpage (Zanoni Tajikistan, 1963 (3))



Photograph 12: Back cover (Zanoni Tajikstan, 1956 (8))

Embodied memories of work and place: the reproduction of gendered and ethnic hierarchies

Spatial reproduction of Soviet ideals

Soviet discourse is a site of contradictions, simultaneously producing spatial imaginaries of belonging, togetherness, and gendered, religious and ethnic hierarchies. Oral histories with men and women evidence the reproduction of these contradictions in situ. In this section, we draw on these narratives to contrast oral histories of Soviet ideology. The memories shared first reveal the way that idealized Soviet space as framed by Soviet rhetoric was re-inscribed into places. The Soviet ideal of 'friendship of the peoples' with all nationalities combined marching together towards the modernization objective, was materialized in the organization of work. The example of Sarvoda, a semi-urban town situated 250km from Dushanbe, is telling. Like many towns built in Soviet Tajikistan to shelter workers, Sarvoda in the Sughd province was created for the '*Anzob combinat*' founded in 1937, an antimony, mercury, and later coal extraction industry. Initially living together in the small town of Dijigrout, south of Sarvoda, workers were all resettled there in the late 1970s. 'The town was constructed so all workers from the Union could live together' recalls Paiman a sixty-seven years old man in Dijigrout. 'Kazakhs, Armenians, Ukrainians, Russians, and Tajiks were all in the same place'.

Soviet ideals also appear in today's vestiges of the Soviet era. As a Russian woman who still lives in the small town recalls, the central market was once full of goods, perfume and clothing coming from Russia. Four-storey buildings where all Soviet workers were supposed to live adjoin the central market (Photograph 13). The empty theatre (*kinoteatr*) was once the stage for Russian-speaking plays coming directly from Moscow (Photograph 14). The almost-intact mosaics in front of the mine also display a Tajik woman geologist, next to male workers. Her long black hair and traditional dress represent her Tajikness, illustrating the Soviet objective of integrating women into skilled work (Photograph 15). Finally, a faded board with drawings of children still marks the entrance to the kindergarten that was built to facilitate the transfer of reproductive support to the public sphere.

Rural areas were also reconfigured to shape the organization of work, geared towards modernization. Near Sarvoda, the collectivization of the 1930s led to the merging of six villages, into one *kolkhoz*. In Kante, one of these six villages, most people worked in

tobacco production, animal rearing, cow milking, and all other structures created around the collective farm – the school, the clinic. In the Southern provinces, where many of the interviews were carried out, large plains were transformed into cotton fields. Villagers were often resettled from mountainous areas, to grow cotton for the center, working in brigades of around fifty people.



Photograph 13: Buildings from the Soviet period



Photograph 14: Soviet Theatre in Sarvoda



Photograph 15: Anzob combinat fresque with a Tajik woman working among men

Spatial boundaries, and the reproduction of ethnic and gendered lines

People's embodied narratives of work and place also reveal the same contradictions and hierarchies constructed in Soviet ideology. While respondents expressed their nostalgia for this feeling of togetherness and friendship (*barodari* - *dusti*) revealing how Soviet rhetoric was re-appropriated in everyday lives, they also evidenced the same gendered and ethnic hierarchies constructed by the rhetoric. This contradiction in people's narratives – evidence of ethnic and gendered hierarchies and even sometimes violence versus nostalgia – is, as Sahadeo (2007, p562) noted, *telling* in itself. While it reveals how hierarchies were lived, it also highlights the process of materialization of these hierarchies and its role in carving out boundaries.

The first boundary identified was the frontier between the urban and the rural that organized Soviet space. The 'urban', as the site of the superior, mechanized, and industrialized, was the only place of mixing, whilst the rural remained exclusively Tajik, branded as backward. Russians lived in urban areas, leaving the rural to the Tajiks. Contrary to what Lubin (1984) observes, respondents did not choose or prefer staying away from cities. Instead, they expressed the naturalness of their exclusion - 'Russians preferred working in cities, there was no room for us' said most interviewees. Russians were also absent from villages and agricultural activities. In Kante, Russians lived in the village in the 1960s, but only to explore the coal potential – 'They were living in the upper part of the village, far from us, we did not have contact with them (….) they did

not bother us, they did not care about the Tajiks, they had their place and they were staying there' recalls Katayoun in Kante.

The second boundary identified is the hierarchical and gendered stratification of the urban space itself. In Dijigrout, the first town created for the Anzob combinat in the 1930s before Sarvoda, there were two classrooms in the local school – one Russian and one Tajik. Ethnic boundaries drawn from a young age were also re-inscribed into work hierarchies – upper positions at the Anzob combinat were systematically held by Russian male specialists from all over the Soviet Union, while Tajik males mostly held less qualified positions. Women working in the Anzob combinat were largely outnumbered by men, and mostly of Russian origin. Tajik women in the city, who were wives of the rare middle-class Tajik managers and/or engineers, often did not work. The very few female Tajik workers held 'lighter', or 'lower', feminine positions – as cleaners, cooks, or employed in kindergartens where most children were of Russian origin. When reasons for such a divide were raised, men and women, both ethnic Russians and Tajiks, directly referred to Russia's superiority in terms of knowledge, and their responsibility in 'developing the Tajiks' (*Pishraft kardan*)[97].

These hierarchies, which also appeared in everyday work divisions in the city, ruled the way space was occupied with the marginalization of less-qualified Tajik workers and Tajik females. Tajik male miners could only pass through the city and commuted every day from surrounding villages by buses/shuttles while their wives stayed in villages to work in the kolkhoz. While Tajik wives of middle-class Tajik engineers could live in the city, their mobility and contacts with the Russians were restricted – 'we were all friends' but 'we were never going to their house, and they were leaving us alone' mentions a Tajik woman living in the city of Sarvoda. Russian women and men who held higher positions, on the contrary, lived in the favoured communal buildings in Sarvoda, and were mobile.

The kolkhoz: 'In-between spaces' of Tajik women's work

The ambivalence of Soviet discourse – praising women as both workers and mothers and raising them to be both – was also re-inscribed into places. Tajik women's workspaces, rather than being spaces of liberation, became *in-between spaces/ third spaces* – between the domestic and the public, the Tajik and Soviet, the traditional and

[97] Interview with a woman of Russian origin who still lived in Sarvoda.

modern (Bhahba 2004). Women's double burden was evidenced through interviews with female *kolkhoz* workers and women working in Sarvoda or Kulob.

> 'It was hard, we had to work and take care of our home at the same time, we were doing everything, we had to go to work, but after work, we were baking bread, making food, taking care of the children, until late at night' mentioned Gurdia, a former *kolkhozchi* in Kante.

The geographical layout of the *kolkhoz* – with fields and barns situated in proximity to people's houses – also allowed them to negotiate work both within the collective farm and at home as evidenced in this quote from Geesou, an 80-year-old former *kolkozchi*.

> 'The *brigadir* did not let us stay with the children. And I did not have a mother-in-law, so I used to take the children with me to work, I was leaving the six-month-old one with the cows in the barn, he was sleeping there with other children. When they were waking up, we were going to breastfeed them, and then going back to work straight away. When they became older, we were doing the same, they were staying there, and we were working'.

It also allowed them to perform religious duties, echoing what Tett had already identified in Tajikistan (1996).

> 'We could not stop, and we could not pray in front of everyone. Men were out, but us, we could just go back home'.

While women's association with the domestic sphere is a widespread Soviet feature, observing the reasons for this association in Tajikistan reveals the specificity of Muslim Central Asia in the Soviet world. Women's restricted mobility and their relation to the private/domestic can be interpreted as a way to protect women from a sexualized/Russified outside space. When men and women were asked why women worked in the *kolkhoz* while men worked in mines, the first answer given was that mining was men's work (*mardikor*), and that women's bodies were too weak to work in mines. The second relies on notions of shame and honor (*ayb/namus*)[98] – it was shameful (*ayb*) for women to go 'here and there', 'to hang out'. In Sarvoda, 'few women worked, and women who did could only work 'in-between' women' mentioned a female Tajik interviewee still working in the mine's administrative office in Sarvoda. The structure of the brigade was a way to ensure that women were working with kin

[98] For a discussion of notions of shame/honor in Tajikistan, see Chapter 5 / Article 2

(*adamoyeh khodemuni*/our people). Tajik engineers' wives who were not working 'did not need to work, and their husbands did not want them to' she adds. When reasons for this specificity were raised, Tajik women and men referred to Russian and Tajik women's different attitudes towards the outside space – 'Russian women can interact with 'unknown men' (*mardoyeh begoni*), drink alcohol, marry Tajik males', 'Tajiks are different' she shared. Tajik femininity was in turn defined in opposition to Russian femininity and imposed a certain level of confinement and impossibility for Tajik women to marry Russians.

This intimate line drawn between Tajiks and Russians echo other colonial contexts where zones of contact and intimate relations between colonizers and colonized were defined based on racial or ethnic lines (Stoler 2002b; McClintock 1995; Edgar 2007; Lewis & Mills 2013). Marked on women's sexuality and mobility, this frontier challenges ideals inscribed into Soviet ideology based on the friendship of the people (Edgar). It also questions the notion of 'tradition' as defined by Soviet rhetoric. Tajik women's restricted socio-spatial mobility, associated with 'tradition and religion' and cast as a barrier to the creation of the Soviet people, can in this context be conceptualized as a form of reinvestment of indigenous norms of femininity in response to the Soviet presence. As Tett (1996) showed in the context of Tajikistan, 'tradition' was partly a way to reaffirm a Tajik authenticity versus the Russians. Although we agree that interpreting such acts as resistance would constitute a misreading (Kamp 2006), we highlight here how women's attachment to the domestic sphere and control over their mobility is not a remnant from the past (*'boqimanda'*), but a product of the Soviet presence shaped in opposition to a Soviet foreign and Russified outside space.

The Tajik *'pishqadam'*: from spaces of control to spaces of freedom

Tajik advanced (*'pishqadam'*) women fall into an equivocal category. Their narratives challenge the idea of the Soviet production of tradition. *Pishqadam* were women recompensed for their hard work with promotion to higher levels and access to political institutions. Their oral histories answer the question of whether their existence was only a vitrine, or had an impact – first, on their ability to break gendered boundaries; second, on their sense of freedom. By focusing on *pishqadam* women, we do not foreclose other women's agency in shaping their everyday lives. We rather highlight both the exceptional and ordinary character of their lives.

Because women's restricted social and spatial mobility appeared as the major constraint experienced by women in Soviet Tajikistan, freedom is approached as their ability to move, socially and spatially, as well as their feelings of pleasure, satisfaction and fulfillment related to this mobility. As regular women workers, *pishqadam* women were controlled by the same notions of shame/honor regulating other women's mobility. An 82-year-old former *pishqadam* recalled these restrictions by highlighting the social control that prevented them from studying outside the village.

> 'Women did not really go to study. People were saying 'Girls have to make children', they were scared of having a bad reputation *(badnom)* They were scared of people talking behind their backs, of girls not getting married.'

Although women holding higher positions were accepted within the *kolkhoz*, age also impacted definitions of appropriate socio-spatial mobility.

> 'In the *kolkhoz*, there were two women brigade leaders *(brigadir)*. Everyone was working together, it was not a problem (…) But these women were respectable *(baqerhat)* because they were older women. (…) Some young women were sent out of the village to work in the cotton *kolkhoz* near Khudjand. They were sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, and could only go until they got married. After that, they did not any more, they had to follow what their husband was telling them'.

This social control was driving women's decisions as reveals this quote from another *Pishqadam* in Kante:

> 'I was a very good worker, a pishqadam, a cow milker for several years. At some point they asked me to go to Leninobod. They offered me to become the *kolkhoz* deputy there, but I refused. I could not go. My child was too young.'

While she first raised her reproductive duties as the main reason for not accepting this promotion, she also confessed the social control which drove her refusal - I was ashamed *(sharm kardam),* I knew my father did not want me to go'.

Soviet institutions were also a space of production of gendered hierarchies. *Pishqadam* women describe access to political institutions as conditional on motherhood, evidenced by this quote from a brigade leader *(brigadier)* in the Khatlon region who was also president of the local women's committee, and Tajik deputy at the Soviet Supreme in the 1980s:

> ‘When the party members worked with women or chose women [as representatives], they first thought about their family. They said that women should be married and have children to be a role model for others. (...) They said that when a person is married, she gets life experience. If a woman was not married and did not have children, she could never become women's committee president for instance’.

Despite this social control, *pishqadam*’s narratives also revealed how they used Soviet institutions to open spaces of freedom. The story of a former tractor driver *(traktorchi)* and brigade leader *(brigadir)* in a cotton *kolkhoz* in the village of Kaftorkhona, shows how the valorization of women’s education and work by the Soviet created spaces for women to challenge social control:

> ‘One day, one of the heads of the *kolkhoz* came to ask if anyone wanted to become a mechanic. I said that I did, because I liked it. They tried to push women to do it at the time. I just liked it you know, I wanted to become a chauffeur (she laughs). My father agreed and pushed for it for me, but my mother did not. She was scared of neighbors. They said ‘she’s going to study and then you know what happens: free head, free bottom (*sarelidj, kounelij*). But I went anyway. We were 80 girls at the institute, sleeping in dormitories; boys were studying with us as well. I met my husband there (she smiles).’

She also recalls the sense of freedom she experienced as a *Pishqadam* woman as her work gave her space, mobility, and justified her sharing of domestic labor with other household members.

> ‘I was waking up in the morning, doing things for the house, and then going to work in the *kolkhoz* the whole day. But it was my mother-in-law who was doing most things at home, she was taking care of the children, making food, cleaning. My husband helped as well (…) Me, I was leaving the children and going to work, in the fields, or as a deputy for the *viloyat* (…) In 1981, they gave a car to my husband and I, and we were just leaving the kids (she insists on the word leaving) to my mother-in-law, and driving to Dushanbe the two of us, just leaving (she laughs)’.

Pishqadam women also experienced a feeling of pride regarding their social position. Most of them emphasized their hard work, respectability and allegiance to the Soviet system. Their position also influences their current perspective on the Soviet period

compared to other regular *kolkhozchi*. While regular workers tended to emphasize the hardships of work, and their double burden, *Pishqadam* women often highlighted the sense of self constructed by collective work, as highlights this quote from Sheela in Kaftorkhona: 'There was work, people knew their place, where they belonged, what they were doing. Now there is nothing'.

Conclusion: Towards feminist postcolonial post-Soviet geographies

Drawing on a feminist postcolonial geographical approach to gender and work in Tajikistan, this article has highlighted the complexity and hybridity of the question of women in the Muslim Soviet periphery and its role in informing debate about the way Soviet emancipation policies could be qualified in Central Asia. Drawing on an analysis of gendered and ethnic hierarchies, it has showed the relevance of postcolonial readings in understanding this project. As in other contexts, Soviet rhetoric created spatial hierarchies – here, the rhetoric created the category of the Backward Tajikistani Muslim Woman to be developed by the superior Russians. Hierarchies shaped in discourse were re-inscribed into places through the creation of boundaries and restrictions to Tajik women's socio-spatial mobility. Their restricted mobility, in this context, rather than being a *'boqimanda'* (a remnant from the past) as conceptualized through Soviet rhetoric, can be seen as a construction of Soviet discourse, and a marker of Tajik authenticity in opposition to a Sovietized Russified outside space. The narratives of the *pishqadam* contrast this conclusion and reveal the complexities of the Soviet system. Despite a certain degree of control, most women also found spaces of freedom through Soviet institutions and models.

This research has been concerned with history. It is worth noting however that it is not the task of historians and was born from the collaborative effort of a feminist geographer and a feminist sociologist both concerned with contemporary issues of gender, place and development. By digging into the past, we hence contribute to building a feminist post-Soviet postcolonial geography. We deconstruct some of the assumptions that have stemmed from present-focused perspectives, including conventional readings of gender and change in Muslim post-Soviet countries and the way they have infiltrated development thought and discourse, through crystallization around the 'retraditionalization narrative'. Mainly articulated by development organizations in Central Asia, this narrative focuses on Islam as the main cause for the retrenchment towards patriarchal norms since the fall of the Soviet Union. Besides

building a teleological vision of change that conceals the Soviet legacy, this narrative relies on a simplistic view of gender that overlooks its socio-political, historical and spatial construction at the intersection with ethnicity, age, nationality and sexuality. Here, we call for feminist research that further challenges this narrative, and explores women's everyday contemporary lives in Tajikistan, in light of memories of the Soviet past.

CHAPTER 5 / ARTICLE 2: WOMEN'S EXCLUSION AND MUSLIM MASCULINITIES: A FEMINIST POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF HONOR AND SHAME

Submitted to Geoforum

Abstract

This article explores the gendered process that leads to women informal miners' restricted access to natural resources, their exclusion and stigmatization in a context of protracted male migration, and the neoliberalization of the economy and resources in post-Soviet Muslim Tajikistan. It is particularly concerned with understanding how and why this process is mediated through notions of honor and shame in this post-Soviet extractive landscape. I draw on eight months of ethnographic work in the village of Kante in northern Tajikistan, where informal coal mining developed alongside male migration and the setting up of a Sino-Tajik coal mine after the fall of the Soviet Union. This article develops a feminist political ecology reading of honor and shame and attends to reconfigurations of masculinities and emotions in a shifting environment. It particularly challenges the idea of fixed Muslim masculinities entrenched into codes of honor and patriarchy anchored in religion. Instead, it reveals how cultural notions of honor and shame are mobilized in the wake of embodied and emotional work and resource struggles, leading to women's exclusion from natural resources, and reflecting localized and everyday gendered impacts of broader resource struggles.

Key words: Muslim masculinities, Honor-and-Shame, Emotional Political Ecology, Feminist Political Ecology, Mining, Resource Extraction, Women Miners, Post-Soviet Central Asia

Introduction

In Kante, a village perched at two thousand meters of altitude in the Fann Mountains in Tajikistan, armies of villagers plunge every day during the winter months into the underground galleries to extract the country's black gold: coal. 'We have nothing else here, it's coal or our men leave to go to Russia', says Mohira. Her husband, like most men of working age in Tajikistan since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, is a seasonal labor migrant. Unlike most places in the area, however, Kante lies on a coal reserve. The informal coal mining area in the village, where around five hundred men work every day, adjoins and sometimes overlaps with an industrial Sino-Tajik open pit coalmine which opened in 2013 and has encroached on the village's resources. Around three hundred men from the village and surrounding areas work in the industrial mine, but as Ali, an informal miner recalls, 'things have changed since the Chinese are here, they're taking all our coal, soon there will be none left'. Hidden behind the mountains at the top of the village, there is a second informal mining area where only women work. There, coal is harder to extract, and the illegal market smaller. 'These women are rotten (*gandeh*), says Ali, 'I don't want to work near them'. Men are ashamed (*sharm mikonan*), 'they fight us', say women miners in Kante. To explain the inappropriateness of women's work in mines, male and female villagers use notions of honor (*namus*) and shame (*ayb/sharm*). The nineteen women who go mining everyday are the outcasts of the village, their names as dirty as their hands and faces, blackened by coal.

This article explores the gendered process through which women miners are relegated to the bottom of this chain of resource exclusion in Kante. It links the mobilization of notions of honor and shame that mediate this process to the impacts of broader politico-ecologic changes in this post-Soviet extractive landscape, first on men's sense of self, and second on women. Gendered norms, practices and roles in Tajikistan, and more generally in the Muslim world, from the Mediterranean to the Balkans, are often seen as defined through an Honor-and-Shame System, a complex, a syndrome, anchored in religion, which relies on the control over women's mobility and sexuality by men, and justifies multiple forms of socio-spatial exclusions experienced by women (Feldman 2010; Weidman 2003). Feminist anthropologists and other scholars of the Muslim world, however, have argued that this idea of a system naturalizes hegemonic versions of Muslim gendered identities based on socially dominant men and female passivity (Weidman 2003; Lindisfarne 1994; Abu-Lughod 1986; Harris 2004; Werner 2009). Such

representations obscure the complex ways through which people negotiate their gendered subjectivities and life choices in different geographical and historical settings. They also conceal the way through which local idioms of honor and shame are in some instances mobilized (Feldman 2010; Werner 2009).

In this article, I make visible some of these underlying gendered negotiations in the context of economic desolation, protracted male migration and the neoliberalization of the economy and resources of post-Soviet Tajikistan. Here, I ask how and why have norms of honor and shame become privileged idioms used to mediate gendered relations in the context of Kante? More precisely, I take as a starting point the role of men in the process of excluding women miners from access to resources and explore how the mobilization of notions of honor and shame is related to the transformation of masculinities that began with the fall of the Soviet Union and the emergence of multi-focal livelihoods – informal mining, formal mining, and migration. I document this process by investigating the connections between men's emotional responses to transforming work and resource struggles, through feelings of anger, dispossession and their impact on the mobilization of these cultural notions.

Women's exclusion from mines and the inappropriateness of their work are not specific to Tajikistan or the post-Soviet Muslim world. Mines have both historically and recently, been defined as a man's place, or even as a place that reinforces certain forms of strong masculinities, thus leading to women's exclusion, invisibility and, in some instances, their stigmatization (Lahiri-Dutt 2015; Lahiri-Dutt 2012; Jenkins 2014). The exclusion of women from mining also echoes gendered dynamics around women's restricted access to water, land, and forest which are salient in the rest of the Global South, where particular gendered responsibilities, rights, and norms condition gendered divisions of labor and intra-household distribution of resources (Agarwal 1994; Moser 1993; Rocheleau et al. 1996). As highlighted in more recent strands of feminist political ecology, these conflicts over resources are also fundamentally embodied, emotional processes through which gendered subjectivities are redefined (Nightingale 2006; 2011; Sultana 2015; 2009; Mollett & Faria 2013).

While feminist political ecologists have developed refined analyses of transforming femininities, little attention has been paid to the relationship between the definition of masculinities and the changing ownership of, control over, and access to resources (Ekers 2009; Elmhirst 2011b). Masculinities are yet a fruitful angle through which to understand and decipher women's control, exclusion and oppression (Nye 2005). A

focus on masculinities and the politico-ecologic is all the more enlightening in the context of the post-Soviet Muslim South. Local gendered work and resource struggles act as a window into broader shifting gendered regimes and their relationship with the politico-ecological changes experienced in the region with the switch from collective modes of resource governance to capitalist modes of production and extraction of resources. Conventional readings of Central Asian gendered identities, however, still tend to rely on the cultural and the religious to the detriment of the economic or the ecologic.

Here, I challenge such dichotomies between culture/tradition and the economic/ecologic by developing two arguments. First, the implementation of cultural norms of honor and shame in Kante is not related to religion, or a supposed Islamic revival since the fall of the Soviet Union. Rather, it is constituted by a broader gendered political ecology of exclusion related to the neoliberalization of economy and resources in post-Soviet Tajikistan. Second, the mobilization of these norms is also the product of men's loss of sense of self and reconfigured masculinities in response to gendered, emotional, embodied work and resource struggles that emerged in this context.

To develop these arguments, I draw on data collected during eight months of ethnographic research undertaken between September 2014 and July 2015 in Kante. During this time, I lived with two families, taught in the local school, and regularly visited the informal coal galleries and the Sino-Tajik formal/industrial coalmine. In addition to participant observation, I carried out seventy-four interviews with men, women and children in the village on their work/life histories, amongst which thirty-six were with males aged between five and eighty-three. I also interviewed the Sino-Tajik mine's operation manager who moved to Tajikistan from China to run the mine. The young and adult men interviewed were either working in the industrial or informal mines, and/or were on break from labor migration to Russia. Here, I also complement men's narratives, with insights drawn from my ethnographic work with women miners, and other women in the village.

The rest of this article is organized around five sections. The first section starts with advancing the re-theorization of Muslim masculinities that I develop through a feminist political ecology approach. The second section explores the mobilization of notions of honor and shame in Kante and puts them in perspective with a historical geography of gender relations. The third section develops the feminist political ecology readings of the gendered Kantegui extractive landscape, focusing first on the (trans)national context,

second on its local manifestations in Kante. In the final section, I delve into the embodied, emotional coal struggles experienced by men through their everyday work and resource struggles, and the way they lead to the redefinition of a sense of strong masculinity through women miner's exclusion and the reapplication of idioms of honor and shame. This article ends with a conclusion that discusses the contribution of a feminist political ecological framework to building alternative readings of gender and Muslimness.

(Re)theorizing Muslim Central Asian masculinities beyond an 'honor-and-shame' system: A feminist political ecology reading of the Muslim South

Going beyond an 'Honor-and-Shame' System does not mean rebutting the relevance of cultural norms. As Abu Lughod notes, honor and shame are ideals which are respected by men and women in most Muslim societies (Abu-Lughod 1986). Decades of research by feminist anthropologists and other social scientists of the Muslim world have, however, deconstructed the idea of a fixed system anchored in tradition, culture and religion (Werner 2009; Lindisfarne 1994; Feldman 2010; Akpinar 2003; Reeves 2011). Authors, such as Feldman (2010), have challenged culturalist readings by shedding light on the regulatory regimes in a context of politico-economic crises that legitimate and constitute forms of rule and appeal to the use of these local idioms. Central Asian feminists have also highlighted the histories, spatialities and contemporary relevance that these notions have, revealing their entanglements with (post)Soviet gendered political-economies (Tett 1996; Werner 2009; Cleuziou 2016b; Reeves 2013).

Such readings echo broader feminist literature that has resisted culturalist perspectives of Muslim gender identities by observing the multiple ways through which gender comes into being. Feminist geographers, in particular, have opened up analyses of how religion and gender both manifest in the materialities of everyday life, in bodies, subjectivities, and everyday practices and narratives that unfold in the interstices of broader political discourses (Gökariksel 2009; Mills & Gökariksel 2014; Gökariksel & Secor 2009). By exploring spaces of Muslimness beyond the officially sacred, they have included previously unexamined sites and scales of religious identities, highlighting the

nuanced ways through which Muslim gendered identities are constructed in different places, at different scales, and beyond and along religion (Gökariksel 2009).

While there is a rich and wide scholarship on the geographies of Muslim femininities, Muslim masculinities still remain relatively underexplored (Gökarıksel & Secor 2017; Hopkins 2006). The rare geographical research on men has mainly focused on the West, at the risk of reproducing ideas of fixed Muslim masculinities in the rest of the world, and in particular in the rural South (Reeves 2013; Gökarıksel & Secor 2017). In Central Asia, Muslim men are often represented as 'breadwinners, patriarchs, laborers or victims' (Reeves 2013, p.2), reproducing monolithic conceptions of men and masculinities that research in the West has long tried to challenge. At the same time, writing about Muslim men by challenging essentialist representations raises a fundamental question – how to make visible the complexity of processes of construction of masculinities while remaining faithful to a feminist politics committed to challenge women's oppression?

To answer this question, I follow an approach that recognizes instances of women's oppression, at the same time as it seeks to understand the processes that make this oppression possible. I do so by exploring the way through which and reasons why the (re)definition of masculinities occurs in some contexts through a greater control over women. I particularly conceptualize masculinity by emphasizing fluidity, multiplicity, and inter-scalarity, linking local processes of identity making to cultural and religious notions (Hopkins & Noble 2009), but also to broader politico-economic and post-Soviet changes. I see such processes as intersectional, but also relational (Berg and Longhurst 2003; Hopkins 2008; Hopkins and Noble 2009; van Hoven and Hörschelmann 2005). As Connell (2005) notes, hegemonic masculinities are constructed at the intersection of class and other axes of difference, as well as made through the delegitimizing of those other types of masculinity and femininity that are considered inferior (Connell, 1995, 2005). They are also (re)formed within contexts of changing gendered and social relations that co-constitute places and spaces, and relationally impact women (Connell 1995; Berg & Longhurst 2003; Mac Ghaill 1996; Nye 2005; Jackson 1991).

Following broader feminist political ecology readings, I suggest that such gendered social relations are co-constituted by transforming modes of resource governance and extraction of resources (Elmhirst 2011a; Nightingale 2006; Truelove 2011). Geographers and other social scientists have already highlighted the centrality of waged work as a central element of men's sense of self, their status and power (Collins 1996;

McDowell 2003; McDowell 2002b; Maynard 2014). They have shed light on how contemporary neoliberal transformations – including precarization, unemployment and informalization – have also destabilized men's sense of self, leading in some instances to various strategies of reconstructions of strong masculinity that also impact women (Maynard 2014). Little is known,however, about how changing masculinities are also produced by environments of transformation (Ekers 2009; Elmhirst 2011b).

Feminist political ecologists have, however, developed tools to make sense of these changes. Mollet and Faria's (2013) call to 'mess with gender' in FPE has given rise to refined analyses of the intersectional and relational construction of racial and gendered subjectivities within resource struggles, opening the field for investigations of how masculinities and femininities are constructed relationally at the intersection with age, and local expressions of religiosity. More recent strands of FPE have also paid attention to the role of intimate, embodied practices, and in particular emotions as connected to broader scale transformations, intersubjectively produced through environmental struggles, and materially active in shaping people's identities (Sultana 2009; 2011; Truelove 2011). Through her work on water crises in Bangladesh, Sultana (2011, p.163) illuminates 'the ways that resource struggles and politics are not only economistic, social, or rational choice issues, but also emotive realities that have direct bearing on how resources are accessed, used, and fought over'. She explores feelings of joy, relief, pain, fear and despair to demonstrate how conflicts over water access and use are lived and embodied experiences where gendered subjectivities are constantly reproduced and/or renegotiated.

This reading is particularly useful in post-Soviet Central Asia, where the end of collective modes of resource governance, and a centralized Soviet system of resource extraction (Olimova et al. 2006), has transformed the everyday lives and work practices of men and women. The fall of the Soviet Union led to the erosion of livelihoods, the growth of male seasonal migration[99], and the privatization of modes of production, often impacting women through their exclusion from access to land and resources (Kandiyoti 2002a; Kandiyoti 2003; Kanji 2002; Eggenberg 2011). It also led to the gradual opening of local Central Asian markets to the interests of new private actors such as Chinese companies (Blank 2011; Kassenova 2009). While these changes in the development

[99] In Tajikistan, remittances of labor migrants constituted 36.6% of the GDP (World Bank 2016, p.21). For more statistics on migration in Tajikistan see the Eurasian Development Bank (2015) report. For literature on migration in Tajikistan and Central Asia see for instance Thorez (2007), Olimova & Bosc (2003), Laruelle (2013), Marat (2009).

landscape have been widely documented at the national and institutional level in Tajikistan (Kassenova 2009; Blank 2011), little is known about their everyday lived experiences.

Such changes also reflect broader transformations in many countries of the Global South, where the neoliberalization of resources and economies has led to the shaping of new extractive landscapes marked by the advent of new actors (Indian, Chinese) and the emergence of multi-focal livelihoods (migration, informal mining, formal mining) (Lahiri-Dutt 2018). Studies on these extractive landscapes often highlight the nature, and sometimes violence, of these work and resource struggles, making explicit debates around marginalisation, dispossession and their emotive and gendered realities (Geenen 2014; Cuvelier 2014; Rustad et al. 2016). While recent literature has paid attention to women in mining (in particular informal mining) in the Global South (Lahiri-Dutt 2015; 2012; Bryceson et al. 2013) and made women's involvement visible and valuable, few readings have developed critiques of the gendered dynamics and power relations inscribed within the work processes in these extractive landscapes (Jenkins 2014). They have also left unanswered questions about how changing relational gendered identities also impact women's lives, positions and wellbeing [100].

Honor and shame in perspective: Past and present gendered exclusions in the extractive landscape of Kante

Gendered exclusions in Soviet Kante

In Soviet Tajikistan, the government aimed to achieve gender equality and to undermine traditional Islamic patterns of life by integrating women into the workforce and promote them to traditionally male-dominated vocations (electricians, tractor drivers,

[100] Perhaps the large body of ASM in Africa is where these gaps have been the most successfully addressed. The work of Sarah Greenen (2014) for instance highlights the types of resistance that emerge from artisanal/informal men gold miners feelings of frustration in the DRC and the way they alter local power relations. Joan Cuvelier's (2014) research in the same country focuses on how men's involvement in dangerous, physical and informal types of artisanal mining became more than a mere economic strategy, but a place of definition of strong masculinity and pride. Rustad et al (2016) similarly observe the way through which hyper-masculine subcultures in artisanal mining in Eastern DRC appear as responses to conflict, precaritisation of work, and unemployment in a context of crisis, leading to greater sexual violence against women.

mechanics etc.) (Kandiyoti 2007; Kamp 2016). Despite these Soviet policies, notions of women's restricted socio-spatial mobility, the protection of their fertility, and honor remained central to the organization of everyday life. Work in Kante was organized along gendered and ethnic lines, recalling the stratification already identified by other Central Asian scholars in the region (Lubin 1984; Kandiyoti 2007). Kante was part of a tobacco *kolkhoz* where mainly women worked. At the same time, men commuted to the nearest town of Sarvoda to work in the Anzob *combinat*, an antinomy, mercury, and later coalmine set up in 1937. In turn, most ethnic Russians worked and lived in Sarvoda and held higher skilled positions (engineers, chemists).

Local idioms of honor and shame regulated the socio-spatial, gendered and ethnic stratification of work in the village, where women were usually relegated to the least desirable tasks in collective agricultural farms. This hierarchization of work reflected a social control evidenced in the narratives of former *kolkhoz* workers in Kante. According to Bahar, working in the *kolkhoz* was acceptable for women, 'it was just our own people', she says. The organization of work in brigade mapped onto extended Tajik family networks, allowing women to avoid contact with 'unknown men'. The example of Bahar also illustrates how norms of honor and shame controlled her life. Praised for her productivity as a cow milker in the *kolkhoz*, Bahar was also invited to become the *kolkhoz* deputy. She refused the promotion 'I was ashamed' (*sharm kardam*), she says (…) 'I knew my father did not want me to go'. While women were on the one hand promoted to traditionally male-dominated and 'masculine' positions, their mobilities were on the other still constrained by notions of honor and shame.

This restricted socio-spatial mobility of women has already been analyzed in the context of Soviet Tajikistan (Tett, 1996). In her ethnography of a Tajik village at the end of Soviet rule, Gillian Tett (1996) showed how notions of honor and shame governed a socio-spatial division that reflected the investment of women's bodies as repositories of tradition, religion and indigenous authenticity versus a Sovietized public sphere. Memories of Kantegui echo these analyses, revealing how traditions associated with Islam were part of villagers' everyday lives, in the confines of their homes. Said, the village's history teacher recalled, 'We've always been Muslims, always' (…) 'Before, we just did not have the right to stop working to pray' (…) 'but people were doing it anyway'.

Gendered exclusions in post-Soviet Kante

While the mobilization of local idioms of honor and shame are not new, the gendered geographies of exclusions they mediate have changed with the dismantlement of the *kolkhoz* and the emergence of new livelihoods, such as informal mining and the arrival of the Sino-Tajik mine in Kante. As illustrated through the vignette in the introduction of this article, informal women workers are spatially marginalized and their access to resources restricted through the use of local idioms of honor and shame. Their social marginalization and stigmatization is apparent in the story of Nadirah. Aged thirty-four, Nadirah started mining around ten years ago. Other men and women in the village speak of her as 'crazy' 'not reputable', and as having a 'bad temper'. Nadirah is also a 'left-behind woman' and a *de facto* head of household who does not receive remittances from her absent husband, Khosrow. Rumors about her life and past are widespread in the village, highlighting her 'faults' – 'Nadirah was not a good wife', shared my hostess in the village with me, echoing similar opinions of other men and women in the village.

Like Nadirah, all women miners were marginalized, laughed at, sometimes bullied, and excluded from networks of reciprocity and respectability[101]. Those women, however, have different life stories and experienced different degrees of stigmatization, depending on gender, age, socio-economic and family background. The village counts nineteen women miners between the ages of eighteen and fifty-one, and eight young girls between thirteen and eighteen. Amongst the nineteen women miners, four are left-behind women, four still live with their husbands in the village and mine on their own or sometimes as a joint strategy with them. While these women are all in their thirties, six women miners are older women in their forties who run family businesses and make their daughters-in-law (*kelin*) work in the mines. Amongst these nineteen women miners, the most stigmatized are women in their thirties who mine on their own. In the village, however, adolescent miners are the most shamed. Other villagers, men and women spoke of them as tired, unusable or spoiled (*mandeh)*; bad, rotten (*gandeh*); and unmarriageable.

Women both practice shaming and are active in resisting their stigmatization. While I recognize women's agency, my concern here is not with women's experience or response to marginalization/stigmatization, but with men's role in this process of women's exclusion. Women miners often hold men responsible for excluding them from the mining area – it is *men's* shame that leads to women's exclusion. 'Men do not want us

[101] In particular, women are excludes from weddings, barter, and socio-religious ceremonies.

to work near them', says Nadirah. Mirzo, like most men proudly said, 'our women do not work, they are housewives (*khanechin*)', before adding 'women in the city, they work, but here, it's the village (*qislaq*). In the same vein, a thirty-six-year-old artisanal miner, shares his doubts about women miners.

> 'Women should take care of the children. They should not exhaust themselves by working hard. They have to keep their energy to take care of the house and the children (…) It's not good for women to work that hard, then they cannot have good babies'.

In a later discussion, Hofiz also explains some of the initially hidden reasons behind his refusal to let women work in the main artisanal mining area: 'these women speak to unknown men (*mardoyeh begoni*), they are unrespectable (*beqehat*).

These quotes highlight the stigma surrounding women miners' work. They also underline what men perceive as the appropriate local femininity in the village, and their role in ensuring its enactment. Assumptions around women's bodies, the threat that working in mines may affect their fertility, and their role in domestic labor, are raised to explain why women's work in mines is shameful, revealing norms of ideal rural femininity. Men in turn, see themselves as the guarantors of a correct performance of these norms. Ideas about men's honor are central to its construction: adult men in Kante are responsible for ensuring that women do not work for wages. Men should also provide for women and children and protect women's roles as mothers. 'Their role is to control their own and their family's honor (*namus*), by avoiding contact with unrespectable women, and making sure that their wives and daughters will not become miners.

Gendered exclusions in Kante: A window into national and transnational resource struggles in post-Soviet Tajikistan

National and transnational resource struggles

Going beyond the idea of honor and shame as a fixed system anchored into tradition and religion, however, shows how the use of these local idioms in Kante also reflects a broader gendered geography of exclusion made possible by the neoliberalization of the economy and resources in Tajikistan. The end of Soviet rule over Tajikistan was marked by a civil war and a decade of politico-economic turmoil that left the country's infrastructure in ruins. In 1997, the Tajik government signed a peace treaty which was

supported by international organizations that pressed for a 'neoliberal peace-building' model based on the idea that capitalist modernization is the condition sine qua non to achieving political freedom (Heathershaw 2009, p.51), Economic reforms in the forms of stabilization and Economic Structural Adjustments Policies were set up by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Olimova et al. 2006). These reforms had the same dire consequences for Tajik women (Falkingham 2000b; Falkingham & Baschieri 2004; 2005; Hämmerle 2008; Kasymova 2008; Kanji 2002; Behzadi 2012) as in other countries of the Global South (Afshar & Dennis 1992). They also lead to the informalization of women's labor (Nasritdinov et al. 2010) and widespread male seasonal labor migration from Tajikistan to Russia' (Olimova & Olimov 2007)[102].

Besides these adverse impacts on women, the post-Soviet landscape was also marked by broader resource struggles. The gearing of international aid towards privatization first resulted in creation of monopolies and personal control over resource in the hands of particular elites (Nakaya 2009). The ownership of the state-led aluminium enterprise TALCO illustrates this form of control. As the largest state-owned enterprise and exporter in Tajikistan, the company reports directly to President Rahmon and has gained notoriety for non-transparent practices, as well as fraud and corruption allegations (Cooley & Sharman 2017; Nakaya 2009). This elite control is also paralleled by transnational resource struggles that involve foreign actors. The fall of the Soviet Union marked the end of regional interdependency leading to countries' vulnerable exposure to each other's policies, as illustrated by the Tajik/Uzbek conflict around water resources. This conflict first escalated around the Rogun dam – a gigantic hydropower project that started in the 1960s. In 2012/13, Uzbekistan closed the taps that were providing Tajikistan with gas, in order to put pressure on the Tajik government, which lead to the economic revival of coalmining in the country.[103]

The Chinese, in particular, were central in this return to coal (Peyrouse 2007). The government contracted a large number of foreign companies (British, American, Indian, Chinese, Kazakh), among which the Chinese entered in a privileged position (Bankwatch 2017). In November 2012, the central coal heating power plant Dushanbe-2, which was

[102] In 2015, remittances constituted 42% of the share of the GDP, and most household counted at least one male migrant (World Bank 2016).

[103] In January 2013, according to the Energy and Industry Ministry of Tajikistan, the country had increased coal production by more than twice comparatively to the same period in 2012 (Nasibova 2013)On April 4, 2012, the government of Tajikistan adopted the 'Law on Coal' which aimed to intensify extraction and investments, and since May, 1, 2012, Tajikistan has banned exports of coal (Backwatch, 2017).

built by a Chinese company was opened . While Chinese-Tajik relations in the early 1990s were mainly concerned with borders disputes, the global competition for energy reserves since 2001 has made energy the new predominant focus of Beijing's diplomatic strategy in Central Asia (Kassenova 2009). Since then, the participation of Chinese companies in the mining sectors of Central Asian states has increased exponentially. In parallel, imported Chinese-manufactured goods flood bazaars in Tajikistan, a recent consequence of China's new 'One-Road, one-belt' trade route project[104]. Equally, this rise in Sino-Tajik trade is accompanied by increased development cooperation in the areas of culture, education, and military. In 2009, Tajikistan was the main recipient of Chinese foreign development assistance.

Local resource struggles and gendered exclusion

In Kante, the exclusion of women miners from access to natural resources and their socio-spatial marginalization provides a window into national and transregional economic and resource struggles. The village is situated on one of the main coal reserves in the country (Bankwatch 2017) and the establishment of the Sino-Tajik coal mine (subsidiary of TALCO Resources and a Chinese company) reflects the local materialization of new forms of resource governance. After the demise of Soviet rule, men and women continued farming in the tobacco *kolkhoz* – 'we just continued as usual, as if nothing had happened', shares Mahbouba, a sixty year-old woman. When men stopped working in the Anzob *combinat*, collective farming gradually transformed into subsistence farming, and was often carried out by women. Demonetized, agriculture was also feminized, like in the rest of the country and abandoned by men who preferred seasonal labor migration to Russia, leaving their wives behind (Behzadi 2012).

While excluded from this migration, women are also excluded from the only alternative that has emerged in the formal economy of Kante: the Sino-Tajik mine. The gendered and national/ethnic organization of labor within the mine illustrates the new hierarchies that appeared with the neoliberalization of resources and the opening of the Tajik market to new foreign investors. The formal/official coalmine hires men mainly from Kante and neighbouring villages. The only women who work in the Chinese mine occupy traditional 'feminine' and marginal positions as cooks and cleaners and come

[104] 'One road-one belt' is an infrastructure plan consisting of oil and gas pipelines, railways, overland highways, from Xi'an to Central Asia, Russia and Europe and the opening of a Maritime Silk Road – these projects are often seen as way for Asian countries to develop without the strings of the West (Yeh, 2014).

from the small town of Sarvoda. The local 'left-behind' women like Nadirah, who do not receive remittances from their husbands or are not supported by their families, often have no other choice but to enter informal mining.

In addition, energy-related conflicts between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and the opening of the Tajik economy to Chinese investors underwrite the emergence of an informal coal market in the village, revealing how the growth of informal mining often occurs in tandem with the neoliberalization of resources and the advent of foreign actors (Lahiri-Dutt 2018). The presence of the formal coalmine takes ownership over a resource essential to the villagers' livelihoods. The formal mine blew up part of the coal galleries that had been dug by the villagers when it set up in the village. Today, there is one area, at the bottom of the village, where informal mines and the formal Sino-Tajik mine overlap geographically. Two Tajik employees of the Sino-Tajik mine usually stand at the bottom of the slope that leads to the informal mining area and are in charge of informing miners with loudspeakers to evacuate the area in case the official mine starts dynamite explosions.

Despite this coexistence of formal and informal economies, the Sino-Tajik mine gradually pushes informal miners away and attempts to regulate them. Meanwhile, legislation on artisanal mining in Tajikistan remains opaque. While use of subsoil for artisanal mining is not illegal, the government is responsible for determining the list of minerals that are permitted for artisanal mining on a case-by-case basis (International Business Publications 2013). The executive level of the oblasts, cities and regions (*khukumat*) is in charge of issuing permits for the exploitation of the subsoil, and for controlled, 'rational' use of mineral resources .

Siamak, a male informal miner aged twenty-seven, recalls the local history of control over access to coal and thus illustrates how notions of legality/illegality are malleable and can easily be manipulated by the authorities.

> 'It's always the same story' (…) 'They come here (the police), they tell us that if we do not stop they will close the mines, they ask us for money, we tell them that we do not have any, so they just fill up a truck or a car with our coal bags and leave... until they come back again'

Siamak carries on, illustrating changes in the application of control since the Sino-Tajik mine set up in the village.

> 'Nobody cared about us before the Chinese came here. Now, they come all the time, ask us for our permits. It's the Chinese who call them (…) They want to keep it all for themselves'. (…) 'They say that it's too dangerous, that children work, but they just want us out'.

While villagers refer to the Sino-Tajik mine in the village as the 'Chinese mine', they are aware of the fact that, 'there is nothing to do (…) Behind the Chinese, there is the president's daughter', as one of the employees of the Chinese mine recalls[105].

Emotional work and resource struggles: The reconfiguration of masculinities through women's exclusion

'The Chinese' mine and miners: Dispossession, fear, anger

Politico-ecological transformations impact the multiple gendered work and resource struggles that emerged in Kante,. They also impact the emotional response of men to these changes and gendered subjectivities are reconfigured through these emotional everyday experiences. In Kante, this process expedites the formation of alternative strong masculinities defined through the exclusion of women miners and the reinstatement of cultural notions of honor and shame. The 300 men workers employed by the industrial mine, as well as the five hundred informal men miners, and seasonal men labor migrants from Kante appear as distinct groups of workers with sometimes conflicting values and identities. Their discord reflects antagonistic ways of defining what constitutes men's work in the face of adversity. This happens against a backdrop of bursting dynamite and creeping yellow and orange containers littering the Sino-Tajik mines. As excavators marked with Chinese ideograms unearth the Black mineral, the darkening of the red Fann Mountains constantly reminds villagers of the Sword of Damocles that hangs over their heads: 'soon, there will be no coal left', says Ali whose words are at the beginning of this article.

Feelings of material and psychological dispossession related to the presence of the 'Chinese' shape men's sense of self in Kante. 'We are bringing jobs to all the surrounding villages,' says the proud Chinese mine manager. However, narratives of local development strongly contrast with tales from villagers and their feelings of

[105] Rumor in the village which is unverified but reveals a fear of control by the state, and a feeling of powerlessness

dispossession, anger and fear. 'The Chinese, they are taking all our coal, this is all we have here', repeats Parviz. His son Sepehr is only five years old, yet he can imitate the sound of the exploding dynamite in the mountains. Stories of expropriation and loss also dominate villagers' tales. After the 'Chinese' blew up the mountains, walls of newly built houses cracked, and donkeys are being crushed by flying debris. 'Did you tell the Chinese about it?' I ask Parviz. 'I did, yes… we did,' he answers with a disillusioned look, 'they don't care, they don't do anything'. Relationships with the Chinese are difficult, they are not good people'. Delays in payment, unpaid labor, and unilaterally terminated contracts without notice are common in stories of exploitation in the village. In addition to the casualization of labor, all villagers share their 'fear' that the Chinese mine will ultimately take control over the whole village's resources. 'What are we going to do after, there is nothing else here', says Parviz.

Migration: Compensatory narratives and the control over women's mobility

The presence of the Chinese mine and its exploitative character adds to a feeling of psychological dispossession amongst men that appeared following the fall of the Soviet Union. When I inquired about the transformation of men's everyday life, men shared their feelings of nostalgia. 'We were all friends before, all part of the Union,' says Jawid, a forty-five-year-old man, 'now, it's not the same'. Men also commonly refer to their experience in the USSR military service as a period of openness and discovery. Their memories contrast with tales of violence, widespread xenophobia, and the impacts of restrictive Russian migration policies (Marat 2009; Gorodzeisky et al. 2014). Noor, who just came back from migration. 'It's hard there, sometimes, Russians just beat you up, like that, you don't know why, in the street (…) They don't like us, we take their women'.

To compensate for feelings of disempowerment, men in Kante build heroic narratives around the experience of migration that can protect their status, gender role, and honor. Because migration in Tajikistan has also become a 'way of life,' these narratives become co-constitutive of normative femininity and masculinity and tend to reinforce the same gendered norms that lead to women's restricted access to natural resources and their exclusion. This strong masculinity defined through narratives of migration is related to mobility and the seizing of the outside space. Discussions with men and women revealed the high value given in Tajik society to the men who have 'travelled the world' (*djahan didir*), and the maturity they gain from this experience. 'It's good for men to go to Russia,

they learn how to make a living, they see the world, and then they come back' says Jawid.

As already revealed by Reeves in Uzbekistan (2011), migration appears as a rite of passage for young men, a moment of their life when they experience freedom, including sexual freedom. They often go to the same place and reconstitute ties that they had in the village. In Kante, a large number of men migrate to Kamtchatka where one Kantegui started a fishing business in the 1990s. Family photo albums back in the village - shown with pride by parents, wives and children – are awash with pictures of men in shared apartments in Russia surrounded by bottles of alcohol and Russian women. Although polygamy is legally unrecognized in the country, men often take a second wife in Russia whilst away (Cleuziou 2013; Reeves 2013). These common practices are not hidden in the village, although sometimes silently disapproved of by women. Men often prided themselves with details about their double lives, a fact that reveals both the normalization of this practice and its role in defining men's sense of self, as in the case of Jawid:

> 'I had a wife there, all men do. (….) It's easier this way, when we go there, you do not have papers, do not have a house. Tatania (his Russian wife) helped me a lot'(…);

When I asked his wife, who stayed back in the village for ten years how she felt about his husband's second wife in Russia, she said:

> 'What do you want, a man cannot make it without a woman'. Who would wash his clothes? who would cook for him?' (…) "Russian women like Tajik men. Our men are strong, they are good workers. They don't drink. All Russian men drink all day long'.

In contrast, with the redefinition of a strong masculinity around ideas of mobility, the seizing of the outside space, and sexual freedom, femininity is reconstructed against the experience of men's migration as related to a protected *inside space*. When I asked why women do not go to Russia, Parviz replied, 'women don't know the way (…) They're scared', echoing answers given by most men and women in Kante, young people included. My host in the village similarly mentions that there is no place (*jah nist*) 'there is no place to stay, no place to sleep (for women) (…) Women don't speak Russian, they would get lonely and bored'. Assumptions about women's association with reproductive labor were also raised, as illustrated by Afsar: 'they stay here to 'take care of children

and parents'. Often, the only reason which allows a woman to join her husband is when he is in need of her support due to illness, or even more importantly, for fertility reasons.

In a context in which hegemonic masculinity is defined by the male mobility and female immobility, men who do not migrate or do not control women's social and spatial mobility are feminized and considered weak. Only two categories of men do not migrate in Kante. The first category is older men like Muhammad, who 'already did their job', he says, and have already migrated. Their immobility is included into a broader intergenerational transfer of duties that is considered acceptable. Like Muhammad, these men are 'done with migration', 'old now', it's 'the young ones turn to leave now'. The second category concerns those who are younger, and for whom mobility is more disruptive in terms of their sense of self and familial responsibilities, as in the case of Ashkan (twenty-three years old) who just got married and is the youngest of four sons in the family. When I asked him if he had already been to Russia, Ashkan shook his head and looked down 'No', he says 'I'm the youngest of the family, so I stayed here, I have to take care of my parents' (…) 'I didn't have the choice', he says. Ashkan wishes he could have gone to Russia like his older brother.

Informal Miners: Redefinition of a strong masculinity through women miner's exclusion and the use of narratives of honor and shame

In this context of extreme poverty, entering into informal coal mining can be seen as a viable economic choice which enables men to perform their role as breadwinners, while avoiding the hardships of migration. During the mining season (October to February), men miners can earn up to 100 US dollars per day. Work with the 'Chinese' mine pays on average 700 US dollars per month, whilst remittances from migration vary, some men do not send any remittances for months, whilst others would send 50 to 100 USD or more per month. Work in the illegal mines, however, is considered *'hard'* compared to work with the Chinese: 'Working for the Chinese is less tiring, you just drive a tractor or a car up and down the mountain (…) Men who go to the informal mines (*komor*), they have to extract themselves, this is a tough job', shares Umed, an employee of the Sino-Tajik mine who decided not to work in the informal mines when he returned from migration.

However, entering into informal mining in Kante, instead migrating to Russia or working with the Chinese, is more than merely an economic choice. Informal coal miners and other villagers ascribe particular values to this activity. Informal men miners

are 'strong', says Umed, they also comply with their role as breadwinners, agreeing to engage in manual labor to provide for their families. Their work is considered more arduous than artisanal mining. In addition, my hostess Manzilla mentions that 'Men who got to the informal mines (*komor*) are good men, they take care of their families (*negah mikonan*). Most people in the village speak of them as respectable men, who accept to submit to the hardships of work in mines to support their families.

For Murad, a twenty-eight year old informal miner, the Chinese are bad (*gandeh*): 'I will never work for the Chinese, look at what they did to the village!', he says. 'The men who work for them, I won't tell you what I think of them, you know'. Murad's house lies on the Southern slope of the Kantegui mountains, where the informal mining area overlaps with the Sino-Tajik mines area. His house was hit by flying rocks, 'just two years after' it was built. His tales echoes narratives of other men informal miners in Kante. Similarly, his cousin Umed who used to work for the Chinese and now works for the informal mines shares his thoughts about the Sino-Tajik mine and its miners:

> 'The Chinese do not treat us well, we do not understand one another (…) Men who work for them do not mind about the village, they don't care about the fact that the village will disappear. They have already asked us to move, they keep telling us that there is another village where there is land, and where there is more water than here. But we know that it's because the Chinese want our coal'.

The value informal miners ascribe to their work revolves around ideas of self-determination, resistance, and freedom, which enable men to negotiate economic and material constraints alongside the redefinition of a strong masculinity. Askar added when I asked him why he worked in the informal mines: a

> 'Here, I don't have to justify myself for anything' (…) 'nobody can tell me what to do'(….) 'I decide when I work and what I do'.

Informal miners also pass a strong judgment on both the Chinese and men who work for the Sino-Tajik mine. Murad's views echoes rumors and tales about the Chinese in the village. These rumors point to the cultural difference experienced:

> 'Since the Chinese have come here, all our donkeys have disappeared, they eat them (…) They don't have any education, they did not even have toilets, we had to build toilets for them! They used to give us chopsticks to eat, but we did not know how to eat with chopsticks'!

Such comments on the Chinese' ways of life recall broader Sinophobic attitudes in other places of the Global South, where the growth of Chinese investments transforms local landscapes and identities.

Men informal miners in the extractive landscape of Kante redefine their sense of self through a process of othering – first of the Chinese, second of men working with the Chinese, and finally of women, and in particular women miners. For Murad, men who work for the Chinese are not respectable, they are perceived as weak. Similarly, informal miners such as Murad or Umed are often the most vehement in their attacks against women miners or men who 'let' their wives work. The relationship between Nadirah and Umed illustrates this antagonism and the way in which Umed's sense of masculinity was defined through her exclusion. While Umed and Nadirah are part of the same extended family (*avlod*), Umed categorically refused to speak to Nadirah as well as other women miners. When I asked him for the reasons for his refusal, Umed started a monologue that illustrated the way in which his own sense of self was redefined through her exclusion and re-articulated through notions of honor and shame.

> 'Nadirah is a komorkesh, they are all unrespectable (*beqerhat*). Who can let them do that? They go mining, this is not what a woman should do. (…) These women should be ashamed (…) I don't want to see their faces. I know that they mine up there, I don't want to see it. I don't want to see her'.

Conclusion

This article aimed to nuance culturalist views that analyze women's exclusion as the consequence of 'traditional' notions of honor and shame without recognizing politico-ecologic transformations and their impact on men and women's everyday work and resource struggles. In particular, it aimed to decipher the underlying reasons behind the diverse geographies of exclusion in the Tajik village of Kante as a window onto broader gendered trends in the country. By focusing on the specific gendered geography of exclusion in Kante, it showed how the reinstatement of gendered norms that oppress some women made possible by these transformations. It particularly did so by attending to changing masculinities in post-Soviet Muslim Tajikistan and the extractive landscape around one of the country's main coal mining areas.

The article first described the specific gendered geography of exclusion in this village, how it was related to narratives of honor and shame articulated by men, and the way

these narratives were underwritten by specific ideas of (in)appropriate masculinity and femininity. It then challenged the idea that these specific normative masculinities and femininities were related to 'tradition' by showing how the local usage of honor and shame was also made possible by broader structures of exclusion related to national and transnational politico-economic changes. These resource struggles shape the landscape of extraction of Kante, characterized by a gendered socio-spatial organisation of emergent multi-focal livelihoods. The broader 'energy wars', and their impact on coal production and the opening of the Tajik market to Chinese companies, along with the specific ways these changes are lived in the village of Kante, create a hierarchy of exclusion in which some women appear at the bottom.

This process illustrates previous findings in the Muslim world, where notions of shame and honor appear as local idioms that legitimate certain political economies of exclusion (Feldman 2010). These structures of exclusion are also co-constituted by 'emotions' and their role in shaping masculinities. Men's feelings of material and psychological dispossession and disempowerment - related to the presence of the Chinese mine in the village, the loss self-worth since the end of Soviet rule, and the hardships of labor migration - create a disruption of conventional masculinities. Men in this context use compensatory narratives to retrieve a strong masculinity. These narratives participate in shaping norms of masculinities that revolve around mobility, the seizing of outside space, and relationally the control of women's mobility and fertility. In this context, informal mining in the village of Kante becomes a space where men can avoid the hardships of migration but also resist the casualization of labor in the Chinese mine. To negotiate material constraints while keeping a sense of honor, men use informal mining as the only alternative livelihood in the village for 'strong men'. Their involvement in artisanal mines becomes imbued with a sense of resistance, and self-determination that defines their masculinity. Central to the definition of this masculinity is also the re-application of values around the control of women's mobility and sexuality, which justifies women miners' exclusion, and its mediation through local idioms of honor and shame.

By unravelling the reasons behind gendered geographies of exclusion in this village, this article contributed to three bodies of knowledge. First, it showed how understanding of shifting gendered regimes in a post-Soviet Muslim context requires a careful analysis of broader politico-economic changes, the way they shape structures of exclusion and lead to the reconstruction of oppressive gender norms. In that sense, it challenged the culturalist assumptions that conventionally underlie studies on the transformation of

gendered norms in the post-Soviet Muslim periphery. Second, this article offered an illustration of the way feminist political ecology can – in conversation with emotional geographies – better illuminate the gendered nature of struggles around natural resources. Finally, it participated in building a situated understanding of how gendered power relations shape the lives of men and women in extractive landscapes where the advent of new investors transforms local identities.

CHAPTER 6 / ARTICLE 3 – WORKING BODIES AT THE MARGINS: ABJECT WORK, SHAME AND AGENCY AMONG MUSLIM WOMEN MINERS IN TAJIKISTAN

Submitted to Gender, Place and Culture

Abstract

This article focuses on the embodied experiences of marginalization of women artisanal coal workers in a context of extreme poverty. It is based on eight months of ethnographic research in one village in Tajikistan, at the margins of the post-Soviet space in its Muslim periphery. Drawing on a conversation between feminist labor geographies, and Sabah Mahmood's conceptualization of 'embodied and affective' agency, this paper aims to explore the most intimate geographies of gendered exclusion and challenge the claim that Muslim women are devoid of agency. Through ethnographic portraits of women miners, the article first explores the role of narratives of social shame in the process of abjection of women workers' bodies and the production of their socio-spatial marginalization. It then shows how women in positions of non-conformity also process shame through everyday working practices. The corporeal work they perform to maintain their sense of self in a position of non-conformity (re)produces their own marginality. Through their embodied work, women also reclaim space, and open new spaces of becoming and transformation. By exploring Muslim women's oppression at the margins, this article also opens a reflection on how to conciliate the grounded work of cultural translation with a feminist emancipatory politics.

Key words: Embodied Labor, Shame, Agency, Dirty/Abject Work, Muslim Women, Women Miners, Post-Soviet Tajikistan

Introduction

The first time I saw Nadirah, she was out of breath, her face darkened by coal. She was leading a donkey back to the shed just outside of her house. I did not know at the time that she was one of the pariahs in the village – this group of women you greet, but never visit, women whose stories can only be whispered. 'Don't tell anyone what I told you', otherwise 'she will fight you', 'she is not an easy person', she is 'harsh, bossy and has a bad temper' says my hostess. Work in the artisanal coalmines of Kante, a mountain village of Tajikistan in the Muslim post-Soviet periphery, is shameful *(ayb)* for the nineteen women who, like Nadirah, work every day. Mining is not a woman's place, it is men's work (*mardikor*). Most women miners hide at the margins of the village to perform their 'shameful' activity. They sometimes also work at night when they know they can go unseen. 'It's another village up there' - It takes twenty minutes up the village's sinuous dirt roads to get to the women's mining area. Coal is hard *(khin)* and more difficult to extract here, than down in the village where only men go mining, and where women are not allowed. 'Men are embarrassed (*sharm mikonan*)' (…) 'they won't' let us', 'but we work anyway; coal is all we've got'.

This article explores the embodied experiences of socio-spatial marginalization of women informal coal workers in the post-Soviet Muslim periphery. Through ethnographic portraits, it sheds light on women miners' everyday life as a window onto the most intimate geographies of gendered exclusion and their relation with post-Soviet transformations. It focuses on two aspects of women miners' embodied labor: first, the construction of their work in mines as abject, dirty and shameful based on the fact that women, through their bodily work, defy norms of appropriate femininity anchored into local interpretations of Muslimness; and second, the emotional labor or 'corporeal work of being' (Mahmood 2004, p.132) women perform to live with and beyond shame.

Women miners' marginalization is not new or specific to post-Soviet Muslim countries. Mines around the world are typically defined as a 'man's place', as sites of definition of strong masculinities, despite the fact that women have always been active workers within and around them (John 1980; Labonne 1996; Gier & Mercier 2006; Lahiri-Dutt & Macintyre 2006; Lahiri-Dutt 2012; Bryceson et al. 2013; Bashwira et al. 2014; Jenkins 2014). In Kante, men control women's access to the village's main natural resource and refuse to work near women. Other women villagers and men miners cast their work as shameful, exclude women from social kinship in the village, bully them, laugh at them. Telling stories of women miners first contributes to challenging their practical and

epistemic exclusion, highlighting the gendered dynamics that regulate and shape their work in specific locales (Lahiri-Dutt 2012; Jenkins 2014). It is also a way to delve into the complexity of gendered exclusions, taking the standpoint of women at the margins as a site of epistemic privilege (Hooks 1989). Their experiences I show, are a profound edge, part of the whole, outside of the body, simultaneously acting as a window onto relations of power, and a place of creativity where relations of power can be reversed (hooks 1989)

Hence, my focus is not only on mining per se, but on women miners as abject workers *occupying* the margins. Exploring the reasons that justify their marginalization raises topical concerns embedded in the complexity of the gender question in post-Soviet Central Asia (Kandiyoti 2007; Kamp 2009; Cleuziou & Direnberger 2016; Reeves 2011). Women's informal mining in Kante constitutes a heavily gendered bodily work that challenges all notions of acceptable femininity in a place marked by economic desolation[106] and the reestablishment of local Islamic notions of decency, privacy and modesty after the fall of the Soviet Union. It also raises a historical question –, how can we make sense of the inappropriateness of women's work outside the home in Kante, ,but also in the rest of the post-Soviet Muslim space, given that women's integration into the labor force was the main tool for their emancipation during Soviet times (Lubin 1984; Kandiyoti 2007)?

This question is all the more relevant in Tajikistan as the mainstream narrative on women in the Muslim post-Soviet periphery relies on the same stereotypes used around the world. As feminist researchers of Islam such as Lila Abu Lughod (2002) and Saba Mahmood (2001; 2004), but also other social scientists within and beyond geography (Falah & Nagel 2005; Dwyer 1999) highlight, conventional and mainstream discourses still tend to picture Muslim women as devoid of agency. Women's representations do not escape this Orientalist picture in Tajikistan, despite the seventy years of dominance by the Soviet Union. Women's condition is constructed through the 'retraditionalization narrative' that is mainly articulated by development and international organizations in the country. This narrative assumes that the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of its gender equality policies led to a return to Islam, a retrenchment towards home, and the acceptance of oppressive patriarchal norms (Behzadi 2012; Cleuziou & Direnberger 2016). Similar trends in the non-Muslim post-communist countries are interpreted as

[106] With 31% of the population still living under the poverty line in 2016, Tajikistan is the poorest country of the Community of Independent States (UNDP 2016, p.219)

both the consequence of the economic impacts of transition and the redeployment of traditionalist ideals of femininity in national discourses (Barbara Einhorn 1994; True et al. 2000; Funk & Mueller 1993; Buckley 1997). In Muslim Central Asia however, tradition is conflated with Islam and women are often reduced to passive victims of religion, of their husband, or their mother-in-law.

While my research recognizes multiple forms of retraditionalization in post-Soviet Muslim countries, it aims here to challenge some misuses of this concept as an all-encompassing term, a paradigmatic reading of social change. I focus here on deconstructing one of the main underlying assumptions of this narrative, which is the idea of women as passive victims. I both emphasize and (re)theorize their agency in face of gendered exclusion by drawing on feminist researchers of Islam's conceptualizations of agency as more than resistance, and as a capacity for action within structures of subordination (Mahmood 2004; Bilge 2010b; Sehlikoglu 2017). I particularly develop two arguments. First, through their embodied working practices and their 'corporeal work of being' (Mahmood 2001, p.160), women become subjects in (re)producing, navigating and challenging their marginalization. Submitted to social shaming, women abject workers, through the way they live with and beyond shame, also reproduce and resist their marginalization. Second, this article calls for a conciliation between the academic argument that has emphasized the necessity for cultural specification of Muslim women's agency (Mahmood 2001; Vasilaki 2015; Schütte 2013; Ibrahimhakkioglu 2012) and a feminist progressive emancipatory politics concerned with challenging notions of what constitutes women's oppression.

By developing these arguments, this article draws on previous research that has resisted stereotypical views on Central Asian women (Kandiyoti 1998; Kandiyoti 2007; Reeves 2013; Cleuziou & Direnberger 2016; Direnberger 2011b; Cleuziou 2013). It is also attentive to scales, subjects, and conceptualizations that offer a different angle on women's exclusion in this context. By focusing on 'embodied and affective' (Mahmood 2001, p.160) agency, it challenges masculinist approaches that place emotions and the body at the bottom of the ladder in modes of knowing (Jaggar 1989; J. Sharp 2009; Davidson & Smith 2009; Longhurst 1995; Grosz 1994). The study of shame as an embodied emotion that reflects normative systems, bridges spatial dichotomies of objectivist knowledge as it is 'both intensely individual and social' and undoes 'the opposition between the private and the public', the intimate and the political (Probyn 2004, p.329). By focusing on women's work, this research also resists the idea of Muslim

women as solely religious selves, by retrieving their role as makers of their everyday economic geographies (Falah & Nagel 2005).

This article is organised in six sections. The first section shows what a conversation between feminist geographies of work and the body, theories of abjection (Kristeva 1982), shame, and Mahmood's (2001) concept of embodied agency, brings to the understanding of the specific gendered geographies of exclusion in this setting. This is followed by a methodological section and three empirical sections, before reaching a conclusion.

Work, abjection, the body and Muslim women's agency

Feminist labor geographers have revealed the importance of the body as a scale to investigate the relationship between gender, work and exclusion (McDowell & Sharp 1997; McDowell et al. 2007; McDowell 2009; Wright 1997; Longhurst 2001). Gendered assumptions about bodies underscore a sexual division of labor based on the spatial dichotomy between home and work, women's association with the home and social reproduction, their exclusion from the productive sphere, and their relegation to spaces of precarious and informal work (McDowell et al. 1984; England & Lawson 2005). Research on embodied labor drew on Butlerian notions of gender identity to foreground the body as a site of re-inscription of gendered discourses, and of performance of femininities and masculinities at work (McDowell & Court 1994). It has shown how workers who subvert notions of appropriate femininity and masculinity through the 'wrong' bodily performances of gender are constructed as 'out of place' . Numerous forms of bodily work have also been included into definitions of work - the emotional labor that people do in order to perform gender has, for instance, been analysed as a type of reproductive labor or 'life's work' (Mitchell et al. 2004).

This article draws on these conceptualizations and refines the relationship between work, gendered bodies and exclusion through a consideration of how certain types of worker's bodies are constructed as abject. For Kristeva (1982) the abject refers to the reaction of horror, repulsion and disgust related to bodily wastes, residues and dirt through which a distinction between self and other leads to the defence of embodied boundaries. First used as a way to tease out the intra-psychic grounds from which women's bodies are constructed as impure, abjection has also been taken up by scholars who have exposed the construction of socio-spatial boundaries between the pure and its

others (McClintock 1995; Sibley 1995). Processes of socio-spatial exclusion are based on the exclusion of the poor, queer populations and racialized ethnic or religious communities, as a threat based on a literal or metaphorical association with dirt, sex, filth, mess, and danger. Research on different forms of dirty work – sex work (Russell 2013; Wolkowitz 2007), garbage work (Moore 2008) and care work (Huang et al. 2012; Dyer et al. 2008) – has similarly drawn on notions of the abject/unclean to uncover the embodied, racialized, gendered and sexual constructions that justify exclusion. 'Pervasive stigma' (Ashforth & Kreiner 2013, p.128) and shame constitute the core of dirty workers' experiences. Yet, dirty workers also labor positive meaning to redefine a sense of self-esteem in a position of non-conformity. Ambivalence often characterizes the emotional landscape they navigate, between shame/pride (Ashforth & Kreiner 2016), repulsion/desire (Tyler 2011).

Most research on embodied labor and gendered aspects of abject work builds on a longstanding concern in feminist geography with theorizing the relationship between the body, gender and agency. Whilst the anatomical body is foregrounded as a starting point for analysis in the works of feminist authors like Irigaray (1985) or Gallop (1988), constructionists critique this view for its essentialism, and emphasize the discursive production of the gendered body. Here, I draw on the corporealist feminism of authors like Longhurst (1995; 2001; 2005a; 2014) and Grosz (1994), to recognize both the discursive production of bodies, and their physical, fleshy, sensuous, reality. This focus on 'weighty materiality' (Longhurst 2001, p.5) is a way to conceptualize the body as more than surfaces of inscription of relations of power, but as lived, and as the site of agency (Grosz 1993).

Emotions, as lived through and in the body, are in particular seen as a central place from which gender is experienced, and made (Bondi 2005; Davidson & Smith 2009; Simonsen 2007). Here, I particularly focus on shame as 'the affective cost of not following the scripts of normative existence', as a response to a wrong performance of gender, and one of the primary negative affects (Ahmed 2004, p.107). Shame is a lived emotion, which defines one sense of self against another, and one's failure in face of social norms and expectations. Shame is also inherently physical, painful and 'works on and through bodies', 'deforming and reforming' bodies and social spaces (Ahmed 2004, p 103). While it leads to hiding and concealment, it is at the same time deeply ambivalent (Ahmed 2004; Probyn 2004). In shame, one exposes oneself to a failure through the gaze of an ideal other (Ahmed 2004), highlighting the process through which some identities become shameful. At the same time shame demonstrates a desire for belonging. While

the difficulty of moving beyond shame evidences the power of the normative, shame can also be transformed. As a complex emotion it is also associated with a series of sister emotions that appear as responses to shame: guilt, but sometimes also anger and pride (Sedgwick 1995).

Such a concern for emotions and the body in the construction of one's gendered sense of self is reflected in the work of Mahmood on Muslim women's agency (2001; 2004). In her research on Egyptian Muslim women in mosques, she offers an alternative reading of agency that attempts to challenge the 'epistemological conditions under which Muslim women are understood' (Bautista 2008, p.75). Mahmood explores what secular feminism has framed as a contradiction – 'women's active support for a movement that seems to be inimical to their own interests and agenda' (Mahmood 2001, p.212). Contesting some strands of Western feminism's view of women's participation in their own oppression as a form of '*false consciousness'* (Ibid, p 205), she calls for historicising agency and underscoring cultural specificity to resist the universalisation of the desire for freedom (Mahmood, 2001). Agency for Mahmood (2001) does not equate to resistance, but is 'embodied and affective' and refers to people's 'capacity for action' (Ibid, p 203) and their agency in inhabiting norms. Through their 'corporeal work of being' and 'the work bodily practices perform in creating a subject' (Mahmood 2001, p.160), they also become (Clare 2009).

Researching gendered exclusion and Muslim women's agency in Kante

Eight months of ethnographic research were undertaken between September 2014 and July 2015 in Kante, a village of an estimated 1500 inhabitants on a hillside of the Fann Mountains, in Northern Tajikistan. Physical and spatial remoteness is one of the main elements that characterizes this village – whilst it is only 130km from Dushanbe, reaching the village via the South can take up to ten hours depending on road conditions. Kante is also eight kilometres from Sarvoda, a town created during Soviet rule to shelter workers of the 'Anzob combinat', an antimony, mercury and coal extraction industry founded in 1937. During the Soviet period, mining was mainly considered as the work of men despite a Soviet policy that promoted women in traditionally male positions. Whilst most men in the village commuted from Kante to the semi-urban town of Sarvoda to mine, women usually worked in the countryside, in the tobacco collective farm, the *kolkhoz*. Since the fall of the USSR, collective structures of work were dismantled and gradually replaced by alternative forms of livelihoods. As in many areas of Tajikistan,

shortage of water and the private agrarian reform lead to a feminization of agriculture, its transformation into a subsistence-oriented activity, and hence its demonetization. Men in Kante, like in most Central Asian countries, started migrating seasonally to Russia for work, leaving their families behind. Unlike most places in Central Asia, Kante however lies on a coal reserve. When they do not migrate, men in Kante work in the Sino-Tajik open-pit coalmine established in 2013 in the village with the opening of Tajikistan to Chinese investments, and which encroaches on the villager's main resource, and on the main artisanal mining area in the village that was first dug by families after 1991. Often, children from the age of five follow their fathers, uncles, and sometimes mothers, to the end of the dark damp galleries, and wait for them to load their donkey with coal bags before leading it back down the mountains to the small markets.

The nineteen women miners in Kante have different life stories. While four of them are 'left-behind women' as they are called in the development jargon in the country, four of them still live with their husbands in the village, mine on their own or as a joint strategy with their husbands. Most of these women are in their thirties. Six women miners are older women above the age of forty, who usually do not work in mines themselves but run a family business of selling coal. Six women miners in their twenties are also the *'kelins'*, (daughters in law) of these older women miners. While work in the mines is considered as shameful for all women in Kante, the degree of shame, and its experience vary according to multiple factors that this article will make visible as a way to explore how gender norms intersect with age, but also socio-marital status, the type of bodily activity in which women engage in the mines: either extracting coal, selling coal, leading the donkey. In the next sections, I will start with ethnographic portraits of these different categories of women miners, before analyzing the different types of exclusions/marginalization they experience. The most marginalized women miners in the village are constantly bullied, excluded from networks of reciprocity like weddings, circumcision ceremonies and barter which in Tajikistan are crucial in defining social positions (Cleuziou 2013; Harris 2004).

During my fieldwork I lived with two local families, worked as a teacher in the school and regularly visited the mines. I used participant observation and carried out seventy-four interviews with men, women, and children on their work histories. Around five hundred men, nineteen women miners, but also around two hundred children worked in the artisanal mines. I interviewed women miners several times and developed friendships that gave me the opportunity to enter into intimate discussions. I particularly developed close relationships with Nadirah and Sayebeh, the two most

marginalized women in the village. Unspoken thoughts, feelings, evasions, silences, lies, denials, but also rumors (Fujii 2010) were used as a primary source of knowledge. The ethnographic portraits that follow, and their development in the analytical parts of this article, reflect this dedication to make visible interpersonal relationships beyond language; in addition, they use the way these relationships were built as telling: women miners' initial fear, refusal to speak, and lies in my first encounters with them were a valuable source of understanding of how women responded to their shaming.

My own bodily and emotional experience, and the bond created with women miners, also became a privileged site of understanding of gendered relations of power. As a French-Iranian woman living in the UK, speaking Farsi, looking Tajik and having a Tajik name, I was either considered as one of 'them' (an outsider or 'Westerner/Russian') or as one of 'us' ('Iranian/Tajik' and Muslim). My positionality was particularly constraining in some sites, leading to initial difficulties to build trust. Sometimes it simultaneously allowed me to navigate multiple gendered positions and bodily norms in different spaces that often put me in uncomfortable, perilous, but also illuminating situations. Trespassing social gendered norms and living with their repercussions allowed me to first to make these norms visible, and second to be seen by other women miners, as both another alien and an ally.

This interest in my own positionality also attenuates some of the critiques made against Mahmood's (2001, 2004) theorization of Muslim women's agency. Ibrahimhakkioglu (2012) identified two main feminist concerns with regards to Mahmood's theory – first, her call for contextualization has led to specific anxieties related to issues of cultural relativism and the impossibility of cultural translation (Waggoner 2005; Bangstad 2011). Second, her theorization has also been read as a dissociation from progressive feminist ideals. How can one challenge oppression if women's capacity for action through expressions of subordination is considered as a form of agency (Bangstad 2011; Bautista 2008)? By focusing on the embodied and emotional relations of and between the researcher and the researched, I follow Mahmood's call for a 'more corporeal basis to ground transnational feminist projects' (Ibrahimhakkioglu 2012, p 15). In particular, I consider these experiences of sameness, difference, bonding, as a base for solidarity among women.

Portraits of women miners in Kante

Nadirah, Sayebeh: Those who extract coal (mikanan)

Nadirah, whose words are at the beginning of this article, and her friend (*dogani*) Sayebeh do not only lead the donkey back and forth in the mine (*mikechan*), they also extract coal with a pickaxe (*mikanan*), fill up bags that they load on the donkey and sell them to the truck drivers (*kamaz*) who wait in the small informal market of the hidden women's mine. Months passed before both agreed to speak to me. While Nadirah simply turned her eyes away and found ways to politely decline or postpone my invitations, Sayebeh was sometimes aggressive, scary and rude. Other men and women in the village had warned me – explicitly in the case of those who I lived close to, my host, hostess, and their extended family that: 'she is crazy', 'she has a bad temper', she has a bad reputation (*badnom*), 'be careful', 'don't speak to her'; and or indirectly for those who I knew less well: through mocking smiles, ironical jokes, complicit giggles. Both Nadirah and Sayebeh observed me from afar before trusting me. Going back and forth to Dushanbe on my own, working as a woman, writing, talking to both men women, laughing in public and accepting to be seen with her and other women miners, confronting men and other women's jeering about my singlehood with a silent persistence.

Nadirah is thirty-four years old, and one of the 'abandoned' wives in the village. Her husband flew to Russia six days after they got married, took a second wife in Russia, and has stopped sending remittances. 'Of husband, he's only got the name' she shared once. When he comes back to the village, her husband usually lives with her and their only daughter, Zarina who is thirteen, and who Nadirah takes mining. Her husband expects Nadirah to perform all her wifely duties, including sexual ones when he is back. 'Before getting married, I had a good life', shared Nadirah, 'it's after, that life started getting tough for me'. Left-behind women traditionally go back to their own families or to their in-laws when their husbands do not return, but Nadirah refused. She decided to work in the mines in order to make a living and raise her only child in her own house, far up the village, next to the women's mining area. Others, like her in-laws and brothers, fight with her (*djang mikonan*). They want her to be a proper woman, 'they tell me to stop going to coal (*komor*), your husband does not want you to, it's shameful (*ayb*), says Nadirah. She always refuses, preferring the contemptuous silences when she enters a room than leaving her work.

Like Nadirah, Sayebeh is also thirty-four and was forced to get married at the age of twenty-three. 'I was already old, my parents needed to get rid of me', shared Sayebeh.

Following their wedding, her husband had multiple affairs, all known in the village. 'We did not get along. We fought all the time' she says. He first left for Russia, and only sent money to his parents who did not share the remittances with Sayebeh, and their two young children aged eight and five. When he came back, he decided to take a second wife in Khudjand. 'We did not choose each other, we were forced to get married, my sister had married his brother, so they forced us, our families did a barter (*dad o gerift*)'. When I asked Sayebeh why she did not get a divorce she said 'I would not be able to re-marry, which man would accept to take care of children who are not his own?'. When Sayebeh's husband comes back to the village, he sometimes stays over 'he says that my house is not mine, it is his' (…), 'We just don't talk, don't sleep in the same room, we ignore each other'.

Almost every evening, Sayebeh and Nadirah climb the mountain together, followed by their donkeys. They sometimes go with other women miners. From my balcony, I can see their figures at dusk, going up the mountains and helping each other in accomplishing the arduous task of hitting the rock off, after a day of hard labor at home.

Nargis and Banu: those who only lead the donkey (mikechan)?

No, I won't talk, I am embarrassed (*sharm mikonam*) is how Nargis, thirty-two years old, answered my request for an interview with her the first time we met. She was sitting on a coal bag next to her donkey on the side of the road. 'I'm not working in the mines', she said. Nargis, unlike Sayebeh and Nadirah, lives with her husband, daughter and son in Kante. Her husband is one of the rare men in the village who has never been to Russia. He is a 'skiver man' (lazy), as other women in the village call him. 'He does not do anything, spends his time sleeping, and hanging out', shared my hostess Manzilla. 'Poor Nargis', as she is systematically called in the village by other women, goes on her own to the mines, 'She suffered a lot you know', says my hostess. Whereas everyone in the village knows that Nargis is an extractor, she persists in hiding this reality - 'I do not extract', says Nargis, 'It's my husband's job'.

Men and women in the village also speak of Banu with pity. She is one of the poor women *(bitchareh),* who did not have a choice but to work in the mines. Her husband did not 'abandon' her with her five children. As many Tajik males however, his remittances from seasonal trips to Russia are irregular. 'Sometimes he sends a bit of money, sometimes months go without him sending anything', says Banu. As everyone knows in the village, the reason why Said hides in their house, sleeps the whole day, and does not go mining in the illegal mines in between his trips to Russia is not related to

what Banu refers to as his 'heart disease'. Like 'most men in the village', Said drinks. 'Men only wait for weddings to get drunk' (….) 'Sometimes, he gets too drunk, and he beats his wife' (…)', shared with me by a neighbor.

While Banu first lied about her activity trying to convince me that she was 'just leading'; she later adjusted her narrative - 'you saw me, I go to the mines, sometimes, not always'. When I asked her who was extracting, she first feigned ignorance, saying 'not me, I cannot extract, it's too hard for me, it's men's work (*mardikor*). It is only a few weeks later, when I saw Banu's oldest son for the first time that the truth came out. Parviz interrupted our conversation, ran out to her, mumbling unintelligible words and making big movements with his disarticulated arms and legs. Banu asked him to calm down. He left, talking to himself. She then started, uninterruptedly with a tone that switched from self-pity to defiance.

> 'All that is because of our son. It's hard, all the other young males of his age go to Russia or to the coal mines (*komor*) to support their family. But him, he was born like that, there is nothing to do with him. (…) My husband gets sad and worried, and he drinks (…). So, yes, I go, sometimes, I extract [coal] myself. I have five children. It's hard, it hurts, I hurt my back, to the point that I could not go anymore. It's too hard for a woman. But what do you want, there is no choice'.

Tamina: working as a team *(amkari)*

'Yes, I extract myself as well' shares Tamina, hiding her embarrassment with a laughter. 'All women who go mining extract, all without exception, even those who say they don't!' Tamina is one of the few women who go mining together with their husbands. When her husband leaves the village, however, she goes on her own. At first, Tamina tried to tone down the inappropriate character of her activity 'I never go with people I don't know' she says. If I were to go in a gallery with men I did not know, everyone would fight me, but I go with my people'.

For Tamina, informal mining is a livelihood strategy in which all family members are involved – Muhammad, her youngest son who is ten years old, draws the donkey, every day after school; Goldasta, her daughter who is sixteen joins them sometimes. When her husband is away, Tamina goes mining with her brother and her sister in law in the shared gallery that her father dug after the fall of the Soviet Union. 'I am the one who decided to work in mines' says Tamina. Madjid, her husband, 'has never wanted to go (to Russia), and he does not want to work for the Chinese either. Working in Russia is tough

for men, and the Chinese, they don't pay, they tell you what to do and you have to work every day'.

A few months earlier, however, Tamina had an accident while mining with her sister-in-law:

> 'We were extracting, and the gallery collapsed. Stones fell on me, and both my legs got stuck. My sister in law released me, carried me, put me on the donkey, and took me back home. She then went to find a car in the village which took us to the hospital in Sarvoda[107]. I suffered a lot. I had to lie down for eight months'

Tamina told me the story whilst giggling and hiding her face. When I asked her why she was laughing, she told me because it was shameful (*ayb*): 'people talk, laugh they say she went to the coal mines (*komor*) and broke her legs!'. She then started a monologue that was only interrupted by silences.

> 'You, you live in town, and in the cities, women work. Here, it's the 'village', and in our village, women do not work. Women are only housewives' (…) 'Everyone says that it's shameful (*ayb*). But Me, I go anyway! I'm not going to stay here and do nothing. I have to run our life. If I were to say 'it's *ayb*, I don't want to do it', who is going to give us bread? Me, I don't say that it's *ayb*, I confront with men'. (…) 'Men and women should be equal. I work, and I eat. (…) When men and women work together, this is when it works out! The women who say that it's shameful, they have two or three young men at home who work and their husbands as well. Us, we don't. It's the women who 'talk'. They say 'she is going to speak to truck drivers (*Kamaz*), it's shameful (*ayb*)'. But they are mountain women, they are narrow minded! They should go and hang out in cities for a while. They would see. They should go to the bazaar! Here, what? Our women, they sleep. No one stands up to go and work! No one stands up to go anywhere! (…) Us, the miners, we do something at least. We draw the donkey. And they say that it's not appropriate? Me, I'm not afraid. The ones who say that it's *ayb*, I let them say whatever they want. I broke my leg last year, and now, I am standing up again, and I work again'.

[107] Nearest town

Mitra: older women *(zanayeh kalan),* and their daughters-in-law *(kelin)*

Mitra is forty-five years old, has three sons of working age, two daughters who have already left the house, and two daughters in-law (*kelin*), who live with her. Mitra is one of the older women miners who act as family business 'matrons'. She sits on coal bags like on a throne, deals with the coal buyers, and waits for her sons to work in the galleries. 'I have the power, because I deal with the money' shares Mitra. Her husband does not go to Russia, he is too old and too weak. The villagers laugh at her, though not as much as at her husband. 'I take the money, men cannot be trusted here, if I was letting my husband deal with it, he would just drink it all'. When she was younger, Mitra was an extractor, too. Like many older women, she speaks about Nadirah and Sayebeh with contempt: 'they are rotten (*gandeh*). Mitrah does not speak to them and has no plan to invite them to her grandson's circumcision ceremony in two weeks' time.

Ask about her duties in their coal business, Mitra replies 'I do not do anything, I send my sons and daughters-in-law (*kelins*) to work and I get the money'. 'Men go extracting, and I go to the stores and buy what we need at home'. Mitra, like other women of her age who work in mines, considers herself as the head (*sardar*) of the house. 'Since my mother-in-law passed away, I am the chief'. 'It feels good to have people who work for you'. Her daughter-in-law *(kelin)* is only 19 years old. She works sometimes with her husband, leads the donkey, but as soon as she gets pregnant, she will have to stop. She works discretely, does not want anyone else to see it, and would never 'extract', 'it is too hard', and people would talk (*ovoz micheh*).

Dirty work, social shaming and women miners' abject bodies: the production of the margins

Strength, fertility and reproductive labor: young women miners' shame

In this section, I draw on the diversity of social positions and activities described in the ethnographic portraits and enrich them with narratives of other men and women in the village to analyse the complexity of women miners' labor, focusing on the construction of their work as dirty, abject, and shameful. I show how women miners' exclusion is the result of a process of shaming which stigmatizes 'wrong' bodily performances of gender. Protecting women's bodies for an appropriate gendered division of labor appeared as central to the definition of women miners' work as shameful. When Afsar, my male host, returned from to Russia, Manzilla, his wife, offered to go to the mines with him. 'We did

not have money, we wanted to build our house. I thought we would save money faster this way…He got so angry', recalls Manzilla. Proudly, she told me that Afsar forbade her to 'even think about it'. 'It's men's work *(mardikor)*', said Afsar to Manzilla 'it's not a job for you. A woman does not have strength. She cannot. She gets tired (*mandeh)* also meaning rotten/unusable), 'she has to take care of the children and work in the house'. Younger women's work appeared as particularly inappropriate and dangerous for women's fertility. 'People say, she is a miner (*komorkesh*)', she is unusable, she is not going to make good babies, and no one will marry her' shares Mitra.

Women miners in Kante are shamed and ashamed because their embodied labor challenges the bodily gendered norms that traditionally associate them with the home and reproductive labor. This association is also due to economic necessity as men miners rely on women's reproductive labor – (in this case children and elders' care, cooking, cleaning), in order to work in the productive sphere (legal or illegal mining) (McDowell & Massey, 1984). Younger women's stigmatization reflects broader trends in Tajikistan and Central Asia as younger women's value is based on their capacity to become 'good daughters-in-law' by undertaking reproductive labor. This increased importance of reproductive labor and related gendered bodily norms has been inscribed into economic transformations since Soviet times. As collective work and social support systems disappeared, reproductive labor tends to be reprivatized. In most post-Soviet Muslim countries, and Tajikistan in particular, gendered bodily attributes which associate women with reproductive labor are legitimated and reinforced as they are in line with assumptions about a correct bodily performance of Muslim femininity.

'If a woman can extract, what's the man for?'

The diversity of experiences of dirty work revealed a hierarchy of shame in Kante that depended on different types of bodily work performed by women miners. Women like Nadirah and Sayebeh, who extract coal with a pickaxe in addition to leading the donkey, appeared as a distinct social category that was more heavily stigmatized than women miners who appeared to only lead the donkey, such as Nargis and Banu. For a long time, their existence was hidden to me, revealing the sensitive character of this activity. The feeling of trespassing experienced when, during one of my visits in the galleries, I tried to extract coal myself highlighted the fact that this bodily act was considered inappropriate for women. When Afsar and I reached the end of the damp and dark gallery, I asked him if I could borrow his pickaxe to extract coal. There, I heard him raising his voice for the first time 'No, it's not your job, I won't let you, it's impossible'.

Extracting coal for a woman appeared to be a disruptive performance of gender that destabilized the core attribute of normative working-class masculinity in Kante. After all, men's bodily strength justified the construction of women extractors' bodies as abject. The rhetorical question 'If a woman can extract, what's the man for?', raised by my hostess illustrates the threat to men's sense of self that women's act of extracting constitutes. Just like men's seasonal migration to Russia (Reeves 2011), extracting in Kante, is a *rite of passage* that defines young men's entrance into manhood. Abbas, a fifteen-year old who goes mining after school, is like many young men, looking forward to this 'moment' when he will 'have the strength to extract'. 'Then, my father can rest, and I can take care of the family', he says, 'for now, I'm not strong enough'. The centrality of bodily strength as a marker of masculinity is common in manual professions. In this context however, a closer association of masculinity and physical strength has developed. The loss of a sense of self in a situation of economic impoverishment seems to be the reason why men retrench towards traditional norms. Relationally, the reverse applies too: women must be weak, and stay 'in place'. The shaming of women extractors is a form of social control exerted to ensure the protection both of men's sense of self and the social value of women who do not mine.

Socio-marital position, oppression and choice

Besides destabilizing hegemonic masculinity, the bodily act of extracting coal appeared to be a practice that signalled a specific socio-marital position and a 'wrong' performance of gender that justified the casting of women miners' work as shameful. 'Women who extract' like Nadirah and Sayebeh are usually sole heads of their household, and their husbands have left for Russia not to return. Besides being shamed for having been left for another woman in Russia, they were known as having been active in their separation from their husband. Nadirah is one of these four 'left-behind women' who started extracting after their husbands left. Rumours about her, as demonstrated by this quote from my hostess, constructed her as responsible for her lot:

> 'It's her fault if her husband left in the first place' (…) She was not a good wife, she was not setting up the beds at night, nor making tea.' Her husband banned her from working whilst, but she did not listen and did it anyway! (….) She got pregnant after one of her husband's visit and she decided to have an abortion against his will. When her brother in law heard, he came, and beat her. She went to the police and lied! She said that she lost the baby because her brother in law

beat her in the stomach. (…). But that was untrue, she did decide to get this abortion'.

Nadirah later told me her own version of the story – including the fights, abuse from her husband, and her decision to lie to protect herself.

In contrast to Nadirah and Sayebeh, women extractors like Nargis or Banu who submitted to oppressive relationships, were less shamed and even pitied. Other women in the village often called them poor women (*bitchoreh*) and were complicit in hiding the fact that Nargis and Banu extracted coal. Their capacity to endure hardship was often praised - 'she suffered a lot' was the sentence repeated when other women in the village spoke of them. Nargis' husband is a 'lazy man', I had been told. Similarly, Banu stayed with her husband despite the meagre remittances he sent when away and despite the second wife he married in Russia and the physical abuse she suffered.

By choosing to escape oppressive relationships, Nadirah and Sayebeh breached norms of femininity embedded into an aesthetics of suffering that values submission, docility, self-devotion and sacrifice. These gendered norms are widespread in the way femininities are performed in Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Iran (Schütte 2013). Shaming women who defy these norms and praising women who submit to these norms is a way to guarantee the (re)production of gendered oppressive practices. The stigmatization of choice in this context is a way to preclude women's attempts to resist these practices.

Moving bodies, loose women and sexuality

Younger women miners, such as Nadirah, Sayebeh, Nargis and Banu, were also regarded as inappropriately sexualized. In the intimacy of her household, safe from other villager's ears, my hostess revealed to me the main reason behind the inappropriateness of women miners' work. She stood up quickly, spoke louder and mimed women miners: 'Look at me, you move your body, like this (she bent and stood up quickly) (….) 'you show your breasts, you show your bottom to unknown men[108]'. Women miners, through their bodily movements, subvert norms of virtue considered appropriate for women, they become bad, rotten *(gandeh)* as says Mitra. They do not respect the accepted zone of contact between women and unknown men and they challenge the appropriate bodily gestures of women associated with their immobility and restriction to inside spaces. Women in Kante, I have been told, are *'khanechin'* which means 'housewife' but literally

[108] Coal buyers

means ‘who sits at home’. In contrast, women miners move around *(migardan),* a term that can be used to refer to ‘loose women’. This sexualization recalls women in Victorian British coalmines who were cast as immoral due to their inappropriate bodily postures, as for instance working topless near naked men (John 1980). In Kante this sexualisation is however embedded into a broader sexualization of the outside space since the fall of the Soviet Union. The portrayal of mobile women as sexually available finds justification in religious norms as well as in the necessity of male migrant laborers to control women’s mobility at home.

Corporeal work of being’ and women’s agency: from the (re)production to the transformation of the margins

Living with shame, (re)producing the margins

Through the corporeal work they perform to live with shame, women also become agents in the (re)production of their own marginalization. The narratives describing women’s affective and corporeal experiences revealed their distress and uncovered how their sense of self was impacted by their position. Nadirah, Sayebeh, Banu, Nargis, Tamina and others were carrying shame on their body through the coal marks that never left their hands and cheeks. Their abject status could never be disguised or denied. Their physical aches constantly reminded them of their social position, ‘It always hurts’, shared Nadirah whilst touching her hands, arms and neck. Most women miners refused to be interviewed at first. ‘The others would have fought me, I was scared of them’, shared Nadirah months later speaking of her brothers and husband. Nadirah and Sayebeh also felt guilty and responsible for their condition. Sayebeh often blamed herself in her narratives – ‘It’s my fault’, she repeated, ‘I did not make his bed, I did not give him a son’.

Women miners also entered into corporeal strategies to protect themselves and disguise their working practices. These metaphorical and material hiding strategies are part of the active production of women’s own exclusion and responses to shame (Ahmed 2004). Constant lies, evasiveness, and sometimes aggression prevailed in my earlier exchanges with most women miners. Their attempts to hide sometimes put their bodies at risk. By working at night, at the edges of the village, women were able to go unseen and hope to be forgotten. Tamina's poignant story recalled the physical pain endured to become invisible. It also is a reminder of bodies' inexorable breakability. When the gallery

collapsed on her legs, her comrade dragged her inert legs out of the mines. She placed her on the donkey and led her back down to their house. 'After hours, my brother-in-law came and took me to the hospital in Sarvoda'. Other cars could have taken her there, but 'I was embarrassed', she said. For Tamina, the physical pain endured through the accident was the price to pay to ensure that her activity would not be revealed in the village.

Women shaming women

Women are also active in the reproduction of exclusion through the shaming of other women. This process produces women's marginalization and echoes a broader practice where women who have been oppressed themselves exert oppressive practices towards younger women. This practice can be included in women's life's work of transmitting gender norms. It is also an illustration of what Kandiyoti (1998) refers to as women's strategies of 'bargaining with patriarchy'. Nadirah, and Sayebeh were constantly bullied in the village, especially by older women and those who had been miners themselves. Other young women miners, although not bullied and sometimes even pitied, were still considered as outcasts and as less successful than others. Mitra is one of the older women involved in mining who shames younger miners. When she was younger, Mitra was an extractor too. Her role in shaming other women highlights the power of the normative, showing how even women who have been shamed themselves in the past, seek a form of redemption in shaming other women whilst they themselves enjoy a higher degree of freedom. This generational hierarchy in shame also reveals the differentiated gendered norms according to age – oppressed when young, older women can retire.

From shame to pride, reclaiming the margins

Yet, through their corporeal work, women miners also became active in transforming the margins into reclaimed spaces, where they experience more freedom, solidarity and sometimes challenge oppressive gender norms. New spaces of becoming were made apparent through the way women transformed shame into anger and pride, revealing how women's embodied and affective experiences were also a site of possibility. In the intimacy of our conversations, Nadirah revealed the ambiguity of her position, echoing Tamina's proud monologue. 'Here, when women work, it's *ayb*, but we did not have the choice! People are narrow-minded. In the city, people would not say the same thing. But here, everything is always women's fault (…) 'For our in-laws, it's never their son's fault,

(…) the other women in the village cannot understand, their husbands are good people, they take care of them'.

It is also with pride that Nadirah shared with me the way she stood on her own feet when she escaped from an abusive relationship and had an abortion rather than submitting to her husband's control. 'What kind of husband is that? He left right after we got married, never sent money, took a second wife, and expects from me to stay here doing nothing?'. Similarly, Tamina's anger and pride reveals this capacity to intimately transform shame into personal strength. In her monologue on other villager's narrow-mindedness, Tamina affirms the equality of men and women, the value of solidarity and overtly expresses pride in standing on her two feet.

'I am a man'

Women's bodies were also transformed by the experience of mining. Sayebeh, Nadirah and Tamina walked, moved and spoke differently from other women. My everyday walk from the school to my house took me past Nadirah's house and gave me time to observe her in her everyday activities. I saw her give orders to construction workers and occupy space like no other woman of her age in Kante. Once, I saw her carrying a ladder, putting it against the wall, and climbing up in her flip flops. I told her to be careful, she snorted, and said 'I am a man', 'my husband is not here', 'I became strong'. Even though Nadirah complained about her body aches, she also noted how she had gained 'muscles'.

Some women miners like Nadirah and Sayebeh could also experience a degree of sexual freedom similar to men. I was having tea at Nadirah's place when one of her male 'friends' phoned her. She spoke at length and playfully with him. I was surprised given how policed men/women relationships are in the country. I asked if he was her boyfriend. She denied but smiled and added 'He is not, but I have a boyfriend'. Soleman lives near Khudjand; he is a truck driver who has a wife, and two children. 'He is a good man' she adds 'he provides for me' (…) 'He is the one who wanted to be with me. I am 12 years older than him! But he did not care' (…) 'I have been married for 18 years to my husband, but of husband, he has only got the name!'… 'If people knew here, they would kick me out'.

'When men are away, women stand up'

Tamina, Sayebeh, Banu, Nargis and Nadirah all tried to suggest in subtle ways that they were mobile women. Nadirah in particular was always moving around. The first time she offered to take me to Khudjand (a city in Northern Tajikistan) with her, I was very

surprised. I had never received an invitation from women other than 'drinking tea', 'eating', or 'sleeping' at their place. Noticing my own mobility, she then started asking me regularly to join her, always insisting on how often she went there on her own, hitchhiking and sharing trucks with men. This increased mobility is uncommon for women in Kante. My own mobility had been an element of concern for villagers as I regularly travelled to the capital city and walked to the closest town. 'Women here only sit', said Nadirah, 'but sometimes, when men are away, they stand up'.

Conclusion

Through ethnographic portraits of women artisanal coal miners in Kante, I have explored gendered embodied experiences of marginalisation in the post-Soviet Muslim periphery. Women miners' stories challenge the narrative of 'retraditionalization' in Tajikistan and its stereotypical view of Muslim women as lacking agency. I showed how a focus on agency as embodied and affective, and as including the way women also inhabit social norms builds a refined understanding of how women simultaneously submit to, (re)produce, and challenge oppressive gendered norms. Nadirah, Sayebeh, Nargis and other young women miners' bodies are produced as abject, sexualized, or 'out of place' through narratives of shame that are articulated in Kante. Gendered narratives on dirty work shape their bodies and spaces of marginality alike. However, their gendered bodies are not only the products of discourses, but also construct social spaces and subjectivities. Through their corporeal work of being, and the life's work women perform to (re)make gender, they (re)produce their own marginality. In the way they labor meaning and transform shame into pride and anger, they also reclaim spaces of marginality for themselves.

This study illuminates the complex and ambivalent gendered dynamics of women's work in a specific setting in the Muslim South. Such readings enrich literature on women and mining in the world, making their work visible, and readable, showing how their exclusion is constructed, but also negotiated (Lahiri-Dutt 2018; Jenkins 2014). It also allows us to reconsider some of the assumptions of gender and development discourse in Muslim Central Asia, but also more generally in the Muslim Global South, highlighting the necessity to resist Orientalist readings of Muslim women's everyday lives, and rather capture the multiplicity of gendered positions held by women, and the multiple forms of oppressions they experience beyond religion (Falah & Nagel 2005).

Through women miners' stories, this article also questions the link between research on Muslim's women's oppression and a feminist progressive politics. Mahmood's (2001) critique of Western feminist approaches to agency and her radical call for contextualization has often been read as incompatible with a feminist progressive politics. Yet, this article has hinted the contrary in multiple ways. First, stating that women are active in their marginalization does not preclude structural exclusion. Older women miners embrace shame and even *become* shamers, even though they are constrained by structures that they themselves recognize as exclusionary. Second, work on Muslim women by feminist researchers of the Muslim world has sometimes focused on retrieving the voices of Muslim women at the core of their own countries to challenge a mainstream narrative in the West and for the West. By refocusing on the margin of margins, and contexts of economic desolation, in countries of the Global South, but also on women who experience forms of oppression beyond religion, research on Muslim women has potential to open the cognitive maps in understandings of processes of gendered subjectification. In particular, this article highlights how economic hardship, livelihood struggles, and the embodied experiences thereof lead to multiple and complex gendered identities and gendered negotiations.

Finally, this article has also emphasized the role of the researcher in the relationship with oppressed women in local research settings imbued with potentially neo-colonial power dynamics. Rather than applying a liberal feminist framework, I call for an attention to spaces of relief and transformation in these relationships between the researcher and the researched, and a localization of a feminist politics *within* these spaces, rather than the search for truly 'progressive' ideals or the roots of a feminist movement. Feminist ethnography helps with producing knowledge beyond language and can fruitfully focus on the embodied and affective relationship of the researcher with the researched, thus opening spaces for the construction of a relational politics. As Nadirah shared with me at the end of my ethnographic work in the village, I was 'the first person to tell her that I thought that she was a strong woman'. Through this confidence, I understood that Nadirah's awareness had also been made possible by the way her embodied affect had been brought to language in our interactions.

CHAPTER 7 / ARTICLE 4 – MUSLIM YOUTH AND THE LIFE'S WORK OF (UN)MAKING GENDER: A FEMINIST GEOGRAPHY OF CHILDREN MINERS IN POST-SOVIET TAJIKISTAN

Submitted to Development and Change

Abstract

This article explores the coming into being of gender amongst children and youth in the post-Soviet Muslim South. Building on eight months of ethnographic research with children coal miners, and their parents in Kante, a village in Tajikistan, it conceptualizes this (un)making of gender as socially reproductive work or life's work, intergenerational, embodied, and entangled with children's work within and around mines. Investigation of the dialectical relationship between these two types of work reveals how the retransmission in Kante of norms of femininity revolving around docility, chastity and modesty, conventionally attributed to Islam in Central Asia, is the product of the emergence of capitalist relations of production/reproduction since the fall of the Soviet Union. Youth, through their embodied labor, learn appropriate norms of femininity and masculinity anchored in religion. They also negotiate their gendered identities in ways that both rework traditional and religious norms and capitalist modes of production. This article first taps into the development debate on informal coal mining as one of the worst forms of child labor by examining the socio-cultural and gendered norms that justify, normalize and naturalize its existence. It also opens new geographical possibilities for researching Muslim youth in the Global South grounded in feminist postcolonial thought.

Key words: Muslim youth, Child Labour, Mining, Intergenerationality, Post-Soviet Tajikistan, Social Reproduction, Gender, Children's geographies

Introduction

It is two pm, Nazaneen is getting prepared to go mining with her father after a morning spent at school. She ties the family's donkey to the wooden gate, and sits next to me. Her hands and nails are still blackened by yesterday's coal. I notice a heart drawn on her left hand; I tease her, ask if she is in love. 'No, I was just bored in the History class' she says. A few days ago, under her father's apricot trees, Nazaneen shared with me everyday stories and memories of her life at school, at home and in the coalmines. 'I used to go every day, but now my parents won't let me' says Nazaneen. She pauses and frowns. 'I want to go, but my father always says no', she adds perplexed, 'coal is nice, I just like it!'. Nazaneen is too old now 'I am a big girl (kalon)*'. It is Mani's turn, her younger brother to go. Mani started mining when he was six, alongside Nazaneen and their father. 'Now that he turned eight, he can go on his own, so I don't have to go as often' she adds. 'My mother wants me to stay at home now' (…) 'I help with cooking, making tea, washing clothes and dishes, sweeping the floor, fetching water'. Nazaneen's parents do not want her to become one of these young women who carry on working after puberty, a miner* (komorksesh)*, they say. Work in mines is shameful* (ayb)*, for all women. The most vulnerable are however young women in marriageable age. These women are tired (*mandeh*, which also means spoiled, unusable) say men and women in the village, 'no one wants to marry them'.*

In the village of Kante, a small village of 1500 inhabitants, hidden in the heights of the Fann Mountains, in post-Soviet Muslim Tajikistan, children and youth learn, through work within and around coal mining, where a girl and a boy's place should be. Around two hundred children and young people, boys and girls, mine every day in the harshest months of the year from the age of five. While people started initially to dig coal for subsistence after the fall of the Soviet Union, the broader marketization of resources in Tajikistan lead to the emergence of informal coal mining alongside the setting up of a formal Sino-Tajik coal mine in the village, which encroaches on the villagers' resource and threatens their livelihoods. Unemployment, casualization of labor, unpaid contracts and low incomes characterize work in the formal mine, and leads men, when they are not away for seasonal migration, to favour work in the informal mines. This broader trend in the village is paralleled by the demonetarization and feminization of agriculture, the informalization of women's work, funding cuts in education, and the state's withdrawal from its reproductive role since the fall of the Soviet Union.

This article explores the process of gender subjecfication, or coming into being of gender, amongst children and youth in this context marked by (i) the reinforcement of notions of femininity revolving around decency, chastity and docility traditionally attributed to an Islamic revival in Central Asia (Commercio 2014; 2013); and (ii) the transformation from collective/socialist modes of production to capitalist modes of production and exploitation of resources; since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. It particularly conceptualizes this coming into being of gender as a type of life's work, or socially reproductive work (Katz 2004; Mitchell et al. 2004): intergenerational, embodied, and always dialectically entangled with other forms of productive/reproductive labor. Here, I focus on the relationship between parents and children's work of (un)making gender norms and the gendered work of children and young people aged between five and seventeen within and around coal mining.

Over the past three decades, since the emergence of children's geographies, research interest has grown in children's everyday lives, and the socio-spatial (re)production of gender, along other axes of difference such as age, class, sexuality, disability, nationality and religion (Holt 2007; Evans & Holt 2011; Hopkins 2007; Dyson 2008; McDowell 2002a). While research has explored gender and religion within Muslim youth and children in the West (Dwyer 1999; 2000; 2008; Hopkins 2006; Aitchison et al. 2016), the geographies of Muslim girlhood and boyhood remains largely understudied in the poorest countries of the Islamic majority world (Holvorson 2005). This silence has repercussions, including the risk of a tacit reproduction, in reading Muslim children's gendered geographies in the East and South, of the neo-colonial and orientalist tropes long used in the study of Muslim and Third World women (Falah & Nagel 2005; Aitchison et al. 2016; Abu-Lughod 2002; Mahmood 2004; Dunne et al. 2017).

It also leaves a series of topical questions unanswered. Scholarship on Muslim youth within and beyond Central Asia has already observed socio-cultural transformations and their entanglement with the politics of Islam (Holvorson 2005; Dunne et al. 2017) though violence, conflict, education, or more mundane - although not less political issues - such as dating, and family life (Harris 2006; Roche 2010; Kirmse 2010; 2012). Little is known however about how notions of appropriate Muslim femininity and masculinity, and their retransmission to children have also changed with the unprecedented politico-ecologic transformations the poorest countries of the Global South have experienced since the start of the neoliberal global era. In particular, little is known about how new livelihood struggles have also shaped the retransmission of gendered norms, and beliefs (Holvorson 2005).

Through ethnographic vignettes of four children and young coal miners, and the narratives of adults and parents in the village, this paper sheds light on how Muslim boys and girls become and are made men and women, in this shifting, derelict, neoliberalizing post-Soviet extractive landscape. It develops two main arguments. First, retransmission by parents of norms of femininity revolving around notions of decency, chastity, docility, modesty, in Kante, is not the consequence the re-emergence of religious norms. Rather, it is a condition of possibility of the emergence and expansion of capitalist modes of production and extraction of resources since the fall of the Soviet Union, and its role in eroding aspects of social reproduction. Second, transmission is not unilateral and children and youth are not passive recipients of norms and beliefs. They are both victims and agents, whose gendered and embodied experiences of work are a site of constant becoming, of redefinition and renegotiation of gendered identities; in ways that sometimes resist traditional gendered norms and capitalist modes of production. As men, women and children rework the local impacts of broader politico-ecological shifts through their everyday and gendered livelihood struggles, they also reinterpret the intergenerational meanings and geographies of Muslim girlhood and boyhood.

By developing these arguments, this article contributes to several theoretical debates. First, it participates in the broader project of building a feminist postcolonial politics concerned with challenging notions of Muslim children in the Global South, and in particular Muslim girls as 'passive victims of oppressive cultures' (Dwyer 1999, p.7), religion, tradition, backwardness and lack of development (Habashi 2011). It challenges the idea of a unilateral transmission of religious norms and values from parents to children (Hopkins et al. 2011), and of gendered oppressive norms from parents to young girls, without careful attention to two shaping factors: first, the agency of children in producing, reworking, amending, and subverting values and norms, and second, the role of broader structural politico-economic/ecologic changes in shaping them. By doing so, it also draws out some new and emergent geographical possibilities in researching Muslim identities (Aitchison et al. 2016; Falah & Nagel 2005); including the rethinking of how gender 'comes to being' along and beyond religion (Hopkins et al. 2011).

In addition, by following this agenda, this article also develops the main epistemological raison d'être of geographies of children and youth: namely unravelling the unprecedented structural changes that have impacted children's everyday lives with the era of neoliberal global capitalism (Jeffrey 2010); giving voice to children as resourceful political agents capable of shaping their everyday geographies (Skelton 2013; Jeffrey

2012); and challenging the idea of childhood as a universal and homogeneous concept (Evans 2006). Finally, by bringing gender, religion and the body together, this article taps into the development debate on children's work (Abebe 2009; Nieuwenhuys 2007; Bourdillon 2006; Ansell 2017), and in particular on coal mining as one of the 'worst forms of child labor' (ILO 2013a) to offer a new angle to the question: is the eradication approach traditionally adopted by development organizations in the Global South the right approach to children's work in mines? (André & Godin 2013; Hilson 2010b; 2010a; Maconachie & Hilson 2016).

This article is organized in four sections. I first introduce how feminist intergenerational geographies, through the lens of work, help in understanding the coming into being of gender along and beyond religion. In the second section, I introduce contextual elements of this research and my methodology, highlighting the specific Central Asian questions on child work that justify this research. I then turn to the four ethnographic vignettes of child miners that are at the core of this article, and follow with an analysis of stories of gender, (inter)generation(ality), and work in the village of Kante. Finally, in concluding, this paper draws out some of the new postcolonial feminist geographies emerging from this research.

Children's work and the integenerational life's work of (un)making gender

The coming into being of gender, its transmission, and negotiation is, I show, an intergenerational, embodied and spatialized process (Vanderbeck & North 2015). While early analyses across social sciences focused on the idea of a unilateral transmission of gendered norms from parents to children, youth and feminist geographers have reconceptualized children's gendered subjectification as lived, discursively enacted, but also resisted and contested by children themselves though their everyday practices (Bettis & Adams 2012; Evans & Holt 2011; Evans 2006). A focus on the body, or the 'geography closest in' (Aitken 2001, p.63), amongst children and youth geographers (Colls & Hörschelmann 2009; Costello & Duncan 2018; Valentine 1997) has in particular challenged the tendency to essentialise children's gendered development, based on a linear biological growth from childhood to adulthood. Rather, it has highlighted how children's embodied and emotional material experiences, in and out of place, are sites of learning but also renegotiation of beliefs and expectations (Hemming & Madge 2011; Colls & Hörschelmann 2009). This process of (un)making of gender is also relational and

intergenerational – while parents shape their children's bodies, children also have agency in influencing older generations (Hopkins & Pain 2007; Hopkins et al. 2011; Colls & Hörschelmann 2009; Valentine 1997; Vanderbeck & North 2015).

Embodied, situated, and intergenerational, this making/unmaking of gender is also connected to broader political economies. Here, I particularly conceptualize this process as a type of life's work or socially reproductive work, always dialectically entangled with broader and changing relations of production (Mitchell et al. 2004; Katz 2017). Social reproduction is, according to Katz (2004, p.x), the 'fleshy, messy and indeterminate stuff of everyday life'. It is the set of material, cultural, embodied and spatialized practices necessary to the reproduction of societies, communities, environments (Meehan & Strauss 2015). It includes the making and remaking of cultural norms, which unfolds with capitalism, reproducing the gendered, generational inequalities that are necessary to its expansion (Katz, 2004). In the context of the post-Soviet Muslim South, exploring gendered subjectification processes through the lens of social reproduction is particularly enlightening, as it allows us to debunk naturalized assumptions around certain actors, and bodies.

A feminist economic approach challenges culturalist readings that see women's association to the home as related to tradition and/or religious norms in Muslim countries. Rather it links this association to capitalism, following the path of Marxist feminists who have shown how the exploitation and enclosure of women's bodies for reproductive work was a necessary condition to capitalist expansion (Dalla Costa & James 1972; Federici 2004). In addition, it allows us to drive attention back to children as socially reproductive actors whose every day and mundane practices of work, play and learning are shaped by as well as shape broader structures (Katz 2004). As Katz (2004) has revealed, global restructuring, and the eroding of the social contract, fractures children's lives along gender, age, and class lines. At the same time, she has highlighted children's capacity to enter into forms of resistance, resilience and reworking of these structures.

In the context of the post-Soviet South, these conceptualizations are illuminating. Post-Soviet socio-cultural and economic dislocations have precipitated questions on how the new generation lives in comparison with the last Soviet one, and led to a significant literature on changing youth gendered identities in contexts of emergent capitalism (Pilkington 1996; 2002; Hörschelmann 2008; 2005; Blazek 2011). In Tajikistan and the rest of the post-Soviet Muslim periphery, questions of gender, generation and change

have however, as in the rest of the Muslim world, often remained encapsulated into analyses that focus on religion to the detriment of the economic and the ecologic.

In the analysis that follows, I challenge these views by delving into children's mundane practices of work within and around mining, as a way to observe how the life's work of making gender is also transformed alongside new forms of livelihoods in transforming politico-ecologic environments. Children's work is always integrated within the everyday gendered and livelihood struggles families engage with to respond to these broader changes (Oberhauser 1995; 2004). Their work, both productive and reproductive, is crucial, particularly in times of economic crisis (Nieuwenhuys 2005; Ansell 2017; Bourdillon et al. 2010; Abebe & Kjorholt 2009). It is also always differentiated by age, class, gender, generation, and sibling order (Chant & Jones 2005; Punch 2001; André & Godin 2013); and a site of learning of the intergenerational and gendered contract that binds societies (Skelton & Waters 2017).

This gender contract is, like in the case of Kante, sometimes anchored in religious norms. It is however not fixed, but constantly remodelled and shattered by politico-economic/ecologic changes (Robson 2004; Katz 2004; McDowell 2017), and shaped by children themselves. In her research in Zimbabwe, Robson (2004) reveals how economic liberalization and the HIV/AIDS pandemic impacts the gendered and generational division of reproductive work, highlighting the growth of young carers for their sick parents. Her compelling reading shows how broader patterns of privatization and poverty reshape notions of what constitutes appropriate performances of childhood and gender.

In parallel, feminist children geographers have highlighted, how through their embodied working practices, children like adults also reproduce and negotiate various norms, identities and subjectivities (Dyson 2008). Dyson's (2008; 2010) ethnography of young working girls in the Indian Himalayas shows how youth imbue their work with meaning. Their work is first a place of sociality and friendship as well as a place of reinforcement of pre-existent gender, caste, and class inequalities. In contrast, Van Blerck (2011)'s research on young female workers in Ethiopia sheds lights on the multiple identities they manage across spaces of work, families and how they are entrenched within structures of rural poverty. Through their everyday and embodied performances of gender, young workers also negotiate and resist predominant norms .

Within and beyond the mine: researching children's work and gender in Muslim Central Asia

Investigating this making/unmaking of gender through work is particularly relevant in the context of post-Soviet Central Asia and Tajikistan. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 has brought massive ideological, politico-economic, ecologic changes that vindicate questions of how people rework aspects of politico-economic restructuring in their everyday lives. Tajikistan is today still the poorest country of the CIS, and one of the poorest countries in the world. Childhood literature in the country has also largely focused on the growing exploitation, vulnerability and abuse of children since the fall of the Soviet Union – through the increased number of left-behind children as a result of seasonal male migration (Catrinescu et al. 2011), labor exploitation (ILO 2013b), and other forms of violence (Haarr 2005). Child labor, in particular, is considered as a major issue in Tajikistan with 27 per cent of children who were child workers in 2013 (Akilova 2017, p.231)[109].

Authors have in other countries challenged the dominant Western view of child labor as 'unchild like' (Aitken 2001, p.3), even in mining which is considered as one of the 'worst forms of child labor'[110] (André & Godin 2013; Maconachie & Hilson 2016; Hilson 2010a; 2010b). They have highlighted children's agency in carving out their livelihoods, challenged ideas of children's work as solely driven by poverty and incompatible with school, and linked their resource extractive activities to the broader de-agrarianization of economies. Tajik and Central Asian policies, however, still rely on the eradication approach and its underlying assumptions. The Tajik government has since the country's independence from the Soviet Union, engaged into creating a favourable legal environment with the ratification of international treaties[111]. Besides failing to reach their objectives, these treaties overlook underlying socio-cultural but also gendered processes that justify, normalize and naturalize child labor (Behzadi 2015; Akilova 2017).

[109]While the Soviet reported zero child work, 522,000 children aged 5-17 were working in 2013, of which 96% were involved in child labor. The ILO (ILO 2013a, p.1) differentiates child labor and child work, by defining child labor as type of work that is 'mentally, physically, and morally dangerous and harmful to children; and interferes with their schooling'. Here, rather than differentiating both, I propose to see them as integrated in a continuum, and within gendered familial livelihood struggles.

[110] Mining is considered as one of the worst forms of child labor according to ILO (2013a)

[111] In 1993, the Convention on Minimum Age for Admission Employment and the Convention on the Rights of the Child; in 2005, ILO's Convention on Worst forms of Child Labour (Child slavery, forced labour, prostitution, work that harms the wealth safety and morals of children)

Here, I have delved into these gendered aspects of work by undertaking eight months of ethnographic work between September 2014 and July 2015 with children workers and their parents in the village of Kante. Children, both male and female, usually start work in mines after school (1-2pm), until the end of the afternoon (5pm-6pm) in this village. Their role is to lead the donkey back and forth in the coal gallery whilst an adult (male or female) extracts coal with a pickaxe at the end of the gallery. Children usually wait for the adult to load the donkey with coal bags at the end of the gallery, and then lead the donkey outside of the gallery to the informal market where they upload coal bags and wait for an adult to sell them. In one day, children can go back and forth ten to fifteen times. Some parents also 'rent' their children to family members who pay parents daily Children usually get 10 per cent of this sum, which they use for buying clothes, school accessories Children are also involved into other types of work around mining – including domestic work, and agricultural work.

While child labor was forbidden during the Soviet times, children were sometimes working, mainly to help their parents in the *kolkhoz*, the village of which Kante was part. Islam was also still central to villagers' lives during the Soviet era, despite policies that aimed to undermine its practice (Nourzhanov & Bleuer 2013). In Kante, men and women were not allowed to display signs of religiosity in public. Yet, women were often responsible for maintaining religious and traditional norms during the Soviet era (Tett 1996). Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Islam was reinvested as a marker of national identity (Olimova & Tolipov 2011), and men, and women in Kante regularly mention the freedom that they experience in expressing their religiosity in public .

Today, when men do not migrate to Russia as part of a circular/seasonal male labor migration, they either work in the Sino-Tajik mine, or in the artisanal mines, whilst women are expected to be housewives (*khanechin*). There are two main informal mining areas in the village –first, down the village, where mostly men work and which is more accessible for coal buyers; second, in a hidden space in the village, where mainly women work.. Women's work in coalmines, because it is considered as shameful, is relegated to this marginal space in the village. Children's work in contrast, is widely accepted, and normalized in both mining areas.

I lived with two different families in Kante. In the first family, the eldest daughter (age eleven) was sporadically mining for subsistence with her father. In the second family, the eldest son (age ten) was mining every day after school with his father and uncle. I visited the mines several times with adults and children. I also taught in the local school

in the village, which allowed me to gain trust both with parents and children. In addition to participant observation, I carried out seventy-four interviews with men, women and children on their work/life histories, amongst which twenty-two with children and ten with parents and/or carers. Children and young people interviewed were aged between five and seventeen - nine males and thirteen females. These interviews were complemented by life-history interviews with elders in the village, which pointed to the changes in systems of production/reproduction since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Researching child labor in Kante raised several ethical issues related to research with vulnerable youth (Valentine et al. 2001; Skelton et al. 2017; Morrow 2008). I first encountered a large number of refusals from male parents who saw my interest in child labor as dangerous. As a schoolteacher and adult, relations of power related to both age and my position of authority *vis-à-vis* children were also involved in the process. To address these issues, I approached consent as more than agreeing to participate in research but as an 'ongoing' process of back and forth with children, parents and other gatekeepers at school (Morrow 2008).

In the next sections of this article, I draw on the ethnographic vignettes of four children and young people - Nazaneen, Babak, Shaheen, and Delruba and discuss these stories in light of other findings. These stories of two females aged eleven and seventeen and two males aged ten and sixteen, have been selected because they reflect the diversity and relationality of age, gender and elements of class in the context of Kante. They are based on field notes, and interview transcripts. This specific way of writing children's portraits reflects an interest in how single lives reveal both individual experiences and wider political, cultural, and economic trends in the societies people are part in (Jeffrey & Dyson 2008). They are also in line with a feminist postcolonial children's geography concerned with creating space in research for the lived experiences of children, in relation with other generations; as well as the emotional, embodied subjectivity of the researcher.

Nazaneen, Babak, Shaheen, and Delruba: portraits of children miners

Nazaneen, eleven: 'Coal is nice'

Nazaneen, whose words are the beginning of this article, remembers her first steps in the mines when she was eight. 'I did not like it at first, I was scared, it's dark there! (…) But then, I got used to it, and now I'm not scared anymore. You take a lamp torch, and

it's all fine'. She also describes the environment of the gallery, her mining routines and how they fit within her school duties.

> 'You go, go, go, and go again. Sometimes coal falls on your feet. But it's ok, it's nice. Far inside the gallery, it's difficult to breathe, it's dusty, there is no oxygen there. Then, when you get back towards the entrance, you get a bit of air, and you can breathe again' (…) 'My dad loads the coal bag, it's heavy! When it's too heavy, he helps. You do that, until it gets dark, four or five' (…)'Then I go back home, I wash my face and hands, drink tea, dress up and start doing my homework if I am not too tired. When there is a Turkish movie, or some singing on TV, I stay up, otherwise I go to sleep. When you go mining, you usually wake up late the day after, because you're a bit tired. Now I don't go anymore, so I wake up fast in the morning'.

Despite the physical hardships experienced in the mine, Nazaneen highlights how much she likes mining, and experiences her withdrawal from the mine with a feeling of injustice. 'Coal is nice!' she says 'there are lots of people there, People hang out, you speak to people. And me, I cannot go anymore!'. Nazaneen seems to also despise her new tasks within the home. She preferred 'being out', she says. 'Girls work, all the time, they just work, and boys just get to play out!'.

She also shares the reasons that justify this withdrawal from mines. 'Girls go when they are younger, but they stop when they get older' (…) 'There are lots of boys in the mines, so older brothers don't let girls go, 'They are ashamed' (*Sharm mikonan*). When I ask her what she thinks about older women who go mining, Nazaneen also seems to have a very clear explanation. They 'carry heavy loads', says Nazaneen, 'it's bad for them, they can get sick, so men don't let them'.

Nazaneen's father, Ali, does not like making her work. 'It's not good for a girl, they don't have strength'. Her brother, Mani, is 'stronger' he says, 'for him it's fine, he is a boy, it's good for him to learn'. If he accepts to make Nazaneen work sometimes, it is first to make as much money as possible to stay in the village and not to have to migrate again. 'It is not a life for a man not being with his family' he says. Ali does not tell me anything about these other young girls who carry on working beyond the age of puberty. Women in the village are usually less shy than men about sharing their thoughts about them however. And as Nazaneen's mother shared 'None would like their girl to become a miner (*komorkesh)'.*

Babak, ten: 'I'm dirty, always dirty'

'*Tcherkin*', I'm 'always *'Tcherkin' ,* says Babak. Dirty, I'm always dirty. Every evening, in winter when he comes back from the mines, Babak follows the same ritual. He washes his hair, his hands, his face, only then he can sit down, drink tea and rest. 'I don't like it' he says'. I don't like the mines'. 'Everything gets black'. 'I prefer the city'. There, I don't have to go to the mines, you just hang out, you eat kebabs in the streets'. He smiles.

Babak started mining when he was seven, with his uncle and father. 'Once, I went at night' he says proudly. It was in September. I went from five pm to eleven pm! The Chinese were working there the whole day and throwing bags of dirt around, so we could not go, and we went at night'. Babak remembers seeing children, no less than five years old, with their parents at night. 'They were so tired, some of them were falling off the donkey' (…) 'I was always falling off the donkey as well, at first, I couldn't stay still, but then it got fine'.

Babak also recalls with pride the few times when he extracted coal on his own. While he mostly works with his father, Babak sometimes work 'for other men' (…) 'I can keep the money (when this happens,) he says' (…) 'I buy notebooks, clothes, 'sunflower seeds (*semoushka*), and lots of other things!'. Babak's mother knows that he hates mining, she shared in one of our discussions. 'But it's good for him' she says, there he learns how to take care of elders (*nega kardaneh kalono*).

Shaheen, sixteen: 'Everything was a problem'

Shaheen speaks nonchalantly, and between each word glances at his cell phone. He usually wears a black leather jacket and flattens his fringe on his forehead, like most Tajik young men do. When he goes mining, he puts a scarf around his mouth 'Stones fall all the time, and there is dirt everywhere, if I don't wear this, it makes me feel sick', he says.

Shaheen started mining when he was ten with his father, Rastin. He remembers: 'everything was an issue, everything, I could not remain still on the donkey, so I was falling off all the time. Stones were also falling off the gallery. It was hard'. Today, Shaheen both leads the donkey and extracts coal himself. 'I've started when I was 14', he says proudly. 'Younger boys are not strong enough to extract, it's only when you get older that you can'.

His father, Rastin, usually helps him extracting. He is a technology teacher at the local school and like most male teachers spend his afternoons in the mines 'what do you want me to do' he says 'you don't make enough money with school'. Shaheen wants to become a teacher, like his father. Like his father as well, Shaheen knows that he will have to go to Russia, even if he does not 'feel like it'. (…) 'All the men go to Russia' he says, 'so I'll go as well'. Shaheen wants to get married, 'not now…later…', he says. His wife will 'stay at home and help my mother, while I make money, I will never let her mine!' he says.

Delruba, seventeen: 'We're unusable, we're unusable' *(mandeh).*

Delruba is leading the donkey loaded with coal bags down the mountain. She smiles and waves at me from afar. Like most days after school, Delruba went mining with her father. At school Delruba is quiet, reserved. While most women and young girls tie their headscarf the traditional 'Tajik way', far behind the head, Delruba wears it tied in front of her neck. Worn this way, the headscarf usually signals a higher degree of devotion and faith. 'I prefer it this way' says Delruba; this way, 'people know that I am a good girl' (…) 'that's why I do it'.

Delruba knows what people say about her in the village. She is a miner (*komorkesh*). Mines are not a woman's place, it is the work of men. The degree of shame experienced is even higher for the 11 young women in age /or almost in age of getting married who, like Delruba in the artisanal coalmines in Kante. 'People say that we're unusable[112] *(mandeh)* says Delruba

Delruba is seventeen this year and has lots of hopes and dreams. She wants to become a nurse, leave the village, the '*qishlaq* 'and get married, one day. She knows however that her chances to live up to her dreams are very low. Her parents are the poorest of the poorest *(kambaral)*, they don't have sons, have no other choice than sending her to the mine. 'Girls don't have the right to study' (*ejazeh nist*) here, they become housewives *(khanechin)*. And anyway, 'Men don't marry girls like me', she says.

When I ask her why, Delruba explains 'There are lots of men in the mines. And they 'look'. Men don't want to marry women who have been looked at'. She also knows what people say about girls who study. 'They go away to another city, and then they sleep around, and people speak about it' *(ovoz micheh).* So, girls get scared, and they just stay in the village'.

[112] *Mandeh* means tired, as well as spoiled and unsable

Delruba seems resigned. 'What else is to be done' she says. 'I have no choice'. She adds 'we have to work, otherwise my father could not stay here'. She also shares with pride and a sense of accomplished duty her contribution to family life. Delruba's father, unlike other men in the village has never been to Russia. 'It is just me, my youngest sisters, and my mother here' she says (…) 'he just does not like it back there'.

Despite these constraints imposed by her position, Delruba also shares, in one of our encounters, that she is secretly engaged with a young man, Javad, who she met at school. The engagement has not been approved by the family and is still a secret, but Delruba and Javad both want to get married.

Muslim youth and the (un)making of gender: Stories of life, work and generation in Kantegui coal mines

Shaping appropriate gendered bodies

The stories of Delruba, Nazaneen, Babak and Shaheen highlight the stark embodiedness of work, and its role as a site of learning of norms and values. They also illuminate the differentiated gendered and aged experiences of children's work within and around mining in Kante. While both male and female children work in coalmines, males' work is more common than females'. Like Nazaneen, most girls stop working in mines when their brothers get old enough (between six-eight). Girls are usually withdrawn from mining when they reach puberty (around eleven-fourteen) and usually start working alongside their mothers at home and support them in reproductive labor. They are also expected to participate in supporting their mother in the task of taking care of the elders. Boys in contrast carry on until they learn to 'extract' coal between fourteen and seventeen years old. Whilst for young men like Shaheen, extracting coal appears as a rite of passage into manhood, the older female adolescents get, the more inappropriate and shameful their work becomes. Reasons for carrying on working despite the shameful character of mining for young women are diverse, but the eleven girls in the village like Delruba who carried on mining after puberty are usually considered as being part of the *'kambaral'* – the poorest of the poorest. These families 'don't have sons' or 'are too poor, so must make girls work as well'says Delruba.

This organization of work recalls the way child labor is organized in many countries in the Global South (Punch 2001). In Kante, however, it reflects a broader intergenerational, sexual, and spatial contract that prevails in Tajikistan, and which is in

line with Muslim Central Asian patrilocality (Kandiyoti 1998; Grogan 2007; Ismailbekova 2014; Harris 2004). It is also mediated through notions of honor and shame that control the right performance of gender in Central Asia (Harris 2004). These norms defined notions of femininity revolving around docility, chastity and modesty. Women in Tajikistan live with their husband's extended family and are submitted to various forms of control by, and subordination to men and more senior women – including control over their sexuality and mobility (Harris 2004; Harris 2011). Daughters, alongside daughters-in-law *(kelin)* are responsible for reproductive labor whilst older women run the household. Young men, in contrast, are expected to be breadwinners, while older men usually retire and stop working. The responsibility of the young is to take care of the elders *(nego kardaneh kalono)*.

Parents, through the way they organize child labor in Kante, shape their children's bodies and geographies in order to conform with these gendered roles and expectations. 'Girls are weak' parents explained in the village, they must be protected, boys in contrast are 'stronger', and more apt to work in mines, 'they can'. Building son's bodily strength and physical resistance and mobility is an objective that parents aim to achieve through making sons work in mines. The physical and emotional hardship experienced is often considered as a necessary step for them to 'toughen up', become more resistant. Work is also a site of learning of children's intergenerational duties - as Babak's mother recalls, she knows that working in mines is hard for her son, but it is also 'good for him', he learns how to 'take care of the elder', to help *(yordeh kardan)*, to 'understand what it means to be a man' says his mother. Similarly, Shaheen's father teaches him how to extract, as a rite of passage into manhood. Through work, Shaheen learns how to feed a family, he also gains the bodily strength which will, in the future, be necessary for him to work on building sites in Russia.

Parents' practices, by contrast, shape young girls' geographies to prepare them to become good daughters-in-law. Nazaneen's parents move her back to the space of the home to learn how to perform household reproductive work. By restricting her spaces of mobility and social interactions, they make sure to reduce the risks of encounters between young girls, boys and men. This coming of age, at puberty, for young girls is a crucial moment, when norms of femininity switch to chastity and fertility. The switch to these norms is evidenced for instance through the way girls and young women's access to education is controlled - schools are expensive, but they are also 'too far' (*rah door)*, 'Village girls do not know the ways! they cannot be on their own'. Staying in dormitories in cities, is running the risk to meet other young men and lose their virginity. The

shaming of non-conforming bodies such as Delruba's also regulates this right performance of gender. As Delruba mentions, young girls who mine beyond puberty are called *'mandeh'* which means spoiled but also unusable, rotten, and in danger of not finding a husband. Because of their bodily movements, young girls risk losing their virginity and may not 'make good babies' Because they have already been 'looked at', they also lose their chances to get married. To justify this shaming of young women miners, adults mention the 'ways of life', 'rurality' (*qishlaqi*) versus 'urbanity' (*shahari*), and pressures related to rules of marriage according to Islam (*niqah*), according to which young women must show blood on their wedding's night sheet.

Social reproduction/production: beyond everyday Islam

This life's work of reproducing gender through children and youth work is embedded into the local manifestations of everyday Islam. It is also imbricated with the emergence of capitalist modes of production/reproduction and extraction of resources in Kante. The normalization of child labor in post-Soviet Kante, and the emergence of one of the 'worst forms of child labor' is a consequence of these changes (Behzadi, 2014)[113]. Children's work is nothing new - 'Child labor was forbidden during the Soviet times' recalls Said, one of the elderly in the village, but all children were working anyway'. 'Children were staying up to help their parents to tie the bundles of tobacco in the collective farm (…) there were quotas' set up by the center.

This local history reflects broader trends in the country. During the Soviet times, child paid work was considered as unacceptable[114], and was prohibited under the age of 14 (Bourdillon et al. 2010; Akilova 2017). Yet, children were involved in household work, as well as communal work (mainly through the mandatory cotton harvests campaigns that were widespread in Central Asian countries[115]). The context of emergent capitalism in post-Soviet Kante has, however, changed the nature of their labor. While in Kante, children's work was embedded into a familial agrarian type of economy, coal marketization and de-agrarianization led to a switch from agricultural work to the physical dangers involved in mining. Like in other places in the country, it also led to the monetization of children's work. In this context, children's labor became an economic necessity and a way to provide cheap labor (Akilova 2017).

[113] For a more general review of the 'naturalization' of children's work in post-Soviet Tajikistan, see the work of Akilova (2017).

The naturalization of child labor in Kante is also entangled with the dialectical transformation, and shattering, of social reproduction. The failure of school to fulfil its reproductive role led to the switch to coal mining as the main site of learning since the fall of the Soviet Union - 'There is nothing to learn at school, nothing; at least with coal, children learn to do something when they go mining', says Giti, Shaheen's mother. Teachers do not make enough money with their salaries and must often work on the side to make a living. 'Nothing gets in people's head here' says Giti, 'it's coal, only coal'.

This naturalization of child labor is also related to the transformation of the intergenerational and gendered contract that bound the Kantegui during the Soviet times. Post-Soviet change in Kante is marked by the reprivatisation of intergenerational support, which justifies the greater value given to take care of the elders. The absence of state support, reduced pension schemes, and large scale male migration to Russia, have created a greater need for both children and women's reproductive work. 'Children must help' repeated most parents interviewed, and their work in mines is a way to learn their duties towards the older generation. Producing as many sons as possible is also necessary to ensure that 'someone will take care of us when we get old' recalls Mitra, an older woman.

Post-Soviet change is also marked by a re-evaluation of young women's reproductive work which justifies why, in Kante, women's bodies must be saved for reproductive work, while children's labor in mines is tolerated. Importance of young women's reproductive work is the result of a generational displacement of reproductive work. According to elder women, domestic work was during the Soviet times the responsibility of the mothers in law (*khochdaman*): considered too old to work in farms, women usually stayed home. Today, women who do not find work in the public sphere are responsible for household work. This is paralleled by a remasculinization of formal work and education in Tajikistan, which leads to women's greater association to the home. In a context of rising unemployment and shortage of work since the fall of the Soviet Union, most paid work becomes the work of men. Parents know that males have more chances to get employed and prefer saving money to send boys to school rather than girls. As Mitra mentions, in Kante, 'our girls do not study, we marry them when they are very young'.

For parents, marrying girls as soon as possible is a way to transfer financial responsibility to the groom's family, and respond to economic pressures. It is also a consequence of elements of class differentiation that leads to women's restricted

mobility and their retrenchment towards the home as being reinvested as markers of social status. For a Kantegui man, making sure that his wife does not work is a way to show that he is a good provider, while for a woman, it means that she ensured a good alliance. This feature reflects broader trends in non-Muslim post-Soviet countries that have been illustrated by literature on gender in transition whereby women after the fall of the Soviet Union deliberately chose to stay at home (Rainnie, Smith, Swain, et al. 2002; Ashwin 2000). It also echoes practices in the broader Muslim Global South whereby the entering of women into purdah in context of emergent capitalism becomes a marker of class superiority (Hill 1977). Reproduction in Kante of an ideal type of femininity, the village girl (*dokhtareh qishlaqi*), who, unlike urban women, must remain docile, shy, pure, chaste, modest and uneducated to become a good candidate to marriage is hence more than the manifestation of everyday Islam. The gendering of daughters through the appropriate performance of femininity is a class privilege – young women miners like Delruba who bridge all norms of femininity, are the poorest of the poorest, the miners (*komorkesh*). To accommodate economic pressures, parents accept to threaten their respectability, and future chances.

Children and youth are also agents of these changes. While stories of work in mines reveal the hardship and violence experienced by children and youth, the embodied and emotional experiences of being a miner also reveals how young girls and women in Kante renegotiate gendered norms and expectations, in ways that challenge hegemonic norms of femininity in the village. Nazaneen likes working in mines; for her, work is a place of socialization, where she can 'hang out' and make friends. Her parents do not want her to mine anymore, but she goes anyway despite their will, and sometimes even persuade them to let her go. Like her friend Manzilla, aged nine, Nazaneen feels a sense of pride in working in mines. Both of them were scared at first, but felt courageous *(shoja)* now. Similarly, Delruba is aware of the inappropriateness of her work, she however still has hopes and dreams of becoming a nurse and of getting married one day. Her switch to *satr* (common word used in Tajikistan for hijab), is a way to exhibit a sign of piety, that compensates the inappropriateness of her work in mines. Usually associated with signs of Muslim and urban modernity (Miles 2015; Nozimova 2016) the wearing of the *satr* by Delruba reveals the way she negotiates her gendered and religious identity to rework the gendered and class stigma that she experiences through work in mines.

Young girls and women 's renegotiations are also intergenerational, they are inscribed into familial strategies and negotiations, to ensure solidarity, kinship, and resist the

negative consequences of neoliberalization of economies in Kante. By making children work in informal mines, families make more money, and can build a house as soon as possible. They also make sure to prevent their fathers from exploitation: either through work in the Chinese mines, or through migration to Russia. They keep the family together, make sure that their fathers will not leave them again. By supporting her father, Delruba accomplishes her daughter's duties and makes sure that he can 'stay here', that she and her family will 'have him' with them. Accepting the stigma that comes with being a miner is hence a sacrifice. It is also an act of intergenerational support, towards the social reproduction of familial togetherness.

Conclusion: towards feminist postcolonial geographies of Muslim youth

The 'coming into being' of gender for Muslim youth workers in Kante is an intergenerational process of renegotiation of norms and beliefs in response to changing relations of production and reproduction with the emergence of forms of capitalist expansion, and extraction of resources. The stories of Delruba, Babak, Shaheen and Nazaneen first illuminate how their everyday experiences of work is differentiated at the intersection of age, gender and class. They also show how gendered and aged expectations are embedded into the everyday local manifestations of Islam in Tajikistan. Parents' life's work of shaping their children's gendered geographies and bodies entails the reproduction of norms and beliefs in line with local ideas of Muslimness.

This life's work is however entangled with the emergence of a capitalist system in post-socialist Kante, which first justifies, legitimizes and naturalizes children's work in a type of work traditionally seen as one of the worst forms of child labor; and explains changes in the intergenerational and gendered contract that bounded the Kantegui during the Soviet times. Through the shattering of social reproduction in post-Soviet Tajikistan – with the devaluation of education, the eroding of livelihoods, the re-privatization of intergenerational support and the displacement of reproductive work to younger women; gendered identities, norms and responsibilities are also reshaped, in ways that reinforce hegemonic norms of femininity that revolve around docility, chastity, fertility and modesty conventionally attributed to Islam. Through their embodied work in and around mines, young boys and girls first learn how to become a man and a woman. They also rework traditional norms and enter into intergenerational and familial economic

strategies aimed at resisting in solidarity with their families the hardships related to economic restructuring, elements of class differentiation, and stigmatization.

In making these points, this article contributes to several major debates. It first aids to decipher the complexity of gender and generation in the Muslim post-Soviet South. It challenges simplistic ideas of retraditionalization in Central Asia mainly articulated by development and international agencies and reveals how the retransmission of gendered oppressive norms to young women is more than the consequence of an Islamic revival. Through their everyday livelihoods struggles, men, women and children renegotiate both gendered identities, norms and expectations, and the local meanings of Muslimness. Second, it responds to major debates on child labor, and in particular on one of the 'worst forms' of child labor by highlighting the gendered and intergenerational norms and expectations that underlie children's work, and by illuminating how they are embedded into the expansion of capitalist forms of production/reproduction. These findings have policy implications beyond academic debates, as they highlight the inefficiency of eradication policies, which neglect gendered understandings of child labor and calls for a simultaneous analysis of their productive and reproductive labor.

By questioning Muslim children's agency, this article also participates in a broader effort to build new and emergent feminist postcolonial geographies of Muslim youth. The case of Kante illustrates the centrality of understandings of gender at the intersection of age, class and local manifestation of religion to examine the geographies of children and youth in the world and in the Global South. It engages with the way these geographies and axes of identity are reshaped in the process of expansion of global neoliberal capitalism and its impacts on children's embodied everyday lives. By investigating these multiple scales from the global to the body, it also nuances claims that either overemphasize children as victims of development, and religion; or as active agents and modellers of their everyday lives. It reveals how children are constantly both submitted to broader structures of oppression, but also and often simultaneously active in their reworkings. Their agency is embodied, emotional, affective, and relational. Their becoming does not happen in vacuum, but is also constantly made and remade with others, brothers, mothers, fathers, in between and across generations.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter is divided into five sections. The first section reiterates the main aims and argument of this thesis. The second elaborates the individual analysis provided in each article and draws parallels between them, revealing how each of them responds to the main objectives of this thesis. In the third section, I highlight the different contributions made by this thesis, emphasizing initially how the specific feminist postcolonial geography of work and resource struggles built here advances the different bodies of literature this thesis engages with: the new feminist Central Asian social sciences, feminist postcolonial geographies of Muslimness in the world, feminist labor geographies, and feminist political ecologies. In the fourth section, I delve into the contributions made by this thesis beyond academia, focusing on the broader policy recommendations that this thesis opens up, in particular with regard to issues of child labor in mines and gender in mining. In the final section, this thesis ends with a discussion of the limitations of this study and invites further research – highlighting the urgency of complementing in-depth ethnographic analysis with analyses of the state and development agencies to further understandings of processes of gendered subjectification in Tajikistan, Central Asia, and generally the Muslim Global South. Ultimately, such concerns are essential to continue building alternative readings of gender and Muslimness in the world.

Beyond retraditionalization: gendered work and resource struggles in Muslim Central Asia

This dissertation took the embodied stories of work and resource struggles in Kante as a starting point to unravel the way gendered geographies of exclusion are produced, reproduced, maintained and resisted in Tajikistan. In that sense, it has provided a window into post-Soviet gendered transformations in a context marked by (i) what has often been identified as a retrenchment towards patriarchal norms since the fall of the Soviet Union conventionally attributed to Islam and, (ii) broader politico-ecologic changes characteristic of post-Soviet change, but also of global change, and their local manifestations through work and resource struggles. In particular, it has focused on the neoliberalization of resource exploitation and its local impact in terms of men, women and children's everyday work and resource struggles.

By doing so, this study investigated three broader geographical questions.

The first question raised in this thesis related to the necessity of deciphering what has often been identified as a contradiction or a paradox within studies of gendered transformations in post-Soviet Central Asia – knowing the idea of a return to tradition, religion, and patriarchal gendered norms despite seventy years of gender equality policies and their focus on women's integration into the workforce and attempts by the Soviet to undermine religious traditions in Central Asia. In particular, this dissertation has sought to understand why women and men, who supposedly experienced a certain degree of gender equality during the Soviet era, would reproduce oppressive gendered norms and transmit them to the next generation?

The second geographical question addressed by this dissertation is related to the impact of the transformation of work and work practices with the switch to a socialist economy to emergent forms of capitalism. Here, I have sought to understand the role of these transformations – and in particular the dismantlement of former collective work organizations such as *kolkhoz*, *sovkhoz* and Soviet industries, and the emergence of new livelihoods (including male season labor migration, informal economies, and new actors such as Chinese investors) characteristic of neoliberal global development, in shaping gendered norms, and identities at the intersection of age, and class.

The third geographical question raised by this thesis has focused on the ecologic/environmental side of these transformations. By focusing on a landscape of resource extraction around coal mining in a remote village in Tajikistan, this dissertation opened questions about how gendered transformations are also entangled with the neoliberalization of resource exploitation and their local impacts through men, women and children's resource struggles.

By answering these questions, this dissertation was driven by one main academic and political goal grounded in a feminist and postcolonial politics – to challenge simplistic readings of retraditionalization in Central Asia, its application in Tajikistan, and the way this narrative participates in reproducing neo-colonial, orientalist perspectives on gender, Muslimness, tradition. Rather, this thesis has argued that, norms of femininities and masculinities, and their retransmission to youth are not inscribed into fixed notions of tradition anchored in Islamic belief. Rather, these norms and beliefs are fluid, changing: embedded in histories and their embodied legacies, but also transformed in the wake of broader politico-ecologic changes and their local manifestations through men, women and children work and resource struggles. These gendered

transformations also take unexpected and complex paths, while reproducing forms of gendered oppression and exclusions, they also at the same time, reveal how forms of oppression are resisted, negotiated, and challenged by men, women and children.

In order to develop this argument, this research has focused on one in-depth case-study at the margins of the post-Soviet space, in a remote village of rural Tajikistan, in the Northern Fann Mountains – the village of Kante. This in-depth analysis of one area was complemented by oral histories in other parts of the country, in particular in the Southern region of the Kathlon province. These (hi)stories came to complement contemporary analysis of post-Soviet transformations by delving into the Soviet past in other areas of the country. By focusing one place-based understanding, I have built an empirically rich grounded view of the post-Soviet experience in one village as a window into how processes of neoliberalization of economy and resources impact specific locales. Such a view from below has also revealed how these processes also transform gendered relations, norms, and identities.

By doing so, I have also invited consideration of the post-socialist situated experiences in Central Asia as not distinct but deeply comparable if not similar to many places in the Global South, and in particular in the Muslim South, where relations of production/reproduction transform men, women and children gendered lives and futures, and the way gendered and religious norms and beliefs are lived and transmitted. I have sought to highlight how forms of gendered exclusion traditionally attributed to culture, Islam and/or the specific post-socialist experience in the Central Asian context recall processes of exclusion and gendered transformation in many places of the world where the expansion of global capitalist forms of production/reproduction and extraction of resources have deep impacts on the reshaping of gendered exclusion. At the same time, by delving into the specificities of one place, and the most personal and intimate experiences of such changes, I have also made apparent the ways these changes are pregnant with renegotiations and resistances (Katz 2001a)

The village of Kante, exposed the brutality of an extractive landscape marked by post-Soviet transformations, their entanglement with neoliberal global transformations, and their local manifestations through men, women and children's work and resource struggles: the protracted absence of male migrants, stories of left-behind women, the encroachment of livelihoods by the emergence of a Chinese mine, the emergence of informal mining since the fall of the Soviet Union, the exclusion of women miners and the restricted access to natural resources that they face, the emergence of children's

labor in mines, and the shaming of women who bridge appropriate norms of femininity through notions of honor and shame. Men, women and children's embodied stories of life, work and resource struggles have traced the contour lines of broader neoliberalization patterns in economies of the Global South, their most personal and intimate impacts, and their relationship with how men, women and children perceive gendered norms. It has also revealed how these processes occur in a Muslim majority country where religious and gendered norms are deeply entangled.

Theoretically, this dissertation has built what I have referred to as a broader feminist postcolonial geography of resource struggles in Muslim Central Asia, drawing on four interconnected bodies of literature, that I have expanded upon in Chapter 2, and for which the contributions will be outlined in this conclusion: (i) first, the new Central Asian feminist literature; (ii) second, feminist postcolonial geographies of the Muslim world – focusing in particular here on feminist geographies of Muslimness and their role in building spatialized understandings of intersectionalities and agencies (Hopkins 2017; Gökariksel 2009); (iii) third, feminist labor geographies; (iv) fourth, feminist political ecologies, with a particular focus on the landscape of resource extraction.

An intergenerational story of gendered Soviet and post-Soviet change in a shifting environment

Before developing the contributions that the four articles have together made to these different bodies of literature, I summarize here the way each article has addressed the main questions raised by this dissertation. Chapter 3 / Article 1 focused mainly on the Soviet past, raising one main question: How to make sense of the apparent retrenchment towards patriarchal norms in Tajikistan, despite the importance of the Soviet project of women's liberation in Central Asia's Sovietization? This article specifically answered this question by exploring the way the Soviet gender ideology was articulated and experienced in Tajikistan, focusing on questions of work, and the integration of women into the workforce, and confronting a gendered analysis of the Soviet rhetoric in Tajikistan since the 1930s with oral and lived and embodied histories of men and women workers in Kante, Sarvoda, and the Kathlon province. By applying a feminist postcolonial geographical framework concerned with both discourses, and material lived experiences, this article revealed the hybridity, complexity and contradictions in the articulation and experience of the women's liberation project in Soviet Central Asia.

The research shows that, despite ideas of gender equality and friendship of the nations, the Soviet rhetoric was a central place for the reproduction of gendered and ethnic hierarchies, and a site of where the category of the 'Backward, Muslim, Tajikistani Woman' was produced. These gendered and ethnic hierarchies were then re-inscribed into the socio-spatial organization of work, and shaped men and women's experience of place. In Kante and Sarvoda, this entailed a socio-spatial stratification of work based on the production of a Russified urban place, and the relegation of Tajikistani women to agricultural work in *kolkhoz*. This article conceptualised the *kolkhoz*, drawing on Homi Bahbba's (2004) concept of in-between space/third space as the locus where the colonizer and colonized cultures meet to shape transcultural forms, and a place of renegotiation and reinscription of indigenous gender norms. While workers saw the *kolkhoz* as a workplace, it was also perceived as situated between the domestic/public and was still associated with the home. For women, work in the *kolkhoz* was a way to ensure that they could still perform their reproductive domestic labor. At the same time, the relegation of women to work in the *kolkhoz* can also be analysed as a way to ensure women's restricted socio-spatial mobility and protect them from a sexualized and Russified outside space.

In the context of Tajikistan, such readings are a way to delve in the Soviet past to understand the post-Soviet present. Challenging the retraditionalization narrative, such analyses have shown that the actual retrenchment towards patriarchal norms should not be seen as a sudden return to oppressive norms anchored in religion and related to an Islamic revival since the fall of the Soviet Union. Rather, it revealed that, to a certain extent, the reapplication of traditional norms anchored in religion was a product and reaction to Soviet gender equality policies. By delving into the past, this article also built the ground for the contemporary analyses of post-Soviet change built in Chapter 5/ Article 2, Chapter 6/ Article 3 and Chapter 7/Article 4.

Chapter 6/ Article 2, in particular, focused on the impact of broader post-Soviet politico-ecologic changes, their local manifestations in Kante, and their role in first reshaping gendered subjectivities, and second justifying women's exclusion and restricted access to natural resources in the village. It did so by taking, as a starting point, the two sets of gendered power struggles around access and use of natural resources experienced by men and women in Kante: first, the struggles between informal miners and the Sino-Tajik mine that encroaches on the village's main resource; and second, women miners restricted access to coal and the shaming of their work in informal mines. This article was particularly concerned with examining how these struggles emerged in a context of

politico-ecologic transformations, as well as unravelling the underlying gendered processes that made women's restricted access to natural resources possible. In the village of Kante, men and women used notions of honor and shame, anchored in religion, to justify the inappropriateness of women's work in mines, the shaming of their work, and their restricted access to natural resources. Behind these notions of honor and shame, were, however, hidden subtle and complex gendered negotiations. In this article, I have particularly uncovered one aspect of these transformations, focusing on changing masculinities since the fall of the Soviet Union in Kante. I unpack how they have relationally impacted the definition of what constituted appropriate femininity, leading to the shaming of women miners and their restricted access to resources.

First, I have shown how the centrality of notions of honor and shame, and their reapplication by men onto women's lives, were not related to the performance by men of rigid masculinities fixed into codes of honor and patriarchy ingrained into Islamic traditions. Rather, I turned attention to the way the reapplication of notions of honor and shame as the main driver of the socio-spatial organization of work was made possible by broader structures of exclusion opened by the neoliberalization of economy and resources. Men, as well as women, use notions of honor and shame overtly to justify women's restricted access to resources. In Kante, work in mines is shameful and inappropriate for women who are expected to stay at home, and bridge notions of acceptable femininity revolving around docility, chastity, modesty, conventionally attributed to Islam.

The working lives of men and women in Kante has, however, illustrated that women's exclusion, their restricted socio-spatial mobility, is also part of broader processes of gendered exclusions that have emerged with the switch from capitalist modes of production and extraction of resources, and the broader neoliberalization of the economy and resources. In a context of unemployment, women are relegated to spaces of informality. Processes of informalisation of women's labor are also accompanied by the transformation of familial economies with the growth of seasonal male migration. In Kante, left-behind women whose husbands do not send remittances any more have no other choice than working in informal mines. In a context of pressure over resources, with the installation of a Sino-Tajik mine in the village, women miners find themselves, however, at the bottom of a chain of exclusion, where villagers are dispossessed from their only resource. Such a gendered chain of exclusion is also the result of the broader neoliberalization of resources, and related energy wars between Uzbekistan and

Tajikistan around water governance, that have led Tajikistan to turn to coal production and consumption and to invite Chinese investments in the region.

These broader global processes manifest through localized emotional and embodied resource struggles that are also the site of production, reproduction of gender norms, identities. In Kante, exclusions are co-constituted by men's anger and their feelings of material and psychological dispossession since the fall of the Soviet Union, as well as their constant expropriations and humiliations - both through their experiences as migrants in Russia, and through the localised resource struggles with the Sino-Tajik mine. To respond to the destabilization of their sense of self, men build compensatory narratives around migration that reinforce ideas of strong masculinity revolving around physical strength and mobility. The definition of masculinities is also a relational process. Changes in masculinities occur through the redefinition of notions of appropriate femininity revolving around notions of immobility, docility, chastity and modesty. In the context of Kante, villagers reinvest informal mining as an alternative site of definition of strong masculinity revolving around ideas of self-determination, resistance to exploitative ways of resource appropriation, and resistance to other exploitative economic practices. Central to the redefinition of this strong masculinity is also the idea of control over women's labor, bodies, and sexuality, their work and access to resources.

This article challenges simplistic views of retraditionalization in multiple ways. While evidencing an overt move towards patriarchal norms, it deconstructs the idea that this move is related to a reapplication by men of oppressive norms, anchored in religion. Men exercise a certain degree of control over women's bodies and actions in Kante. This control is part of what defines their masculine identity. The process of definition of masculinities is, however, not straightforward nor simple, and is dependent upon multiple factors that go beyond tradition/religion. Rather, traditional norms are reconstructed, reapplied, reinvested in response to the hardships experienced in a context of transformation of livelihoods and their resource basis. These reconstructions are deeply emotional and personal, as well as reflecting global processes of neoliberalization of resources and economies and the way they impact the post-Soviet Muslim periphery.

While Chapter 5/Article 2 has focused mainly on the redefinition of masculinities in the wake of politico-ecologic changes and their relational impacts on women, Chapter 6 / Article 3 has gone one step further to explore women miners' shameful work and their

most intimate, embodied experiences of marginalization. Through ethnographic portraits of women miners, this article has delved into the personal experiences of shameful work, and how notions of shame are also lived, and processed by women themselves. Starting with the story of Nadirah, a woman miner, and one of the most stigmatized women workers in the village, this article has particularly opened analyses of two types of embodied labor women engage with – first, the embodied labor that women perform in mines and the way they bridge norms of appropriate femininity, and second the embodied and emotional labor they perform to live with and beyond shame.

For women miners, the process of social shaming stigmatizes a wrong bodily performance of gender, highlighting how women who bridge appropriate gendered division of labor are considered as out of place, as well as highlighting the centrality of gendered bodies in the making of socio-spatial relations. The different forms and degrees of stigmatization experienced by women, mirror the underlying and bodily gendered norms that define socio-spatial relations in the village. In Kante, women who actively participated in the separation with their migrants' husbands appear as the most stigmatized. In contrast, women who accepted to submit to hardship and oppressive relations and did not actively take part in their separation with their husbands are less stigmatized, and even sometimes pitied. Such readings make visible the ways through which norms of self-sacrifice and devotion are policed and controlled through social shaming. Finally, women miners' work bridges norms of modesty – their work being a site of production of ideas of loose and mobile women, who are seen by unknown men (the coal truck drivers in the illegal market). Their stigmatization is based on the types of bodily movement they perform in and through their work.

In parallel, in their position of marginality, women miners also perform another form of work – embodied, affective, corporeal, and emotional – the work of being. Through the work they perform to live with shame, women also become agents in first the reproduction of their own marginalization, and second the transformation of their position of marginality. Women, such as Nadirah, feel ashamed, guilty, and blame themselves for the life they lead, re-imposing social norms onto themselves. They exclude themselves, lie and hide to protect their honor, sometimes also shaming other women miners. At the same time, their feelings, and emotional experience is ambivalent, multiple, and doubly conflicted. This article shows how through these emotional experiences, women are also active in transforming the margins into reclaimed spaces where they experience a higher degree of freedom, solidarity and also sometimes

pleasure. It also shows how women are differentially positioned in a hierarchy of shame, based on their different class position, their age, and their socio-marital status.

This research is central to resisting some of the assumptions of the retraditionalization narrative, and challenge monolithic visions of Muslim femininities embedded into ideas of Muslim women as devoid of agency. In particular, they show how understandings of embodied forms agency as a capacity of action within structures of subordination (Mahmood 2001; Bilge 2010a; Sehlikoglu 2017) help deciphering the complex ways through which women define their gendered senses of selves. My reading reveals how gendered transformations in the post-Soviet era in Tajikistan are taking contradictory and messy paths, carved out by women themselves. They also highlight how women both submit to broader structures of subordination, and partake in their reproduction, while also challenging these structures through everyday and embodied forms of resistances.

Chapter 7 / Article 4 then expands such understandings to questions related to the intergenerational retransmission of gender norms in Kante. The last empirical chapter of this thesis brings my ethnographic work to a close by inviting the reader to think through and with the current generation of Tajikistani, those who have not lived the Soviet Union themselves, but whose lives are impregnated with its legacies. In this article, I have explored parents and children's life's work or socially reproductive work of transmitting, negotiating and contesting gendered norms, beliefs and responsibilities in Kante. I have done so by investigating the way this life's work is deployed through two other forms of embodied and gendered labor: the work of children and youth in and around coal mining, and the work of children and parents in making and unmaking gender. By focusing on this work of making and unmaking gender as a type of life's work that must be analysed dialectically with other forms of labor, I have opened investigation of how the process of gendered subjectification for Muslim youth is intergenerational and entangled with the emergence of capitalist modes of production/reproduction and extraction of resources.

Here, I have drawn on four ethnographic vignettes of children and youth mine workers that reveal the differentiated experiences of work in mines according to gender, age, but also emergent elements of class differentiation in Kante. The stories of boy and girl coal workers make visible the stark embodiedness of their work, and how their work is also embedded within a gendered division of labor that reflects Central Asian Muslim patrilocality. Parents, through the way they organize their children's labor and the

practice of shaming young girls work, ensure the reproduction of gendered identities that comply with appropriate norms of femininities and masculinities. Parents shape gendered bodies to ensure this reproduction.

At the same time, the reproduction of these norms is also a condition of possibility of emergent forms of capitalism in Kante. First, children's labor, and the specific forms it takes (with the monetization of labor, and the emergence of worst forms of child labor) is a consequence of the politico-ecologic changes experienced in Kante, and the specific gendered work and resource struggles families engage with. This naturalization of child labor is also entangled with the dialectical transformation and shattering of social reproduction in Kante since the fall of the Soviet Union with the erosion of livelihoods, the de-valuing of school, the dismantlement of state support systems. These transformations shape the transmission of gendered norms to younger generations in ways that reinforce young women's attachment to the home, their withdrawal from school, and the need to marry them as young as possible. The shaping of these gendered identities is also classed, with young women miners, being identified as the 'the poorest of the poorest' *(kambaral)* in the village: those whose honor is being traded for ensuring stable livelihoods.

Children and youth are, however, not passive victims in this process. They are also active agents capable of navigating, negotiating and resisting these norms. The gendered labor children engage with is a site of reproduction of gender norms. It is also a site of their renegotiation. The embodied and emotional experiences of work in mines for young girls reveal how youth rework gendered expectations and norms in ways that challenge hegemonic forms of femininity but reveal intergenerational solidarity. As with many young girls in the village, Delruba knows that her work is shameful, and threatens her capacity to get married. At the same time, by working in mines, she also brings an income that contributes to the family and makes sure that her father will not leave to go to Russia again.

Such readings highlight the complexity of the (inter)generational transmission of gender norms in Tajikistan, and the post-Soviet Muslim South, challenging further the assumptions of the retraditionalization narrative. By focusing on children and youth workers and their relationships with their parents, the study reveals how the retransmission of gendered oppressive norms to children, and in particular the reinvestment of norms of femininity revolving around docility, modesty and chastity, the early year of marriage, and girls' withdrawal from school, are first and foremost a

product of the context of economic desolation and the livelihood/resource struggles youth and families engage with. Through such changes, notions of what constitutes appropriate Muslim girlhood and boyhood are transformed.

Contributions to feminist and broader critical geographies

Together, these four articles build a feminist postcolonial reading of work and resource struggles in Muslim Central Asia, which contributes to the four different bodies of literature that this dissertation has drawn upon. While Chapter 2 detailed this conceptual framework, I here aim to show how the four articles of this dissertation both drew and expanded on each of the bodies of literature upon which this conceptual framework was built.

The new feminist Central Asian social science

The first body of literature this thesis has expanded upon, is scholarship on post-Soviet gendered transformations, and in particular the most recent body of literature in Central Asia that has emerged since the fall of the Soviet Union, that I have referred to as the new feminist Central Asian social science. This dissertation has expanded this literature in multiple ways. I have first tried to answer Marianne Kamp (2009) and Deniz Kandiyoti' s (Kandiyoti 2007) call for readings of post-Soviet change that delve in the Soviet past to understand the complexity of the contemporary present, and to build readings of the everyday histories of ordinary men and women. By taking a feminist postcolonial geographical approach to the articulation and experience of gendered Soviet histories, Chapter 4 / Article 1, in particular, has both built upon and added to existing postcolonial analysis of the Soviet past in Central Asia (Khalid 2007a; Stenning & Hörschelmann 2008; Tlostanova 2012; Heathershaw 2010; Kandiyoti 2002c) . Following authors such as Edgar (2007) and Sahadeo (2007), the analysis proposed a grounded reading of the everyday, embodied histories and contradictions of the Soviet policies – revealing how, while not imperial in intention, the Soviet project was to a certain extent, imperial in effect . Through a geographical approach, this article has also added to these analyses by driving attention to the particularities of space and place – first in the spatial imaginaries produced by discourses, their materialization, but also contestation and negotiation.

All the articles in this dissertation have also participated, like other literature in this new feminist Central Asian body of research, in complicating understandings of tradition,

gender, generation and Islam in the post-Soviet era, and challenging orientalist and caricatural readings of the retraditionalization narrative. Chapter 3 / Article 1 revealed how traditional norms based on the idea of women's restricted socio-spatial mobility were not just the manifestation of conservative gendered norms that would have re-emerged with more post-Soviet overt expressions of religiosity. Rather, it showed, echoing the findings of Gillian Tett (1996) in Tajikistan, that these norms have to a certain extent always existed during the Soviet times, and were, like in the contemporary period, mediated through notions of honor and shame. A postcolonial approach however showed how these norms were also, partly a production of Soviet policies. Chapter 4 / Article 2 then looked at these notions of honor and shame, the way their overt application to the socio-spatial organisation of work and life in Kante was made possible by broader politico-ecologic changes. By doing so, it also invited more complex readings of masculinities beyond notions of honor and patriarchy, hence adding to emergent literature in Central Asia that has observed questions of changing masculinities with politico-economic changes and their relational impact on women (Reeves 2013). Chapter 5 / Article 3 focused on the diversity of women's gendered identities and their role in producing reproducing and challenging traditional norms, adding to the growing, rich and nuanced literature on the multiple sometimes ambivalent types of femininities that emerged in the Muslim post-Soviet South (Mcbrien 2006; Cleuziou 2015; Werner 2009; Cleuziou & Direnberger 2016). Finally, the last article focused on under-researched questions of youth and intergenerationality in the post-Soviet space and in particular the post-Soviet Muslim South (Kirmse 2012; 2010; Harris 2006; Roche 2010; Stephan 2010; Roberts 2010). It revealed how the retransmission of oppressive gendered norms to younger women was not related to an Islamic revival but could be analysed as a consequence of everyday negotiations with emergent forms of capitalism. By doing so, it also made visible and valuable the experience and role of children and youth in shaping post-Soviet gendered transformations in Central Asia .

Feminist postcolonial geographies of Muslimness

Intersectionalities

Together, these four articles have also engaged and contributed to broader feminist geographies of Muslimness (Gökariksel & Secor 2015; Gökariksel & Secor 2009; Hopkins 2004; Dwyer 2000; Falah & Nagel 2005). By challenging the retraditionalization narrative, these articles mirror broader research on the Muslim world that has aimed to

resist orientalist and caricatural readings of Muslim femininities and masculinities across generations. The four articles have also all drawn on the intersectional approach to the gendered subjectification process that has characterized research on Muslim identities across social sciences. A geographical perspective, has in particular highlighted the socio-cultural spatialities of these intersectionalities (Gökarıksel & Smith 2017) focusing on how identities are shaped in place, as well as at different scales from the global to the body.

Each article has built on a conceptualization of gender as one axis of identity intersecting with other axes such as class, age, generation and religion. At the same time, each article has also provided a view of gender as a process, socially emergent, relational and spatialized. Speaking to one another, these four articles have built a holistic view of this process in one place – while each article predominantly focuses on one group, each one also points towards connected processes of identity construction. The four articles together build a narrative of gendered subjectification amongst Muslims in the post-Soviet South, alternatively moving the magnifying glass from memories of women and their gendered construction of self during the Soviet past, to men, women and finally, children and youth. They also span the temporal divides of Soviet/post-Soviet, by moving from memories of Soviet women workers to the next generation of Tajikistanis.

Through a focus on embodied processes of making/unmaking of gender this dissertation also drives attention to the different scales through which this process of gendered subjectification occurs – highlighting the connection between the shaping of gendered bodies and broader changes of economies, and ecologies. Chapter 5/ Article 2 and Chapter 7/ Article 4 in particular make these different scales notably visible. While Chapter 5/ Article 2 focuses on broader political ecologies and their impact on men's sense of self, Chapter 7/ Article 4 drives attention to how parents shape gendered bodies to respond to constraints related to changing relations of production/reproduction since the fall of the Soviet Union, reapplying traditional norms of appropriate femininity and masculinity to children and youth.

Agency

By drawing on the specific conceptualizations of agency developed by feminist scholars of the Muslim world (Sehlikoglu 2017; Bilge 2010a; Pullman 2015; Mahmood 2001; 2004), and adding a geographical lens to its conceptualization, this dissertation also builds on and expands previous feminist literature on processes of gendered

subjectification amongst Muslims. The notion of agency runs throughout the four articles. Chapter 4 / Article 1, in particular, has observed how place-based, material and embodied understandings of men and women's lives during the Soviet times revealed how subjects were first made by discourses, at the same time as they were agents in their renegotiations. Delving into the everyday and material practices through which people become gendered subjects has been a way to make visible what de Lauretis (1984) using the cinematic term 'space off', had described as aspects that escape the frame of dominant discourses, where forms of negotiation and subversion occur. In parallel, article one has also highlighted the complexity of agency processes beyond notions of subversion, emphasizing how women could both submit to forms of subordination whilst finding, within these structures, spaces of negotiation. This approach to agency lingers through and is developed in the three other articles. Chapter 6 / Article 3 on women miners has – similarly to Chapter 4 / Article 1 – highlighted the ambivalence inherent to the notion of agency. While women miners were active in the production of their and others' socio-spatial marginalization, they were also capable of resisting their marginalization. In parallel, these negotiations also occurred within broader structures of subordination. Engaging with Mahmood's (2001) conceptualization of agency as embodied, affective, corporeal, has here highlighted how a focus on the body could also illuminate how intimate negotiations are both personal, and embedded within broader structures of exclusion.

Chapter 5 / Article 2, in contrast, has focused on the production of exclusion across different scales, driving attention to the relationship between the micro and the macro, focusing in particular on the politico-ecologic aspects that shape structures of subordination. Scaling down this analysis, it has also revealed how men and women's gendered identities were also shaped by these experiences of subordination and exclusion, and the way they impact people's senses of self. Such focus on structures allows counterbalancing views of agency that focus on the individual to build a more thorough diagnostic of power. Finally, Chapter 7 / Article 4 encompasses the structure/agency divide, by observing two aspects simultaneously – first the way through which children and parents are constrained by emergent forms of capitalism, and the way these changes influence their socially reproductive labor of transmitting gender norms; and second, the embodied experience of gender and the way it is both produced, reproduced, and challenged by children themselves. By doing so, this last article also contributes to nuance conventional views of agency in scholarship in childhood study that have tended to focus on children's agency as forms of resistances,

sometimes overlooking the denunciation of their exploitation. Together, these articles highlight the relational aspects of agency, emphasizing how people – men, women, children, are never mere victims or agents, but always occupy these subject positions within structures of subordination, and with and alongside others. They all also ground this theorization in place, through space, and at multiple scales, demonstrating how the geographical study of material lived experiences can illuminate the complexity of agency.

Provincializing Muslim geographies

Finally, by focusing on the specific context of Central Asia, this dissertation also adds to geographies of Muslimness in multiple ways. First, it opens consideration of the specificities of the Muslim post-Soviet South in understanding of processes of gendered subjectification in the Muslim majority world, and hence contributes to challenging a predominant focus on diasporas and the West in research on Muslimness (Mills & Gökariksel 2014). Specifically, in the study of Central Asia and Tajikistan, this project provincialises Muslim geographies, and opens investigation of themes usually silenced in conventional geographies of Muslim identities. These include, in the context of Tajikistan, a combination of understandings of gendered geographies of exclusion through careful attention to questions of religion and tradition, and their relationship with resource and work struggles. Each of the articles in this thesis has unravelled this relationship. All articles have focused on lived experiences of work and/or resource struggles, the way they are also mediated through notions of shame, honor conventionally attributed to Islam, and the way these norms are spatialized, operationalized, reproduced, experienced, negotiated, resisted. Such a project is crucial – by highlighting the multiplicity of ways to live and experience Muslimness in the world, it challenges monolithic views of Islam. At the same time, it allows us to overcome the view of Muslims as solely religious selves, by highlighting how subjectivities are made along and beyond religion (Falah & Nagel 2005).

Feminist labor geographies

In this dissertation, I have particularly gone beyond the idea of Muslims as solely religious selves, by exploring how their gendered identities were also made in relation with their work/working practices and resource struggles. The use of a feminist labor geography framework in particular, has allowed, following the work of previous labor geographers, to reaffirm the centrality of work/working practices in processes of gendered subjectification (McDowell 1999). The four articles have together build an integrated reading of the way through which work, gender and bodies are co-

constituted through space and in place (McDowell 2009; Wolkowitz 2006; England & Lawson 2005; Huang et al. 2012; Waite 2006; McDowell et al. 2007). Chapter 4 / Article 1 investigated the ideological construction of work and gender, focusing on the spatial and hierarchical dichotomies central to the Soviet rhetoric, and their assumptions about gendered bodies. It then confronted the Soviet discourse to the materiality of historical geographies of work in Sarvoda and Kante – revealing how the ideals of the Soviet rhetoric as well as its contradictions were reproduced and negotiated in place and space. It both highlighted the types of hierarchies experienced in places and focused on embodied memories of work in the spaces of the *kolkhoz*, and the mine.

Chapter 5 / Article 2 has observed the diversity of men and women's economic and working practices as a reflection of broader structural transformations, at the same time as it has approached work/working practices as a site of re-construction of femininities and masculinities. Here, I have particularly emphasized the significance of work in the shaping of men's sense of self, and its relational impact on the construction of femininities, adding to the literature on questions of masculinities and work (Ekers 2009; Mcdowell 2003; Batnitzky et al. 2009; Elmhirst 2007; Collins 1996; Maynard 2014). By delving into men's sense of self, and their emotional response to hardship and work exploitation with emergent forms of capitalism, this article has also shown the importance of theorizing the body as more than a black box and as more than a mere surface of inscription of relations of power (Longhurst 1995). Rather, it has highlighted the centrality of emotions of anger, and feelings of dispossession in the wake of broader work and resource struggles, and in the shaping of men's sense of identity.

Chapter 6 / Article 3 and Chapter 7 / Article 4 then went one step further by foregrounding the making of the body and of gender as a form of work. Chapter 6 /Article 3 has first emphasized how women's bodily work in mines was bridging appropriate norms of femininity, leading to them being considered as 'out of place' and marginalized. It has secondly also expanded notions of gendered subjectification by theorizing the process of 'being', becoming a gendered subject as a type of embodied labor. Such a perspective echoes theorizations of feminist geographers who have looked at questions of emotional, embodied work (McDowell 2009; Huang et al. 2012). It also draws on Saba Mahmood's (2001) theorization of the corporeal, emotional work of being, and becoming, and allows to make visible the ambivalence of women's position with regards to the making/unmaking of gender. Their work of being is a complex and sometimes contradictory process, reflecting emotional negotiations between shame,

guilt, and pride. The spaces of marginality where they evolve are also, in some instances, transformed into reclaimed spaces.

Chapter 7 / Article 4 also delves into the relationship between bodies, gender, space and work – first by focusing on the embodied and gendered aspects of child labor in mines, and hence adding to the literature that has called for analyses of child labor that go beyond questions of morality to focus on their complex socio-spatial, gendered, generational, and classed arrangement (Punch 2001; Robson 2004); and second, by focusing on how children's work is also a site of intergenerational retransmission of gendered norms and beliefs (Skelton & Waters 2017; Dyson 2010). In this article, I have particularly theorized the intergenerational making and unmaking of gender as a type of socially reproductive labor that is embodied, as well as connected to broader scales of transformations. Through the way they organize children's labor in and around mines, parents shape children's bodies to conform to specific gendered expectations anchored into Central Asian Muslim patrilocality. At the same time, the embodied experience of labor by young boys and girls is also a site of negotiation of these norms in ways that challenge the reproduction of oppressive gendered norms onto younger women, and at the same time, resist capitalist modes of production. By looking at the making and unmaking of gender as a form of embodied socially reproductive work, this article also highlights the importance of observing the work of making gender in dialectical relationship with other forms of waged an unwaged labor. By doing so, this article moves from a focus on gender and religion, to reveal how both are also reshaped in the wake of politico-economic transformations.

Feminist political ecologies in extractive landscapes

By focusing on resource struggles and the political ecological aspects that shape the making/unmaking of gender in the extractive landscape of Kante, this dissertation also adds to literature on feminist political ecology (FPE). Chapter 5 / Article 2 and Chapter 7 / Article 4 are the two articles that engage the most explicitly with this literature. By observing everyday, embodied, emotional aspects related to resource access, use and struggles, Chapter 5 / Article 2 is grounded into the feminist political ecology literature tradition to draw attention to the micro-politics through which gendered identities are shaped (Sultana 2009; Truelove 2011). At the same time, it also demonstrates how these intimate scales connect to other scales – such as the nation and the global (Truelove 2011). Both Chapter 5 / Article 2 and Chapter 7 / Article 4 connect men, women and children resource struggles to broader resource struggles and transformations of

relations of production/reproduction with emergent forms of capitalism. These readings also open new area of explorations for feminist political ecologists. While Chapter 5 / Article 2 adds to the emergent literature in FPE on questions of masculinities (Ekers 2009), Chapter 7 / Article 4 focuses on questions of intergenerationality and children that are often absent from FPE analyses. Finally, a focus on the role of politico-ecologic transformation in shaping notions of what constitute appropriate Muslim femininity and masculinity across age, constitutes a unique way to analyse processes of gendered subjectification amongst Muslim identities in countries of the Global South marked by processes of neoliberalization of economy and resources (Holvorson 2005).

By focusing on the landscape of extraction in Kante, at the crossroad between illegal/legal, informal/formal, small scale/large scale mining, this dissertation also adds to literature on gender and mining in the world (Lahiri-Dutt 2012; Lahiri-Dutt 2018; Hilson 2010b). In particular, it illustrates how the opening of markets to the Chinese in Tajikistan transforms the country's extractive landscape, shaping men, women and children's identities. Here, Chapter 5 to 7 (Articles 2 to 4) in particular show how these local changes have impacted people's sense of selves. Chapter 5 / Article 2, by highlighting how informal mining is a site of reconstruction of a strong masculine identity in response to feelings of dispossession and anger experienced in response to exploitative work conditions in the Sino-Tajik mines and migration, adds to the rare body of research on artisanal mining and masculinity in the world (Cuvelier 2014). Chapter 6 / Article 3 in turn, delves into the embodied experiences of marginalization of women, following the large feminist body of literature that has attempted to make visible the experience of women in mining (Lahiri-Dutt 2012; Jenkins 2014; Bryceson et al. 2013). While emphasizing the agency of women miners, it also adds to this literature by recalling the structures of oppression women live within, hence responding to Katy Jenkins's (2014)recent call to elicit the fact that retrieving women miners' voices is also about making visible the forms of oppression they experience. Finally, Chapter 7 / Article 4 engaged with a type of labor often framed as 'one of the worst forms of child labor' (ILO 2013a), highlighting the underlying gendered dynamics around children's work in mines (Hilson 2010a). Here, I have particularly highlighted how children's work in mines was a consequence of emergent forms of capitalism, and the erosion of social reproduction. At the same time, I have shown how this type of work was also gendered and a site of retransmission and learning of the intergenerational and gendered norms

that rule the Tajik society. Finally, I have also highlighted children miners' agency in carving out their livelihoods, and in their own performance of their gendered identities.

Policy implications

This thesis has implications beyond academia. Here, I have identified two main areas where this thesis could contribute to policy debates: (i) first, questions of child labor and mining; (ii) second, questions of gender and mining. The issue of child labor in mines has over the past two decades attracted significant attention, both from academic and applied research (Hilson 2010a; André & Godin 2013; ILO 2013a). The case-study of Kantegui children miners has first contributed to complicate the understandings of the nature of their work, and the reasons why children engage with such work. While policies frame mining as one of the worst forms of child labor (ILO 2013a), this dissertation has first revealed how the emergence of this practice is inscribed into intergenerational regimes of solidarity, where children's work is one type of labor amongst others performed by other members of families. Second, this study has also challenged homogenous view on children that prevail in policy-oriented analyses, by revealing how child labor was also differentiated by age, and elements of class differentiation (Punch 2001; 2009). Third, this study has also called for a consideration of how children's labor is also embedded into broader gendered divisions of labor undergirded by specific cultural norms. In Kante, while the work of young miners is considered acceptable, the work of women in mines is not. These findings question the eradication approach to children's work in mines by revealing the necessity to take into account the underlying socio-cultural gendered aspects that normalize child labor.

The second policy contributions that I have made in this thesis relates to questions of gender and mining. International organizations have already identified the importance of women in Artisanal and Small Scale Mining (ASM) around the world, highlighting the necessity to understand the local gendered dynamics around ASM practices (World Bank 2014; Eftimie et al. 2012). This study has contributed to such objectives. It has however gone further than an identification of how forms of socio-cultural norms shape gendered work practices in mining, or how specific cultural taboos restrict women's access to resources (World Bank 2014). Rather, it has observed the way these cultural taboos and socio-cultural norms were created by the forms taken by landscapes of extraction where formal/informal mining overlap (Huggins 2016), and where governments engage into processes of resource privatization supported by these same

international organizations. By doing so, this study has also challenged conventional calls in policy relevant research that focuses on formalizing informal mining (World Bank 2014; Eftimie et al. 2012). Here, I want to highlight how these claims are contradictory with other policies that gear local economies towards neoliberalization. My study invites a major question, in the context of Tajikistan, that can be applied to other settings in the Global South: is formalization the right strategy in places where the states and foreign companies work hand in hand to dispossess the poorest?

Limitations and further research

This dissertation has attempted to build a holistic view of the gendered subjectification process in the Muslim post-Soviet South. Further research is however needed to better understand the relationship between gender, Islam, tradition, and changing environments in the post-Soviet world, as well as the Muslim Global South. I have identified two main limitations of this thesis and further areas for research. The first one relates to the specific conceptualization of intersectionality adopted in this thesis. While I have used a geographical approach to intersectionality that focused on men, women, children, and the production and reproduction of different axes of oppression along gender, age, ethnicity, local manifestations of religion, generation and livelihood, I have here not conceptualized questions around race. Yet, such theorizations are crucial and contentious in the historical as well as contemporary analysis of Central Asia. Here, I call for further research that engages with critical race theory (Price 2010; Mirza 2013) to observe the production of race versus ethnicity in Soviet Tajikistan (Weitz 2002). With regards to the contemporary period, my research has touched upon questions of representations of Muslim populations in development discourse; it has also investigated (particularly in chapter 4/Article 2) questions of redefinition of gendered identities with the presence of Chinese investors. More is however needed on how racial identities are reconfigured with the advent of new actors such as Chinese, Iranians, Western investors and development actors in the development landscape of Central Asia.

This interest in racialized identities, and their reconfiguration with new development actors also leads to the second limitation of this research. The role of the state and development actors appears in the background of this study, both in the introduction and the description of my case-study. Chapter 5/ Article 2 also analyses how national policies in response to broader global and regional shifts have impacted localities in

Tajikistan. Further research on the role of local state actors and development programs in shaping the local gendered transformations, beyond broader discourses is however needed. Local development programs led by Western NGOs and/or international organizations have developed in many of the poorest areas of Tajikistan. Local governmental institutions are also closely monitored by international development organizations, revealing how the objective of gender mainstreaming materializes in places. Studying the local appropriation and negotiations of these gendered discourses at the local level seem crucial. This task has already been started in Central Asia by feminist scholars (Cleuziou & Direnberger 2016). Further research that opens conversations with other Muslim countries in the Global South is however needed in order to better understand how gendered identities are also reconfigured in the Muslim South. Ultimately, such developments have potential to contribute to empirically and theoretically rich alternative readings of gender and Muslimness in the Global South.

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